



Debates

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Wednesday, 25 February 2009

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Wednesday, 25 February 2009

MR SPEAKER (Mr Rattenbury) took the chair at 10 am and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

Community events

Debate resumed from 11 February 2009, on motion by **Ms Le Couteur**:

That this Assembly:

- (1) acknowledges that live music and events are an integral part of our culture and essential for maintaining a vibrant, culturally diverse community; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
 - (a) develop a policy and actions to support live events in our community, including, but not limited to, ensuring that:
 - (i) order of occupancy legislation is reviewed;
 - (ii) each local shopping centre has a large 24 hour accessible community space, such as bollard or clearly sign posted and prominent wall space, for the promotion of events via bill posters;
 - (iii) large commercial developments in group and town centres provide a community bollard for the promotion of events via bill posters; and
 - (iv) building codes for residential development in all commercial zones have sound insulation and physical security appropriate to co-location with live cultural events;
 - (b) provide adequate late night transport options for large scale events; and
 - (c) report back to the Assembly by the last sitting week in 2009.

And on the amendment moved by **Mr Barr**:

Omit part (2), substitute:

“(2) refers the issue of supporting live music and events in our community be referred to the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services for inquiry and report by the first sitting day in October 2009. The inquiry will consider, but not be limited to:

- (a) a review of order of occupancy legislation;
- (b) the existing provision of, and necessity to supplement, prominent areas for the display of promotional material for live music events via bill posters;
- (c) options to encourage or require large commercial developments in group and town centres to provide community bollards for the promotion of events via bill posters;
- (d) examination of how building codes for residential and business development in commercial zones could be amended to ensure sound insulation and physical security are appropriate to co-location with live cultural events; and
- (e) options to improve late night transport for large scale events.”.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (10.01): I thank Ms Le Couteur for raising these issues, especially those issues in relation to planning and bill posting. The opposition, of course, acknowledges that the live music industry and events scene in Canberra are an important part of our vibrant city.

Land use planning is a difficult issue. There are many different interests that have to be accommodated with the planning system and ongoing tensions between different land uses that may need to co-exist. Planning is hard enough with a good government and supportive administration, let alone with a minister that does not want to engage with his portfolio and a cabinet that does not know its highways from country roads or high-rise development from leafy suburbs.

I wholeheartedly support the motion’s call on the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services to review order of occupancy rules in the territory. After all, it was I who first called for this debate in January. I also support the motion’s call for residential and business development in commercial zones to be appropriate for the setting, with particular restrictions.

The order of occupancy issue first came to my attention earlier this year in relation to a development application on the Lake Ginninderra foreshore. Should the application be successful, it will allow for residential development at the old Pizza Hut restaurant at Emu Bank, up to 15 units above other commercial development.

There are concerns, especially amongst local business owners, that siting residential development so close to existing businesses, in particular the Lighthouse in Belconnen, will unfairly impact on these original occupiers. The Lighthouse regularly has live music gigs and also has a beer garden where patrons can enjoy socialising on the banks of Lake Ginninderra. Placing residential development so close to this venue may result in some noise complaints and threaten the viability of evening entertainment.

Order of occupancy rules exist in both Queensland and New South Wales. This means that when planning decisions are made, noise and other issues are considered before placing new developments inappropriately close to conflicting original uses. Order of occupancy rule can provide better certainty in city planning. Order of occupancy will help protect the character of Canberra's suburbs against inappropriate high density development and ensure that town centres continue to provide a vibrant mixed use environment with an appropriate mixture of residential, commercial and entertainment uses. I look forward to further work on this matter.

With regard to bill posting, whilst I do not want to pre-empt the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services, I do want to briefly look at the elements of the motion calling for community space for bill posters. The feedback I have received since the Crimes (Bill Posting) Bill 2008 was referred to the committee suggests that there is a genuine community demand for bill posting, and that bill posting needs to be appropriately accommodated.

Some of the concerns I had regarding the bill included that there was not enough space for legal bill posting for community organisations and businesses to utilise. I look forward to the government's response to this motion and hope they are able to address these concerns.

Late night transport is a concern for the opposition, and the appropriate support for adequate late night transport options must be provided for large scale events. I do, however, flag concerns that when public subsidies of transport services are provided, we must get value for money. The last thing we should advocate in this Assembly is running double the number of buses if it means doubling the number of empty buses. That is not good for the tax-paying public, the travelling public or the environment.

The opposition looks forward to working with the government and the Greens on the issues raised by this motion. I look forward to the government's response and the standing committee's inquiry.

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (10.05): I would like to move an amendment to Mr Barr's amendment, which is now being circulated in my name. I move:

Omit paragraph (2), substitute:

- “(2) calls on the ACT Government to develop a policy and actions to support live events in our community, including, but not limited to:
- (a) providing improved, accessible community space (such as bollards or clearly sign posted and prominent wall space) for the promotion of events via bill posters;
 - (b) supporting adequate late night transport options for large scale events; and
 - (c) providing community venues for all-age music events in the city and town centres; and

- (3) refers the issue of supporting live music and events in our community to the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services for inquiry and report by the first sitting day in October 2009. The inquiry will consider, but not be limited to:
- (a) a review of order of occupancy legislation;
 - (b) options to encourage or require large commercial developments in group or town centres to provide community bollards for the promotion of events via bill posters; and
 - (c) an examination of how building codes for residential and business development in commercial zones could be amended to ensure sound insulation and physical security are appropriate to co-location with live cultural events.”.

I would like to thank Mr Barr for proposing in his amendment that some of these important issues be referred to the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works, Territory and Municipal Services for inquiry, and I agree with the minister that the committee inquiry will help in examining some more complex parts of this motion and come up with recommendations.

However, I do not think that the inquiry has to be as broad as needing to look at every part of the motion. Some of the motion is quite straightforward. Therefore, my amendment will ask for the committee to review the order of occupancy legislation which, as Mr Coe has commented, is substantive legislation. We really need to consider how it will work within the ACT. It will also look at options which will require commercial developments to provide community bollards and examine how building codes can be amended to support live community events.

Under my amendment, the motion still calls for the government to develop policy and actions to support live events, including by providing improved community bill posting space, supporting improved late night transport options—I do agree with Mr Coe’s comments about the desirability of having buses which are patronised—and providing community venues for all-age music events. I think that these are reasonable things. The amended motion is also a better way to use the committee’s time.

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) (10.07): As my colleague Andrew Barr stated in moving an amendment to Ms Le Couteur’s original movement, it is the government’s view that the issue should be referred in its entirety to the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services.

Ms Le Couteur has today sought essentially just to separate different aspects or sections of the motion, or actually the terms of reference for the committee, and certainly I do not disagree with Ms Le Couteur that whilst the essential nature of the

motion and our interest in it remain the same, there is a separation of the issues that had been included in the Andrew Barr amendment for reference to the committee.

I must say that the government does not have particularly strong views on this, though I think on balance our view would be that there would be continuing sense in a single reference and a review of all aspects of this issue of live music and live music venues in support of live music. The issue would benefit from a more general or inclusive consideration of all the issues that have been identified as reasonable.

In going to some of the issues, I might just say that the ACT government does have a reasonably strong record in the provision of community space for bill posters. We do benchmark against a significant number of cities, jurisdictions or communities around Australia in relation to the municipal services and infrastructure that we provide, and it is a feature of Canberra that we do invest heavily, particularly on a comparative basis, against other cities.

For instance, there are only eight legal bill posting sites in the city of Sydney, and when one compares the city of Sydney with the ACT, we currently have five. Sydney has a total of eight and we are in the process of adding to that. Nevertheless, it is a very real issue. But it is also relevant for governments to compare, because there is a cost to everything, the nature and level of services which we provide. That, just by way of background, suggests that this is an issue that the government has taken seriously, and an area in which we have recognised need and to which we have responded.

As I say, I do not have a particularly strong view about Ms Le Couteur's amendment and in the end we are happy to work with Ms Le Couteur and the committee in advancing the interests of live music within the ACT. It is a sector that does need support. I think we are all aware of some of the frustration within the community and I do have a very strong, genuine desire to support all artistic and creative activity. I think that the live music area is an area where there is a genuine need for greater support and I have sought in my own way to advance that.

I turn to the issue of late night transport options for large-scale events. It is an issue that once again would probably benefit from the capacity of the committee to consult and its insight. But it does raise issues that need to be addressed. I think a comparison between late night music events and the perhaps unsatisfactory nature of some of the transport options for actually departing the scene of large live music events can be compared, for instance, to regular Raiders or Brumbies matches. This was an issue that was drawn to my attention today.

It perhaps goes to the heart of Ms Le Couteur's concern or interest in a way. For example, Canberra Stadium most particularly, in consultation with the Brumbies and the Raiders—the users—has developed transport options for facilitating the movement of significant numbers of patrons from Canberra Stadium to other places. The system works reasonably well, but it is not a standard ACTION or a standard public transport response. It is a specific response and there is a significant cost. It is a cost over and above that of an ACTION fare.

I do not disagree that it is an issue. But once again, I think it is an issue that the committee might have pursued. I understand the point that Ms Le Couteur makes. There is an issue there that needs to be addressed. I think there is a need for those entrepreneurs or organisers that are responsible for large music events, particularly those that run them in a commercial way, to accept some responsibility. That essentially is where an investigation into transport options post-live music leads. It leads to a need for a greater partnership and a greater acceptance of responsibility by the entrepreneur, the commercial entity that facilitates a live music event. Where they are commercial offerings and not community events, there is an issue about the availability of buses, transport or transport options to assist those people to leave a particular venue.

I make the point that the successful precedents that we have are probably most particularly Raiders and Brumbies games or large sporting events where special transport arrangements are made. But I also make the point that they are special transport arrangements that come at a cost and where ACTION fares are not charged, where there is a cost for the provision of that service. So in relation to this particular item, I guess I highlight that particular point.

The government is more than interested in being part of a conversation around the development of transport options. It certainly is an area of need—a gap—but I am not suggesting that it is something that could be done by ACTION on a non-commercial basis. We can not just ask ACTION to provide a transport option for large numbers of people on non-commercial terms. It is not enough to simply have half a dozen or a dozen ACTION buses turn up at midnight after a concert and accept the standard fare, which would not cover the cost of the operation, and then expect that in that way ACTION will subsidise that particular event. I do not think that that is reasonable and I just foreshadow that.

In any consideration of transport options, it is not acceptable for ACTION, as the public transport provider, to be asked to provide a direct subsidy at that level for such events, particularly if they are commercial live music events. That is just one of the issues that we would need to work our way through in relation to the provision of late night transport options for large scale events.

The amendment which Ms Le Couteur just moved also seeks to remove from committee consideration the proposed role of the government in providing community venues for all-age music events in the city and town centres. There are a number of government-owned facilities. But there is more particularly a very strong role in relation to the provision of live music events. There is a strong role across the non-government sector—the private sector—for non-government-owned facilities or private venues to actually better contribute to all-ages live music events.

Once again, whilst it is an area that I have no issue in the government being involved in the consideration of, I do believe that there should not be an automatic expectation that the government can build venues just for live music. We just do not have that capacity and I am not prepared, just off the top of my head, to say that we will look at this and we will deliver a new range of additional facilities that are live music capable.

The government is more than happy to be involved in this two-stage process. I am more than happy to accede to this refining amendment which Ms Le Couteur has moved by which there will be twin processes—one by the government, one by the committee. We are happy to contribute to a continuing conversation, discussion or consideration of issues in relation to live music.

I think it is a really good initiative that Ms Le Couteur raises through this motion, an area that is in need of government, community and broader support and understanding. It is one of those issues where we do need a deeper understanding, but we also need a signal that this is an issue of genuine concern and a gap in service or capacity that we really do need to fill. The government is really happy to be a part of that and we will accept the dual approach that Ms Le Couteur proposes.

Ms Le Couteur's amendment to **Mr Barr's** proposed amendment agreed to.

Mr Barr's amendment, as amended, agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Land—rent scheme

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (10.18): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes with concern:

- (a) that the land rent scheme has failed to deliver a real and substantial improvement in housing affordability;
- (b) the failure of the government to clearly identify to the Assembly and the broader community which financial institutions will support the land rent scheme;
- (c) that a number of those contracted to the scheme have or will accrue a stamp duty liability;
- (d) the potential for those contracted to the land rent scheme to experience negative equity;
- (e) the public comments made by the government in relation to the liability already accrued by some involved in the land rent scheme; and
- (f) the distress those Canberrans involved in the scheme have experienced as a result of the land rent scheme stalling; and

(2) calls on the government to:

- (a) reveal to the Assembly and the broader community who the lender is that has provided in-principle support;

- (b) explain to the Assembly and the broader community why those participating in a rental scheme are required to pay stamp duty;
- (c) provide these contracted to the scheme, but who have been unable to secure finance, the capacity to opt out of the program; and
- (d) explore reasonable reimbursement expenses for those who choose to opt out of the program as a result of a lack of finance.

I am pleased to bring forward this very important motion today. The first thing it is worth doing is to reflect on the context of how we got to a position where the land rent scheme became such a centrepiece of this government's housing affordability strategy. What we have and what we have had over the last few years, particularly under the watch of the former minister—he is here with us and hopefully he can contribute to the debate—was a deliberate squeezing of land supply. That was very clear. We saw that for a period of time.

Mr Corbell: Not true. It's a myth.

MR SESELJA: Well, it is true. We saw the numbers drop significantly. The minister interjects and says he did not deliberately reduce the numbers of blocks being released to the market and that it happened accidentally, apparently. It is a ridiculous argument that he is putting to us. We saw a significant drop in the number of blocks released to the market. That is a fact. They simply got the market wrong. At a time when the commonwealth public service was expanding, we saw this government squeezing land supply. As a result, we saw the price of land go up significantly. This is, in fact, acknowledged by the Chief Minister, because much of the focus has been about correcting the wrongs that happened under his government previously in squeezing the land supply too much and pushing the price up too much. As we all know, once that happens and you artificially inflate that price, you are faced with very difficult challenges in bringing the price of land down. We have always said that once you allow that to happen it is very difficult to quickly moderate prices. We do not want to see a situation where people who have bought see the value of their land drop significantly. So there are tricky challenges when you make these mistakes, and that is what this government did.

Other things they have done are that they have offered no real genuine relief in terms of taxes. Their inadequate concession scheme really does not benefit many people. It has often been playing catch-up with house prices, and we have seen that, in many cases, people with very moderate levels of income who buy very moderately priced houses either do not get any concessions or only get very small concessions on their stamp duty. This government has lived off the taxes of first homebuyers in particular. It has balanced its budgets on the backs of first homebuyers.

The third part of the equation which has led to this situation has been the flaws in the planning system, particularly around the administration of development applications and the like. We see it even now with the planning minister saying to us that the only way we can get things built in schools is to bypass ACTPLA. That is what he is saying to us today. We will certainly consider that very closely, but with this

regulation he is moving, he is saying the only way that these things can be done is to bypass ACTPLA. We are seeing that more and more. So the delays in the planning system that have been caused by this government by its failure to actually act and make changes in ACTPLA have led to higher prices and a stalling in activity.

The combination of this has led to the situation where so many Canberrans find it increasingly difficult to purchase a home. Remember, this is a government that owns a lot of the land and is a government that develops a lot of the land and is a government that also sets the planning framework and, of course, the levels of taxation. They pull significant levers that go to whether housing is affordable or not, and over the last few years they have made it less affordable.

Let us look then at the scheme itself. We need to look at why this scheme is flawed, why we argued that the scheme was flawed from the start, and why we will continue to argue that. We oppose this legislation because of a number of concerns about how this would work in practice. Fundamental to those concerns is the unlikelihood of financiers coming on board. It is a very simple equation. The reason we have seen such a reluctance from financial institutions to lend under this scheme is because they do not have the security that goes with land. That is the reality.

At the time the *Canberra Times* said that the government had consulted with financial institutions, which had supported the scheme, and we had someone from NAB saying they may support it in principle. Doubts were raised again in August, and Jon Stanhope said that he had no reason to believe financial institutions would not lend to applicants under the scheme. Well, we have come many, many months since then, Mr Speaker. We did see a bit of a mixed message in yesterday's question time when we were told by the Treasurer that no-one had received finance, and then we were told by the Chief Minister that one person had received finance.

We were told there were no lenders and then we were told that there is an anonymous lender who has given in-principle support. Well, we had in-principle support from someone who was not anonymous back when the scheme started, and now we have got in-principle support from someone who wishes to remain anonymous. This is the fundamental problem with the scheme. There is a reason why lenders are reluctant, and that is because the price of land tends to go up whereas the price of buildings depreciates. Because buildings depreciate, if a loan is against the building and not the land, there is a far greater risk for financial institutions. This is the simple equation. This is why it is being avoided by financial institutions and this is why the scheme is dangerous.

Secondly, we pointed out very clearly that there is a strong potential, because of the factors that I have just outlined, of people finding themselves in negative equity. They take out a loan and they see their asset—the house—depreciating and the land it sits on that they are renting appreciating and getting further out of their reach. But they do not get the benefit of that appreciation as people do in an ordinary transaction where they purchase a house and land package.

It is worth going through, Mr Speaker, some of the comments that have been made by the Chief Minister and how they compare with the comments of the families who

have spoken to us. Part of the defence we heard from the Treasurer yesterday was that it was the global financial crisis. Well, the family that was in my office this week said that they were seeking finance in July of last year and they could not receive it under the land rent scheme.

Contrary to the position that the Chief Minister has put that these people would not ordinarily be eligible for any finance, that is not the experience of this family who sat in my office this week. They have actually been offered finance; they have been offered significant finance on a house and land package. They have a good savings history, the gentleman has a stable job, and the banks and financial institutions do not see them as a bad risk. They see them as a reasonable proposition. They have saved up a reasonable deposit. They have a reasonable income up towards the threshold where the land rent scheme cuts out and they have stable prospects, but they will not give them finance under this scheme. That is one of the falsehoods that is being put out there by the government on this issue—that these are people who could not otherwise get finance.

The people I spoke to have chosen to go for the land rent scheme because they do not want to take out that high level of finance, but what they have been offered is a dud scheme and what they have consistently received from financial institutions is the answer no. These are not people who are not eligible for finance. They have been offered finance, but not under the land rent scheme, and that is the fundamental problem. It is the scheme itself that is the problem, not the individuals.

We saw the language that was used by the Chief Minister on Tuesday in the Assembly:

So we looked for a way to deal with that disability. And we found one, an excellent one, a land rent scheme ...

These are people who work hard, who have saved hard and who simply want to purchase their own home. What they are being offered is a dud scheme that does not work. The problem is not with them; the problem is with the scheme and with the false choice they have been offered by this government. They have pushed prices up so much, they have not made the changes necessary in the planning system and they continue to take significant amounts of taxation from first homebuyers. The government then turns around and says to them, “Well, we’ve got the solution for you”—the solution to the problem that they have created—“and that is the land rent scheme”.

I want to go through some of the particular parts of the motion. It is clear the government has failed to deliver a real and substantial improvement in housing affordability. The government has not identified to the Assembly which financial institutions will support the land rent scheme—they are anonymous. A number of those contracted to the scheme have or will accrue a stamp duty liability. The family that sat in my office this week will have a liability of \$5,000 in stamp duty.

Let us just think about that for a moment. These people do not own the land; they are not purchasing land; they are renting land, and the government is taxing them \$5,000.

These are middle-income earners who have saved hard for a deposit, who feel they do not want to burden themselves with the high mortgage needed to have a house and land package, and the government says to them, “Well, we’ll give you this scheme which no-one will lend under, but we’ll charge you \$5,000 for the privilege of renting land from us.” I think that is an outrageous proposition, and it is one of the less commented upon aspects of this scheme.

This government will charge you tax to rent. It will charge you stamp duty to rent a block of land. That is \$5,000 out of the deposit. That is \$5,000 more that is put on a mortgage for families, if they are able to get finance under this scheme. It is an outrageous imposition on young families. It is not offering them a genuine solution to their problems; it is burdening them with further levels of taxation.

We have seen the public comments that have been made by Jon Stanhope in relation to liability. He says that no-one is out of pocket. Well, they are out of pocket. They have spent legal fees. It is absolutely reasonable to expect to engage a lawyer if you are exchanging contracts. We would expect that in a transaction like this. That is the ordinary way of doing things. Jon Stanhope says, “Well, if they don’t find finance, it’s not our problem. If they’re out of pocket as a result of legal fees or anything else, that’s not our problem. They went into it with their eyes wide open.”

That is where we get to the crux of this issue, Mr Speaker—that is, they were led astray by this government. The lady quoted in the *Canberra Times* on Saturday summed it up—you do not expect to be led astray by the government. When the government puts on a scheme, you expect that it will work. You expect that it will have some backing.

When people read the newspaper reports and the press releases, they were led to believe and given the impression that there would be financiers. To date, there are not. Now we are told about an anonymous financier who “may” support the scheme. Eight months later we are told about an anonymous financier who may support the scheme. We were told about financiers who supported the scheme in principle many, many months ago, and they have not yet eventuated.

Moving to the second part of the motion, Mr Speaker, we call on the government—this is very important—to reveal to the Assembly who the lender is that has provided in-principle support. Mr Stanhope wanted the names of people who have come to the opposition. Well, what about the lender? Explain to the Assembly and the broader community why those participating in a rental scheme are required to pay stamp duty. That is not clear, and we look forward to the answer to that. The government should provide those contracted to the scheme but who have been unable to secure finance the capacity to opt out of the program and explore reasonable reimbursement expenses for those who choose to opt out of the program as a result of a lack of finance.

These are reasonable requests that will put at ease the minds of those individuals affected. We believe they have been led into a flawed scheme. Financiers have been slow to come on board, and we still do not see these people getting finance apart from the one example that has been given to us in the Assembly, and we do not know the

details of that at all. The broad experience of these people is they cannot find finance. The problem is not with them; it is not with their savings history; it is not with their capacity to pay; it is with the scheme itself.

They have been led into a scheme about which we have grave concerns, even if they do get finance. Because of the way that it is set up, we have grave concerns that these people will find themselves in difficulty in a few years, they will see themselves in negative equity and they will not get the benefits that people ordinarily get when they purchase a house and land package. They will not get the security that comes from seeing your asset value grow over a period of time.

The government have not been able to point to how that will happen. They do not have any answers on it. We deserve some answers now on this flawed scheme which has led so many people astray. We deserve to have the Chief Minister get up and tell us who these financiers are, whether he will allow these people to opt out, whether he will reimburse them and whether he will ensure that he does not lead struggling Canberra families into further financial difficulties as a result of a poorly thought out and ill-conceived scheme.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (10.34): The ACT Greens supported this scheme when it was introduced in June last year and still do so. We do have some concerns about the story to date, however, and take the view that some of the problems might have been addressed earlier on if the ACT government had brought a more open mind to its development.

As many people pointed out when this scheme was first proposed—both advocates and adversaries—having at least one interested credit provider on board was going to be crucial in its operation. The failure of the scheme to date has been, without a doubt, the failure to find money.

Any condemnation of the operation of this scheme, and its failure to actually bring a bank or other mortgage provider on board, needs to be tempered by an appreciation of the impact of the global financial crisis that broke with enormous velocity and power over the world economy through August and September last year. The pointy end of the global financial crisis back then was a shortage of credit. Since then, of course, it has spread more widely to manufacturing, resources and the economy more widely.

The credit crisis, however, flattened banks, finance companies and insurance businesses around the world. Here in Canberra, the mortgage insurance for the nascent land rent scheme which was coming out of the USA did dry up. Mortgage insurance is a protection for banks, not consumers, so do not think that we should have been surprised that the banks, in their nervousness at a difficult financial moment, faced with a dubious proposition of backing a very new product, instead backed away from the scheme.

I do not believe that this initial failure of the land rent scheme was inevitable. A little more care in setting it up, with some financial partners on board from the start, might have made a difference. Treasury's confidence in its modelling and the expectation that with the right regulations in place the market would rise to the occasion was, even at the time, a little unconvincing.

When the bill was introduced for debate last year, Greens MLA Dr Deb Foskey sought some advice from the Consumer Law Centre. She was surprised to discover that the ACT government had not also sought this advice. While welcoming this initiative as a lateral approach to affordability issues, the centre raised a number of concerns. Let me quote briefly from comments made to Dr Foskey's office. The centre advised as follows:

There is no doubt that the changes will have an impact on how credit providers view the market for consumers taking up the land rent option. For example, how will the changes effect amounts credit providers are prepared to make available and on what terms? Will it impact the thresholds at which mortgage insurance is required or available and the cost and terms of that availability? Has Government had this type of conversation with large credit providers or industry associations? If so, it would be very useful to know something of their response and their willingness to work with the changed arrangements.

It also said:

Separate, though related, questions of priority in the repayment of debt may also present challenges. In a property market where there may be some downward pressure on prices the incidence of negative equity is likely to increase. It will be important for Government to have regard to how it exercises its rights in such situations so as not to exacerbate hardship, even crisis.

It is worth making the point that David Tennant and the Consumer Law Centre were raising concerns about unsustainable credit and increased pressure on low to middle-income families a year before the market collapse. They do have the runs on the board, as it were. The best information and the best advice, in economies as well as other domains, often come from the margins of our society. We would like to see the ACT government look more carefully at this scheme and develop a plan to get it moving.

I know that there will always be statements that a bank or another business, or indeed a number of businesses, are interested, that there are market sensitivities and that, while issues will be sorted out soon, none can talk about it yet. But given that it is such a good idea, one of these days it will succeed.

That may not be very reassuring to people who have completed the CIT information course and are signed up to participate in this new form of homeownership. Those people, and others in waiting, as it were, need to know that more action is now being taken to get the scheme up and running as quickly as possible. There will also be many comments made that this approach is and always was simply a recipe for disaster and that no-one should invest in a house if they will not own or virtually own the land because that is where the value of the asset lies. Of course, in a time of recession or depression, it will similarly be the value of the land that falls, leaving heavily mortgaged homeowners at risk of negative equity.

The ACT has a leasehold system, which does allow for a different model and which, if the right protections are in place, offers an affordable step up to homeownership.

The ACT Greens will not be supporting this motion as it is written, because we believe that it is not focused enough on action at this time. I notice that Mr Smyth has circulated an amendment for it to go to the public accounts committee. The motion would set up an inquiry when what we really need is action. The inquiry will give everyone a chance to run their agendas, which in terms of the political parties here in the Assembly are well marked out. I note, too, that the public accounts committee has a number of annual reports hearings and presumably an inquiry into the third appropriation on its plate.

We would rather get things moving, so the Greens propose to amend the motion in order to put the government on notice that it needs to do the work now, consult appropriately, get some finance organised and get the scheme up and running in the next few months. I move:

Omit all words after “Notes with concern”, substitute:

“(a) that financial institutions are yet to make funds available to participants in the land rent scheme; and

(b) the impact of this uncertainty on would-be participants in the scheme; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

(a) consult with industry groups and community organisations, including the Consumer Law Centre, on remaining issues of concern to ensure that the scheme:

(i) carefully considers the actual capacity of consumers to fund purchases and sustain the necessary debt;

(ii) provides some protection against the risk of negative equity associated with falling property values;

(iii) is wound up in the event that lenders cannot be found; and

(iv) does not result in participants bearing a cost if the scheme fails; and

(b) report back to the Assembly on the progress of the scheme in the first sitting week in June.”.

Keen observers will note that most of the words have been changed. However, I think we have been fairly respectful of the substance of Mr Seselja’s motion before moving to an action plan. In the first instance, the Greens do share the opposition’s concern that finance is not yet available for the scheme and that the uncertainty of this scheme is impacting on its would-be participants.

I note that we have taken a more constructive tone in this amendment. I appreciate that the language of parliament invites drama and overstatement. The more ferociously you write, the more impact you think you might have. It is our view that in this instance, however, the reverse is true.

