



Debates

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Tuesday, 24 March 2009

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Tuesday, 24 March 2009

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

Public Accounts—Standing Committee Report 1

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (10.02): Pursuant to the order of the Assembly of 26 February 2009, I present the following report:

Public Accounts—Standing Committee—Report 1—*Appropriation Bill 2008-2009 (No 3)*, including additional comments (Ms Burch) dated 23 March 2009, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

I am pleased to speak to report No 1 of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts—*Appropriation Bill 2008-2009 (No 3)*. The resolution of the Assembly of 26 February 2009 referred the appropriation bill to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for inquiry and report by Tuesday, 24 March 2009. We held public hearings on 4, 11 and 13 March and heard from ministers and accompanying departmental and agency officers.

In reporting, the committee considered the context for the third appropriation bill and that its tabling was coupled with the presentation of the government's local initiatives package and pre-announcement of the 2009-10 capital upgrades program.

The committee's report focuses on areas of interest raised during the inquiry process, and our report makes 16 recommendations. Looking at recommendation 1, the committee was concerned about the level of research that underpinned the third appropriation bill. The government relied on a series of roundtables to gain anecdotal information about problems in the ACT economy. The committee was concerned that, given the substantial stimulus to be given to the construction industry in the ACT, and indeed the rest of Australia, by the commonwealth government's stimulus package, there may not be significant underutilisation of available resources.

The committee notes that significant parts of the commonwealth's package have to be spent in the same time frame as the local initiatives package which is supported by this appropriation bill, so as our first recommendation the committee recommends that the ACT government consider detailed statistics, such as unemployment by industry sector, before framing any further stimulus packages or, indeed, the 2009-10 ACT budget.

In recommendation 2, the committee recommends that the ACT government ensure that future spending plans have a clear basis on how spending proposals may be

evaluated. In recommendation 3, we looked at the updated estimates for the budget process. In recommendation 3, the committee recommends that the Treasurer provide to the Legislative Assembly an update of the estimated outcome of the ACT budget for 2008-09 and for the outyears. Also, we were concerned about the proportion of spending which would be spent on plant and equipment, so our recommendation 4 is that the Treasurer provide to the Legislative Assembly a breakdown of the proportion of spending that is proposed in the Appropriation Bill 2008-2009 (No 3) that will be directed towards labour, plant and materials.

In recommendation 5, we looked at possible things that the government could spend money on. The committee recommends that any further stimulus packages should consider one-off service provision as well as capital expenditure. In recommendation 6, we looked at—

Mr Stanhope: It will take a while.

MS LE COUTEUR: I should probably say that was the major part of the recommendations as far as the general environment of the appropriation bill was concerned, and we are now moving on to more of the actual expenditure items. Given that the government was looking at some other issues as far as energy efficiency was concerned, we thought we would make a recommendation here. In recommendation 6, the committee recommends that the ACT government explore the feasibility of providing tax incentives, or other forms of incentives, and related education programs to encourage private landlords to make energy efficient modifications to their rental properties.

We then looked at the asset management plans. Given that the third appropriation bill proposes additional investment in the buildings and facilities that are used to provide services to the ACT community, the committee was of the view that the review of the agency asset management plans provides an opportunity for making the ACT environmentally more sustainable. So in recommendation 7 the committee recommends that the Department of Treasury, as part of the asset management plan refresh, ensures that ecologically sustainable development is aligned with standardised agency asset management plans.

We then looked at the urgency of this, and in recommendation 8 the committee recommends, to the extent that work is not already taking place, that the Department of Territory and Municipal Services ensure that procurement improvements, as announced in the 2008-09 ACT budget, support and facilitate—quickly and productively—the works proposed under the local initiatives package.

Continuing on the timeliness theme, the committee noted that the government had appointed a coordinator general to ensure that the federal stimulus package is completed on time. Whilst we felt that such arrangements were not appropriate for this, given the timing of the third appropriation bill, it is incumbent upon respective ministers and departmental and agency heads to ensure the completion of the proposed works on time. This led to recommendation 9, which was that the committee recommends that the Treasurer provide to the Legislative Assembly by the last sitting day in June 2009 a detailed project report on the delivery of projects under Appropriation Bill 2008-2009 (No 3).