Rather than talking about what comments may or may not have been made on the matter of financial implications, this amendment includes a point in the requested implementation plan for the government to protect would-be participants from any financial penalty if the scheme should fail or linger on. The implementation plan here, in the next point of the amendment, is the bare bones. The ACT government may choose to address more issues or provide more support for participants and more assurance for the Canberra community.

The bottom line, however, is that the ACT government was not able to ensure that there would be finance available at the inception of this scheme. In our minds, it has not properly considered the risk and complications faced by the industry and participants, and there has not been proper consultation with local experts. The motion asks the government to do that and then to report back to the Assembly on the progress it has made.

It is our view that the next three months, with the situation of banks having somewhat settled down for better or worse, should be long enough to either get the scheme up and running or give us the evidence that it is not going to succeed. I urge the Assembly to support this amendment as the most constructive way forward.

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) (10.42): I am very pleased to be able to speak again on this very significant, new, innovative and very practical measure to seek to increase affordable housing for Canberra families. It has been a major imperative and priority of my government, and I am very pleased by the great progress we have made through our affordable housing action plan—an Australian-leading action plan with 62 very significant initiatives, one of which, of course, is the land rent scheme. The land rent scheme pushes the dream of homeownership closer to very many Canberrans and makes the possibility of owning a home a far more realistic option for a great number of households that are currently unable to access the housing market.

An affordable housing strategy such as the one that we have initiated has had some very significant successes to date. The strategy has seen record releases of residential land, 15 per cent of which are now required to be affordable. It is a strategy that has enhanced stamp duty concessions for low-income Canberra families, and that has seen blocks of land become available for sale over the counter and a restructuring of public housing to better meet the needs of tenants. The strategy is setting new standards for affordable housing. We have encouraged innovative design and construction of affordable homes, and just last week the Land Development Agency celebrated the commencement of construction on OwnPlace blocks, which will deliver house and land packages for less than \$300,000 for young families.

The affordable housing strategy is setting new standards in innovative approaches to address housing affordability. The land rent scheme is just one of the initiatives put forward as part of the strategy—one of the innovative ways that will help more Canberrans into homes of their own. The scheme is expected to be used as a means

for some households to advance their entry into homeownership by saving to buy the land outright in the future while paying land rent. The land rent scheme may not be the preferred or suitable option for every household, depending upon their preference and circumstances, but it will provide another option and another choice—and, for some people, almost certainly the only option, the only choice, for entry into the housing market.

The government's policy has been targeted to provide help to those households currently struggling to enter the housing market to repay a debt on both house and land through only requiring funding for construction of their new house. The scheme will provide the greatest benefit to those households with incomes that are less than \$75,000 by reducing their entry costs and their mortgage repayments. Under the scheme, households will only need to finance the costs associated with the transfer of the land and construction of the house, rather than the cost of purchasing the land.

The land rent scheme has deliberately been designed to be flexible, to minimise the costs of holding land and to maximise the opportunities for homeownership. There is no deposit required for people with incomes under \$75,000 who want to access the land rent scheme. There is no penalty if they decide to return the land to the government or transfer the land to a regular crown lease. The scheme is designed to help homeownership, not to hinder it.

We are pleased to see the number of people who are excited about the scheme—Canberrans who recognise that, for them, land rent represents the only way that they can afford to have a home of their own. In fact, around 340 people have already attended CIT land rent information sessions to date, and another session is scheduled for 21 March. There are currently 40 land rent blocks on hold; four blocks have exchanged but not settled; and there has been one settlement. These numbers indicate that the scheme is not on the brink of collapse, as has been suggested most particularly by the opposition, as it continues its trashing of and opposition-for-opposition's-sake approach to what is a fantastic scheme.

The global financial crisis that we are experiencing is the problem, not the design of the land rent scheme. There are, however, alternative views to those that have been presented by the knockers, who are led most particularly by Mr Seselja and the Liberal Party, and also a select group of mortgage brokers—surprise, surprise—a particular group in our community which, of course, does not want to see a scheme such as land rent succeed. Why would they?

There are alternative views—views that are provided by people who have spent their professional lives analysing affordability issues and people who are experts within our community. Emeritus Professor Brian Roberts of the University of Canberra has described the land rent scheme as having great merit, enabling lower income groups to enter the housing market in the ACT. A former director of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Professor Vivienne Milligan, describes land rent as an innovative scheme—

Mr Hanson: It's too bad the bank managers don't agree with them, Jon.

MR STANHOPE: They don't want to hear from the experts; they don't want to hear from Professor Brian Roberts of the University of Canberra; they don't want to hear from Professor Vivienne Milligan from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR STANHOPE: You hear the hubbub now, when you get down to the nitty-gritty of how well received this scheme has been—

Mr Seselja: You can get a million academics, but how many are actually getting a house?

MR STANHOPE: Here we go; Mr Seselja says: "They're only academics. They're not building houses." Professor Vivienne Milligan, a director of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute—only an academic, in the eyes of the Liberal Party—describes land rent as an innovative scheme for improving access to homeownership and has noted that the ACT is uniquely placed to offer land rent because of our leasehold land tenure system.

The banks themselves support the scheme, and consultations with lenders in the development of the land rent scheme were overwhelmingly positive. In fact, as we announced yesterday, we now have a financial institution which has provided their in-principle support for the scheme. Indeed, the government hopes that this burst of negativity led by the Liberal Party will not impact on their willingness to access the scheme. The fact that many more lending institutions have not come forward is overwhelmingly a reflection of the impact of the global financial crisis rather than a reflection on the land rent scheme. Just in the context of the position of banks around the world, there are only 12 banks in the world that remain AAA rated.

Australia, of all the OECD economies, is about the only one that has not yet either nationalised or partially nationalised its banks. A reflection of the impact of the global financial crisis on banks around the world is that almost every one of the OECD nations has begun a process of nationalising their banks. And we saw it again just this week, with President Obama involved in negotiations on the nationalising of banks in the United States of America.

All around the world, financial institutions are having difficulty in accessing and providing finance for even their longstanding lines of business, let alone for a new product line such as land rent. Speak to some of the developers around town. Ask the airport whether it has been able to access credit; ask John Hindmarsh how easily he has been able to access lines of credit. We are talking about established major businesses that are having difficulty establishing credit, and we are talking here about a new product line, a brand new product line. And, surprise, surprise, there is some resistance within a sector of the economy or the community that is under enormous pressure as a result of the global financial crisis.

Despite the global financial crisis, this government is determined to advance this particular issue. We have continued discussions with a number of major lenders since

the commencement of the scheme to provide any information that they may require in assessing the scheme. We will continue to encourage financial institutions to provide finance to the land rent customers. We are not financiers, we are not a bank, but we are happy to continue to facilitate the conversation, and we will not give up.

We will not do what the Liberal Party have done. We will not give up on those Canberrans who continue to dream of homeownership. The Liberals have abandoned them. The Liberals have given up. The Liberals have determined and decided that young working families are not worthy of their support, that young working families do not deserve their support, that young working families do not deserve a government that is prepared to fight for them, that young working families do not deserve a government that is prepared to be innovative and to go out on a limb to pursue a new product such as the one we are proposing here through the land rent scheme. This is a government that will stand up for them, a government that will stick up for them, a government that recognises their needs and a government that is determined to respond to the needs of battling Canberrans, most particularly battling young Canberra families. We will not abandon them in the way that the Leader of the Opposition, Zed Seselja, is determined to abandon young working Canberra families.

The Assembly needs to be reminded that it is not the role of the ACT government to provide finance, or indeed even to ensure that finance is available. That is not a role of government. The government has put in place a sound scheme. The government's role, which we have fulfilled, is to put in place a sound scheme that has been positively received by academics within the business. The government adopted a thorough approach to the development of the land rent policy. An important consideration was always whether it would contribute to meeting the housing needs of households under stress in the housing market or of households trying to enter the housing market.

The compatibility of the land rent scheme with the leasehold system and the land development system operating in the ACT was, of course, also considered. Modelling was then undertaken to review the assumptions and to determine appropriate settings for the land rent. Once the system was developed as a detailed policy, independent expert reviews were sought from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute and from the University of Canberra. Further changes, generally of a minor nature, were made to the package and the legislation was introduced.

The government has taken a thorough approach to the introduction of land rent, but it cannot, of course, guarantee finance. We are not a financial institution; we are not a bank. It cannot and should not become a bank. It is unfortunate that the policy is being held up by the global financial crisis, but the government is continuing to work to help those households that are not able to get into the housing market in any other way than by using land rent, that who may choose to use land rent as the most appropriate way of obtaining their housing.

It is ultimately up to the financial institutions, the marketplace and the ACT community as to whether the ACT government's offering of a land rent scheme is taken up. But the government will not turn its back on the scheme. We will not give up. We will continue to work with the financial institutions to keep the land rent scheme alive and running.

Mr Speaker, yes, the situation is, of course, frustrating for all of us—most particularly for those 40 Canberra families with land rent blocks on hold, families for whom land rent represents, perhaps almost certainly, the only way they can achieve a home of their own. It is a hope and a dream that they have, and it is a hope and a dream that we in the government hope that we can keep alive, a dream which the Liberal Party believes should simply be squashed.

I guess this is the great divide. The Labor Party wants to work with Canberrans who continue to dream a dream that was previously unavailable to them. The Liberal Party's approach and attitude is to squash the dream—patronise young working Canberra families and squash the dream. We will work with those families, we will continue to support them and, at the end of the day, I am hopeful that we will work with them to achieve the dream that each of us has—a dream that the Liberal Party believes that people who earn less than \$75,000 should not dare to have and for whom the Liberal Party does not have a response or an answer. Its response is to say: "Look, there's a bit of political mileage to be made in this. Let's just squash it. Let's play politics with it. Let's do everything we can to ensure that those people earning less than \$75,000 are kept where the Liberal Party believes they should be kept."

While the delays are, of course, frustrating, the majority of those people with blocks on hold have not, as alleged, suffered financial loss due to their involvement. They have not had to pay a deposit on the land, stamp duty has not been paid yet and, for those who are eligible for stamp duty concessions, full duty will not be required. It would be stunning to think that those that access this scheme would not be eligible for all of the concessions that apply. It would be remarkable—

Mr Seselja: \$5,000—that's reasonable?

MR STANHOPE: Well, it would be remarkable if anybody accessing this scheme pays \$5,000 in stamp duty. I would be amazed to find that. But for all those 40 families with blocks on hold or who are waiting to access the land rent scheme, the current delays are frustrating. We do not deny that. They are frustrating for the government. That is why the government will not turn its back on the land rent scheme. That is why we will not give up. That is why we will continue to work diligently in discussions with financial lenders. We will continue to support the land rent scheme, even at a time when global market conditions make the work difficult, because we are conscious of the frustration of those Canberrans who are eagerly waiting to access the land rent scheme, and we do want to minimise any delays.

That is why we do not, of course, support the opposition's motion. We are not prepared to just give up. We do not wobble like they do. When the going gets tough, we get on with the job. We do not do what the Liberal Party does—turn tail and run; run away from the hard decisions and run away from the hard issues. At its heart, of course, as we all know, the Liberal Party has no brief for young working families. It does not care about them. It does not care to support them through a land rent scheme, an innovative way of ensuring that young Canberra families, young working Canberra families that battle, have this option and choice. And that is—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Speaker, I am having a lot of difficulty hearing the Chief Minister.

MR SPEAKER: The Chief Minister's time has now expired. Mr Smyth, you have the floor.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (10.57): Mr Speaker, it is interesting that we have this debate because, if you go to the academics and the expert that Mr Stanhope wants to quote, I do not see on the bottom of any application form for a home loan, "This has been approved by an academic." It is well and good to quote academics who live in their academic world but in the cold, hard reality, in the light of day, when you and your partner go to the bank and you sit before the bank manager, the bank manager says, "Yes you can have the money," or, "Sorry, no, you cannot." The reality is this: people presenting to banks asking for a loan under Jon Stanhope's and Katy Gallagher's land rent scheme cannot get a loan. And that is the problem.

But if you go to people who actually understand how housing affordability works, people like UDIA, the Urban Design Institute of Australia, they say in their most recent report that the things that cause housing to be unaffordable in the ACT are the cost of land and the fees and charges in the planning system operated by the government. If you had a government that actually cared about the dream, that cared about the disabled households in the ACT who earn less than \$75,000, surely you would address the things that are causing the problem. When Jon Stanhope, Ted Quinlan and Katy Gallagher came to office, housing was affordable in the ACT. It was some of the most affordable housing—the ACT. But because of Jon Stanhope's taxation policies of "squeeze them until they bleed but not until they die", we have created, the government has created, this problem in the ACT. The land rent scheme will not address the fundamental of housing affordability because it does not address the cost of land and the fees and charges paid.

I have to take exception to what the Chief Minister said in his answer yesterday, "So we have looked for a way to deal with that disability," the disability of household income in the ACT. He said if you earned \$75,000 or less in your household income then you are in some way disabled. That is an insulting use of the word. But it is insulting to half of the households in the ACT. The outcome shows that half of all households in the ACT in 2005-06 had gross household incomes below \$75,000. According to Jon Stanhope, half of all ACT households are disabled. And he has disabled them. He has created this problem. He has created this stress in the market.

We had the spat between the Minister for Planning and the Chief Minister. They had the levers in their control and they shut down the land supply, exacerbating the problem. They increased fees and put in place a planning system that did not allow things to go ahead. That is the problem, that is why we believe that this motion should be passed today and that is why indeed, through my amendment, we believe that this land rent scheme should go to a committee for inquiry.

When you look at the Treasury proposals that have been brought forward by this government, you will see the scheme is nothing but a litany of failure. And this is another scheme that follows that standard format: “We have got a problem, we need to do something quick.” And the best example was the rating proposal brought forward by the government where even the then Treasurer, Ted Quinlan, finally admitted that it sounded like a good idea at the time.

I am sure a government under pressure, a government that did not want to address the real issues of the cost of land and planning fees because they were taking that money and spending it—and, as I have said many times in this place, at the top of the cycle they were planning for deficits; at the top of the economic cycle we were spending more than we earned, not putting anything away for the future or diversifying the income—of course is not going to touch those people that it was squeezing until they bled. Of course you are not going to stop squeezing before they had died, because you needed that money because you could not manage your budget. You come up with schemes that seem to be an answer, that make it look like you are doing something and, indeed, that sound potentially plausible. But when the detail is gone through and the outcomes are looked at, those schemes deliver nothing for those in housing stress.

Indeed, you can make the parallels. The Chief Minister is now saying, “The global financial crisis has stopped all the banks.” But none of the banks, before the full effect of the global financial crisis set in late last year, were going to lend on this. None of them have come forward. It is well and good to say, “We have got people interested.” We can only take the Chief Minister at his word for what they actually said.

To say “in-principle agreement”—“yes, we will look at that for you; we have got an in-principle agreement; they will look at it for us”—does not mean or say that any of the banks were ever going to lend on it. And they have not. They have not before the global financial crisis and they have not during the global financial crisis. We are going to hear about the global financial crisis a lot in the coming months, simply because the government is going to hide. The theme song of this government is going to more and more be “not, not, not responsible”.

What we have got is a scheme from a government, in the Chief Minister’s own words, that says half the households in Canberra are disabled. What sort of city have you created, Chief Minister, through your Canberra plan, your spatial plan and your economic white paper, that you now consider half the households in the ACT are financially disabled? What a sad indictment of your government that you have created the situation where half of the households in your care you consider to be disabled.

You have done nothing to address the root cause of that disability, which is the price you charge for land—until recently you were the only land seller in town—and the fees and charges and the planning system that you have. This problem was created by you and your government, by your government’s policies, and it should be rectified by your government. If not, get out of the way and we will.

The problem with hiding behind the global financial crisis is that it does not address what is going on. People still need to buy. People want to buy. We now know that half the households have less than \$75,000 as their combined gross income.

As Mr Seselja has pointed out so eloquently, this is a scheme that right back, eight months ago, did not have financial backing. What we have is a Chief Minister who was then Treasurer peddling false hope, saying, “We want to help you live the dream, but we are not going to change the things that would genuinely allow you to get into the housing market.” We are not going to look at the wasteful spending of the LDA on advertising. We are not going to look at the flawed planning system and the fee structure that you have that slow down people getting into the system. What we are going to look at is this airy-fairy land rent scheme.

On the percentages—and you can only go by the percentages; we heard them yesterday, 340 people have attended, 40 blocks are held, four have exchanged and one has settled—the one person settling is 0.29 per cent of those that attended. That is a failure by any measure. The four that are holding blocks is 2½ per cent. That four have exchanged and one has settled is a damning indictment of a system that does not work.

The Greens have moved an amendment—and we have looked at your amendment to the motion—but your amendment fails to address primarily what we are seeking to find out here: the failure of the government to identify the supposed institution that will lend, the liability of accrued stamp duty; things like the requirement to pay stamp duty, whether or not there will be reasonable reimbursement of expenses. We think this is worthy of answers from the government and we think it is worthy of an explanation in committee by the government.

I note, with interest, that the Greens now think that inquiries are there simply to allow people to run their own agendas. We will look at all committees in future in light of that statement from the Greens. But the reality is that people are coming to the opposition, they have spoken to us. They earn less than \$75,000 a year. They are saying that they can actually borrow double what they would want to borrow if they can own the land. But they do not want to do that. What they can't do is borrow money to be part of Jon Stanhope's flawed land rent scheme.

I have an amendment that I will move that refers the land rent scheme to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for inquiry and report. I understand it will be done after Ms Bresnan's amendment is dealt with. It is important we get to the bottom of this. It is important we find out how they came up with this scheme. It is important we see the modelling so that all can know how badly flawed this scheme truly is. (*Time expired.*)

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (11.07): I speak in support of Ms Bresnan's amendment. The amendment takes on board the inevitable impact of the global financial crisis on this land rent scheme. The Greens are concerned that there is still no finance provider in the market for this product. The government has doubtless been active behind the scenes trying to get someone on board. Sometimes acting sensibly behind the scenes is not reassuring for those people out in front.

It is our view that the government needs to come back to the Assembly, having done a fair bit of work on the known concerns with this scheme, and hopefully with at least

one finance provider available. We would also like the ACT government to assure would-be participants that they will not be hung out to dry if the scheme fails. We also need an answer on whether any costs have been incurred by people who have been in the scheme to date. We have heard that they have not been charged stamp duty and so on, but are there other costs that we have not become aware of?

I understand that the Liberal Party has a very different view of this scheme, of how the market works or should work, than we do. The Greens supported the introduction of the scheme because we believe it opens the door to a range of options. However, the onus is on the government now to make it work or, failing that, to let those people who would like to participate off the hook.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (11.09): The great Australian dream played out in song and literature is to own a home among the gum trees. I guess you could say owning a depreciating home in the bush capital on rented land does comply with that great Australian dream. But I think if you took a much more sensible approach to the great Australian dream you would probably find it is to have a house and land package, to have ownership, to have control of that land, to have security, to have an investment, to have something to give your children when you move on from the world. This government does not share that dream. This government does not share that aspiration of so many people in our community. In the ACT we have got 37 per cent of people renting, according to an AAMI survey. Thirty-seven per cent renting is a very high percentage. In fact, it is up there with the highest in the country.

To help combat the difficulties of homeownership, last year the Liberals took a policy to the election to abolish stamp duty. The government were pretty quick to pick up our policy on smaller class sizes but, unfortunately for Canberrans, especially young Canberrans and Canberrans on low incomes, they did not take up our policy to remove stamp duty for first homebuyers. Instead, they have stuck with their systems, shoddy as they may well be, to try to maintain their credibility, to try to maintain some integrity, to try to maintain their pride at the expense of young Canberra families. On 28 August last year, the Chief Minister said on the ABC:

They indicated that they were prepared to back this scheme—

“they” being financial institutions—

and we proceeded on the basis of assurances from a broad range of financial institutions that they would support the scheme.

I wonder whether the Chief Minister would support that quote with regard to this new financial operator that is allegedly coming on board. I wonder whether that quote remains true. I will read it again:

They indicated that they were prepared to back this scheme and we proceeded on the basis of assurances from a broad range of financial institutions that they would support the scheme.

He went on to say:

So at this stage we have no reason to believe that the relationships that we have, the undertakings we have from financial institutions, are other than that they will support land rent.

I find it pretty amazing that the Chief Minister, in spite of all that has happened or all that has not happened over the last eight months with regard to this scheme, still remains so committed to this scheme. But again, it is not so surprising. This government is not committed to homeownership; it is not committed to young Canberra families. In fact, if you look at the sale to tenants scheme, part of Housing ACT, 0.2 per cent of tenants last year took up the scheme. Two in every thousand people last year took up the sale to tenants scheme. As an indicator of how serious this government is about homeownership, I doubt the other 998 people even knew the scheme existed. Last year, according to the annual report, there were 11,253 public housing tenancies. In one line in the annual report it says 27 people bought their own ACT government property. That is not much of a commitment, I think, to sales to tenants. It is not much of a commitment to people trying to get into the housing market.

What this problem comes down to is a complete lack of responsibility, a complete lack of duty, that this government has to the people of Canberra with regard to the scheme. They promised so much. They promised these people that this would be their in, their in into a market they otherwise could not get into. They signed up to the scheme with good intentions. They signed up, thinking that it was a good scheme. They signed up, thinking that it was a credible scheme. They signed up, thinking that this would actually better their futures. Instead, they have been grossly let down. Thirty-nine families have been grossly let down by this government and they are still out there in the cold, still waiting for a financial operator to come on board. But why would they come on board? Why would they come on board when you have got a depreciating house on a block of land that you do not own?

Perhaps the government is going to announce, in the coming days or coming weeks or coming months, that there is in fact a financial operator. We do not know. The Chief Minister will not say. But before that time, Canberrans are going to be waiting, these 39 families are going to be waiting, to get some security for their future which is the very thing they signed up to. The government does not take public housing seriously; the government does not take sale to tenants seriously; the government does not take sale to first homebuyers seriously. So it is no surprise that the land rent scheme is not working.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Disability and Housing, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Corrections) (11.15): The opposition have missed one of the most significant points related to this scheme and other initiatives of the government to effect homeownership or try to encourage homeownership in the ACT. Certainly, Mr Coe shows his ignorance of the public housing sector and continues to display that ignorance. I wish that he would do his homework just a little better and then maybe he will make some sense that we can actually take on board.

Mr Coe talks about the sale to tenants system, which has been well known by tenants of the housing system for decades and decades and which is regularly featured in the newsletter. But Mr Coe does not recognise that 86 per cent of our tenants are on rebates. He is happy to quote 0.2 per cent and things like that, of the 11½ thousand tenancies, but he does not recognise that something like 40 per cent of these tenancies are in multi-unit complexes so the units are not for sale anyway. We cannot sell those; it is just not possible. And Mr Coe does not recognise that significant numbers of people in our public housing stock are on incomes where they just will not be able to. There are significant numbers of them on under \$30,000 a year.

He also does not recognise that we are trying to, over time, provide a series of options for people to transition to homeownership. That is the word that those opposite have not picked. This particular land rent scheme was not portrayed as a panacea for all evils. It was supposed to be one of a number of options which may suit certain categories of people trying to transition to homeownership. Some other people will be looking forward to the shared equity scheme when it gets the nod from our financial institutions. Some people will go through the sale to tenants system. Some people will be taking advantage of the initiatives which came out of the affordable housing strategy with regard to the release of blocks englobo at west Belconnen, where, through the initiative of the Chief Minister's affordable housing task force, we were able to have the developer provide units at less than \$300,000 a head. What we are seeing here is a range of options.

Mr Seselja: They put some land on the market. They actually put some land on the market, and they want some credit.

MR HARGREAVES: Do be quiet, would you. Would you just be quiet and stop continuing to make a fool of yourself.

Members interjecting—

MR HARGREAVES: If you are hell bent—Pauline, you can be quiet too, thanks.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves, address the chair, please.

Mr Coe: We're really embarrassed.

MR HARGREAVES: Same to you, young fella. When you've got your long pants on, come back. The issue about the land rent scheme which people have forgotten is that it is an option being put forward to enable certain people to get into homes. If they do not want to pick it up, they do not pick it up. The object of the exercise is people who do not have the disposable income to be able to afford \$400,000, so in fact—

Mr Smyth: And if you do, you still cannot get the loan.

MR HARGREAVES: You are a bore, you know, sometimes.

Mr Smyth: No, and you are just wrong.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Smyth!

MR HARGREAVES: You are so boring. You are a professional bore.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Smyth! Mr Hargreaves! Mr Hargreaves, ignore the interjection by Mr Smyth.

MR HARGREAVES: Just go back into your burrow, will you; talk to your rodent friends somewhere else.

Mr Smyth: It is a very telling debating point.

MR HARGREAVES: Just go away for a while, will you, and let me make the point. The issue is that people cannot afford \$400,000 but they have sufficient disposable income to afford a couple of hundred thousand dollars and pay rent on the land underneath it; when the capital value of that building is realised and they have paid it off, they can then buy the land. In other words, they can purchase the premises in two hits.

These people here are trying to make a huge issue out of a particular option. They are treating this as the panacea for all evil. “You’ve got it wrong; you’ve got it wrong.” We have had a go at providing a number of options—a number of options. What we did not do was sell 1,000 units of our public housing stock. We did not do that. We did not sell 1,000 units of our stock so that we ended up—when we came to government, to administer the housing portfolio, we were 1,000 units short. No.

It was this government that increased and accelerated the land release program which enabled that englobo experience out at west Macgregor to happen. It was this government that explored and started to introduce the shared equity scheme. This government has got a very clear idea of the housing continuum, whether it be private or public, from homelessness or imminent homelessness through to homeownership, and it is doing something about it.

All these folks are doing collectively is carping—carping and trying to find a little something. It is opposition for its own sake, notwithstanding the rhetoric that we heard at the beginning of this particular Assembly. This is something that Mrs Burke used to say all the time to me: “I would like to work with you.” Then she would go out there and expose some poor person’s drastic circumstance.

We are hearing that again: “We would love to work with you.” There is a distinct difference between the offer to work with us from the Greens and these people. Their offer is hollow. They are just doing this for the spectacular. You are just doing it for the spectacular, for the one-line grab, to make yourselves look good. All you do is expose yourselves and the ignorance that you have. All you have to do to avoid the imagery of absolute ignorance and stupidity is to ask the question. All you have got to do—

Mr Hanson: How embarrassed the Greens must be to be tangled up with this mess.

MR HARGREAVES: I am embarrassed to sit in a chamber with people like that, Madam Deputy Speaker. That is what I am embarrassed about. This government has done so many things to try to get people into homeownership that people interstate ask me in housing ministerial councils how we are going about it. They ask me, “How are you going about it there?” And we tell them. The conversations that we have with the commonwealth now are agreeable conversations, trying to move forward in this sense.

I contrast that with my experience with the Liberals when they were in charge in the commonwealth parliament. I had nothing but fight after fight. Nowadays, at least we are finding the way forward, because we are doing innovative things here in the ACT. What these guys should do is recognise that there is an option. There are a number of options being put forward to the people of the ACT.

What they might like to do is this. I give them this challenge. They are supposed to be the alternative government. Let them put on the table another option to help people into homeownership. In all of my time as minister for housing in this place—and this is my fifth year—I have heard not one suggestion on how we could move people from the rental marketplace into homeownership. Not one. They come up and say, “We do not like this, we do not like that and we do not like something else.” We have heard nothing about how you can do it.

Mr Hanson: Didn't you hear about stamp duty?

MR HARGREAVES: They have not come up with a scheme yet. They talk about stamp duty, their stamp duty concessions. What happened about that? The Treasury officials themselves blew that one out of the water. It was a nonsense, and you know it was a nonsense. It was arrant, abject nonsense. I wonder which absolute bright spark on that side of the chamber invented the nonsense. The Treasury department blew it out of the water. They have gone back to go; down the snake they have gone. They just pull up the ladder and down the snake they go again.

I would like them to put on the table a concrete scheme which will effect homeownership more quickly for people on low incomes—actually concrete. So far you have been found wanting. Mr Coe sits there and plays with his telephone instead of thinking up something really concrete to do. I know what he is doing, Madam Deputy Speaker; he is ringing a friend. That is what he is doing; he is ringing a friend. *(Time expired.)*

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (11.25): I am not surprised that Mr Hargreaves has run away from his chair after that performance. It is unfortunate that we have got cameras in the chamber, because it is that kind of performance which leads ordinary Canberrans to not have much faith in some of the people in this place. That was a disgraceful speech, which made no sense and was not backed up by one fact or any sort of basic logic.

Just briefly to respond to Mr Hargreaves, because I do not want to spend too much time doing that, he obviously was not listening to my speech. We have outlined in a

number of ways how we can do things better. We can do it through streamlining the planning system. We can do it through better targeted land release policies. We can do it through cutting taxes for first homebuyers. There are a number of ways that we can make housing more affordable—and this mob has failed on every one of them. That is why John Hargreaves had to run away after that ridiculous speech.

Mr Hargreaves: What? I'm here. What do you mean "run away"; I'm here.

MR SESELJA: If there was one message that we got from Mr Hargreaves, it was a new defence to the land rent debacle, and the defence is this: it was never really meant to do much. That is what John Hargreaves was saying to us: "It wasn't a panacea. No, please, we never expected people to put too much store in this." It was the centrepiece of your policy—

Mr Hargreaves: Absolute rubbish and you know it. You know it is rubbish.

MR SESELJA: and it is a failure, and you are running away from it now. You are telling us that really it was never meant to be that important. "There are all these other things that we are doing."

Mr Hargreaves: You are making it up. You are trying to scramble out from under because you are trying to make it up.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, Mr Hargreaves!

MR SESELJA: He points to land release. He points to englobo land release, something we have been calling on for years and something that had been resisted by the minister for years. They squeeze land release and he said: "Isn't it wonderful? We stopped squeezing it for a little while. We allowed a bit more land to trickle out," having squeezed it for years and pushed prices up and pushed it out of the reach of first homebuyers. He sees that as a success. So they are the two successes. There is the land rent scheme, which Mr Hargreaves did not even attempt to defend, essentially saying: "Well, it was never that important. It wasn't central to our affordability strategy." The fact is it was cobbled together in an election year to try to pretend that this government had some credibility on housing affordability. It is a failure and hundreds of Canberra families have been offered false hope as a result of this. They, in the words of one of the individuals, have been led astray by the government. They have been led up the garden path.

The defences are quite pathetic. We are going to hear more and more: "It's the global financial crisis; that's what it is." That is Mr Stanhope's defence now: "It's not the scheme. It's not that it was a dud scheme; it's the global financial crisis." But people who have spoken to us say that not only were they knocked back in July—these are people with a good savings history, with a good credit history, who were knocked back in July—they were knocked back in August and they are still being knocked back. It was not the global financial crisis which led to them being knocked back. And, in fact, they are not being knocked back for finance altogether. Even now, these people eligible for the scheme are being offered finance—just not for the land rent scheme. They are being offered it on house and land packages.

It totally blows out of the water the argument that it is about the global financial crisis. The reality is that banks are still lending for housing in the ACT. They are lending for housing and they are offering finance to some of the very individuals who qualify for the scheme and have signed up to the scheme. But they will not offer it for a dud scheme; that is the problem.

It is disingenuous for this government to try and hide behind global financial difficulties and claim that that is the problem with their system. It was a dud when they put it to the Assembly; that is why we voted against it at the time. It is a dud for a number of reasons, most important of which is that lenders are unlikely to want to lend with so little security. It is a dud because, if the lenders do end up lending, we can guarantee that there will be more onerous conditions than on a normal loan and we will see people go backwards. As they see the value of that asset go backwards and they see the value of the land that they do not own go up and get further out of their reach, they will get into trouble. They will not get the same kind of security that we expect for people who purchase a house and land package.

One of the wonderful things about homeownership in Australia over many years around the world has been the security that it offers. This does not offer security. It offers false hope. It is a dud scheme and the government's pathetic defence that we will hear more and more—that it has got nothing to do with them, that it is someone else's fault, that it is global conditions—does not stack up. Banks are still lending for houses in the ACT. They are offering finance to these people in the ACT. They are not offering it under the land rent scheme because the land rent scheme is a dud.

We will not be supporting the amendment. We do not believe it covers what it should. We believe what we have put to the government is very reasonable. We are surprised, really, at the changed approach of the Greens to the inquiry. But we will not be supporting their amendment, which significantly changes the motion. We are disappointed that they will not be supporting our call for an inquiry. We believe it should be inquired into. It appears that the Labor Party and the Greens are going to get together to squash any attempt to inquire into this, get some outcomes and get some answers for these people who have been led astray by Jon Stanhope and his government.

Question put:

That **Ms Bresnan's** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 10

Noes 5

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

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (11.36), by leave: I move the following amendment that I referred to in my speech:

Add:

“(3) refers the land rent scheme to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for inquiry and report.”.

The opposition believes the amended motion is a much weaker version of what is required and one can only assume that, because the Greens and the ALP voted to put this flawed system in place last year, what they are doing now is stopping an inquiry that will really get to the heart of what is going on in this failed land rent scheme.

It is interesting that the minister responsible for the act, the Treasurer, is not here and has not spoken. Indeed, the primary agency responsible for the land squeeze and the failure of housing affordability in the ACT, the planning minister, has not even bothered to attend. This is symptomatic of the way in which Labor has approached this problem. We saw it with Mr Quinlan’s quick-fix rates amendments that seemed like a good idea at the time.

Clearly, this is another one of those ideas that simply seemed like it was a good idea at the time—and it has failed. It is the notion of having to do something, to be seen to be doing something. We have had the dreadful admission from Mr Hargreaves that not even they expected it to be a panacea of much impact or much effect. Again, that just heightens the need for an inquiry into this—what did the Chief Minister describe it yesterday as—“still breathing” land rent scheme. Well, “still breathing” might in this case be a scheme that is on life support, because it has failed to deliver what they said it would do. It has failed to deliver in eight months a single start of a construction to put a roof over a family in the ACT—a singular failure of policy, which is so common of this government.

That is why it is important to find out what is wrong with the scheme. It is important to find out whether it was flawed right from the start, as we contend. It is important to find out what could be done to rectify the scheme. But it is particularly important, as Mr Seselja has outlined in his motion, to find out which institutions have been consulted and have failed to lend their support and, indeed, which is the supposed institution that has agreed in principle. We need to find out from the people out there what is their accrued stamp duty liability. We need to find out whether or not the government will explore reasonable reimbursement expenses and we certainly need to find out what is going to happen with the stamp duty and other fees and charges. Those are the reasons why it is important to have this inquiry.

We still have not addressed at heart the failure of housing affordability in this city, and it is a failure that can be laid well and truly at the feet of the Chief Minister and the Treasurer, because it is their policies that have caused this. You only have to go to the UDIA report, which simply says that housing affordability in the ACT has

declined because the government is charging too much for land, as the sole supplier and now in some cases the partner in deals, and the fees and charges and the planning system militate against housing affordability.

The land rent scheme is a sham; it is a scheme on a life support system. That only one person in eight months has been able to get finance clearly indicates that in its entire life—not because of the global financial crisis; in its entire life—it has not been supported by the financial institutions. At the end of the day the scheme has to be a scheme that banks and institutions will lend on confidently or it will fail. And that is why it is failing. It is not the global financial crisis, which will be trotted out as the excuse of choice of all Labor governments across this country, particularly here in the ACT. This scheme failed before the full impacts of the global financial crisis were settling in.

What the opposition wants is for the land rent scheme to go to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for inquiry and report. It can be a broad ranging inquiry. We have left this just to move it to the committee; it will be up to the committee to come up with further terms of reference. It can look at ways of making it work better. It can go and talk to the banks and the financial institutions. It can ask people—the 39 frustrated families that the senior public servants spoke about in the *Canberra Times* on the weekend—who have not been able to use this scheme to realise their dream of homeownership.

Perhaps half of all Canberra households might come forward—the \$75,000 gross income disabled households that the Chief Minister speaks about, which represent half of the households in the ACT, who have now been slammed by the Chief Minister for their lack of income. It is appalling that he thinks that half of the households in the ACT cannot afford to buy their own homes—in a city that he has run for seven years, under policies that he has implemented and passed. So it is important that this goes to a committee. It is important there is an inquiry. It is important that the Assembly debates this further.

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (11.41): I am rising to oppose Mr Smyth's amendment. Basically, as we see it, the bottom line is that this scheme needs more work on it, and the people who can do the work on it are the government. The PAC is not in a position to make the commercial arrangements which would appear to be what are needed to progress this scheme.

The other issue is the timeliness. Ms Bresnan's amendment requires the government to report back to the Assembly by the first sitting week in June and I am not confident that PAC would be in a position to meet that time frame, given the estimates coming up for both the third appropriation bill and the budget itself.

I totally agree with the Liberal Party that this is an important issue but I think it is an important issue which at this point of time the Assembly should continue to ask the government to progress; it is in a much better position to progress it than PAC is. So the Greens do not support this amendment. We support the government getting on with the amendment that Ms Bresnan has moved.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (11.43): Just briefly, it is very disappointing that what we have seen today is that the Greens and Labor voted for this flawed scheme and the alliance has now come together to shut down any genuine scrutiny of this issue. We are particularly disappointed. We will continue to take this up, even if the Greens will not. We believe it is an issue worth pursuing the government on. I think this is going to become a pattern here—that it will be the opposition who are prepared to ask the hard questions and do things that make the government uncomfortable. But the alliance agreement, the partnership, will make that very difficult for the Greens. We see that again: they are standing behind this flawed policy.

We take a different view and we are very proud to take that view because it is the right thing to do. These people have been led astray. It is a poor policy; it is a policy that was simply never going to work. We stand by our opposition to it and we stand by the alternative policies we put forward that would genuinely help first homebuyers and would genuinely help young families to get into the housing market. The Greens and the Labor Party coming together to shut down this inquiry is a great disappointment and will be a great disappointment to those people who have been so badly let down by this government.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 6

Mr Coe
Mr Doszpot
Mrs Dunne
Mr Hanson
Mr Seselja
Mr Smyth

Noes 11

Mr Barr
Ms Bresnan
Ms Burch
Mr Corbell
Ms Gallagher
Mr Hargreaves
Ms Hunter
Ms Le Couteur
Ms Porter
Mr Rattenbury
Mr Stanhope

Question so resolved in the negative.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 11

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

Noes 6

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Maternity leave

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (11.49): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) acknowledges the benefits of a paid national maternity leave scheme; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

(a) fulfil its promise to implement 18 weeks maternity leave for its employees; and

(b) show leadership by calling on the Commonwealth Government to accept the recommendations of the Productivity Commission report regarding maternity leave.

I was prompted to bring this motion to the notice of the Assembly due to the proximity of International Women's Day 2009 on 8 March. International Women's Day is a longstanding global recognition of women's rights and achievements. The International Women's Day website informs us that annually, on 8 March, thousands of events are held throughout the world to inspire women and celebrate their achievements.

A global web of rich and diverse local activity connects women from all around the world, ranging from political rallies, business, conferences, government activities and networking events. Australia's theme for this year is to unite to end violence against women. UNIFEM Australia advises us:

Violence against women is one of the most widespread violations of human rights, as one in three women will suffer some form of violence in her lifetime. Violence against women is an epidemic that devastates lives, fractures communities and stalls development. Despite some progress on this issue over the past decade, its horrendous scale remains mostly unacknowledged, with new dimensions including the global trafficking of women and girls.

This day also draws our attention to what UNIFEM informs us are the other three prominent issues facing women globally. UNIFEM reports:

1. Almost half the HIV-positive people in the world are now women, but in Africa, where the epidemic has stretched the furthest, young women are three times more likely to be HIV-positive than young men, and young women make up over 60% of 15-24-year-olds living with HIV. Gender inequality leaves women with less control than men over their bodies and their lives. They have less information about how to prevent HIV, and fewer resources to take preventative measures. They face barriers to the negotiation of safe sex that

include economic dependency and violence and in some cases, poverty forces women into the sex trade. And regardless of whether they themselves are HIV-positive or sick with AIDS, women assume the burden of home-based care for others who are sick or dying. While many have shown great fortitude and courage in these situations, they lose time and energy that might be spent on earning a livelihood or caring for their own illness, and risk sinking into an ever-deepening degree of poverty.

2. Poverty traps women in multiple layers of discrimination and hinders their ability to claim their rights, not only do women bear a disproportionate burden of the world's poverty, but in some cases, globalisation has widened the gap, with women losing more than their share of jobs, benefits and labour rights.

3. In addition women's political participation, a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and genuine democracy, is extremely limited internationally and as a result, laws, policies and government institutions fall short—neither affecting the needs of all citizens nor supporting progress on women's rights.

This brings us to an issue close to home that affects Australian women—the provision of paid maternity leave. Paid maternity leave has a variety of benefits. The World Health Organisation notes:

... an assessment of available evidence indicates that:

- A period of absence from work after birth is of utmost importance to the health of the mother and the infant. This is conducive to both the optimal growth of the infant and the bonding between mother and infant. Absence from work also allows the mother to recover ...
- Breastfeeding is a major determinant of infant health. There is ample evidence on the advantages of breastfeeding for child health and development and for the prevention of child mortality and morbidity ... WHO recommends that infants should be exclusively breastfed on demand from birth for at least 4 and, if possible, 6 months of age ... Women who are unable to breastfeed on demand are at increased risk of stopping breastfeeding prematurely.

In conclusion, they recommend that women need at least 16 weeks absence from work after delivery. The health benefits of having time to recover from birth, breastfeed and bond with your child are undeniable. This time should not be disrupted by financial stress. Families with new children have enough worries without adding the burden of the loss of income, especially in the current economic crisis.

Providing the mother and child with enough time to bond and be healthy, is not the only advantage of providing paid maternity leave. For employers, staff retention is a key benefit. The Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency has noted that in 2003 their annual survey found that the retention rate of female employees that had taken maternity leave was 67 per cent of organisations where paid maternity leave was provided. The agency continued:

This retention rate was only 56 per cent at organisations where no paid maternity leave provisions were offered ... Paid maternity leave is increasingly seen by employers to benefit their organisation by:

- Increasing the number of employees returning to work after maternity leave;
- Reducing recruitment and training costs;
- Improving staff morale and productivity;
- Providing a cost-effective means of retaining skilled staff: and
- Improving organisational efficiency through the benefits of long service—for example, institutional memory, industry knowledge, networks and contacts.

These factors are valuable not just to the families of the employer but to the economy as a whole. The ACT Greens policy supports local and national initiatives that assist parents to balance work and family commitments, including paid parental leave. This policy reflects the importance of recognising the rest of the family in these situations, and providing leave and flexible working arrangements is the focus of this motion in support of maternity leave.

In 2008 ACT election the Labor Party produced their *Fair and safe workplaces: statement of principles*. In this document they promised to increase paid maternity leave for ACT public servants from 14 weeks to 18 weeks. This promise was one of a list of measures aimed at assisting workers to find a balance between work and family. While I acknowledge that compared with many employers the ACT government is doing relatively well with its maternity leave programs, Labor promised to increase the number of weeks. This increase will bring the ACT above the World Health Organisation recommendations and will also bring us in line with the proposals from the 2008 Productivity Commission report.

Another election promise was to provide funding for specialist industrial relations advice for the community sector, and I would encourage the government to progress this and to work further to enhance IR provision for these crucial services. I have anecdotal evidence that suggests that paid maternity leave is a major issue for employees in the community sector. I urge the ACT government to assist these services in any manner possible to ensure that employees' families have the time and flexibility they need and that the community services can retain their much needed staff.

Both federal and ACT Labor have publicly announced and reinforced their commitment to paid parental and maternity leave over the last couple of years. I call on the ACT government to stand by that commitment and urge their commonwealth colleagues to accept the recommendations of the Productivity Commission's inquiry.

Key points from the draft Productivity Commission Report in September 2008 include:

- ... the introduction of a taxpayer-funded paid parental leave scheme that would:

- provide paid postnatal leave for a total of 18 weeks ...
- provide the adult minimum wage for each week of leave for most eligible employees, with benefits subject to normal taxation.
- All employees with a reasonable degree of attachment to the labour force would be eligible, including the self-employed, contractors and casual employees.
- A broad range of family types would be eligible ... so long as they meet the employment test.
- Those families not eligible ... would be entitled to a maternity allowance (the equivalent of the baby bonus) and other social transfer entitlements.
- Businesses would also participate in the scheme by acting as “paymasters” for the government-funded scheme, and by providing capped superannuation contributions for employees.

The commission states that such a scheme would help to provide the benefits I have mentioned previously—increased staff retention for business and therefore decreasing costs of recruitment and training—providing financial security for families and generating child and maternal health and welfare benefits. The draft report also notes that the scheme would promote some important, publicly supported social goals, and in particular, the normalcy of combining a caring role for children and working.

While I understand that the final report to the Australian government has not yet been released and will be released this weekend, I am concerned about recent press reports which suggest that federal Labor may back away from the proposed scheme due to the current economic situation. Ms Julia Gillard has said they would have to wait and see before deciding whether the scheme would be in the budget and that it will have to be weighed up against the current financial climate.

I am not alone in my concerns. More than 100 prominent women, including the federal sex discrimination commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick, met yesterday and called for the scheme to be retained in the upcoming budget. ACTU president Sharan Burrow has said:

This would help thousands of families experiencing financial uncertainty at a time of greatest need.

Both the federal and state governments are currently spending money to help stimulate the economy and keep jobs and families secure. Paid maternity leave is one measure that addresses both these issues. I call on the ACT government to lead by example by committing to including in the 2009-10 budget the provision of 18 weeks paid maternity leave for ACT public servants. As the Productivity Commissioner, Robert Fitzgerald, stated, “This is a workplace entitlement. It is not a welfare measure.” I look forward to members’ responses to my motion and commend it to the Assembly.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Disability and Housing, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Corrections) (12.01): I move:

In paragraph (2)(b), after “maternity leave”, add the following words: “if the final report of the Productivity Commission mirrors the interim report in this respect.”.

I advise members that on their printed sheet it has the term “paragraph (2)(b)(ii)”. That was the term on the original motion that I had when I drafted the amendment. It should just read “paragraph (2)(b)”, and members should ignore the roman numerals.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I will speak to both the amendment and to the main substantive motion. The motion is that the Assembly acknowledge the benefits of a national paid maternity leave scheme. Before I go on, I would like to indicate that the government will not be opposing the amendment circulated by Mrs Dunne. My colleague Ms Burch will speak to the promise to implement 18 weeks maternity leave for ACT government employees, and I will address the benefits of a national paid maternity leave scheme funded by the Australian government and what the Productivity Commission might recommend.

I say “recommend”, because we do not know what the final recommendations of the Productivity Commission will be until this Saturday. Maybe this motion would have been better debated in the March session where we would have been able to discuss the actual recommendations rather than to speculate today on what might be based on an interim report that may have limited relevance for final recommendations. However, we did not determine the timing of this debate.

I wish to speak to that part of the motion which concerns the ACT government’s commitments to implement 18 weeks paid maternity leave within the ACT’s public service. Paid maternity leave entitlements have been a feature of public sector employment in Australia for more than 20 years and have increasingly been introduced into the larger private sector employers. Unions and interest groups have long campaigned for both the right to unpaid maternity leave and for a paid leave entitlement. The paid maternity leave debate, as we have seen, has received renewed impetus in Australia since the federal government commissioned the Productivity Commission to conduct an inquiry into options for a national scheme in early 2008. The renewed interest in paid maternity leave reflects, in part, government and employer concerns over the national skills shortage.

Nationally, the declining fertility rate and the retirement in the workforce of large numbers of the baby boomer generation are contributing to a significant skills shortage. Equally, research into early childhood development education has identified bonding between mother and child as ever more critical for the life outcomes of the child. The ACT Labor government has responded to the skills shortage through a \$50 million program announced as part of last year’s budget. This includes responding to the recommendations of the ACT Skills Commission that all new ACT government offices with 500 or more employees will include childcare facilities and lobbying for an extension of fringe benefit tax exemptions for childcare expenses.

The government has also taken significant steps in supporting early childhood development, for example, through the extension of access to preschools, the establishment of early childhood skills and the building of child and family centres in Gungahlin and Tuggeranong.

In 2008 in October the government committed to introducing in this year's budget an additional four weeks in paid maternity leave for ACT public service employees and an additional week in bonding leave. Mr Speaker, we made this commitment because the government believes that having children and having a family should not be an impediment to the skills and contributions people bring to the workplace. It is also about choices and assisting with the work-life balance. In fact, at this point I have to thank the Leader of the Opposition for his endorsement of this commitment. On 7 October last year he said:

We wholeheartedly support it: we believe it's a good policy and it's a natural next step in helping women, in particular, in balancing work and family.

Current arrangements within the ACT public service provide for access after 12 months service to 14 weeks paid maternity leave and up to five days bonding leave and five days personal leave for bonding purposes. Maternity leave provisions for ACT government employees are contained in the Public Sector Management Act 1994. These provisions are supplemented by additional arrangements contained in each agency union collective agreement.

In summary, all female permanent and temporary employees who are pregnant are entitled to maternity leave. Paid paternity leave provides employees other than the mother of the child with paid leave in a similar fashion to paid maternity leave. This entitlement provides flexibility for families with newborn children. Maternity leave, while accessed by some employees, is not statistically significant. Paid carers leave, which, amongst other things, covers adoptive parents, is also supported by provisions that parallel the paid maternity leave provisions.

In addition to providing employees with access to paid maternity and other leave provisions, the ACT government has demonstrated its strong commitment to employees with family responsibilities more generally to a range of family-friendly employment conditions, including permanent part-time work, unpaid parental leave, flexible working hours, compassionate leave, bonding leave and grandparental leave. These are generous provisions which are designed to both attract and retain employees within the ACT public service and support families and early childhood development.

In considering paid maternity leave within the ACT public service, it is worth noting that Australia is ranked eighth amongst OECD nations in female labour force participation at around 58 per cent. However, the female workforce participation rate in the ACT at close to 70 per cent is significantly higher than the national average and places very real competitive pressure on employers in the ACT and potential stresses in early childhood development.

Australian Bureau of Statistics data indicates that federal enterprise agreements cover approximately 26 per cent of workers in Australia. Of these, around 40 per cent include paid maternity leave provisions. The bulk of workers under these agreements are employed in public sector or education-related fields, two major markets in the ACT. As such, in the public sector labour market where the ACT competes directly with the Australian public service, maintaining or enhancing the ACT public service's relative position in paid maternity leave is important.

In this regard, most federal and state agencies offer between 12 and 14 weeks paid leave. However, significant increases have been made in the tertiary sector, which offers 20 or more weeks paid leave, and a select number of federal agencies are looking to radically extend their provisions. For example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics is currently negotiating for a possible 26 weeks.

The number of instances of maternity leave in the ACT public service per year over the last five years has averaged between 300 and 350, trending slightly upwards. In relative terms, this is not particularly high, given that as at 30 June 2008 there were, according to the Commissioner for Public Administration's 2007-08 workforce profile, 12,463 women in the ACT public service. Nevertheless, it is a significant chunk of our workforce, and for these 300 to 350 mothers, access to paid maternity leave is extremely important to them and their families.

Not surprisingly, the instance of maternity leave is concentrated for women between the ages of 25 and 39 years, peaking at between 30 to 34 years. This is despite a relative dip in the representation of women in the workforce for this age group. The average period of leave from the workplace for ACT government female employees is 38 weeks, with 23 weeks made up of maternity leave—paid, half paid and unpaid—and the remainder made up of other types of paid leave—for example, annual leave, long service leave et cetera.

Resignations from the ACT public service of women returning from maternity leave are around 20 per cent and higher than the overall turnover rate of women of 15 per cent. There are also marked differences in separation levels depending on occupation and classification. For example, separation rates for teachers and nurses after maternity leave are generally lower, while separation rates for employees in lower paid classifications are generally higher. This data points to the work-life stresses experienced by mothers, and extended paid maternity leave is one possible response to this dilemma.

It is true that extending paid maternity leave within the ACT public service may marginally increase the fertility rate, although this is difficult to calculate without significant modelling of behaviours and demographic shift. However, it is thought that the impact on the ACT public service will be marginal in the medium to long term, particularly if other employers in the future extend their provisions in response to the Productivity Commission's recommendations.

Equally, it is problematic to measure the degree to which additional maternity leave entitlements may impact upon attraction and retention rates or translate into increased

productivity and reduced absenteeism. Most significantly however, a reduction in employee separations will have a positive impact on real and indirect costs for agencies with the replacement of staff calculated as costing anywhere between 50 and 200 per cent of salary.

The proposed extent of provisions put forward by the government effectively match the interim recommendations of the Productivity Commission released in September 2008 for a national scheme providing 18 weeks of paid leave at the minimum wage. Consideration needs to be given as to how and when to introduce extended maternity leave provisions within the ACT public service, particularly given the current fiscal climate. The most obvious and logical means of implementing the added entitlement would be through the negotiations for the 2010 round of enterprise agreements. Other options will need to be considered for any partial introduction.

Apart from the extra weeks of entitlement, consideration will also need to be given to providing additional support for agencies in the backfilling of positions. Otherwise, there is likely to be a negative impact on productivity and retention given the likely period of extended leave, and, if not properly managed, that could lead to discriminatory practices in the recruitment of women of childbearing age in some. Irrespective, it is likely that access to the extended provisions will remain subject to the qualification of 12 months service. Nevertheless, the extension of paid maternity leave is a cost which will impact across all agencies and affect operational capacity.

It is possible, but unlikely in the short term, that there will be some federal funding explored with extending paid maternity leave from 2010-11, subject to the recommendations of the Productivity Commission inquiry and the commonwealth's response. Accordingly, consideration is also being given to other initiatives to retain women of childbearing age in the workforce. These might include providing access to other types of leave for maternity purposes, a possible right of return or reduced classification to better balance work and home responsibilities and keeping women engaged in the workplace while on maternity leave. Greater access to existing leave provisions could be achieved in a number of ways, including easing access to paid personal leave and long service leave.

In terms of a right to reduce classification following maternity leave, currently the ACT public service provides for leave without pay and part-time work options for employees following the birth of a child. These provisions provide for an employee to remove themselves from the workplace or reduce their hours of work during this important stage of a child's life. An alternative approach that might be considered is to provide employees with a right to reduce to a lower or possibly less demanding classification level during the first three years of a child's life. At the end of the reduction period, the employee would have the right to revert to their former level. This proposal has the benefit of enabling the ACT public service to retain the services of valued staff while enabling them to more easily achieve work-life balance.

It is also worth considering that currently the ACT public service recognises instances in which both the mother of the child and her partner are employees of the ACT public service by providing for a period of leave without pay for maternity leave or parental leave purposes to be shared between both employees. Extension of this

principle to allow improved benefits of long service leave and annual leave to be shared between both partners when both are employed by the ACT public service may assist employees to maximise use of their paid leave entitlements.

Enhanced flexibility and contact with the workplace is another option worth considering. During the employee's pregnancy, adjustments are often made to working conditions, such as the frequency of breaks during the day or commencement and finishing times. The provision of a right for pregnant employees to access part-time work or flexible working hours during these times could also assist employees in achieving appropriate work-life balance.