As you can imagine, we looked at the chiller for the Legislative Assembly. We were pleased to hear that the replacement unit is expected to be more technologically and environmentally efficient, thus reducing energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions. We also thought consideration should be given to the implementation of less energy-intensive building cooling methods, such as awnings and blinds. We noted that more than 50 per cent of the total amount to be spent on the new chiller represents the purchase cost of the equipment, and to this extent this spending will do little to stimulate the ACT economy. In recommendation 10, the committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly Secretariat, in addition to the replacement of the chiller, give consideration to the implementation of less energy-intensive building cooling options.

We then moved on to the arboretum. In recommendation 11, the committee recommends that the Chief Minister's Department prioritise the progression of the Canberra International Arboretum and Gardens access strategy to ensure that the various types of recreational opportunities provided by the arboretum are open and accessible to all Canberrans.

We then looked at the stormwater issues. The Department of Territory and Municipal Services stated:

... we have put a proposal to government last year for additional funding for stormwater augmentation, and that has resulted, through the capital upgrade program, in \$3.4 million in each year. To address the 40 cases, we are talking about two to three years, depending on the actual capital cost of the final project. Beneath that there are other stormwater projects that need attention, too.

This led to recommendation 12, in which the committee recommends that the Department of Territory and Municipal Services be appropriately funded in the 2009-10 ACT budget to prioritise work under the stormwater augmentation program for all 40 sites at extreme risk of stormwater damage as long as it is within the department's capability to supervise the expenditure.

Recommendation 13 deals with the bill poster silos. The committee recommends that the Department of Territory and Municipal Services should ensure that the expenditure for the proposed construction of the bill poster silos is (a) informed by the report of the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services inquiry into the issue and (b) expedited once this has occurred.

Recommendation 14 deals with upgrades to rural fire sheds. The committee commented that the minister had noted that some RFS sheds require more major work than had been provided for this initiative and that their needs would be considered as part of the 2009-10 budget process. The committee also noted that some RFS sheds, especially Tidbinbilla, had safety issues, and we welcomed the minister's advice that concerns regarding the Tidbinbilla RFS shed were noted and that the issues raised would be dealt with. This led to recommendation 14, which was that the committee recommends that the 2009-10 ACT budget provide funds for the planning of relocation and construction of the Tidbinbilla Rural Fire Service.

Although the committee was very pleased with the prompt responses we had received to most questions taken on notice, there were still, unfortunately, some outstanding at the time of finalising the report. So in recommendation 15 the committee recommends that all outstanding questions taken on notice be provided to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts prior to debate of the third appropriation bill.

In recommendation 16, the committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly pass the Appropriation Bill 2008-2009 (No 3).

Finally, I would like to say that a report like this does not come into existence without hard work and cooperation by a number of people. The first of these that I would like to thank is the committee's secretary, Andrea Cullen, who has done an absolutely magnificent job in getting such a detailed report together in such a short period of time. I would also like to thank my committee colleagues, Ms Burch and Mr Smyth, for their cooperation and hard work. I was very pleased at the large amount of the report that we were able to agree to, while noting that Ms Burch has put in some additional comments on the matter. I would also like to thank all the ministers and their staff who provided their time and cooperation at very short notice, and, of course, the Committee Office.

I commend this report to the Assembly, and I think it is possible that my committee colleagues may also wish to comment on it.

MS BURCH (Brindabella) (10.15): Firstly, I would like to note that I fully support the substantive recommendation of the report—that the Assembly pass the Appropriation Bill 2008-2009 (No 3).

I support the appropriation bill, as tabled, because it provides additional investment in the buildings and facilities that are used to provide services to our community, and it gets the important work done now, rather than waiting for the next budget or thereafter.

The projects outlined in the appropriation bill were assessed against six key criteria. In summary, these included that the work would provide a measure of job support to the local industry; that it extends the useful life or improves the life of our own asset base; that we utilise the potential emerging capacity in the building and construction sector; that projects be at a mature stage of design and/or procurement to enable the works to begin as soon as possible; and that once they were commenced they be undertaken and completed on time and on budget.

In broader terms, I make the following comments. The recent shifts in the national and international economic environment are well recognised and accepted. The ACT Labor government supports the commonwealth government's national stimulus package and is working in partnership with the commonwealth to facilitate coordinated delivery and, as such, maximise benefit to the ACT community.

The ACT Labor government has responded in a timely manner to local requirements and expectations, and that underpins the projects underlined in this bill. The bill sets

out a range of projects that are achievable in the desired time frame, that support and invest in our community infrastructure and support a range of business across Canberra. It needs to be noted that industry stakeholders and the ACT chamber of commerce are fully supportive of this bill and welcomed input into its development through a range of stakeholder roundtable discussions.

Criticism of the benefits of this bill, based on the argument that it has moved from a stimulus package to a local initiatives package, neglects to recognise the input and support of industry, the criteria by which projects were assessed and the substantial investment into the ACT through the commonwealth's national stimulus package.

Additionally, criticism of this bill based on the argument that it remains unclear about the exact number of jobs that can be created or maintained, or that funds will be directed towards plant, equipment and material, neglects to recognise the difficulty in determining a direct correlation between projects and local jobs, but there is no doubt that jobs will be supported. And it neglects to recognise that the purchase of plant and materials also support a diverse base of small business in our community.

On the suggested issue that perhaps the ACT government has not been able to provide adequate financial updates, I note that regular advice has been provided by Treasury to government and that government, in turn, has updated the community on the likely impact of lost revenues through GST updates, interest rate charges and the like. I also note that the ACT published its midyear review within time and in line with almost all other states, back in December 2008.

Having made those brief comments, I would like to thank my committee colleagues and the committee secretariat for their support during the inquiry. I think we underestimate the commendable job that the secretariat does for committees.

In summary, I think that this bill, without a doubt, provides confidence and support to local business and will provide an injection into our economy. The final and substantive recommendation is fully supported.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (10.19): Mr Speaker, I think the outcome that this report represents is exactly the reason why we should have committee consideration whenever the government puts forward an appropriation bill. I would like to thank the ministers who attended. We spoke with all ministers about the various aspects of their portfolios, and it was good to get to the heart of the matter that the government was seeking to achieve through this bill.

There are 16 recommendations and I think it is important to get the context of where the recommendations come from. As the committee notes on page 7 of the report, the third appropriation bill started as a second mini-budget when it was announced back in December that the stimulus package was to come.

Over the course of December, January, February and into March, of course, it became a local initiatives package. It became a very modest package about which one should not get one's hopes up, according to the Treasurer. I think that is probably an accurate description. There are a number of concerns that the committee had with the bill.

They go to the area of how the government determined what should be in the package and how the government would determine whether or not the package had the desired effect.

If people look at paragraph 2.15 on page 10 of the report, it is noted that this is an area where the committee felt that the government could do more work. This is looking at the area of making sure that spending is focused, and that when we do spend it is on infrastructure creation. The report states:

Then focusing fresh expenditure, and re-focusing existing expenditure, towards its creation, whether it be cleaner environments, a completely new health and education system, or a more equal and open society.

These should be the outcomes that we are after when the recession is over. I think that is quite appropriate, and I am not sure we get a sense that the government is focused. The committee has made the comment that it was certainly an area it felt the government could do more work on. On page 11 the committee explores the level of research that underpins the third appropriation bill.

Again, it was concerned about the level of work that was done and the answers that were received. Ms Le Couteur pointed to the fact that a number of questions are still unanswered. These were simply questions that the committee asked: "Where did that number come from? Can we have that list? How did you determine that?" One would have thought that as the cabinet in particular was going through the options presented to them, they would have asked those questions, and the ministers and public servants appearing could have answered them quite readily.