Furthermore, recent research has highlighted as a concern of women accessing maternity leave that they frequently lose contact with their place of work during an extended absence or subsequently are not aware of developments in their workplace. Provision of formal mechanisms that enabled an employee to be kept informed of important events, meetings and developments that may affect them or their workplace would address some of these concerns. Additionally, such access would be of benefit to the employee in returning to the workplace after maternity leave. Consideration of all of these options should of course be subject to operational needs.

Irrespective of the method and timing of any changes to paid maternity leave, or the introduction of some of the other improvements I have outlined above, the government remains committed to retaining its competitive advantage in the labour market through the provision of extended paid maternity leave, both in the interests of a sustainable workforce and in support of the early childhood development. I commend my amendment to the chamber and indicate my support for the motion from Ms Hunter.

Essentially, my amendment merely says that this will go forward if the wording in the final report mirrors that of the interim one. If, in fact, there is a significant departure, we will need to think about it again and possibly come back to the chamber. If, in fact, it is in general terms the same as what is in the interim report, then I would communicate with the federal minister for industrial relations along the lines outlined in the motion. I commend the motion to the chamber.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (12.16): The Canberra Liberals will be supporting this motion, and I thank Ms Hunter for bringing it forward. I would say also, though, that the amendments that have been circulated, both by Mr Hargreaves and Mrs Dunne, add a bit of clarity to some of it. I think it is difficult to endorse a Productivity Commission report that we have not seen yet. With those amendments being agreed to, I think we are broadly comfortable, but it is worth going through our position, and, in particular, some concerns we still have over the national debate. I will then, in turn, deal with the 18 weeks issue in the ACT.

The Liberal Party supports a paid parental scheme. However, the final recommendations of the Productivity Commission due by the end of this month will provide further clarification on the best approach. The Productivity Commission's interim report had several key recommendations that we support, including that a paid parental scheme would cover a broad range of family types, so long as they meet the

employment test. A paid parental scheme would improve child and maternal health and welfare as families have more time together, improve employment rates of women as working arrangements are more conducive to having a family and relieve some of the financial strain felt by new families. However, there are some concerns that still need to be addressed.

Some businesses that already have paid parental leave have indicated that they may cancel their schemes and replace them with the federal government's scheme, which pays all eligible parents the minimum wage regardless of their income. This has the potential to save a company money while employees go backwards. Many small businesses have also indicated that providing access to paid parental leave for all families will lead to higher costs for them as temporary staff need to be recruited and trained. This needs to be considered in any of the final recommendations by the Productivity Commission and in any actions by government. Whatever scheme is introduced, we must ensure the outcome is the best possible for families and that there are no adverse effects on small business.

The Productivity Commission report also stated that those not working and, therefore, not eligible for paid parental leave, would receive the baby bonus. However, the difference in pay between the proposed paid parental leave scheme and the baby bonus is nearly \$5,000. We believe that regardless of whether a parent is working in the home or working outside the home, they deserve the same treatment. A paid parental scheme should not create two classes of parents, and I think this is a very important point.

It may be indicative of the ACT Labor Party's position on this point, that we have the Minister for Industrial Relations speaking to this issue rather than the Minister for Women. This cannot be looked at simply as a workforce issue. If it is going to be government funded, if the government is going to fund paid parental leave, then we do not believe there should be discrimination between women who work at home and women who work outside the home. We believe there should be parity there. I think that is a reasonable principle.

We have not heard from the minister on this, and maybe when he closes he can give an indication of what the ACT Labor Party believes on this, but the fact that the industrial relations minister, rather than the Minister for Women, is speaking to this issue does cause us some concern. It is not strictly an industrial relations issue. In fact, during the election campaign when this issue came up, it was the Minister for Women, Katy Gallagher, who actually spoke on the government's behalf. So we hope there has not been a change in emphasis.

Our position, though, is clear: we believe a paid parental scheme is something that is worth pursuing. We believe there are issues to be ironed out, and particularly how it interacts with small business. We do not want to see a scheme whereby women who are not in the paid workforce when they have children are discriminated against and are disadvantaged by the scheme. We do not believe that is a reasonable outcome, and it is not something we support.

Currently women participate in the workforce at rates higher than at any other time in Australia's history. According to the Productivity Commission's report, during the

key reproductive years of 25 to 34 years, female workforce participation rates increased from around 45 per cent in 1978 to 70 per cent in 2008. This is a major shift in the role of women and, as a result, workplaces need to change.

Paid parental leave is just one way to adapt to a changing society. Workplaces also need to look at flexible working arrangements and ways they can provide a family-friendly environment to ensure the best possible conditions for staff. The implementation of 18 weeks maternity leave for ACT government staff is, we believe, a step forward, and we look forward to the final recommendations of the Productivity Commission, which we hope will further improve the lives of Australian families.

As to the 18 weeks leave, we came out and supported that when the Labor Party announced it during the election campaign. We believe it is a good step forward and that it is worth pursuing. But I think it is worth reflecting on why we have this wording in this motion. The Greens and Labor Party have signed up to an agreement, and part of this motion calls on the ACT government to fulfil its election commitments. I would expect, and I would think the Greens would expect, that the Labor Party, the Labor government, will fulfil their election promises.

Paid maternity leave should be no different from smaller classes or any of the other major promises that were made during the campaign. It does indicate potentially that the Greens do not necessarily believe that the Labor Party is going to fulfil its election promises, and they are now putting forward the wish list of priorities of which election promises need to be honoured. Obviously, the ones that are not put forward are the ones that perhaps do not need to be honoured. We do not take that view. We actually believe that the government should honour its election commitments. We do not believe the Greens should have to put forward a motion.

The other point that is worth making on this is that the Greens will be part of the development of the budget. The budget will actually be a bit of a collaborative effort between the Greens and the Labor Party. That is in the Greens-Labor agreement, so one would think that as part of that process, which they will have some ownership of when the budget is put forward, these sorts of things will be discussed.

It is worth noting that the Greens, who are in an agreement with the Labor Party and who will form this alliance which will put together and develop budgets, are now picking publicly which of the election promises of the ACT Labor Party they believe should be honoured. We seek some clarification from the Greens, perhaps when Ms Hunter closes, on whether this represents the beginning of the wish list of those promises that they believe are worth salvaging, with the promises absent from the wish list being those which they believe are not worth salvaging or do not need to be honoured.

For instance, would the Greens support a motion that calls on the government to honour its commitment to lower class sizes? We are not sure. That is certainly something we are committed to, and we would like to see the government honour its commitment on that, regardless of how much they would try and use weasel words to get around it. It does represent a very interesting scenario for us, so we would seek some clarification on that.

In the context of the budget process, it will be collaborative between the Greens and the Labor Party; that is the way the agreement frames it. This budget will partly be a result of both the Labor Party's wishes and those of the Greens. It is interesting that we are having now the debate about 18 weeks leave separate from any negotiations. I do not know whether this is the result of budget negotiations breaking down. We do not know if they have commenced, but it is an interesting one. I ask Ms Hunter, though, to clarify for us whether this represents the wish list of those promises that they believe the government should be honouring

We believe the government should honour all of its promises. We do not believe that it should just prioritise a few that it believes are worth saving and throw out the rest. They took certain promises to the electorate, and they should honour those. We have not seen them honour them in previous years, but we will be seeking to keep them accountable for every one of their promises.

In summary, we believe that 18 weeks leave for ACT government employees is a worthy initiative that is worth supporting, and we will support it. We believe that provided the Productivity Commission irons out some of the potential issues which we have raised—the effect on small business and the disparities between women who are in the paid workforce and women who are not—then we would be very supportive of such a parental leave scheme. I thank Ms Hunter for bringing the motion forward. I note Mrs Dunne will be moving an amendment which we will be supporting, and we will also be supporting Mr Hargreaves's amendment.

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

Sitting suspended from 12.26 to 2.00 pm.

Questions without notice

Budget—deficit

MR SESELJA: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, you were reported on 14 February 2009 as saying that the ACT budget would move into a deficit of around \$17 million this financial year. You said on ABC radio on 20 December 2008:

... the next budget is going to be a difficult one.

Treasurer, will the deteriorating budget position mean the dumping or postponing of any election commitments and if so, which ones?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. Budget cabinet has not started meeting yet, as it does in its formal process to consider the 2009-10 budget. I stand by all the comments I have made. It will be a very difficult budget. The budget position is deteriorating. I think there has been around a \$220 million turnaround in our budget since the pre-election budget update was published in September last year.

At this stage, we have not made any decisions about what is in or out of the budget, but our priorities are our election commitments and our commitments under the parliamentary agreement with the Greens. We remain committed to those promises, and we are particularly looking to those promises which have a timetable attached to them.

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Seselja?

MR SESELJA: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will you rule out cuts to the projected spend in health, education, social or community programs?

MS GALLAGHER: Again, at this stage everything is on the table, but I do not want to create concern that we are looking to cut services in this year's budget—unlike what would have happened if the Liberals had actually won the election last year. You had forecast \$200 million in savings out of service delivery agencies across the ACT public service. It was 200 staff.

Mr Seselja: That is not what Treasury said. Is that what Treasury said?

MS GALLAGHER: Let's not quibble about the programs. It was 200 staff. I know the Liberals say there would have been no redundancies. There would have had to have been redundancies, because you cannot take nurses out of Corrections Health and reapply them to one of the other priorities out of health. You cannot do it. There would have been redundancies, and you know there would have been redundancies.

I do not want to create any concern that we are going to approach this budget with any desire to cut service delivery, particularly in those key areas of health, education, community services and our social support systems. I think everybody who is watching the unfolding of our national economic situation is acutely aware of the role that the public purse, through taxpayers' money, through the delivery of budgets, is essential now, more perhaps than it has ever been particularly over the last 10 years.

I would say that it is more critical now that governments invest, that we support our own asset base, that we look at services and that we make sure we continue to invest and support local families and local jobs. That is what this government is about. That is what we are going to be doing through the budget.

It is going to be a difficult process. We will have to look within ourselves and look at whether there are any areas of government where we can reprioritise or reallocate. We live on our record in this regard. Our commitments to health, education and community services are well known. You will not find another government that has invested in those areas to the extent that we have. We have a proud record there. Despite our budget having some pressure and despite the GST sceptics we have over there now—we heard them this morning—

Opposition members interjecting—

MS GALLAGHER: Yes, we heard you this morning—the GST sceptics. Despite all of that we will deliver a fair and responsible budget to the people of the ACT, and we look forward to your support for it when we bring it forward.

Ministerial arrangements

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): The Attorney-General, Mr Corbell, unfortunately is unable to attend question time today. He regrets that. I stand ready to seek to answer any questions that anybody may have had of Mr Corbell today. I apologise, as does Mr Corbell, for his absence this afternoon.

Questions without notice

Planning—schools

MS HUNTER: My question is to the Minister for Planning. Given that all parties have committed to a more collaborative approach in this Assembly, can the minister explain to the Assembly why he did not brief members of the Assembly on proposed changes to the planning regulations in relation to school upgrades on the same day that he announced them in the media?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Hunter for the question. It did, of course, come up as a matter of some discussion in relation to the briefing that I held today with all parties on the government's response to the commonwealth government's significant investment in ACT schools.

It is worth advising the Assembly of some of the time lines that I have been associated with in regard to this particular commonwealth program. The stimulus package only passed the Senate 20 days ago. I note the contribution of the Greens party and I thank them for their assistance in ensuring that the stimulus package did pass the commonwealth Senate. It means that the ACT is in a position potentially to benefit, to the tune, in the education sector, of up to \$230 million from that investment.

I attended a briefing that the commonwealth government provided in relation to the package 19 days ago. That briefing was provided by the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Treasurer. It was a useful briefing. Following that process—and I understand that there was an Assembly sitting week that then intervened—I then held a series of briefings and sought information from key stakeholders, most particularly ACT schools in the government, Catholic and independent sectors, to seek their advice in relation to the sorts of measures and assistance they believed they needed to meet the commonwealth's requirements in order to be successful in achieving funding under this program.

The detailed guidelines in relation to the building the education revolution program were made available to the territory government yesterday. Following the meeting with education stakeholders last Thursday, I announced the government's intention to embrace the views that were put forward by the school sectors in terms of their needs to meet this commonwealth package and the requirements therein, and indicated that the government would seek to introduce planning regulations into this place in order to ensure that schools were able to meet those guidelines. At that time, both the

Greens and the Liberals provided an interim response. The media went straight to them, after I indicated that that would be the government's intended response. At that time—

Ms Hunter: Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order as to relevance. I understand there are very tight time frames; I do understand all of that part. I am asking: why didn't we get a briefing that was scheduled on the same day that the minister went out to the media with the information? That is the question I am asking.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Barr, you have given plenty of context. Perhaps you could answer the question.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. As I indicated, as planning minister and also as education minister, I sought briefings from the stakeholders regarding their requirements of the government as to what they needed the government to do to assist them to apply for funding under the commonwealth program. I received that advice last Thursday and indicated immediately to the media and to all parties what I proposed to do. A briefing was then requested by the Leader of the Opposition on Friday of last week. On Friday of last week, the Leader of the Opposition's office requested a briefing, and I immediately agreed to provide a briefing.

Mr Seselja: I think you'd actually want to check those facts, Andrew. Be very careful.

MR BARR: It may have been Thursday afternoon or Friday morning, but I immediately agreed, upon receipt of the request for a briefing from the Liberal Party, to provide a briefing. The Greens did not seek a briefing at that point. They put out a press release indicating opposition to what the government was proposing. But on Tuesday of this week—yesterday—my office contacted both the Leader of the Opposition and the Greens to set up a briefing for today at 1 pm. That briefing was held, at which I outlined to all those who attended the guidelines that the commonwealth government provided to us yesterday. So it would not have been possible for me to brief on guidelines I had not yet seen. I got them yesterday; the briefing was today. All of this has happened in the last 20 days from when the Senate passed the stimulus plan.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Hunter, a supplementary question?

MS HUNTER: Again for the Minister for Planning, what prevented you from briefing members of the Assembly sooner than you did?

MR BARR: I answered that. In order to brief members of the Assembly on guidelines from the commonwealth that we were provided with yesterday, I needed to have those guidelines and I needed to absorb them, as I did last night and this morning. I then provided a briefing today at 1 o'clock. Let me go through this process again for the clowns opposite. Last Thursday, Mr Speaker, I met with education stakeholders.

Members interjecting—

Mr Hargreaves: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, would you control that unruly rabble, please, so we can hear what Mr Barr is saying.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Barr.

MR BARR: Last Thursday, Mr Speaker, I met with education stakeholders to seek their views in relation to the information that had been provided by the commonwealth on that point. I received their advice and then went and acted upon that. Following the briefings and the information I subsequently received from the commonwealth yesterday, I was then able to provide more advice to both the Greens and the Liberals today. Also in that briefing today, in addition to the latest information from the commonwealth—so, within 24 hours of receipt, I was able to brief the opposition parties—I was also able to provide the detail of the work and the advice that was provided to me by the education department, the Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools from Thursday of last week to provide the government's proposed regulations in the planning system.

Fundamentally, Mr Speaker, what this comes down to is whether the Greens and the Liberals are going to stand in the way of ACT schools receiving \$230 million in commonwealth funding. That is what it comes down to. That is the matter of substance. There is one party in this chamber at this point that appears able to give 100 per cent commitment to working with these school communities to ensure that they can access this school funding. We know the position of the Liberal Party—they are still yet to give even in-principle support to this commonwealth funding. We know that they opposed it bitterly in the House of Representatives and the Senate. We know the Liberal Party's position in relation to funding for government schools in the ACT. Mrs Dunne has expressed it time and time again—it is throwing good money after bad investing in government schools. That is the position of the ACT Liberal Party. That is the position of the Canberra Liberals. That is why they have had so many education spokespeople over the entirety of my time as education minister—they are implacably opposed to funding for public schools.

It is disturbing, Mr Speaker, in the context of this debate that there is a position from the Canberra Liberals of opposition to funding for schools, and we know that that is consistent in the federal arena and the local arena. We know where the Liberals stand on this. My concern is the position outlined—

Mr Hanson: Mr Speaker, on a point of order on relevance, I think that the Greens have moved away from listening to the response to their own question. The question was about the briefing, about the timing of the briefing and not about the matters that Mr Barr is referring to.

MR SPEAKER: The point of order is upheld, Mr Barr. Can you return to the question.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. When providing briefings on matters of this significance, one would hope that parties would approach these issues with the level of significance that they deserve and that they would not have this sort of pointless

political point scoring. In the end, it would appear from what we have seen that there was a knee-jerk reaction from the Greens and the Liberals in relation to this. They are now trying now to back away when every single education stakeholder and every single business, community and property stakeholder who has an interest in jobs and schools in the territory has come out in support of the government's position. Now we see the furious backflips—

Mr Hanson: On a point of order on relevance, Mr Speaker: the question is about the timing of the briefing. Again, Mr Barr is meandering across the wide range of the subject.

MR SPEAKER: The point of order is upheld. Do you want to answer the question, Mr Barr?

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. In the 11 seconds remaining to me, it would be my advice to the Liberals, in particular, that they go and examine the new diving boards at the Canberra Olympic pool and start rehearsing their backflips right now.

Capital works—projects

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Treasurer. It is about the Treasury's role in yesterday's report from the Auditor-General on Fairbairn Avenue and Horse Park Drive. In the report into Fairbairn Avenue and Horse Park Drive that was tabled yesterday, the auditor found that the overall management of these projects "was not effective to deliver the projects on time and on budget". Treasurer, why did the Stanhope-Gallagher government fail to deliver these capital works projects on time and on budget?

MS GALLAGHER: Again, I am not sure what point you are trying to make here, but the management of the Fairbairn Avenue upgrade and Horse Park Drive is the responsibility of Territory and Municipal Services. Treasury certainly has a coordinating and central role in terms of capital works projects, but this project itself lay within Territory and Municipal Services. If you are asking me—

Mr Smyth: You have not read the report.

MS GALLAGHER: If you want to be tricky—you are trying to be tricky, but if your question—

Mr Smyth: Why do I write to you for the quarterly capital works update?

MS GALLAGHER: The question is around Treasury's role in general in capital works provision, I presume. Treasury has a—

Mr Smyth: Yes. I am asking you about Treasury's role. I am asking you about this specific report.

MS GALLAGHER: If it is about a specific report, it needs to go to the minister who is responsible for that.

Mr Smyth: I am asking about the bits in here that included Treasury.

MS GALLAGHER: You have asked me about five different questions, Mr Smyth.

Mr Hanson: No, he did not.

MS GALLAGHER: He is. He is just keeping asking the questions. You get one question. The answer is: Treasury does have a coordinating and oversight role of capital works projects. That does, I imagine, as part of a whole-of-government arrangement, look at cost overruns and management of projects as it would work with a whole range of agencies. I am not sure whether I can assist you other than to say that Treasury would have been involved in the discussions around the project.

Mr Smyth: Have you read the report?

MS GALLAGHER: No, I have not read the report yet, Brendan. I have a whole range of work. This was tabled yesterday. Will I read the report? Yes, I will—as I do with all Auditor-General's reports. But have I read it in the last 20 hours? No, I have not read the report. I will read the report. I have not read the report yet. And if it is about the report, it needs to be asked of the minister responsible.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, a supplementary question?

MR SMYTH: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Treasurer, what actions will you take to rectify the failures in the delivery of capital works projects that have been identified by the Auditor-General?

MS GALLAGHER: I will be reading the report. If there are areas relevant to my portfolio, I will be taking action.

Mr Smyth: You can go to page 7; you can go to page 12.

MS GALLAGHER: You have had the luxury of time to read it.

Planning—schools

MS PORTER: My question is to the Minister for Education and Training and Minister for Planning. Will the minister advise the Assembly of the urgency of the ACT government's work to ensure that ACT schools can take full advantage of the federal government's stimulus package?

MR BARR: Again I thank Ms Porter for her ongoing interest in investment in our schools, for her ongoing interest in ensuring that ACT schools are able to access all that the commonwealth will provide under the stimulus package. In order to protect the territory against the global financial crisis, this territory Labor government is working with the federal Labor government 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 package will deliver new and upgraded libraries, classrooms and new gymnasiums—better places to learn for our students and better places for our teachers to teach.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: Here we go! We see it time and time again—the catcalls and interjections from the opposition that give further evidence to their true views on investment in schools in the territory. They cannot even sit for 30 seconds through any question in relation to this matter.

This package from the commonwealth will continue to build on ACT Labor’s and the Labor Party’s record investment in schools in the territory. ACT Labor is investing \$350 million in our schools. The commonwealth is now proposing a further \$230 million investment in ACT schools, and all ACT schools are eligible for this funding. It must be remembered, despite all of the political hurly-burly, that this funding, this money, is about our schools and our students. It is also about strengthening our economy and keeping Canberrans in jobs in the wake of the current global economic crisis.

As the Prime Minister has put it, we are in uncharted and unprecedented times. That is why this package cannot wait and that is why our schools cannot wait—because the economy cannot wait. That is why the commonwealth has set such stringent deadlines in relation to this package. Indeed, the commonwealth’s guidelines state that we are obligated to “ensure that the design, application and assessment processes—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Barr, one moment, please.

Mr Coe: Have you checked the correspondence on it, Jon?

Mr Stanhope: I’m not sure what you are referring to.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Coe and Mr Stanhope, we are in the middle of Mr Barr’s response here. If you want to take further questions, take the opportunity when it arises.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I repeat, for those who were not paying attention, that the commonwealth guidelines for this program state that we are obliged to ensure the design, application and assessment processes for the projects are fast-tracked, with minimal red tape. They further state that, to ensure that the building education revolution has the greatest impact on job support—

Mr Hanson: It’s the building revolution!

MR BARR: Building the education revolution—it is essential that construction on as many projects as possible commences quickly. Projects which are unable to

demonstrate their ability to be completed within the specified time frame will not be funded.

So we are talking about the actions that this government can take to ensure every ACT student in every ACT school benefits from this package. At the moment we are focused on cutting planning red tape to help schools secure their funding and to ensure that these projects are built.

In this regard, I draw the attention of the chamber, particularly those opposite, to the next part of the guidelines, which state that when funding applications are submitted to the commonwealth in the first round of funding “schools with projects for which relevant planning and approval processes are already well advanced”, when the funding applications are submitted, “may be preferred over other applications”.

To demonstrate the urgency, let us again take the example of a school that wants to build a new gymnasium in round 1 of the funding process. This is a major project for any individual school. The bid needs to be with the commonwealth for approval by the end of April this year, at the latest, and work must start no later than June this year and must be completed by December 2010. If schools cannot meet these deadlines, they miss out.

That is why the government is proposing a series of sensible regulations, to ensure that ACT schools are able to submit their funding applications to the commonwealth. This government is proposing to make sensible arrangements to ensure that schools have their best chance to share in this magnificent commonwealth funding. The government is aware that other states and territories, like Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia either have made or will make arrangements similar to what the ACT government is proposing. We have the support of every education stakeholder.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Porter, a supplementary question?

MS PORTER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Would the minister advise the Assembly about the consultations he has conducted with the community and advise the next steps the ACT government will take to ensure ACT schools can take full advantage of federal Labor’s stimulus package?

MR BARR: Thank you, Ms Porter, for the supplementary question. To ensure that the package is as effective as possible in protecting the jobs of Canberrans and further improving our education system, the government has been consulting extensively with the community and key stakeholder groups. We have consulted with every public school community. I have met with the P&C associations, the AEU and the principals association.

Last week, through the jobs and education round table, I consulted with the ACT independent schools association, the Catholic Education Office and the ACT Block Grant Authority. Today, at the request of the opposition, we have provided them and also the Greens with a briefing on the sensible arrangements the government proposes to put in place to give our schools the best chance to achieve their share of the funding.

There has been very strong support for the ACT government's proposal to further cut red tape to let schools get on with putting in their submissions. The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations yesterday called on the Greens and Liberals to not block the changes to allow money from the federal government's stimulus package to flow to schools. A once-in-a-100-year opportunity is how the P&C council have described this.

John Miller from the Master Builders Association has indicated his support for the government and supporting moves to ensure that we are in a position to act on this commonwealth funding. David Garratt of the ACT Block Grant Authority has also come out in support. Last night I received an email from Chris Peters of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry indicating that the position, as reported in the media, of the Liberals and Greens was "another case of politics getting in the way of sensible outcomes".

Let us be very clear what will happen if the opposition parties combine to block this regulation. It will put schools six months behind and it will mean that they will miss out on tens of millions of dollars. Why is this the case? It is because if these arrangements are blocked, as Minister for Planning I am prevented from making regulations which are substantially similar for six months. This six-month delay would be a disaster for schools, a disaster for Canberra jobs and a disaster for those in our building and construction industry in particular, but also for the ACT economy as a whole.

I urge the Liberals and Greens to join with ACT school communities, with all education stakeholders, with the building and construction industry, with the Property Council, with the chamber of commerce—with all of those organisations—to support what the government is doing. This is important. It should be, in the spirit of collaboration and the new way that this Assembly operates, something that, for opposition's sake, should be put aside.

I would like to acknowledge that the Greens and Liberals did appear to bring an open mind to the briefing I provided at lunch time, and I thank them for doing that. I thank them for the sorts of questions that they asked. But fundamentally, with the stated position of the Liberals publicly on the radio this morning that these changes do not go far enough and the Greens saying, "Hang on, they might go too far," once again it stands to the Australian Labor Party to support our schools.

It is Labor that is taking a sensible, commonsense approach, steering a sensible middle ground between extremes to our right and extremes to our left. It will be this Labor government, in partnership with the federal Labor government, that will deliver \$230 million worth of investment into ACT schools if only the opposition parties will let us get on with governing this territory.

Budget—deficit

MR HANSON: My question is to the Treasurer. When did Treasury first advise you that the 2008-09 budget would be in deficit?

MS GALLAGHER: I would have to check my records, but it was not long after the commonwealth issued their updated economic forecast outlook, or UEFO, which forecast another \$32 million reduction in GST revenue to the ACT government in this financial year. A simple subtraction of a \$15 million surplus minus \$32 million in GST revenue will give you a deficit.

Mr Hanson: When was that, though? Have you got a date?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, are you asking a supplementary question?

MS GALLAGHER: I will check the date when that was released.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Are you asking for the call, Mr Hanson, or have you finished?

Mr Hanson: No, I am all right.

Capital works—projects

MR DOSZPOT: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, the Auditor-General has found in her report on Fairbairn Avenue and Horse Park Drive that was tabled yesterday that:

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

Treasurer, why did the Stanhope-Gallagher government fail to evaluate performance of these two capital works projects?

MS GALLAGHER: I think the key words in Mr Doszpot's question are "responsible agencies". I will hand the question to the responsible minister to answer the question. But in my brief perusing of the report; other than the mention of the words "Under Treasurer", I have been unable to find a link to Treasury now that Procurement Solutions sits outside the Treasury.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Stanhope.

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think one really has to conclude that the opposition, the Liberal Party, are not interested in responses to any of these issues and that this really is just about playing politics. It is not about seeking information or actually even wanting information provided. It is quite clear, Mr Speaker, to anybody with any understanding of government and governance—I guess perhaps I am being generous in suggesting that the opposition fall within that class—that the Treasurer is not responsible for roads and that the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services is. The Treasurer is not responsible for Procurement Solutions; the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services is.

Mr Seselja: Mr Speaker, on a point of order. The Chief Minister is arguing as to who should be answering the question. He is answering it, and I think he should stick to

the actual question, which is about him failing to evaluate the performance of these two public works projects. He is now debating who should answer the question.

MR SPEAKER: The point of order is upheld. Please come to the content of the question, Mr Stanhope.

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is interesting background in the context of the questions and the seriousness with which the questions were asked. The questions were asked with a view to them not being answered because they were asked of a minister who simply does not have the briefings or the relevant information. I do.

I think we should go back to tords in relation to this particular proposal. They are roads, one of which was completed in 2004—Horse Park Drive. It was commenced in 2000, and I think in order to provide a full answer to the questions asked by the Liberal Party, the first thing we need to do is to go back and actually—

Mr Seselja: It's someone else's fault.

MR STANHOPE: Well, who was the Minister for Urban Services in 2000? Who was it? It was Mr Smyth. So, what I undertake to do, Mr Speaker, is I will go back and I will ask the department to dredge back to 2000. Horse Park Drive planning commenced in 2000 when Brendan Smyth was the Minister for Urban Services. Horse Park Drive was completed in 2004. The first two years of the four-year process of delivering Horse Park Drive were managed by Brendan Smyth. Of course, as we look at the record of the Liberal Party in relation to capital of any sort—they never delivered any—the first thing I will do is a full reprise and summary of Brendan Smyth's involvement in the construction of Horse Park Drive. In order to ensure a full answer, I will ensure that every part of the role of Mr Smyth in relation to the construction, the planning, the performance and the modelling of Horse Park Drive—

Ms Gallagher: The funding.

MR STANHOPE: And the funding. Every aspect of it will be provided to the opposition fully. This is Mr Smyth's report; this is Mr Smyth's road. The criticisms of the Auditor-General in relation to Horse Park Drive can be driven home fairly and squarely to the responsible minister—Brendan Smyth. We know why he is no longer a minister. We know why the Liberal Party lost that particular election—it was because of the performance of ministers such as Brendan Smyth. We see a report here today from the Auditor-General which is a report into a road commenced and found to be seriously deficient by the Auditor-General under Mr Smyth's management.

I think we need to provide that context in relation to this Auditor-General's report into these two roads. It is an inquiry into a road—Horse Park Drive—that was completed in 2004 and that was delivered in its planning by Brendan Smyth. We need then to look, of course, at his role in the delivery of Horse Park Drive.

The second of the roads, Fairbairn Avenue, was completed in 2006. So we do need to go back and deliver some of that history. Having said that, anybody that has read the Auditor-General's report will see that TAMS acknowledges and has acknowledged—

Mr Coe: Have you read it?

MR STANHOPE: Yes, I have. TAMS has acknowledged that many of the recommendations that have been made are well made. TAMS has accepted some of the criticism and certainly the recommendations for how to improve on the failings of Brendan Smyth at the outset and in the delivery of the road.

Planning—schools

MS BRESNAN: My question is for the Minister for Planning and concerns the exemption of school developments from standard planning procedures. Was it a deliberate decision to announce changes to the planning system in the media before you informed the Greens or Liberals and to characterise the Greens' questions as an attempt to block the school stimulus package or did you not realise that other parties in the Assembly simply needed the information about what was proposed?

MR BARR: I could accept the line of argument that Ms Bresnan is seeking to advance had the Greens not issued a media release on the Friday afternoon before even talking to anyone in my office or me or seeking a briefing or seeking any information in relation to what the government said. There was an immediate press release issued in response.

All that my media release and my announcement on the Thursday did was say that that was the path that the government was going to pursue. In a knee-jerk reaction the next day—it may even have been that afternoon, because it appeared in the *Canberra Times* the next day; there was a *Canberra Times* article where journalists obviously did the rounds and asked each of the parties what their position was.

Mr Seselja's office, perhaps cleverly, sought to defer making an announcement on what the Liberals' position would be and said that they would seek a briefing—that they would wait until they had received a briefing before indicating a position. In terms of politics 1.01, I will take my hat off to the Leader of the Opposition's office. Mr Doyle, who is sitting over there on the bench, probably advised, wisely, that it would be worth seeking some further information before putting out a public position.

Unfortunately for the Greens, the planning spokesperson issued a media release, I think labelling me as Mr Process and seeking to—

Mr Stanhope: But only after consulting with you, Mr Barr.

MR BARR: No, I do not know that there was. There was not. There was no actual approach made to seek further information before the press release was put out.

Ms Bresnan: The announcement was made in the media without approaching us first.

MR BARR: All is fair in love and war and politics. Let us not suggest, and let us not have the Greens suggest, that there was not a pre-emptive strike fired across my bows in relation to process matters and that the Greens indicated a position.

Mr Smyth: How dare anyone criticise the minister!

MR BARR: I am not suggesting that the Greens are not entitled to do that. This is a political process. But what I will not cop is a suggestion that somehow the Greens are above politics and are not players in this game and this process. If they want to issue press releases bagging a particular position or a policy approach that the government proposes to take, before even seeking further information, and then come into this place and accuse me of not providing them with the information—after I have provided them with the information now—

Mr Stanhope: Sounds a bit like a double standard to me.

MR BARR: My hope is that—now that the information is on the table, now that the most recent information from the commonwealth government has been made available to the Greens and the Liberals, and now that the government has given to the other parties an indication of the proposals that we intend to put into regulation—there is no reasonable excuse for there not to be support for this to proceed. It would appear now, following that briefing and following the questions that were asked, that it would not be unreasonable for schools to now expect that they will get the green light to get on with this and that we will see support from all parties for this investment in schools.

I am optimistic. Perhaps I am too much of an optimist that, following the briefing today and following all of the information that has been provided, we might see a slight adjustment in the position of other parties, particularly noting the support of the P&C council, the AEU—

Mr Stanhope: Save Our Schools?

MR BARR: No, we have not heard from Save Our Schools. They are conspicuous in their silence.

Mr Stanhope: Where are Save Our Schools when you need them? Send an SOS to SOS.

MR BARR: I think we can send out an SOS for Save Our Schools. But in relation to the question from Ms Bresnan—I do not accept the premise of her argument. The fatal flaw in this particular approach from the Greens and the line of questioning that I am getting today is that there was that press release put out in advance of any discussion. Perhaps in the future there might be some lessons learned from all of this: before you come out issuing press releases and talking tough in the media in response to a proposal from the government—

Mr Smyth: Listen to yourself. Listen to your own advice for a change.

MR BARR: My advice to the Greens—

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Barr, your time has expired.

MR SPEAKER: Is there a supplementary question?

MS BRESNAN: Given that Mr Barr has—

Mr Seselja: That'll be in a brochure.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Ms Bresnan, please start again.

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Given that Mr Barr has said we were apparently playing politics here, is the minister therefore saying that this was simply a political move on his part?

MR BARR: No, I was characterising the Greens' response and their attempts to try and sail above this in some sort of pure form as being just a teeny bit political, and that the standards that apply on this side of the chamber and that apply on that side of the chamber might equally now apply to the crossbenches. If there is a lesson learnt, the approach that the Leader of the Opposition took in reserving his comment in relation to the planning aspects of this could well have been a useful thing. Fundamentally, though, I will give the Greens some credit: at least they were prepared ultimately, and when push came to shove in the federal Senate, to support this. I do acknowledge that, and I want to put again on the public record the thanks of the Labor Party and the thanks of every school community in the ACT to the Greens for their support in the federal Senate, and I do note—

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! I can't hear Mr Barr. Please continue.

MR BARR: I am sorry, Mr Speaker. You and I are both having trouble containing our poker faces at this point. But I would like again to put on record my thanks to the federal Greens for their support of the stimulus package. I note again, as I asked about it in the briefing today, that the Canberra Liberals have yet to even give an in-principle indication of their support for the education funding. I now look forward, as should every Canberra school community and every media outlet in Canberra, to a declared position from the Liberals and the Greens. From the Liberals, it is on the in-principle issue of whether they support the education funding and then on the second issue of whether they will support the government's regulation. We acknowledge that the Greens support the education funding. Will the Greens move out of the way and ensure that we are able to deliver on the ground here in Canberra what their federal colleagues voted for in the Senate?

Economy—stimulus package

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, in a report in the *Canberra Times* of 5 February 2009 you are quoted as saying that the proposed third appropriation bill is not being called a stimulus package “because we are too small to stimulate”. Treasurer, when did you become aware that the ACT economy was too small to stimulate?

MS GALLAGHER: Getting fixated on terms such as “stimulate” really is playing at the edges. I think the term “stimulate” in recent times has been used to describe government responses to the global financial crisis. When you look at the governments that have delivered stimulus packages, they have been national governments—those governments that have the national levers.

Perhaps early on I used the term “stimulus package” in the sense that I was saying we will be responding to our local economy with a local package. Nothing has changed.

Mr Hanson: She is rather confused.

MS GALLAGHER: I am not confused at all. I am frustrated at playing with an opposition that simply does not get it. That is my frustration—that we have got this juvenile, undergraduate response from the opposition that we presume is going to continue. I can tell you now. Nothing has changed with the package, despite my desire to clarify the intention of the package and despite my desire to get everybody to understand what we are trying to do here and the capacity that the ACT budget has.

We take this job very seriously. You can sit and laugh about my use of the word “stimulus” and we will get on with delivering the package that we need to deliver to our community, and that is to secure jobs, to look after local businesses and to make sure that in the next three four months, as we put together the budget proper, those businesses do not lay off staff because they are worried about their future.

That is the intention. That was the intention months ago when we first talked about it; it is the intention now. The size of the appropriation has not changed at all, I can tell you that. Again, with my hand on my heart: the size of the package remains the same. If everybody really wants us to call it a stimulus package, we can call it a stimulus package. That does not bother me at all.

Mr Smyth: But you are the one that has changed your mind. You have said it will not stimulate. You have said, “Don’t hold your hopes up.”

MS GALLAGHER: I was answering a question about our capacity to stimulate the ACT economy, and you know, Mr Smyth, the limitations of the ACT budget to do that. You know it. Sit there and make fun. If we as an Assembly want to call this a stimulus package, then let us call it a stimulus package. But let us not forget the intention of this package. The package is trying to keep businesses operating, to secure staff, to improve our own asset base and to deliver projects that are ready to go now with cash out the door. That is the aim of this package.

If you would like me to call it the local investment stimulus package and that makes you feel better, then we can call it that. We could even amend the bill when we are discussing it on the floor of the Assembly in March if that will calm your nerves and address your concerns. Despite what we call it, despite the nature of the package and what it is named, the aim of the package has always been clear.

Mr Hanson: What it will do is the point.

MS GALLAGHER: Well, it has been clear in my mind. I do not know if it has been clear in yours, but it has been clear in mine. The aims are: secure jobs, look after businesses, deliver some cash before the budget and make sure that we, as the ACT government with the resources available to us, do what we can to look after our local industry. I do not know how hard that is for you to understand. That is the intention. If we want to call it a stimulus package, we can.

Mr Smyth: What is hard to understand is a Treasurer who says, “Don’t get your hopes up.”

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Smyth!

Mr Smyth: You have said it is too small and not to get your hopes up.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Smyth!

MS GALLAGHER: You were not at the press conference. The context of those comments was that compared to the nation’s stimulus package of \$42 billion, this will be a very modest package compared to that. That is my comment. That is the honest response from an honest Treasurer about what we are trying to do here. If you want to throw scorn on that and criticise it, do what you can. We have a limited capacity to respond. We are responding in the best way we can. (*Time expired.*)

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, a supplementary question?

MRS DUNNE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Treasurer, why are you proposing to introduce a third appropriation bill when you have admitted to the community that it will not stimulate the ACT economy?

MS GALLAGHER: My answer to that would be: what jobs would you like to see go? What businesses would you like to see lay off staff? What projects would you like not to see happen?

Mrs Dunne: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: my question was about the Treasurer’s assessment that the third appropriation bill would not stimulate the economy. It is not an opportunity for her to go into a rhetorical riff about what the opposition would do. It is about what the Treasurer would do and why she has taken particular action.

MR SPEAKER: There is no point of order, Mrs Dunne. I think the intent of the question is clear and I think the Treasurer is responding in kind.

MS GALLAGHER: Thank you, and that was not a very good point of order from Mrs Dunne. I notice that it only took about 23 seconds, and usually she likes to take a much greater proportion of the time allotted for a minister to answer.

Seriously, what part of any investment in our economy at any level by government at the moment is not a good idea? If Mrs Dunne wants to have an argument about whether it is going to have a stimulatory effect or not, what we are trying to do has a

very specific purpose which, again, we see the opposition deriding and making fun of. To which apprentice do you want to say, “Well, that wasn’t worth it; it wasn’t going to stimulate the economy so it’s best that we do nothing”? And that is what we can see from the opposition—just a “do nothing” approach, with no ideas, no courage and no leadership.

Over here, we have people sitting here, and even on the crossbench, who are prepared to talk about ideas, about leadership, about courage and about building confidence in the economy around all of those things. That is what we are trying to do here. The third appropriation has a very specific purpose, the national stimulus package has a very specific purpose, and here we have the opportunity to provide local input into that, to provide security of jobs, to increase confidence, to stabilise the economy. That is the aim of our package. Call it what you want.

Mr Smyth: Why did you say, though, “Don’t get your hopes up”?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, you have asked your question today.

Economy—stimulus package

MR COE: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, your government has failed to deliver the GDE, the prison and now Fairbairn Avenue and Horse Park Drive on time or on budget. A critical component of the federal government’s stimulus package involves the delivery of capital works projects on time and on budget. How can the Canberra community have any confidence that your government will be able to deliver the capital works projects under the federal stimulus package and not jeopardise that funding?

MS GALLAGHER: The first thing you can do is get out of the way and stop objecting to what we are trying to do, to get on board and to be part of the solution.

Mr Hanson: You’re taking prompts from Andrew now. Are you writing the script, mate?

Mr Barr: Who writes your questions, Jeremy, for question time, mate?

MR SPEAKER: Order! I remind members that the correct form of address in the chamber is “Mr” or “Ms” or “Mrs”. Thank you, Ms Gallagher, continue.

MS GALLAGHER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. We have a very ambitious capital program. I think last year saw record investment in the dollars delivered through our capital investment program—\$282 million worth of capital funds into this economy last financial year. Major projects—ANU medical centre, new school buildings, new cancer centres—large projects delivered on time and, in some cases, under budget. We have a very strong—

Mr Coe: What’s the underspend? Name one.

MS GALLAGHER: Name one? All right—the linear accelerator at the hospital. It was a \$30 million project that opened on time and under budget. I could sit here and

rattle off quite a number of projects. If I get the next question, maybe I will when I find the paperwork of all the projects that we have done. We have spent \$282 million in comparison to the last record of the opposition. What was your record? Was the figure I saw \$68 million? Even then there was an underspend of about 40 per cent, I think. We have spent \$282 million. We are focused on delivering this stimulus package. We understand the importance of it to the ACT community. We are working hard. We have processes in place already, and we—

Mr Hanson: The first step of the hospital redevelopment has fallen over.

MS GALLAGHER: I am not going to respond to interjections.

Mr Smyth: Yes, I'd be embarrassed about the hospital redevelopment falling over as well.

MS GALLAGHER: Well, I am not embarrassed. Mr Hanson is wrong, yet again. We have processes in place. We are focused on it. We are going to deliver the stimulus package. What I do is urge the opposition to get behind it and be part of the solution rather than just bagging it from the sidelines.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Coe, a supplementary question?

MR COE: Yes, thank you, a supplementary question. Treasurer, what action are you taking to fast-track the recommendations relevant to the Treasury from the Auditor-General to satisfy the requirements for capital works projects which will be undertaken under the federal government's stimulus package?

MS GALLAGHER: Which recommendation was that, Alistair? I have just had a look through all the recommendations, and I cannot—

Mr Smyth: You said you hadn't read it.

MS GALLAGHER: But I am a very quick learner, Mr Smyth, you see. What I have done whilst you have all been bickering here in question time—luckily I had it with me, sitting on top with the very extensive amount of work that I have still got to do today—is have a look, Alistair—Mr Coe, sorry—through those recommendations, and I cannot actually find one that is relevant to the Treasury. Perhaps you could draw it to my attention, if you may. I do not know if you have the report there or the recommendations specific to Treasury that I will need to respond to.

Mr Coe: You're not going to do anything? Is that a no?

MS GALLAGHER: In your supplementary, give me a recommendation.

Mr Coe: That was the supplementary.

MS GALLAGHER: Well, I will give you another supplementary. I will give you leave to tell me.

Planning—schools

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the Minister for Planning. Minister, thank you very much for the briefing, which I attended this afternoon with an open mind. From that, I understand that the proposed changes to the planning regulations for the schools stimulus package were largely to clarify the situation for the smaller school developments, like water tanks and shade structures. Was the purpose of your recent media announcements, therefore, to give the appearance of reducing red tape and to appear to fulfil the commonwealth's requirements to fast-track design, application and assessment processes, rather than making any substantive change to the regulations?

MR BARR: No. My intention throughout this process has been to ensure that ACT schools are able to access \$230 million in commonwealth funding; that the ACT education system, government and non-government schools are in a position to meet the commonwealth's guidelines, and that I take every step available to me as minister for education and Minister for Planning to assist schools to achieve that outcome—and I will take those steps.

There are only two obstacles at this point left that will prevent ACT schools from accessing this commonwealth funding program, and those obstacles are the ACT Greens and the Canberra Liberals. But I am optimistic. As I indicated in a previous answer, the overwhelming weight of public opinion will come crashing down on these two parties and they will wake up, hopefully tomorrow, and realise the importance of getting out of the way, letting the government get on with delivering these projects in the government school system and letting our non-government schools get on with delivering the projects in their respective systems.

I am pleased to advise the Assembly of another organisation that has come out in support of the government's position. The ACT Principals Association have issued a media release, and they are alarmed at the possibility of being blocked from \$143 million in commonwealth government funding under the building the education revolution initiative if the proposed changes to planning regulations are obstructed. The ACT Principals Association co-president, Murray Bruce, has written to Canberra Liberals leader, Mr Zed Seselja, and ACT Greens Parliamentary Convenor, Ms Meredith Hunter, asking them to seek a resolution to the current impasse.

The opportunity to upgrade school infrastructure through the BER initiative is a once-in-200-year opportunity that will benefit current and future ACT students enormously. School principals are very excited at the prospect of achieving a range of significant improvements to their school buildings and facilities and believe it would be "a tragic waste of opportunity" if a resolution to planning issues is not found. This funding will not just build useless add-ons, according to the principals association; proposed additions will provide meaningful, long-lasting outcomes for our students, future students and communities our schools serve.

The Principals Association has asked the Liberals and the Greens to do whatever they can to negotiate a speedy resolution to ensure our students are able to benefit from this investment. Let me tell you what the Liberals and the Greens can do. Very simple: get

out of the way! Let the government deliver these projects. Let these planning regulations go through. Give us an early indication. You have had your briefings. You know what we are proposing. Let us see a position from the Liberals and the Greens today, so we can give school communities the certainty they need and that they are demanding.

What more do we need? The Principals Association, the P&C, AEU, Property Council, Master Builders Association, Chamber of Commerce—who else do you need to come out in support before you will decide that this is important enough to put politics aside and get on with building the education revolution? Now is your chance. Step up to the plate, Greens and Liberals. It is time for the Greens and Liberals to step up to the plate. Show us what you are made of. Support these regulations. Support our schools.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Le Couteur, is there a supplementary question?

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes, my supplementary would be that, given the support that the minister has had, how many of these organisations have seen the regulations?

MR BARR: A number of these organisations in fact provided the advice that the government used to develop the proposals that I have put forward today. These came from the school communities. These ideas and these issues were discussed at the stakeholders' meeting and they indicated support for the direction that the government was proposing. I provided today to the Greens and the Liberals the government's proposals, but I will reserve my right, pending a position from the Liberals and the Greens, regarding when I introduce these regulations so as not to disadvantage ACT schools.

Let me make that clear: I will not let you and you stuff this up for ACT schools. That is Labor's commitment, Mr Speaker. This Labor government, in support of the federal Labor government and the position of the federal Senate and the federal Greens, want to see this package delivered, and I am waiting for a position from the Liberals and the Greens. When we get a position from the Liberals and the Greens, we will be in a position to proceed.

Emergency relief assistance

MR SPEAKER: I call Ms Burch.

Mr Hargreaves: You are thrashing around like a bunch of carps.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Ms Burch has the call.

Mr Hargreaves: Thrashing around: flap, flap, flap!

Mr Hanson: I think I want to read that one in *Hansard*.

Mr Hargreaves: You want to check your own stuff, son.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Hargreaves! One of your members is trying to ask a question.

MS BURCH: My question is to the Treasurer. Can you provide an update on the rollout of the emergency relief and support package as funded through the second appropriation of December last year?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Ms Burch for the question. I am very pleased to advise the Assembly about the rollout of the government's one-off emergency relief and support package funding. Members would be aware that through the supplementary appropriation of December last year we honoured an election commitment to provide \$3.5 million to the community sector to provide emergency relief assistance and to volunteers and carers to help them to meet the costs associated with their role.

The money for these programs was released before Christmas to local service providers for distribution to the community. The measures were put in place because we were aware of the extra pressures that faced families around Christmas time. The additional expenses of the holidays and the arrival of end-of-year bills can push some individuals and families into financial stress.

To help relieve this pressure, \$1 million of the funding was provided for emergency relief packages and \$850,000 was distributed to regional community services and the emergency relief providers we fund—St Vincent de Paul Society, Salvation Army and UnitingCare Kippax. This assistance has been used for grocery vouchers, petrol vouchers, phone cards, essential household goods, pharmacy supplies, clothing and assistance to purchase school supplies. Some families have also accessed it to help with the costs of purchasing or installing water or energy efficient appliances in the home to reduce utility costs.

The agencies provided with funding for emergency relief have reported a steady demand for assistance. Belconnen Community Service have reported that they are receiving around 35 calls a day for assistance, and so far have provided \$18,785 of assistance packages to 35 individuals and families to date.

Northside Community Service has told us that so far it has provided \$9,673 in emergency support to 72 individuals and families, which has gone towards items like food, clothing, shoes, support for pain management, dentures and school supplies. Northside Community Service has told us that a large proportion of people who have benefited from this extra assistance were children under the age of 12 years.

Communities@Work have provided assistance to 73 clients in the Weston Creek and Tuggeranong region in the form of food, clothing, school supplies, whitegoods, beds, transport, assistance with moving house, and help with home and yard maintenance and cleaning.

The agencies delivering the emergency assistance are also telling us that they are directing support towards the purchase of bigger items like energy-efficient whitegoods that will have longer-term benefits for low-income people and families in terms of reducing running costs.

We also provided \$1.25 million to organisations to support carers to help them meet the out-of-pocket expenses of the valuable role they play in the community. The funds were allocated to Regional Community Services, Carers ACT, Anglicare's Cyclops program for young carers, Tandem and the Mental Health Foundation. These organisations cover carers, foster carers and kinship carers, all of whom are eligible for support through this package. Carers have been able to access petrol vouchers, phone cards, taxi vouchers, bus tickets, equipment to help with their caring role or domestic cleaning services.

The Cyclops service has so far provided support to approximately 12 young carers, and they have said that the carers support fund has been a great opportunity to remove financial barriers that young carers and their families face. In particular, it has assisted young carers with increased access to transport, essential school support, books, uniforms and tuition, essential household items and assistance with the rising cost of utilities.

It is great to see this kind of feedback as it demonstrates the real and practical ways we have been able to help assist those carers in our community who do such an important job every day. Carers ACT have told us that 52 carers have so far shared in \$18,122 of grants that have gone towards cab vouchers, fuel cards, bus tickets, whitegoods and school supplies. They say:

The Carers Support Fund has been greatly welcomed by all at Carers ACT as we have been able to meet more carers' needs and provide respite in areas that had previously been difficult due to the limitations in available brokerage.

The other group we chose to recognise are volunteers, whom we rely on to deliver so many valuable services in our community. In acknowledging the expense they incur through their role, \$1.25 million has been provided to Volunteering ACT to distribute to volunteer organisations.

Volunteering ACT has recruited a program manager to handle this new program and their grants opened on 2 February. We have advertised their availability broadly in the community sector and through contact networks. The additional investment in emergency relief and support for our carers and volunteers is part of what this government is seeking to do in addressing justice and equity, and I am pleased to see that the money allocated so far is greatly assisting those in need.

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

Personal explanation

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

MR SPEAKER: In relation to what, Mr Coe?

MR COE: It is in relation to a comment by the Chief Minister yesterday. I have been misrepresented.

MR SPEAKER: Do you claim to have been misrepresented, Mr Coe?

MR COE: I do.

MR SPEAKER: Please proceed.

MR COE: Yesterday, the Chief Minister made a specific point of coming back into the chamber to comment on how much correspondence I had sent him. Yesterday, I sent him a letter asking him to amend the record at the earliest opportunity, and I invite the Chief Minister to do so now.

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), by leave: Mr Speaker, I must say that I was not aware that Mr Coe had written to me, and I will look forward to seeing the correspondence when I return to my office. But it was drawn to my attention by my office that, yes, indeed, Mr Coe had written more than five letters to me. I will get the correct number. It was also drawn to my attention by my office that, contrary to assertions which Mr Coe made yesterday that he never included the names of constituents in correspondence to me, in fact a number of the letters that my office has now discovered that Mr Coe has written to me do contain the names and addresses of his constituents.

Mr Coe: I clarified that in the speech.

MR STANHOPE: I correct the record in two respects. I do—

Mr Coe: You can correct this statement tomorrow as well, Jon.

MR STANHOPE: Well, I will table the letters then, Mr Coe. But my office advises me in two regards. In the first—

Mrs Dunne: Point of order—

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Stanhope!

MR STANHOPE: Well, I am withdrawing—I have been asked to correct the record, and I am doing that. My account of the amount of correspondence, I am advised by my office, was incorrect. I apologise to Mr Coe for understating his diligence and energy. But at the same time I do need to draw attention to the fact that Mr Coe yesterday misrepresented the truth in suggesting that he never included the names of constituents in correspondence.

Mr Coe: Check what I said.

MR STANHOPE: Oh? You did concede you had.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Stanhope! I think—

Mr Coe: Check what I said.

MR STANHOPE: I'll check.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR STANHOPE: I had better correct that. I understood Mr Coe had said yesterday that he never included the names of constituents. He has now conceded that perhaps he did from time to time include the names of constituents. If that is the case, I am just confirming that, in fact, he does.

Mrs Dunne: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, could I seek your ruling and your indulgence. The Chief Minister has just threatened to table constituent correspondence. Could I seek your ruling as to whether, if he did that, that would be in breach of the standing orders in that it would impair Mr Coe's capacity to conduct himself as a member of this place, in addition to being a breach of privacy to publish correspondence without the permission of the constituents?

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, I am happy to give you my ruling, but I will have to defer that.

Mrs Dunne: I would be happy for that to happen, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: I will go back and check the transcript, when it is published, and I will come back to the chamber with a ruling.

Paper

Mr Speaker presented the following paper:

Study trip—Report by Ms Le Couteur MLA—Media Skills Training—
Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory, Canberra—25 and
26 November 2008.

Maternity leave

Debate resumed.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (3.12): I speak in support of Mr Hargreaves's amendment and also to congratulate Ms Hunter on bringing forward this motion in relation to maternity leave. I understand Ms Hunter has brought this forward at this stage, before the finalisation of the Productivity Commission's report, because this is the last opportunity that the Assembly has to discuss matters relating to a range of women's affairs before International Women's Day, and Ms Hunter wanted to concentrate on maternity leave as an issue in the run-up to International Women's Day. I think that is laudable, and it is also laudable that there is general agreement in the Assembly about the importance of maternity leave and the impact that will have on the community and on mothers in the raising of their children. Overall, the general

community feeling is that a move towards a national maternity leave scheme will be positive for the whole community.

As Mr Seselja said, this is an important matter which the Liberal opposition in this place believe should be given priority by the government. We are particularly keen to see that the government's commitment to extend maternity leave for government employees to 18 weeks is implemented quickly so that the ACT can be seen as a leader in this area and so that the leadership shown in government employment might be emulated, where possible, in non-government employment.

Like Mr Hargreaves, I have some concerns about signing up to the recommendations of the Productivity Commission report before they have been finalised. Most members would be aware of the draft inquiry report and the recommendations in that report. But at this stage these are draft recommendations. I think Mr Hargreaves was correct when he pointed to signing up to something that we have not seen. It is useful that Mr Hargreaves pointed out that there is a problem with signing up to something that we have not seen, and it is ironic that during question time, time and again, the Minister for Planning asks the opposition and the crossbenchers to sign up to something that they have not seen. So we need to have some consistency here.

I would rather take the model that Mr Hargreaves has proposed: we are in favour of a particular course of action but we will not finally sign up to it until we have seen the way that it is written and the way that it is presented. In the same way, the opposition and the crossbench, in relation to cutting red tape with respect to the schools package, agreed with the sentiment—or they may not—but they are not prepared to sign up to something that they have not seen yet. This notion of signing up to something we have not seen—

Mr Hargreaves: On a point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker: I have allowed Mrs Dunne to continue for quite some time before drawing this matter to your attention, but I think she has made the point about her perception of inconsistency. She is starting to stray away from the subject matter. This is not about the planning process; this is not about the schools; this is about maternity leave provisions. Could you please bring her back to the subject?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Le Couteur): Mrs Dunne, please continue.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you. I was actually about to come back, before I was so rudely interrupted by Mr Hargreaves.

Mr Hargreaves: Vicki, that's getting a bit tetchy!

MRS DUNNE: It was very tetchy, wasn't it? The topic today is about maternity leave, and the Liberal opposition is broadly supportive of the approach taken by the Stanhope government in the run-up to the election. We want to see that promise made good, and we think that is the most important part of this motion. I think it is a bit of a problem that the ACT Greens feel that, this far into the Labor-Greens alliance, they actually have to remind the senior partner what their commitments were and call on them to implement them. It is obvious that the Greens are starting to feel a little

uneasy about the terms and conditions of the Labor-Greens alliance, but that is something for them to work out. It is something that we and the rest of the community need to watch fairly carefully.

In relation to the whole notion of a national paid maternity or parental leave scheme, Mr Seselja did touch on some issues this morning which were of concern to us. While we endorse the general thrust of this, that endorsement needs to be tempered with a little caution. While being in favour of finding a mechanism for funding a maternity leave scheme for all workers in Australia, we need to do that in a way which is equitable, and we need to do that in a way that does not have unintended consequences.

I look forward to the final Productivity Commission report, which hopefully will be out later this week—it is anticipated that it will be out later this week—to see the extent to which the Productivity Commission is helping the Australian community to come to terms with some of the things which may be unintended consequences, so that we can avoid the pitfalls of treating some people inequitably.

Mr Seselja raised the point today that, under the proposed scheme, people who are not in the workforce will continue to receive the baby bonus, while people in the workforce will now receive something which is worth substantially more than the baby bonus, and there will be a considerable disparity between people in the workforce and people out of the workforce if they are having a child. I do not know whether that is something that the Australian community is entirely comfortable about. Yes, there is an increasing proportion of married women and mothers in the community who are in the workforce, but we do not want to force people into the workforce because there are unintended consequences of the taxation system or the benefit system that forces people to make those decisions when they would perhaps rather stay at home for longer with their children.

These are important social issues. The Canberra Liberals will participate in debates on these issues actively and vigorously, with the aim of putting together the most equitable scheme possible. I commend Ms Hunter for bringing forward this motion. I understand why she did it, but I am sure that we will have to revisit this issue in light of the Productivity Commission report, as Mr Hargreaves has already foreshadowed. Madam Assistant Speaker, I seek leave to move the two amendments that have been circulated in my name.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, I understand that we need to deal with Mr Hargreaves's amendment before your amendments can be moved.

MRS DUNNE: In that case, I will foreshadow those amendments, and speak to them briefly. One of them is a process one which refers to parental leave rather than maternity leave in relation to the Productivity Commission report, because that is, in fact, what the Productivity Commission report is about. I understand that Ms Hunter has some concerns about that because she is more interested in maternity leave than in the overall concept of parental leave. She sees maternity leave as a higher priority than parental leave. The first amendment tries to set this in some context, in that we are being asked to refer our views about the Productivity Commission report to the

commonwealth. I thought it would be more elegant to word it in this way and to set it in context. I commend those foreshadowed amendments to the house.

MS BURCH (Brindabella) (3.22): I am speaking to the motion proposed by Ms Hunter and to the amendment moved by Mr Hargreaves. The Stanhope Labor government has long supported paid maternity leave. Our employees—that is, ACT government employees—currently have access to paid maternity leave that is far above the national average. The ACT government made its support for paid maternity leave known in its submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry into paid maternity leave. There is a copy here which I would seek leave to table.

Leave granted.

MS BURCH: I table the following paper:

Paid parental leave—ACT Government submission into the Productivity Commission Inquiry.

In this submission, we supported a universal paid maternity leave scheme funded by the Australian government. Our position remains that we support the introduction of a universal paid maternity leave scheme that is funded by the Australian government.

Due to the caretaker period, the government could not make a formal response to the Productivity Commission's interim report. Of course, the final report is due soon; I understand that it is due this Saturday. The question is: do we support the Productivity Commission's interim report recommendation to use employers as paymasters for a national scheme? This government does, and we hope to see that in the final report. We support the interim report's recommendation for 18 weeks paid maternity leave, and we also want to see that in the final report when it comes through. We also support the interim report's recommendation for a national scheme to be paid at a national minimum wage. That is also something that we want to see in the final report.

With the report so close to release, I am not going to speculate now on which elements of the scheme outlined in the interim report should be supported, for the very good reason that the final report may be different, but this motion goes to its being, in essence, what we have seen in the interim report.

Why would we support a national paid maternity scheme? We do so because our children and our babies need our support. Why would we not support the development of universally available paid maternity and paternity leave? We—and by “we” I mean we in Australia—lag behind the developed world in this area.

Some in this place might say that it is the responsibility of individual families to sort out their own affairs when it comes to caring for a child. We on this side do not agree. Families need our fundamental support at this time. These are our families, our friends' families and our neighbours' families.

We have the highest rate of female labour force participation in the country, currently at 68-plus per cent. We have provided a first-class education system, with ACT

women having, on average, a higher level of education attainment than the Australian average. This high level of workforce participation contributes to the Canberra economy, provides household incomes, reduces the number of families living in poverty and assists in increasing economic independence for women. Without these women, our skills shortage would be even more acute.

So we do all of these good things and then we say to those highly educated, productive, valued employees, “If you have your baby then you’re on your own. Make your decision. It’s your career or your baby.” This is the choice that many women who do not have access to a generous maternity leave scheme and an understanding employer are faced with. These are the hard decisions that these women have to make, and they make them every day. I do not see how, in our economy, that is a productive use of our educated, talented and productive women.

I understand that employers do not all have the capacity and the capability to support a generous maternity leave scheme, and that is precisely why we support a national scheme paid for by the commonwealth. This is not about giving women a holiday at taxpayers’ expense, although I am sure there are some in the community and some—a few—in this place who just cannot back away from that notion. In fact, it is not really about mothers at all; it is about babies. It is about babies and families. What can we invest as a national community in the development of our families and babies?

Let me provide the chamber with a practical example, particularly for the education of those opposite. The World Health Organisation recommends that babies be breastfed exclusively for six months, but research led by Melbourne University, La Trobe University and the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute based on a 2004 longitudinal study of Australian children shows that six months after giving birth, 56 per cent of women who were not performing paid work were breastfeeding. This compared with 44 per cent for women who returned to work part time and 39 per cent for those back in full-time work.

Lead author Amanda Cooklin, a researcher at Melbourne University’s Key Centre for Women’s Health, said lack of paid maternity leave and workplace support were interfering with many women’s capacity to breastfeed. Other issues included lack of privacy, fatigue, inflexible work schedules and unsupportive employers. Ms Cooklin said:

It’s clear from our findings that in Australia working reduced hours every week doesn’t contribute to a mother’s ability to continue breastfeeding. Further support for the current call for paid maternity leave, because the lack of paid maternity leave means women resume work earlier than they would like to.

Let us invest in stronger families, more support for our families and more support for our babies. And, yes, that does mean providing support through women.

While I am on the point, the Productivity Commission interim report did recommend that eligible mothers be allowed to transfer the entitlement to eligible partners who would also like to take on the role of primary carer. That is one recommendation that I would like to see carried through and implemented. As I have said, this is not about

mothers alone; it is about the babies. Any father or eligible partner should be more than welcome to spend time with their babies and this should be supported. If it is the woman who is on the higher salary then it makes perfect sense for her to go back to work while the partner stays at home.

The Stanhope government is doing its best to support families in the ACT. For example, the ACT government provided additional funding in 2008-09 for the West Belconnen Children and Family Support Service. This service will facilitate access for disadvantaged families with children experiencing issues related to educational attainment, child development, health, family breakdown and parenting and domestic violence. In addition, the government will fund in 2008-09 the forward design of a third child and family centre in the Belconnen region.

In 2004, we released the ACT children's plan, which established a whole-of-government approach to early childhood health and development and which placed children's needs first. The most recent initiative in supporting early childhood development has been the development of early childhood schools, and these will be opened in 2009. The services provided within each of these schools will vary from site to site, but include education, health, childcare, parenting and early intervention programs.

The ACT government recognises the importance of early childhood services in supporting families and, accordingly, the ACT's services are at the forefront of best practice. Family and employment structures and patterns have changed markedly over the decade and families are looking for programs and structures which better meet their needs now.

Finally, now is the time to take the next step and, with the assistance of the commonwealth, to invest further in our families in ways that we cannot at this level of government, and that many smaller employers cannot manage either. We are looking to do that through a paid national maternity leave scheme.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (3.31): I am not here to close the debate; I am speaking in response to Mr Hargreaves's amendment. The government's amendment does not conflict with the original purpose of my motion, which, in the light of the upcoming event of International Women's Day on 8 March, was to call on the ACT government to implement their election promise of 18 weeks paid maternity leave for ACT public servants by including this commitment in the 2009-10 budget, and to show leadership by calling on the commonwealth government to accept the recommendations of the Productivity Commission report regarding maternity leave. Therefore, the Greens will support the government's amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (3.32), by leave: I move the following amendments together:

- (1) omit paragraph (1), substitute:

“(1) notes that the Productivity Commission has proposed the introduction of a taxpayer-funded scheme for paid parental leave;” and

(2) in paragraph (2)(b), omit “maternity”, substitute “parental”.

I have already spoken to these amendments. The first one is designed to place the Productivity Commission front and centre in the debate about maternity leave, and the second one is to refer more correctly to the Productivity Commission report in its full context, which is in relation to parental leave.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (3.33): Again, Mr Speaker, I wish to speak to Mrs Dunne’s amendment rather than closing the debate. I understand that the opposition is moving this amendment to clarify what the Productivity Commission is proposing in its draft inquiry report, *Paid parental leave: supports for parents with newborn children*, released on 29 September 2008. This report uses the term “parental leave” in reference to the commission’s original issues paper titled *Paid maternity, paternity and parental leave*, dated April 2008. The issues paper states:

... the Commission will use the term ‘paid parental leave’ to cover paid maternity and paternity leave ...

Therefore, in light of this, I refer to the text of my motion, which called upon the ACT government to show leadership by calling on the commonwealth to accept the recommendations of the Productivity Commission report regarding maternity leave.

The ACT Greens policy supports initiatives that assist parents to balance work and family commitments, including paid parental leave, and I have not made a judgement on the importance of one over the other. However, on the eve of this year’s International Women’s Day, the text of my motion was with particular reference to maternity leave. I make this clarification because for women this has been, as federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick said, 30 years of advocacy, and it’s absolutely time to induce. However, I cannot support the amendments put forward by Mrs Dunne as they require the removal of the acknowledgement of the benefits of paid maternity leave.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella) (3.34): In my speech I referred to my amendment, but I also referred to Mrs Dunne’s amendments and said we would not oppose them. I have had discussions in the meantime which have only recently concluded within the past minute or two. I have not had a chance to have a chat with Mrs Dunne. It is not my form to do this, and I apologise for not being able to get to Mrs Dunne to explain the position.

I am convinced that, whilst Ms Hunter’s motion is about maternity leave, it actually does two things. It talks about the Productivity Commission’s parental leave, it talks about maternity leave, and she wants us to give consideration to the Productivity Commission’s report around non-biological parenting and all of those implications. I think that is where Mrs Dunne was going, and I concur a bit with her. But what Ms Hunter is trying to do, as I read it in the context of this particular motion, is to

highlight that segment within the Productivity Commission's report as it relates to maternity leave provisions, and, in particular, the 18 weeks, the universality of maternity leave and the fact that we are moving forward in maternity leave provisions for women and highlighting that. So, in fact, the intent of the motion is about highlighting the maternity leave provisions as a segment of the Productivity Commission's report.

Whilst not wanting to diminish or denigrate the position that Mrs Dunne is taking on this—I would be quite willing to support, for example, another motion along similar lines—in the context of Ms Hunter wanting to highlight that segment by putting it front and centre, we will, in fact, support Ms Hunter's position.

Amendments negatived.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (3.37): In closing, I thank my fellow members for their contributions to this debate regarding such an important issue which goes to the heart of the functioning of a civil society. I also thank them for their support in recognising that paid maternity leave is an essential investment in the workforce.

It is also important in my summing up to respond to some of the comments made by Mr Seselja during the course of this debate. I say in response to Mr Seselja that I saw fit to raise the important issue of paid maternity leave in the lead-up to International Women's Day, and in future I will continue to raise issues of importance, irrespective of whether or not it is Labor Party policy. If I choose to encourage the government to include certain measures in the budget, I will be doing this in whatever form I see fit, and I will not be consulting Mr Seselja for his views on what is the appropriate forum before I proceed. I also suggest that Mr Seselja should understand the seriousness of the issue in my motion and not refer to his election promises within this context.

Again, I thank members for their support, as I believe many women will on 8 March, International Women's Day.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Planning—Hawker

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (3.39): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

(a) that block 8, section 34 Hawker is listed for auction on 18 March 2009 and the development of the site may adversely affect parking for the Hawker Group Centre; and

(b) that there has been no consultation with the Hawker and surrounding community about the future of the Hawker Group Centre; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) immediately conduct an appropriate planning study, in consultation with the community, before block 8, section 34 Hawker is sold; and
- (b) complete the planning study and table it in the Legislative Assembly by the last sitting day in August 2009.

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines consultation as “a meeting arranged to consult”. The dictionary further defines the verb “consult” as “to seek information or advice or to refer to a person for advice or an opinion”. This is generally understood to be the process of consultation. It is certainly what the business owners and community people associated with Hawker understood by the process of consultation. However, the government will have its own dictionary definition and the government’s definition of consultation is planting a sign in the ground—just planting a sign in the ground.

Last week I received a number of phone calls—regrettably a communication method that prevents me from tabling any substantial paper evidence such as the Chief Minister might demand—from concerned business owners at the Hawker group centre. On the back of these calls I visited those and other concerned business owners in the Hawker group centre over Friday and Monday this week. Again, the situation of my conversations with those people prevents me tabling that in the Assembly as the Chief Minister might demand.

Their concern was over a sign that had recently been planted on block 8, section 34 of Hawker, indicating that the block was to be auctioned for development on 18 March. My understanding is that the sign went up the Monday before last or sometime over that weekend. More importantly, their concern was that they had not been consulted.

Here is the dichotomy that exists between the government’s definition of consultation and the common man definition of consultation. On the one hand we have all the notions of talking, discussion, seeking advice and opinions and meeting with people, and on the other hand we have the government’s approach, which is planting a sign in the ground.

If this is the government’s notion of consultation in the new Seventh Assembly where things will be done differently, I have got news for the government. The advice and the opinions given to me by business owners and community members at Hawker, which they consider to be the primary element of consultation, is that they would like to have an opportunity to discuss with the government its plans for their group centre. It is their centre. It is the centre of their livelihood. It is where they conduct their businesses and their community activities. It is where their customers go to do their shopping. It is their local community. It is their local church.

It has a range of professional services. It is a place for engagement. It is a place for sporting and social entertainment. Business owners at the Hawker group centre tell me that critical to the access to their group centre and therefore to the businesses that go on there is access to parking. This is a vibrant centre which many people use because

of ease of access. Business people said repeatedly that they had people who came to their centre because there was easy access and there were appropriate amounts of parking; it made it easier for people to do business.

Mr Smyth: Like they used to go to Griffith library for.

MRS DUNNE: Yes. But really what it boils down to is that business owners at the Hawker centre would love to be able to talk to the government about all of the things that they raised with me. There are business owners at the Hawker group centre who have told me that they have not had so much as a phone call from a government official about the proposed auction of block 8, section 34—not even to tell them that a sign had been erected.

Some have told me that they were visited sometime last year when an official asked some members of the business fraternity there to indicate what was their quietest business day. They indicated that usually Thursday in a pay week was their quietest business day. When one of the shop owners asked, “Why do you want to know that?” they said that they were told by the official—and I do not know who this person was; no-one can identify which agency they came from—that they wanted to undertake a parking study on just such a day. I do not think that this is appropriate consultation, and neither do the businesses, business owners, business operators and operators of community organisations at the Hawker group centre.

What is the advice and opinions of business owners given to me in my consultation as to the impact of development of block 8, section 34? I emphasise that this is not an exhaustive consultation; it involved the amount of time that I could take out over a couple of afternoons to talk to people.

Mr Speaker, it will come as no surprise to you or to me, but it is probably news to the government, that they do not consider planting a sign in the ground as sufficient consultation. The advice and opinion of business owners is that development on block 8, section 34 could result in congestion, limited parking, customer frustration and resultant adverse impacts on their business. Already there are longstanding business owners at the Hawker group centre who are considering shutting up shop and moving elsewhere. I think that that would be premature.

It needs to be said that, to a man and a woman, I was told by business owners that they were not opposed to further development—in fact, that they welcomed it—but they wanted to be part of the conversation about how their group centre should develop.

There are essentially two vacant blocks of land at the Hawker shops which have not been sold by the government. These are the final pieces in the puzzle, so to speak. As part of putting those final pieces in place, the people who live, work, make their money and provide employment at that shopping centre want to be part of the conversation.

The advice and opinion of business owners at Hawker are that limited parking might limit the scope of the local church to hold large weddings and funerals and that it

might limit the scope of the local sporting club and hotel to hold large functions and community events. Did the government know any of this before today? I think not, because their definition of consultation is planting a sign in the ground.

Let me spend a moment to briefly look at the discussion on parking in the LDA site investigation report for block 8, section 34, Hawker. On page 23 the report notes “the lack of any indicative and consistent up-to-date car park usage data within the Hawker Shopping Centre”. There is no up-to-date data. The approach was then taken to make some estimate based on the generic models in the ACT parking and vehicular access guidelines. Then a single car park occupancy observation was made during a Thursday in February 2008—a single observation on a single day. How can conclusions be drawn when considered against a generic model when we are looking at a single observation of occupancy?

The LDA’s report answers that question. It notes on page 24 that the parking assessment, when made under the guidelines I mentioned earlier, indicates that the current supply of 474 parking spaces, which does seem a lot, falls short of the 611 that are indicated by the guidelines. The guidelines require that this number of spaces “are required within 200 metres of the existing developments to satisfy the minimum parking provision requirements and to meet all relevant objectives”. Yet on page 25 the report notes that the outcome of the single on-site observation on a single day in February 2008 indicates “a significantly lower demand”.

Here we have another dichotomy. On one hand we have a model based on the government’s own guidelines that says that existing car parks and infrastructure are inadequate and on the other hand we have a single observation on a single day that says that parking infrastructure is more than adequate. What has happened? The inconvenient answer has been tipped out in favour of what the government considers the right answer—that is, the answer that the government wants. And the government has gone ahead with the proposal to sell the car park without any consultation with the community.

Car parking is not the only issue. On reflection, I think that perhaps my motion unduly emphasises car parking. There are other issues here. The main issue is that the people in the Hawker group centre did not know that this was happening and have not been involved in any discussion about the future of their area. This is an important business; these are important people. The government is making decisions which impact on the lives and livelihoods of business owners and is based on a car parking study of a single observation on a single day in February 2008.

While the government is making decisions that impact on local communities, churches, clubs and businesses, it has done so on very flawed and insufficient information. The community is concerned: if it has made a decision based on that very obvious failure, what are the other failures in the process that led them to consider selling this block without consultation with the community? Is it any wonder that the owners of shops and businesses at the Hawker group centre are concerned about the government’s definition of consultation?

As I have said, car parking is only one aspect of the issues raised here. A quick glance at the conditions of sale creates more questions than it answers. It creates uncertainty.

The lease purpose clause over the block of land states that it can be used for one or more of the following purposes: club; commercial accommodation limited to hotel and/or motel; non-retail commercial limited to office; residential use limited to multi-unit housing; restaurant; shop, provided any shop selling food does not exceed a maximum gross floor area of 300 square metres; and veterinary hospital. The conditions on the sale also state that residential use is not permitted on the ground floor and that office space is not to exceed 2,000 square metres.

I note with interest that, in prohibiting residential space on the ground floor, the lease conditions specifically prevent retail space from being created on the upper floors. In a roundabout way, they are saying that if you build two storeys or more you have to put residential on the upper storeys. In passing, I wonder whether other potential problems might arise in the planning process.

The point is this: had the government sought advice from the local business owners rather than just planting a sign in the ground, we may not be where we are today. If the government had gone out before planting the sign on the ground and talked to the community, we may not be contemplating a motion that would require the government to forestall a sale of land.

I can understand that the government may put forward an argument that says that in these economic times we should be maximising the revenue of the territory and that the sale of land must go through. I hope that that is not what the government are going to say. We have done it the wrong way round. Instead of going to the community before deciding to sell the block, they decided to sell the block and then they hoped that the community would respond.

The community have responded. They have spoken to members of the Legislative Assembly. I understand that they have raised these matters with Ms Porter as well. They specifically came and asked for one thing, and one thing only: that the sale of the block be delayed until there is a proper planning study that they can be involved in. No-one at the site has said that there should be no development on this site. They just want to be involved in the future of their group centre.

This is a very simple motion. I am surprised that we have got such a large number of officials to come and listen to this, because I think it is a matter of common sense. It is a shame that we have to bring this to this place and move a motion requiring the government to do particular things. They should have thought of it beforehand. But the Stanhope government are not good at thinking about people beforehand: they only think about people when they are forced to.

I am sorry that I have to bring this motion today, but I am proud to represent the people who elected me to do the job that I am doing today. I am proud that Mr Coe will be supporting me in this, because that is the job that he was elected to do—first and foremost, to represent the people of Ginninderra. The people of Hawker are our constituents. We are here today to represent their views to the Legislative Assembly. I commend the motion to the house.

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) (3.53): The government concedes that this is a matter of significant import and of importance and of some current concern to, most particularly, the offices and retailers within the Hawker shopping centre. I too am aware of their concern. I too am in receipt of their correspondence and their representations in relation to their concerns about the process.

I think, just in terms of that process, it is consistent with processes that have been traditionally pursued by our authorities, and not just under this government but previously. The process is essentially the same. It is that an indicative land supply program is developed, released and advertised. And that was the case under the Liberals and is the case under us.

It was advertised. This land was included within the land release program. The LDA, consistent with that, along with other agencies and officials that are part of the process, proceeded on the basis, as they always have, to prepare the land for sale, consistent with the strategy that was developed. That is the way that it has always been. This is not a new process; it is how it has always been done.

That does not mean that, for every piece of land, it is a process that meets the needs of the community. To that extent, I do not disagree with some of the sentiment that Mrs Dunne has expressed today. But I think to be fair to officials, to be fair to the government, to be fair to the process, it is a process that has been pursued by all governments in my time in this place in relation to land supply and the forward program.

At the heart of some of the debate we have had in relation to the data centre is that governments and agencies have proceeded along a process line that identified land, made the land available, sold the land and required the purchaser to then pursue a certain process, a statutory process, involving preliminary assessments, development applications. Because of the way in which our systems have been structured, it is through that part of the process that there is a statutory requirement for consultation.

This is the issue that really was at the heart of the debate we have hopefully concluded in relation to the data centre and it is at the heart of the issue which Mrs Dunne raises today: a second set of consultation, a predevelopment application consultation process. We consult on whether or not to sell the land and then we consult on the use of the land. This is not how our planning and land development agencies proceeded traditionally.

Mrs Dunne, though, raises a legitimate point today. I do not dispute it and I think we need to respond to it.

Mrs Dunne: Careful, you have agreed with me again.

MR STANHOPE: I do; it is disconcerting. I think the challenge is for my officials, and I invited my officials to be here today to better understand the nature of the issues which we face as a government, as a community. I do not disagree with you, Mrs Dunne, that we should have found a way of engaging with the Hawker shopping

centre community at the sale stage so as not to create the levels of anxiety which have been created and not to create the situation which has now been created, which is that I have asked the Land Development Agency to withdraw the land from sale. I have asked the Land Development Agency to commence, through the Chief Minister's Department and in consultation with ACTPLA, a master planning exercise. The consequence of that, of course, is that the sale of the land, if it is to proceed at all, will be delayed. And that is to be regretted. But I do not disagree that a proposal to sell commercial land which currently is utilised as a car park in a suburban shopping centre presents issues for that community that need to be addressed.

There are some historic issues and aspects to the Hawker shopping centre. It was initially, I understand—I might be corrected on this—proposed that Hawker would be a group centre but it is a proposal which was never achieved. The group centre, I think, is now Kippax. The group centre that was imagined for Hawker is not a group centre. I think at the heart of the decision in relation to parking at Hawker is that, in relation to the Hawker shopping centre, in its original configuration and its original development, it was imagined that it would be a group centre.

Mrs Dunne: It was downgraded.

MR STANHOPE: Yes, it was downgraded, I understand.

Mrs Dunne: The new territory plan, which was supposed to be policy neutral, changed the status.

MR STANHOPE: No, a long time ago, in the distant past under the NCDC, I think, no less. But my understanding—and I stand ready to be corrected on this; this is anecdotal, it is just something that I have gathered as an understanding—is that Hawker never realised its original—

Mrs Dunne: Because it was so close to Jamison.

MR STANHOPE: It was either Jamison or Kippax. Hawker is not the same as Jamison and Kippax. Hawker was leapfrogged. It is a significant shopping centre; it is a significant centre. It has grown well and it is a centre that those that use it enjoy and appreciate. I think that bit of history is relevant to decisions that have been taken to identify land at Hawker as potentially excess to the needs at that particular shopping centre, and that was the basis of the original decision.

The centre has developed in lots of other ways: it has a very active church, it has a KFC stuck off in the boondocks, it has developed a significant professional centre. I declare, perhaps I should openly, something of a conflict of interest. My wife shares accommodation in the office block at Hawker. I declare that. I do not believe I have a conflict but I declare that my wife has an office at Hawker. That is some of the background.

In response to the motion, I have indicated to all of those senior officials that are here today that the government is looking for guidance on a new approach but an approach which does not hogtie our capacity to sell land and to develop land. This now is

a significant bite out of our commercial land release for this financial year and we are struggling now to make it up. It is 2,000 square metres. It is two per cent of our proposed commercial land release for this financial year. We will not be able to make it up in this financial year. And that is the consequence that we pay.

But I have already made the request that the land be withdrawn from sale. I have already asked for a master planning exercise to commence. But I have asked my officials to assist me and provide guidance to me on what we can do to ensure that we do not confront this situation again. But I cannot embrace a policy position or a scenario which requires that every piece of land which we sell through the commercial or the industrial supply stream be consulted on before it is sold. That would be simply unreasonable.

The fine line, I guess the policy response that we need to provide, is to identify perhaps those infill sites, to differentiate. It would not be reasonable for me to expect of the LDA or officials that we have a public consultation process on a piece of industrial land in the middle of Mitchell, Fyshwick or Hume. That is not reasonable. And it would not be responsible to consult. I guess what I am saying is that in a case-specific sense I do not disagree with you on this but I could not accept a policy position that allows us to identify those sites where we do need obviously to consult, to embrace or to engage with the community as against those where there is nothing to be gained.

In relation to a commercial site located, I think, in the city, we should note that; we should not suggest that there be a double consultation on every commercial site that we identify or that there be a double consultation on every piece of industrial land. There are 100,000 square metres of industrial land identified for sale in Hume, in Fyshwick and in Mitchell and I do not propose that we consult on the sale or the implications of the sale of a block of land in the middle of Mitchell. But I do accept that, for cases such as this, there does need to be an adjustment to our accepted, historic approach to the notification and the engagement pre sale with commitments to a process such as a master planning which allows that degree of consultation and then the sale.

But we do need to understand that then it starts off again. When the development application is lodged, there is a statutory consultation process. We cannot keep consulting all the time on issues that, as Mrs Dunne has identified, are relevant to economic growth and activity. It will just tie us in knots that will cause us economic pain to a point that would not be acceptable.

Having said that, the government will accept the motion. I think it is not fair to say there was no consultation but I cannot at this stage quibble that there was an appropriate consultation. There was some consultation. There were traffic studies; there were some discussions. I do not believe that they met the needs of the Hawker community so I am happy to accept the motion.

I might just make the point simply that I do not believe it is humanly possible for us to deliver a master planning study for Hawker before August 2009. It simply cannot be done. Or it could be but we would have to drop every other master plan that is

currently being pursued by ACTPLA. I would have to ask them to abandon all other master planning that they are doing and give this priority over and above everything else. And that just simply is not reasonable. It has been suggested to me by officials that we could conclude a master plan by December. I think that is a bit tight.

I have circulated an amendment which asks for an extension of the date for the completion of a planning study. I will conclude on that. Is the government prepared to accept essentially the issue as an issue that the government needs to grapple with? I accept it in relation to this site specifically. I have asked officials to provide me with a process that identifies sites such as this and I think they are probably going to be infill or suburban sites. But I do need to signal that I do not believe that the government should be asked to accept this same stringency in relation to the vast majority of its land release sales. But I accept that.

I have received the same representations as Mrs Dunne, and the representations are well made. Having said that, as they have to Mrs Dunne, they have also indicated to me and Ms Porter, as I understand it, that the majority of retailers and owners—and Mrs Dunne makes this point too—would prefer to see this sale proceed but they just want some certainty on its implications. But there is a strong degree of support within the Hawker shopping centre for additional development because it will enhance the site.

Mrs Dunne: Do you want to move this now?

MR STANHOPE: Yes, I will take this opportunity now to move the amendment circulated in my name. And I will conclude. I move:

Omit paragraph (2)(b), substitute:

“(b) complete the planning study and table it in the Legislative Assembly by the first sitting day in December 2009.”.

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (4.06): I was going to speak on the substantive motion, which I understand I should do next, given what—

MR SPEAKER: You can speak on both now, if you wish.

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I rise to find myself largely agreeing with both of the previous speakers. We also have received representations from residents of Hawker that it was not consultation; to just have a signpost up was not a reasonable process. And basically I would have to agree substantively with what Mrs Dunne said about the process in Hawker. It may or may not in the long run be good changes but there certainly has not been adequate consultation. Equally though, I have quite some sympathy with the Chief Minister’s statements about the impossibility of consulting on every single land sale.

Part of the agreement between the Labor Party and the Greens said that we would reinstitute neighbourhood planning. The whole idea of neighbourhood planning, or master planning, was to reduce, or hopefully eliminate, these sorts of circumstances.

You have a situation where you would be doing in advance what the government is now planning to do. Before the government thinks about substantive changes to a neighbourhood, to a town centre, it would go and consult with the neighbours about what is going to happen in that area, what the master plan will be for that area, what the neighbourhood plan will be for that area. I guess I am rising mainly to commend the Labor-Green parliamentary agreement to the house and trust that it will be followed in the future, as it will now be implemented in this case.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (4.08): Firstly, let me address the issue of the group centres. I do believe that Hawker is a group centre. I have got the latest copy of the territory plan, effective 6 February 2009.

Mr Stanhope: I was prepared to stand corrected.

MR COE: Yes. It does state that Calwell, Chisholm, Curtin, Erindale, Jamison, Kingston, Manuka, Weston, Wanniasa, Charnwood, Conder, Dickson, Hawker, Kaleen, Kambah, Kippax and Mawson are the group centres. Later in that section of the territory plan it does go into a little bit more detail, I believe.

I rise this afternoon to speak in favour of Mrs Dunne's motion which calls on the government to consult with businesses, the Anglican Church and other users of the Hawker group centre. Many businesses in suburban shopping centres are doing it tough at the moment. Such local businesses are at the centre of our communities and provide essential services for Canberrans. More often than not, the businesses of suburban shopping centres are not franchises or subsidiaries but independent, standalone businesses. Hawker is no different. Often they are run by families and employ people from the immediate area. We in the Assembly must support these businesses because they support us and all Canberrans in our daily lives.

I would imagine that there are few people in our community that are better informed about local goings-on than the suburban chemist, the manager of the general store, the operator of the takeaway, the local postmaster, the minister or the newsagent. These business people and community leaders know what is happening and it is hard to pull the wool over their eyes.

I have spoken in the Assembly before about the good work churches do in our community. In Ginninderra, there are many churches that are all doing great work in making our community a better place to live. Christ Church Hawker is one such example.

We in the Canberra Liberals are committed to rejuvenating our suburbs where it is needed and we support appropriate development in our suburbs. We in the Canberra Liberals are also firm in our belief that we must actively consult our community when changes are proposed that affect them.

In Belconnen, there are five group centres. They are Jamison, Kaleen, Kippax, Charnwood and Hawker. Hawker is the smallest of the centres I just mentioned. Good developments that will make the area more sustainable will be supported. And that is certainly the case and certainly the view of the residents and tenants at Hawker.

However, the auctioning of block 8, section 34 Hawker on 18 March 2009 has been done too swiftly and without consulting the community adequately, especially the businesses and community organisations that operate at the centre. The concerned people simply want to be involved in the future of the area that they have invested so much time and money into developing.

Mrs Dunne's motion calls upon the government to do what they should have done from the start: consult. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident. There are other examples in suburban shops where developments have gone ahead with little to no consultation. It is not good enough. As I said earlier, there is nobody better placed to provide advice on local areas than the suburban chemist, manager of the general store, operator of the takeaway, the local postmaster, minister or newsagent.

It would be foolish of us not to speak with them when it is their future and their community at stake. I urge all members to support a return to engaging with the community and support this motion.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (4.12): I will speak to Mr Stanhope's amendment and close at the same time, for economy's sake. I welcome the approach taken by Mr Stanhope and the government. I thank him for his very thoughtful approach on this and I think that, as a result, we may get quite a good outcome.

When I came up with the reporting date, I was trying to strike a balance between taking six months to do a planning study and not putting it out so far as to jeopardise the sale but, if the Chief Minister is of the view that going until December is more appropriate, I will bow to that. I thank the Chief Minister for his generosity in this and I think that the people of Ginninderra will thank him as well. I hope that they do.

I think he makes a fair point about the policy approach that we need to take. It is the case that we should not have a one-size-fits-all approach. But it may be that it is important that we start a master planning process for areas where there has not been a master plan or the master plan has been around for some time. I actually do not know whether there has ever been a master plan for Hawker. If there has been one, it was a very long time ago. One of those approaches might be to look at where there are infill places in group centres and large shopping centres and things like that and start the master planning there.

It would also be appropriate, I think—and it has been my view and the view of the Canberra Liberals for a substantial amount of time—that it is time that there was a whole-of-town-centre master planning approach for Belconnen. There have been master plans for bits of it, but there has not been an overall approach. There has been an overall approach taken to Phillip in the last little while and I think it is time that the same approach was taken in Belconnen.

I thank members for their support. I thank the Chief Minister for his generosity. We will support the amendment. I hope that, as a result, we get a good outcome for the people who make their living and operate community activities at and frequent the Hawker shopping centre, the professional areas and the churches; that we also learn

from this, as the Chief Minister has foreshadowed; and that we do not get ourselves in this situation when we start to sell blocks of land in other places.

It is always contentious, and the Chief Minister will remember how contentious it was to sell blocks of land in the Kippax group centre in the last little while. We need to learn from our mistakes. And it might be true to say that we have always done it like this and we did it like this under previous governments as well but we did not always do it well and, when we do not do it well, we should learn from our mistakes. This was a mistake. It is not a hanging offence and we have been able to pull the fat out of the fire. I think we will end up with a good outcome. I thank members for their support.

Amendment agreed to

Motion, as amended, agreed to

National Multicultural Festival

MS BURCH (Brindabella) (4.16): I move:

That this Assembly recognises the continued success and growth of the Multicultural Festival, and its increasing importance as a flagship event in the ACT calendar that promotes harmony and goodwill among all citizens of the ACT.

Mr Speaker, people from all walks of life and from all corners of the ACT, as well as visitors from interstate and overseas, are well aware of the success and growth of the National Multicultural Festival. It is also an event on the ACT calendar reaching out and engaging all sectors of our community, offering participation and involvement on a number of levels through community groups, stallholders, dancers, event organisers, the members of the audience, the volunteers and more.

It is, and continues to be, a flagship event for a number of reasons. The Multicultural Festival is a significant vehicle for the promotion of harmony and goodwill in the ACT region. It is a vehicle for promoting the underlying principle of multiculturalism and demonstrates the way in which we lead the nation in this area. Canberrans know the importance of fostering a harmonious, accepting and culturally diverse community. It results in a strong social cohesion in the ACT and it is the result of working together; it is the result of mutual respect.

I am pleased to recognise the immense contribution the multicultural community has made to the look and feel of our city. It is something that we take pride in. Multiculturalism is an exclusive concept that celebrates and encourages diversity and the ACT government provides support and creates the opportunities for Canberrans to welcome, embrace and to celebrate this diversity.

I am proud to say that Canberrans welcome culture and religious diversity. We embrace the diversity and we celebrate our differences. There are many benefits of having a multicultural city like Canberra that is rich in languages and diverse in

cultures and customs that we can all share and learn. This advances us internationally and moves us closer to the rest of the world.

Canberra, as the national capital, was built on a foundation of cultural diversity. Multiculturalism is a way of life that is based on working together to maintain social harmony, equity, equality and respect. The many facets of the Multicultural Festival go to promote people coming together, learning about each other and each other's culture and working together for a common objective.

This flagship event is also the vehicle for enhancing those valuable intergenerational aspects, the building of social capital and capacity building for individuals and community groups alike. These impact in a positive way on the wider community as well as within the multicultural community. I have in mind grandmothers and grandchildren dancing and cooking together; members of different community groups talking together at the food and dance spectacular; trying each other's food; and young people learning how to organise and work with other members of communities—working across all age groups with a range of skills and abilities. This government has for many years worked hard to take appropriate action to promote and develop respect and understanding and to appreciate and celebrate the diversity within our community.

The government is committed to providing opportunities for communities to celebrate their unique cultures. The annual National Multicultural Festival is an exemplary example of this. It offers opportunities for cultures that are many thousands of years old to share with us their food, song and cultures that have diversified and changed over time. They bring that to us in our contemporary society.

Of course, the festival has always had strong community focus and a strong community involvement. Through the festival, it is clear that the ACT community is a welcoming community and believes strongly in celebrating multiculturalism. Over the years we have seen greater community involvement in the festival through increased numbers of stallholders, business involvement, sponsors, performers and audiences.

The importance that the community places on celebrating multiculturalism is also keenly reflected in the great number of volunteers who freely give of their time to make the festival such a great success. I cannot speak highly enough of the immeasurable community service made by these volunteers. Again, for me this is remarkably similar to the way in which the festival encourages a diverse range of cultures to work together to reflect and promote our inclusive and harmonious society.

Volunteers at the festival come from all walks of life, reflecting the diversity of the Canberra population. These are people that are so committed to the National Multicultural Festival and to the importance of celebrating multiculturalism that they come from far and wide. I had the pleasure of talking to some volunteers that came from the Snowy Mountains area and Cooma way.

As well as the formal volunteers who participated in the festival under the leadership of the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum, I would also like to acknowledge the numerous community groups who volunteer their time to make the 2009 National

Multicultural Festival, Canberra's premier celebration of multiculturalism, the success that it is. It really highlights that we truly are a cohesive, strong society. With a greater understanding of ourselves and of each other, we are far more likely to continue to grow and prosper as a cohesive and harmonious society.

This is why the festival is a celebration. This is why it is important to both the ACT community and the ACT government. This flagship event, the National Multicultural Festival, on the surface is a huge celebration with attendances of over 100,000. I had the pleasure of being in Civic on Saturday afternoon and evening. It was a tremendous crowd from all cultures, of all ages, coming together with such a wonderful and positive feel. It is to be commended and those that did not attend this year should mark it in their diaries for next year.

I contend that not only has it grown in magnitude, and this year the festival spread from Garema Place to Glebe Park; it is also a vehicle of some magnitude for the promotion of harmony and goodwill amongst the people of the ACT. Who knows how big it will grow in the years ahead and how many more benefits the community will gain through the involvement of the National Multicultural Festival.

The festival shows that Canberrans really know how to celebrate and this augurs well as we approach the centenary of Canberra. As I have just described, the fundamental steps and building blocks are well and truly in place for the continued success and growth of the Multicultural Festival. As an undisputed flagship event, it is wonderfully successful in demonstrating and celebrating the ACT model of multiculturalism and how we promote harmony and goodwill among all citizens in the ACT.

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (4.24): Madam Assistant Speaker, I would like to thank Ms Burch for this motion. This is a great opportunity to again congratulate and acknowledge the considerable efforts of the individuals, community groups and volunteers that combined forces to provide the ACT with an event to be proud of. The National Multicultural Festival has been a fixture in Canberra for some time now and the flow-on effects cannot be ignored. The positive impact that such an event has on the ACT community in general, the feeling of goodwill and harmony amongst the multicultural community, is indeed profound.

The debate also provides an opportunity to reflect on the two words "goodwill" and "harmony". Goodwill can be defined as the friendly hope that something will succeed and harmony can be defined as compatibility in opinion and action. It does seem timely to reflect on what many in the community see as something that threatens the compatibility of opinions and actions—a massive contradiction. I refer to the decision in 2005 to install a life-size statute of Al Grassby at the foyer of the Theo Notaras Centre and the decision to retain the Al Grassby statue, despite what can be considered as a significant and constant criticism and backlash from many in the ACT community.

In a recent article in the *Herald Sun*, Paul Sheehan has reignited the debate on the suitability of commissioning the statue of Mr Grassby in the first place. In his article, based on the recent well-published television series *Underbelly*, Mr Sheehan wrote:

When the Chief Minister of the ACT, John Stanhope, successfully championed this statue, the evidence of Grassby's corruption and treachery was both abundant and widely known.

In fact, it is worth noting here that Mr Sheehan may have actually got it slightly wrong. Mr Stanhope, by all accounts, was not the champion of the statue. It was, indeed, Mr Hargreaves who procured the avenue of immortalising his ideological hero.

Mr Stanhope has been quoted as saying that had he had a say he probably would have put a bit more thought into it. In fact, he goes so far as to say that this was not the most red hot of decisions. He made that statement on ABC radio, Friday, 16 March 2007. In fact, it is worth looking at the full text of his interview. A news report states:

Mr Stanhope distanced himself from the project on Friday, telling ABC radio that the project had been the brainchild of ACT Minister for Multicultural Affairs, John Hargreaves.

Asked what he was thinking in building the statue, Mr Stanhope said: "Well, I wasn't thinking anything, I didn't know about it until it was announced by the minister. I don't approve the expenditure of every cent."

Asked if he would have approved it had he known about it, Mr Stanhope said: "I respect and defend and have absolute confidence in John Hargreaves, but probably not, but he has taken the decision. I am not saying this is the most red hot decision."

He regretted the statue had caused so much controversy.

"I understand the point that is being made and if I had my time again or if I was involved in the decision perhaps the outcome would have been different," Mr Stanhope said. "Or perhaps if our processes had been more rigorous at the time, and I acknowledge that they weren't."

Well, Mr Stanhope, the process was over four years ago—plenty of time to address the situation. But here we are, four years later and the cause of disunity is still in place. In fact, the groundswell of public opinion in recent days further indicates that the government got it wrong. Some recent comments on the statue include this one letter to the editor in today's *Canberra Times*. Under the heading "Statue is a stain", it states:

It is hypocritical in the extreme for ACT Labor Minister John Hargreaves to dismiss *Underbelly* allegations of Al Grassby's smear campaign links to the murder of anti-drugs campaigner as a revival of sensationalism ... Long before *Underbelly*, Hargreaves was himself instrumental in reviving a connection with the sensational.

That was when he commissioned a taxpayer-funded statue in honour of a controversial former fellow Labor politician against the wishes of the murdered man's family.

One point is often lost in the debate surrounding Grassby's attempt to implicate Mackay's family in the murder.

Grassby never admitted the smear or apologised to the dead man's family.

It must be remembered that Grassby's successful appeal against his criminal conviction was only on the grounds that defamation could not be proven, as well as that parliamentary privilege played a significant role in protecting him from the full wrath of the law.

Until the Labor Party in government takes steps to formally apologise to the Mackay family for what was one of the most shameful episodes in Australian political history, the presence of Al Grassby's statue in the ACT will remain a permanent stain on Australia's multicultural history rather than a tribute.

My office also received several phone calls from constituents who go so far as to call for the removal of the statue in the interests of community harmony. Whatever individuals might personally think or say about Mr Grassby is debatable. The fact remains that Mr Hargreaves and ultimately Mr Stanhope had the responsibility back in 2005 to ensure that almost \$75,000 of ACT taxpayers' money was spent on a memorial in good faith and with goodwill to create an opportunity for harmony within the ACT community, not as has happened whereby considerable public funds have been spent on a memorial to an ideological icon of ACT Labor, and Mr Hargreaves personally, without any thought of or care about the possible hurt and controversy that might ensue.

But now back to the Multicultural Festival. I commend Ms Burch for raising this motion. I strongly support the continued success and growth of the Multicultural Festival. Long may the festival live and prosper.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mrs Dunne): Before we proceed, Mr Hargreaves, I understand it is the usual practice in this place for men to wear their jackets in the Assembly.

Mr Hargreaves: I would remind you, Madam Assistant Speaker, of the practice when you were supporting now Senator Humphries and when quite a number of people—Mr Moore to my memory, Mr Stefaniak to another memory—presented themselves in the chamber in the same way. But, if it offends your sense of decorum, Madam Assistant Speaker, I shall put my coat on.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Hargreaves.

Mr Hargreaves: That is all right. I would ask you also to go back and check and make sure that you deliver those sorts of requests with some equanimity in future. I would like to have my time kick off now, please.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I call Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Disability and Housing, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Corrections) (4.32): I want to express initially my disappointment, profound disappointment, in Mr Doszpot for such gutter comments. I had thought him

bigger than that. I have no regrets about the emergence of this statue—none. Indeed, the litany of quotes that he put down here is so full of inaccuracies and untruths as to be laughable. But let us for a little bit of time set the record for those people who were not here. I notice that the three members of the Liberal Party who are here, excluding your good self, Madam Assistant Speaker, were not in the chamber when this debate raged last time. Clearly, therefore, I forgive them for not being aware of what went on.

Mr Doszpot says there is a groundswell of public opinion out there. Well, I have not felt it. I have been looking at the letters to the editor and I have seen, I think, about three to five or something of that order. That is not a groundswell; it is not.

Mr Hanson: They only publish a certain number, John.

MR HARGREAVES: I am not talking to you.

Mr Hanson: They don't publish all—

MR HARGREAVES: Why don't you just belt up! Why don't you belt up!

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Order! Mr Hargreaves, would you sit down, please. It probably would be a very good idea if members took a deep breath and, if there is an interjection, Mr Hargreaves will not go over the top and speak like that. But, in future, Mr Hargreaves, you address your comments through the chair, even if people do interject. I do not want to hear that sort of outburst again.

MR HARGREAVES: Madam Assistant Speaker, I thank you for your ruling. I shall, in fact, ask these people to be quiet, through you.

The issue around the statue is this. The building itself was the multicultural centre. The payment of the money, of \$72,000, \$75,000, was taken from the commissioning costs of that building. The whole building is around the issue of multicultural affairs, harmony. It is celebrating the abolition of the white Australia policy. If you go for a walk around the building, as Mr Doszpot has done, you will see those people who ordinarily in overseas situations would be at war with one another and they are not. That is why the centre is there.

The person whom history records in this country as kicking that off was Al Grassby. These people are perpetuating untruths against someone who is not here to defend himself. These people are saying that this man is connected with this and guilty of that, none of which has been proven. It has been cleared at court. That also, I have to say, is irrelevant to the process.

What do we recall people doing in their lives? There are many things for each of us. For some of us, we think these people are giants. For others of us, we do not like them. I, for example, have absolutely nothing but scorn and abject abhorrence for Bob Menzies, and yet there are statues around the country of this man because other people think he is a wonderful man and a giant in politics. Fine. But do I go around trying to find all the bad bits about him? No. I respect their view.

Mr Doszpot is accusing Mr Grassby of something for which he was cleared; that is the first point. The second point is that he misses the very point which—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Order, members!

MR HARGREAVES: The other thing is that Al Grassby personifies multiculturalism in this town. The consultation process that these people opposite here accuse me of not engaging in took place over six months. I took part in a number of forums with somewhere between 12 and 15 different community groups in this town. Not one of them raised anything but support for the statue—not one of them. Did I receive any negative feedback on this from anybody? No, I did not.

Mr Hanson: What about the Mackay family? Did they comment?

MR HARGREAVES: The Mackay family did not contact me until after the commissioning had been done. How was I to know that any of this had anything but approval? These characters across the chamber would say I have to consult with everybody and I am supposed to know everybody. I had extensive consultation on it and it was quite agreeable to all of those people. And I did not say, “This is what we are going to do; what do you think about it?” I said, “This is a proposal; what do you think about it?” and they said—

Mr Hanson: Did you consult with the Chief Minister?

MR HARGREAVES: Madam Assistant Speaker, I would ask you to get Mr Hanson to address his comments through you in the proper course of events.

Mr Hanson: Because you never interject, mate?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mrs Dunne): Mr Hanson!

MR HARGREAVES: This has been done to death, this particular issue. These characters over there—these three dwarfs over there—are trying their hardest—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves, that is disorderly.

MR HARGREAVES: All right, I withdraw it. Madam Assistant Speaker, let us not get pedantic about this, though. These people across there are trying to inflame a situation which was dealt with before the election. And let me tell you something, Madam Assistant Speaker: much to their disgust, I went to the election. They did their damage; they tried to damage me with this particular subject. They tried to say: “Don’t elect him, horrible person. Look at this.” And I still got elected. Isn’t that sad for you? Isn’t that just sad for you?

Mr Doszpot: Sad for the community.

MR HARGREAVES: The sad part for me, Mr Doszpot, is that I thought bigger of you. I thought much more of you and I am so disappointed that I am going to re-evaluate our relationship on this. Around multiculturalism I stand on my record. I have left you people standing in my wake. There is distance between me and those people, Madam Assistant Speaker. There is daylight between me and those people on the issue of multiculturalism, and the only way they can try to get a slice of the action—

Mr Seselja interjecting—

MR HARGREAVES: Now they bring down the Leader of the Opposition to take part in the blood—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR HARGREAVES: Well, let me tell you for the record, Madam Assistant Speaker: I intend to speak not one further word in this place on this issue. I have done it. You have done it to death. You had your opportunity in the election and you blew it. You just plain blew it. I expect it from Mr Hanson. I expect it from Mr Coe. I expect it from Mr Seselja—but I did not expect it out of you, Mr Doszpot. You surprise me, you disappoint me and now we will see about it.

Mr Doszpot: We will see about it?

MR HARGREAVES: Yep.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (4.40): I am not quite sure what that rant was meant to do but, particularly at the end of it, we seek some clarification on what that threat means—if the shadow minister does not agree with the minister, there is going to be some form of punishment, some form of ministerial punishment, because Mr Doszpot decides that he does not agree with this minister on everything.

We agree on a lot of things in multicultural affairs and it is unfortunate that the minister has hijacked the debate, which is inherently one we can all agree on:

That this Assembly recognises the continued success and growth of the Multicultural Festival, and its increasing importance as a flagship event in the ACT calendar that promotes harmony and goodwill among all citizens of the ACT.

Hear, hear to that! We can thank Ms Burch for bringing that forward. But what the minister seems to want is no opposition to any decisions that he makes. He seems to believe that the new shadow minister should come in and agree with everything that he says. Well, we will not. When you do stupid things, we will say so. We will highlight the stupid things that you do.

Mr Hanson: As did the Chief Minister.

MR SESELJA: As did the Chief Minister, indeed. Let us not forget that there is not unanimity in the Labor Party on this. It is not often that we agree with the Chief Minister, but we did see the Chief Minister make statements on this and I believe he said, “I don’t think it was the most-red hot decision.” I have a recollection of him using the term “red-hot” to describe the decision.

Mr Coe: It was red.

MR SESELJA: It was red. But we do need to go to that point. Mr Doszpot has raised a very legitimate concern. I think most of Mr Doszpot’s speech was about multiculturalism and the importance of it, the Multicultural Festival, and we can all support that. And we will agree, I think, on 80 or 90 per cent of issues around the multicultural community. We in the Canberra Liberals are very committed to multiculturalism in the territory. We see a reflection of it even in our own party room and we are very proud of that fact.

Members interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Order, Mr Hanson! Order, Mr Hargreaves!

MR SESELJA: It is difficult, Madam Assistant Speaker, when Mr Hargreaves is throwing threats across the chamber as he does. We can laugh them off but it is hard sometimes to hear yourself. He does get very upset when anyone criticises him. He does get very upset.

The point that was made, and I think it was made very well, is that we do have a statue of a very divisive character. There is no doubt about it: he is a divisive character. There are some who love him but there are many in the community who believe that he was a person of ill repute. That is the reality. They are the conflicting views of Mr Grassby—there is no doubt about it—and I think that there is a legitimate concern, as expressed by the Chief Minister, in the community that such a divisive character would be honoured in this way.

As I say, he has his supporters and he has his defenders in the multicultural community, to be sure. But that does not mean that we as a community should be honouring someone who is so divisive. It must be said that there were serious and legitimate criticisms of some of the things he did in his public life. Irrespective of whether that could be proven in criminal defamation or not, that does not mean that this is a person who has to be honoured by the taxpayer.

There is some level of rewriting of history to suggest that Al Grassby is somehow the father of multiculturalism. I do not accept that and I think there are many in the multicultural community and more broadly that do not accept that he is the father of multiculturalism. They may give him his dues for some things that he did—they may well give him his dues for some positives that he did—but I think it is stretching the truth to suggest that he is the father of multiculturalism in the way that the Labor Party here in the ACT, or at least part of the Labor Party here in the ACT, wants to assign to him.

It is unfortunate that we saw things degenerate in that way from Mr Hargreaves; that he could not just have a reasoned debate about these issues. Is he really saying that anyone who raises these issues is somehow not entitled to? Is Mr Doszpot not entitled to raise these issues? We know that many in the community share these concerns so it is legitimate that we air these concerns here—and the rant that we saw from Mr Hargreaves does not do him credit. It does not do him credit as minister, it does not do him credit as a parliamentarian and it certainly does not do this place any credit.

We are very committed to a functioning multicultural society. I believe that the ACT is one of the finest examples. Canberra is one of the finest examples in the world of a harmonious community that brings together people from all different cultures. We do not have ghettos in Canberra. We do not have ethnic and sectarian divisions. We have a lot going for us, a lot to celebrate, and that is what this motion does. The Multicultural Festival does that and we are right behind it. That is why we said we would get behind it with more support during the election campaign. It is something we are committed to. It is something we will continue to be committed to.

The sort of ludicrous rants that we have heard from the minister do not help matters, and politicising it in that way does not help things. We will have legitimate points of difference and I absolutely support Mr Doszpot's ability to express that without this hysterical vilification that we have seen from Mr Hargreaves. It is unseemly. It is something that I am sure his Chief Minister would be quite embarrassed about, as he was embarrassed about this project in the first place.

Getting back briefly to the motion, it is a motion that certainly has a lot of merit. We certainly believe in multiculturalism. We are very committed to that. We are committed to the diversity of our city and we will continue to support that here in Canberra. It is something all Canberrans can be proud of—the contribution by people who have come here from other countries to make their home in Australia and particularly have chosen Canberra. They have helped to build Canberra into the wonderful city that it is today. They have contributed so much. And, of course, they have received a lot from a wonderful nation, it must be said. So we support the motion. We wholeheartedly support the Multicultural Festival and we look forward to it being a great success for many years to come.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (4.48): I thank Ms Burch for bringing forward this motion today. Multiculturalism is about celebrating, maintaining, cultural diversity and promoting social inclusion. In Canberra the National Multicultural Festival endeavours to encapsulate these ideals and it has successfully done so for many years. The Greens will be supporting Ms Burch's motion.

I agree with Mr Hargreaves's statement yesterday that the festival is a vehicle for enhancing and promoting harmony and social inclusion and that the Multicultural Festival has a significant and highly positive impact on the multicultural and broader community in Canberra. That is something the Greens are very supportive of.

The meaning of multiculturalism has changed enormously for many people in Australia, in particular the migrant community. The festival continues to be a great

representation of ethnic diversity in Canberra. However, we can go further and broader. Essentially this comes under the broader issues of how ethnicity is represented in the community. While the food and dance spectacular at the Multicultural Festival is a great experience for the observer, ethnicity and cultural diversity should not merely be something abstract to be admired from a distance or in separation.

Multiculturalism is a process that is continually changing. I believe that Canberra has an opportunity to develop new pathways and build on how multiculturalism is expressed through forums such as the Multicultural Festival. While folk dancing is one very valuable form of cultural expression, for many young people cultural identity is about artistic and political expression and dealing with the challenges of modern-day society. The migrant experience is also about celebrating different forms of expression through art, dance and drama.

While there have been statements made by the minister that on one hand the festival is truly the main formal vehicle in the ACT to encourage the passing on of cultural traditions, the minister himself has said that the reason for having the festival in the first place is not so that we can give vent to artistic expression in Canberra but to further the cause of multiculturalism. We need to be careful that we do not dictate what is, or who should express, multiculturalism in our community. In particular, politicians should not dictate these terms. We need to be aware that cultural expression and ethnicity are ever changing.

One great example in the US, for instance, is the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington DC which celebrates community diversity and inclusion through a variety of ways. The Folk Life Festival is an exercise in cultural democracy in which cultural practitioners speak for themselves, with each other and to the public. It encourages visitors to learn, sing, dance, eat traditional foods and converse with people presented in the festival program.

The festival includes daily and evening programs of music, song, dance, celebratory performance, crafts and cooking demonstrations, storytelling, illustrations of workers' culture and narrative sessions for discussing cultural issues. It is inclusive, participatory and interactive. It provides a promising practice where different mediums are used to educate and promote social inclusion. I understand that this is a complex production which requires a large team, funding and expertise, but it does provide directions as to how we can energise and conserve multiculturalism in the ACT and set an example for the rest of Australia.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Planning and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation) (4.51): I thank Ms Burch for bringing this motion forward. I would like to take the opportunity to place on record my support, as tourism minister, for the Multicultural Festival and to indicate a belief within the government that, whilst the festival is a magnificent ACT community event and really is the flagship for multicultural communities in the territory, it is a flagship event for the broader community and I believe has great potential to continue to grow as a major tourism event for Canberra.

No other community event brings together the breadth of the ACT community in the way that the Multicultural Festival does. It is a fantastic community event driven by the community and produced for the community. Mr Hargreaves is a very passionate supporter of the festival and, as minister, has championed its continued growth. After hearing some of the comments in this debate, I am sure that we can be assured that there is consistent support across the hearts and divide in this chamber for this festival to continue to grow from strength to strength.

I must say, though, that the contribution of Mr Doszpot in raising particular issues in relation to the late Al Grassby was perhaps an unfortunate addition to what was, and what should have been, a very positive motion. I think, Madam Assistant Speaker—

Mr Hanson: Do you support the statue then, Mr Barr?

MR BARR: It belies the approach this Assembly took in the condolence motion that was moved in this place on Mr Grassby's death and what the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr Smyth, and Mr Stefaniak and Mr Pratt had to say at that time, just after his passing, about Mr Grassby's contribution to Australian public life. I think it would be very disappointing for those members—Mr Smyth continues to serve in this place; Mr Stefaniak and Mr Pratt are former members—to reflect upon the more recent contributions from the Liberal Party. I think I will go to no more authoritative source than Mr Smyth and repeat some of the comments he made at the time. Mr Smyth said:

... the way Al approached life that endeared him most to Australians. He was not a man who stepped back from life; he was a man who embraced life and then just took it forward. While Minister for Immigration, he became famous for wearing his colourful ties.

Mr Smyth went on to say that the reforms that the Chief Minister had outlined in his speech in the condolence debate were testament to Al's contribution. I could go on to observe—

Mr Hanson: It was a condolence motion, Andrew. What did you want him to say? What did you want him to say during that condolence motion?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Order, members!

MR BARR: It is one thing, Madam Assistant Speaker, for people to come into this place and put on the public record a series of glowing endorsements. Mr Stefaniak—

Mr Hanson: Was it a good decision or do you agree with the Chief Minister? Whose side are you coming down on?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Order members! Mr Hanson, I cannot hear Mr Barr.

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker. Mr Stefaniak in his comments indicated significant support for the contribution that Mr Grassby made to Australian society. Mr Pratt said:

There is no doubt that Al Grassby was a pioneering influence in the development of multiculturalism as a meaningful force in Australian society. By dint of his personality, as well as his strength of character, Al pushed multiculturalism along and was particularly successful in selling this new societal institution to the broader Australian community.

In more recent years Al continually played a role in multiculturalism here in the ACT. I had the pleasure, as the shadow multicultural minister, on many occasions to meet him and to discuss multicultural issues here peculiar to the ACT.

Mr Coe: Totally inappropriate, Andrew.

MR BARR: So it is appropriate for those sorts of comments to be put on the record at that time and then, a few years later, to come into this place and slur someone's character?

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: Madam Assistant Speaker, from the level of interjection and response I have obviously touched on a raw nerve. Later I will table for members opposite the comments that were made at that time.

If we compare the comments the Liberals made at that time with their comments today in this place, it is an appalling level of hypocrisy. But it is perhaps not surprising. Mr Doszpot, it appears—

Mr Hargreaves: He is good at that, though.

MR BARR: Yes. I think that after this debate a number of people will re-evaluate their character assessments of Mr Doszpot. That is for individuals to determine. I have just been passed another piece of Mr Doszpot's work, and it does appear that he likes to borrow the work of others when it comes to issuing press releases. I am also pleased to be able to table a copy of a press release that he issued earlier this year, which appears to be almost entirely lifted from the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils. At the conclusion of my remarks I will table that for the benefit of the Assembly as well.

Mr Hargreaves: Plagiarism.

MR BARR: It is, and it is disappointing, Madam Assistant Speaker. To raise issues like this today in what should be a constructive debate about the National Multicultural Festival does go to credibility and the heart of someone's performance in a shadow portfolio. We do not need the sorts of contributions that we saw from Mr Doszpot and the sorts of interjections that we are hearing from a particular faction within the Liberal Party, and that is to their discredit. It stands in marked contrast to the statements on the public record by other members of the ACT Liberal Party, including a number of past leaders of the ACT Liberal Party.

Mr Hanson: In many statements from Mr Pratt, Andrew—

MR BARR: Mr Hanson can continue his snide interjections, but nothing will detract from the statements that were made during the condolence motion for the late Mr Grassby by leaders of the ACT Liberal Party. I table the following papers:

Multiculturalism—

Hon Al Grassby, AM—Condolence motion—Extract from *Hansard*, 3 May 2005.

Copy of press release by Mr Doszpot, dated 23 January 2009.

Australia Day message from the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia—Opinion piece, 24 January 2007.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (4.58): I rise to speak briefly to the motion moved by Ms Burch. I would like to congratulate the organisers of the festival. I think it was a successful festival. I got to engage in a number of activities there and I enjoyed them immensely. It was good to see some colleagues at the market day a few Saturdays back, including Ms Bresnan with her balloons, and it was good to see Ms Porter there. It was good to see the minister and the Liberals here as well.

I would like to put on the record my thanks and my commendations to Sam Wong and Dominic Miko. I think they have both done enormously good work in the multicultural space. Their work in the multicultural space was certainly on show over the fortnight.

It was great to see so many ethnic groups represented, and I think it is a tribute to our society that we are so welcoming of so many people from so many different walks of life. I got to engage quite extensively with the Indian community, the Philippino community and the Taiwanese community especially, and I very much enjoyed my interaction there.

I would also like to commend Jorian Gardener of the fringe festival. I went to a few of their events. Whilst it is not quite my cup of tea, as I am sure some members here might imagine, I certainly did enjoy it and I enjoyed speaking with those present. I would also like to put on the record my respect and my admiration for the work done at the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Service. The work they do there on a shoestring budget is absolutely fantastic. The volunteers there contribute to grassroots work to help people—

Mr Hargreaves: It was the Liberals who took their 50 grand off them. It was your mob who took the money off them. I gave it back. You do not hear that from him.

MR COE: feel welcome in Canberra. The work they do is absolutely fantastic. It is disappointing that Mr Hargreaves is interjecting here when I am talking about the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Service because I think his interjecting at this moment does belittle the work that they do.

Mr Barr highlighted tourism. The work the Multicultural Festival does for tourism here in the ACT is also fantastic. It, along with organisations and events such as the National Folk Festival and Summernats, are arguably the three biggest events here in Canberra each year. They are run by Canberrans for Canberrans and people around Australia, indeed, the world. We all owe them a debt of gratitude for the work they do.

So in summing up, I would like to congratulate Ms Burch on this motion. I think it is a good motion. I urge the organisers of the Multicultural Festival to deliver just as good a show again in 2010.

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (5.02): I would like to thank Ms Burch for the opportunity to speak about Canberra's Multicultural Festival. The festival, as people have noted, has for a long time been an important institution in our city, and I echo the sentiments of Ms Bresnan and others who have outlined the great benefits that this event brings to Canberra. It is crucial to our community that we are given opportunities to celebrate diversity and learn about the many different cultures and histories that make up our multicultural city.

My experience at the festival this year was also enjoyable. As with Mr Coe, I went to the fringe festival. The fringe festival was a particularly great part of it, I think, for all of us because it was just on our front door and it was really nice to be able to leave work and find the city still alive and vibrant. Some of it was unusual, but it was interesting and enjoyable art just on our front door. You could not ask for better in terms of a workplace than to have the fringe festival on your doorstep.

I went to some other things as well, of course. In particular I went to the Canberra Symphony Orchestra's prom concert, which was an amazing event for someone who is not a big lover of classical music, but it was great. One of the other events was Contact Canberra, which is always an important event for Canberra because we get all the organisations together. It was a bit unfortunate about the weather, but even the ACT government is not capable of controlling the weather, I am afraid.

Mr Hargreaves: Yet.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yet. Thank you, Mr Hargreaves. I look forward to the continuing policy innovations along this line.

Mr Hargreaves: We are working on it. That is why we have the alliance going.

MS LE COUTEUR: I am particularly pleased that this morning the Assembly passed my motion on live music and events in Canberra. I believe that there are a number of elements in that motion which, if addressed properly, can significantly improve the way our city experiences live and cultural events such as the Multicultural Festival. As I have pointed out before, transport to and from the festival can be problematical, especially in the evening and especially as it is a festival which includes sampling the world's different beers and wraps up quite late at night.

One of the things I especially appreciate about the Multicultural Festival is the opportunity it gives to Canberra's arts community. My feeling is that art is a crucial part of our community and yet is the part that is often sidelined or disregarded. Art is inspiring. It opens our minds, promotes creative thinking and is something that we probably need more than we realise. I had the pleasure during the Multicultural Festival of opening the Encuentro art exhibition. It was called *Tierra Viva*, which means changing world, and I think that is a particularly good message in the context of the festival. Encuentro is a not-for-profit group which started off as a Spanish cultural group and has now expanded to be a multicultural group in its own right. Its art and its work is a good example of how multiculturalism can work in this city.

I hope the government and the festival organisers will stay open to the prospect of the festival evolving and making sure that it accommodates new and changing arts and changing concepts of multiculturalism. I think it has over the years and I think that is one of the great things about it. Just to finish off, I very much enjoyed it. I think it is a significant part of our artistic life and I look forward to being there again next year.

MS BURCH (Brindabella) (5.06), in reply: I want to thank all the members who supported the motion to recognise the benefits of the National Multicultural Festival. On that I think we are all agreed. But I, too, would like to refer those opposite to the *Hansard* of 3 May 2005 in which Mr Stefaniak, a Liberal Party member at the time, spoke about Mr Grassby's political career. He said that it spoke volumes for what a wonderful local member he was. Mr Pratt, a former Liberal member, went on to say:

We all know he had to work hard to put—

some matters:

behind him, but ... he got on doing what he was good at—contributing to Australian multiculturalism.

Mr Hanson: You think the statue was a good idea, Joy? You are going to say that, are you?

MS BURCH: I am quoting Mr Pratt—

Mr Hanson: No, I am asking.

MS BURCH: and Mr Stefaniak. But Mr Smyth, who is an existing member, the then Leader of the Opposition, went on to say:

All Australians have probably heard of Al ... No matter what you thought of his politics, I think it is the way Al approached life that endeared him most to Australians. He was not a man who stepped back from life; he was a man who embraced life and then just took it forward.

Members interjecting—

MS BURCH: May I have some silence to finish speaking?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members! Conversations are going on across the chamber. Ms Burch, just ignore the interjections.

MS BURCH: On 3 May 2005 Mr Smyth said:

Al was a man who travelled. He had a world view and I think that helped him in his time as a minister. He certainly saw the light that Brisbane was not the place to live ... decided that southern New South Wales, and ultimately Canberra, was the only place a man of his stature could be. That shows the knowledge and good judgment of such a man.

That was Mr Smyth speaking of Al Grassby. Mr Smyth went on to say:

I think the reforms that the Chief Minister has outlined are a testament to Al. For me the one that really stands out is the repeal of section 64 of the Migration Act 1958 to 1966. That was the last of the old discriminations against the indigenous people of Australia. It is something he should be remembered for for a long time.

Mr Smyth should check his bookshelf, because apparently he has got on his bookshelf books written by the man.

Mr Hanson: What about the statue? Are you going to say that you think it is a good idea?

MS BURCH: If you have differences with Mr Smyth, perhaps you can have other sub-branch meetings with him, Mr Hanson, like you did on the weekend

MADAM DEPUTYSPEAKER: Order! The time for the debate has concluded.

Motion agreed to.

Adoption Amendment Bill 2008

Debate resumed from 10 December 2008, on motion by **Mrs Dunne:**

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Planning and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation) (5.10): The government will be supporting the amendments contained within the Adoption Amendment Bill 2008. When first enacted, the Adoption Act 1993 was viewed as progressive legislation which helped to ensure that the territory's adoption practice remains relevant and responsive to the needs and interests of children. The natural passage of time and the development of a number of key initiatives over the past 10 years, including The Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Inter-country Adoption 1993, the ACT Human Rights Act 2004, the Children and Young People Act 2008 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, have resulted in a need to review sections of the ACT Adoption Act to ensure contemporary adoption relevance and accountability requirements.

The government has begun the process of reviewing the ACT Adoption Act. That process began in 2006, with consultation on a discussion paper *A better system for children without parents to care for them*. The consultation process concluded with the publication of the *Report on key findings from the review of the Adoption Act 1993*. The review and consultation process identified that 17 separate sections of the 1993 Adoption Act needed to be changed. These changes are currently being drafted and I expect to table the amendments later this year. Although the amendments proposed by Mrs Dunne were not specifically commented on through the review and consultation process, the government sees no difficulty in accepting them.

Section 13 of the current act, which prohibits the adoption of any person who is, or has been, married, is inconsistent with the principle of section 6. All adoption matters in the ACT must always give paramount consideration to the child's interest and welfare. This government is already in the process of addressing this and Mrs Dunne's proposed amendment is consistent with the government's position on this matter.

Amendment of section 10(b) will have the effect of removing the requirement for a court to be satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances to justify an adoption order for a person aged 18 years or over, while retaining the requirement that the court must be satisfied that the person is of good repute. The government accepts that adoption of people over 18 years is a private matter for which the Supreme Court will have discretion.

The government is pleased to support the amendments contained within the Adoption Amendment Bill 2008.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (5.12): Towards the end of last term and again this term, the Greens received letters on behalf of a family wishing to formalise a family relationship but finding themselves unable to do so because of provisions of the Adoption Act which this bill is seeking to amend. Given the direct and immediate impact these changes will have on this particular family, we are pleased to be debating these amendments today and thank Mrs Dunne for presenting the bill to the Assembly.

The explanatory statement for section 10 of the Adoption Act 1993 states that the section:

... requires that a report be presented to the court which evidences the good reputation of the applicants and that exceptional circumstances be established to enable an adoption of a person over the age of 18 years, such circumstances may include the person having been maintained in a parent/child relationship with the parents for most of their childhood and wishing to formalise this relationship.

Following these amendments, the only requirement will be that the applicants are of good repute.

The family situation I referred to is exactly the case contemplated by the explanatory statement. The Greens are happy to accept that, should an adult wish to be formally

adopted by a person they regard as their parent, and are regarded by the adopter as their child, the legislature should not prohibit individuals formalising this relationship. It is not sensible to be taking up a court's time in determining whether "exceptional circumstances" exist, or to be putting the family through that process.

The Greens also agree with the clause 5 amendment to remove the prohibition on married persons being adopted. There is no logical policy reason for the prohibition and the explanatory statement for the Adoption Act contains no such information. We agree with the views already expressed that this provision is potentially discriminatory and should be removed, to bring us in line with other jurisdictions, and allow families greater freedom to decide how to formally recognise their family relationships.

The Greens are pleased to be able to support this bill.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (5.15), in reply: I thank members for their support and it is pleasing to see that this commonsense approach and this approach which was first championed by Mr Stefaniak in the previous Assembly will be resolved unanimously by those in this place. I am not the sort of person who is desperately in favour of making legislation on the basis of single cases but Ms Hunter has referred to the representations that were made to members of this place. On this occasion, it seemed such a blindingly straightforward issue that we should actually address this issue. Although the changes have been brought about as a result of representations from a single family, they will have benefits in the future for other members of the community.

I thank members for their support and I will look forward to the minister's more through review of the Adoption Act when that becomes available.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Organ donor awareness Ovarian cancer

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (5.16) I would like to speak in the adjournment debate about two issues today. One is organ donor awareness and the other is ovarian cancer. Firstly, when it comes to organ donor awareness, you would have been aware that there is a lot of information in the media about the seriousness of this issue. Today,

some of us participated in the Terry Connolly walk. I think Mr Barr made it halfway around but had other engagements he had to duck off to. But it was good to see so many people from the Canberra community, so many diverse people in terms of age, gender and so on, and it is good to see that this important issue is starting to gain recognition in our community. But certainly there is a long way to go and the simple issue is that not enough people are registered.

It is a problem when we have several thousand people in Australia—I believe the figure is 200 in the ACT—who are waiting for an organ or tissue transplant to save their lives or to significantly improve the quality of their lives. The problem is that, if you do not have enough people registered, what will occur is that, unfortunately, their time will pass without having received the transplant in sufficient time.

It is a very simple issue as to what we can do. Firstly, have the conversation with your friends and family so that they understand what you are doing and what your intent is. Then get down to Medicare and sign on. It is a very simple process; it will take four or five minutes to do; you will receive an organ donor card; and then you can actually, in a small but very significant way, make a difference.

The other issue is that of ovarian cancer and it is wonderful to see so many people wearing their—I am not quite sure what the colour is.

Mrs Dunne: Teal blue.

MR HANSON: Teal. I notice, on Mrs Dunne's jacket, it looks like you have very well coordinated some of that. I have obviously failed and many of us have failed, not that I am much of a fashion consultant.

Mr Barr: You do not have a teal suit, Jeremy?

MR HANSON: I am sure that you do, Mr Barr.

Mr Barr: I wore it down to Mardi Gras.

MR HANSON: I look forward to seeing it in the Assembly.

Ms Gallagher: With sparkles?

MR HANSON: With sparkles. The sad fact is that it is actually a serious issue. There are 1,500 women every year diagnosed with ovarian cancer; and 850 every year will die. So it is really quite a tragic issue.

The issue also is that most women are diagnosed too late. It is a difficult affliction to have diagnosed. There are a number of warning symptoms and signs and, if you pick those up early enough, 95 per cent of those people that are picked up early will survive. But the symptoms are not as clear-cut as they are for a number of other diseases.

I will go through some of the symptoms: abdominal bloating, unexplained abdominal pelvic pain, feeling full, increased urgency to urinate or change in bowel habits.

I guess they are things that women need to look out for and, if they do, it is a simple matter of going to the doctor. If in doubt, go and see your local GP.

Organ donor awareness

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Treasurer, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Services and Minister for Women) (5.20): I cannot let the opportunity go by either in Organ Donation Awareness Week or the day of the ORGANised walk here in the ACT to acknowledge the efforts of Ms Anne Cahill Lambert not only in organising that walk but as chair of Gift of Life, ACT. In the last 18 months, she has certainly taken the helm of that organisation and moved forward very swiftly and put around her some very strong Canberra advocates who are working to support organ donation in the territory.

As a result of her advocacy, she has been appointed by the Prime Minister to the advisory council to the new organ donation authority. I think she is being appointed as a consumer advocate for organ and tissue donation and health-related issues. She is sitting on that. Sam Chisholm is the chair of that. It is approximately a 12-member advisory council, with some very well known Australians on it. I think her efforts, her advocacy and her genuine desire to improve organ donation, not out of self-interest but out of a genuine interest to make sure that the lives of many people who are awaiting organ donation opportunities are improved, are the reasons for her appointment. I think it is a very prestigious appointment.

I think many of us know Ms Cahill Lambert and acknowledge her very strong advocacy in keeping us all honest at all times. I would like to acknowledge her efforts today. I think the appointment by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Health and Ageing is a very significant achievement for a Canberra woman and a consumer advocate for health services. I would like to acknowledge her efforts and congratulate her on such a prestigious appointment.

Lions Club

MR COE (Ginninderra) (5.22): Over the past couple of weeks I have had the pleasure of assisting the Canberra Ginninderra Lions Club on their recruitment drive for new members. I spent some time at Kippax shops promoting the club and recently had the pleasure of speaking at the new members evening at the West Belconnen Leagues Club. I have been a member of Lions for several years and have very much enjoyed my time with the organisation. So much of the good work in our community is done by volunteer organisations like Lions. Without this selfless commitment to volunteer service, our communities would be worse off. The simple but effective motto of Lions says it all: "We serve."

Lions can raise money and serve their local community in many other ways. The majority of money raised by the Lions Club is reinvested in their local community. Whether it is tree planting, fundraising barbecues, respite care, running volunteer workshops, leading programs or maintaining community infrastructure like parks, Lions indeed do serve.

The Ginninderra Lions Club's major project is in conjunction with the great organisation, Tandem. The club, albeit a relatively small one, is punching well above its weight. I would particularly like to congratulate Graham Erikson on his hard work and dedication to the Ginninderra Lions Club.

I would also like to pay tribute to the Australian Lions Foundation, supported by Lions clubs around Australia, which has recently provided an initial \$40,000 to Lions clubs in bushfire affected areas in Victoria to enable them to help victims of the fires purchase food, clothing and other essentials. This is where volunteer organisations like Lions come in. Being part of their local community, they are able to respond and provide immediate relief. Lions clubs around Australia are still accepting donations to help support the recovery effort.

I would encourage those in the Belconnen community that have some time to put back into the community to consider becoming involved in the Ginninderra Lions Club. My office has the details or you can lodge your interest at www.lionsclub.org.au.

Organ donor awareness Planning—schools

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (5.24): Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for your indulgence of my slightly chaotic state there. I would like firstly to acknowledge also the efforts of the organisers of the ORGANised walk this morning. I thought it was a tremendous effort. There was a great crowd out there, I gather, from listening to the radio. I must confess I slept in this morning and did not make it but I think it has been an extremely successful effort due to the fact that it has actually got me organised and I intend to sign up this week as an organ donor. I have never been quite sure how; so I think the promoters of the week have done an excellent job in making it accessible to someone like me, with a busy lifestyle, to make it very simple and to make it really easy and obvious for me to go out and sign up. So I congratulate the organisers on, I think, a highly effective community campaign.

The other issue I wanted to speak to and reflect on while I have the floor was the efforts of the minister for education to secure support for the changes to regulations for schools because of the stimulus package. We have heard a great deal about that in the chamber in the last few days and I wanted to, I guess, express my dismay at the way the minister for education has gone about this.

Last Thursday, he decided to communicate with the rest of this parliament by press about his intentions and to then use that as an opportunity to create great alarm in the community about the nature of what may happen in this place, without having given either other party a briefing, without having provided any substance of his intended regulations, other than what he put in the press. He then chose to run a scare campaign on what other parties in this place may do without those parties actually knowing what was being proposed, other than what was in the minister's press release.

I think this is an entirely inappropriate way to conduct public policy on important matters such as the stimulus package. We have had a lot of debate in this place about

the stimulus package and I think there is no question that the Greens recognise the need for the government to act at this time. By creating such alarm in the way the minister did, I think he created a great level of concern amongst the community. And we have seen that by the fact that organisations such as the P&C felt the need to issue a highly political press release because they were so alarmed by the frenzy that the minister sought to whip up.

The minister's objective can only have been his own personal ambition in this place and for his own career. This was all about the minister's own personal ambition and not about the substance of the policy question and no accurate reflection on the position of either the Greens or the Liberal Party. He is simply out there to focus on his own ambition.

I think this is an unfortunate way to conduct public policy in this town. I hope this is not a signal of the way the minister intends to conduct himself in the future, because it did nobody any favours. It did not move forward a debate on whether this is the best way to proceed. Through obfuscation, the minister created confusion. He created alarm in the community over something completely unnecessary.

Once we had the briefing today—my colleagues attended the briefing at lunchtime—we sat down. The list is reasonably sensible and we have given in-principle support to the proposal that the minister is putting forward. If he had actually had the fortitude, the decency and the courtesy to come forward last Thursday and provide that briefing to the other people in this place before he went to the media, I think we could have saved ourselves a lot of time and a lot of angst for the community in the last couple of days.

I will finish by saying that I trust that in the future we can find a better way to conduct public policy in this town on important matters, particularly on the education sector which affects so many people in Canberra and which so many people are rightly concerned about. The state of our schools is one that can always be improved. And that is no comment on their current state—it is not my area of expertise—but there is always room for improvement. We should be striving to give our children and our young people the best possible education we can and I think that is not a matter we should be playing politics on or furthering one's own personal ambition on.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.30 pm.