Unfortunately, here we are with a report that has to have a chapter asking for all the unanswered questions to be answered. The report goes on then to look at the appropriation and the local initiatives package. The fact that it was rebadged from a mini-budget to a local initiatives package I think speaks volumes about the approach that this government is taking.

The committee then went on in paragraph 2.39 on page 16 to look at how the government was going to evaluate the effectiveness of this bill. The report states:

The Committee has concerns with the evaluation of the effectiveness of this Appropriation Bill.

The committee noted in paragraph 2.40:

The Committee would expect that proposals involving the spending of public funds would have clearly established means for evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of that spending.

Unfortunately, we did not get a sense of that, Mr Speaker. Recommendation 2, I think, makes that quite clear, and I will read it:

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensures that future spending plans have a clear basis on how spending proposals may be evaluated.

The next section goes on to talk about what the Treasurer was able to tell us in regard to the current state of the financial position of the ACT. To put that in context, at the same time we had the Chief Minister telling us exactly what might happen in 2009 and 2010. He was pulling exact numbers, either out of the air or out of his briefings, to tell people where next year's budget was going, but the Treasurer was unable to tell us or give us an update for 2008-09. At that stage we were told that technically we are still in surplus, because that is the latest updated report that we have got.

Mr Hanson: Where did he get those figures from?

MR SMYTH: That is a good question. Where did the Chief Minister get those figures from? Paragraph 2.42 reads:

The Committee was disappointed that the Treasurer was unable to provide the Committee with an update ...

That is, an update for this current year. For those members who were not here in the early 2000s—2001, 2002, 2003—and for most of the life of the Assembly before that, the Assembly received a monthly update of the financials. Any organisation, any company, any set of company directors that did not ask for an update, given the global outlook and the Australian outlook, would be negligent in not knowing exactly where their organisation's budget was at. Apparently, our Treasurer does not know that and cannot update us from the December numbers.

Mr Hanson: All guesswork.

MR SMYTH: It is all guesswork, apparently. In paragraph 2.43. The committee says:

It is of concern to the Committee, therefore, that the Treasurer provided the Committee with information on the budget outcomes that was published in December 2008.

I think it is quite sad that in the months following 2008 the Treasurer does not have an updated number. Numbers have been touted and attributed to the Treasurer in the *Canberra Times*. A deficit of \$17 million has been touted. One can do the numbers on the back of an envelope if one wants. There is the \$15.2 million surplus and we lost some GST revenue or we lose revenue from the downturn in the interest payments. But the fact that the committee cannot get that answer from the Treasurer I think is very disappointing. The committee's report goes on to say in paragraph 2.46:

The Committee believes the Treasurer should be in a position to provide updated estimates of the budget outcomes for the current financial year.

Recommendation 3 recommends that the Treasurer provide such an outcome for the current financial year. The committee was also interested to get the detail of the proportions of the breakdown of the spending. How much will actually go on labour because that is the money that will protect the jobs; how much will go on plant, because that is money that passes through local companies, but goes out of the territory in the main because, unfortunately, so little is manufactured in the ACT; and

how much will go on materials? We had differing views from differing departments. One said that as a rule of thumb it is fifty-fifty; another one said we are going to spend 30 per cent on this and 20 per cent on that.

So the committee noted in recommendation 4:

The Committee recommends that the Treasurer provides to the Legislative Assembly a breakdown of the proportion of spending that is proposed in Appropriation Bill 2008-09 (No 3) that will be directed towards labour, plant and materials.

I think it is important that the Assembly knows in the end that we will give the government this money to spend. We want it spent wisely, but we need to know how it will be spent.

There are a number of other issues that came up in the course of the inquiry. I think two are instructive. There was discussion about putting furniture in place in the arboretum. At the end of the day, the committee could not decide who got what money when, because the government could not tell us. It could not decide. What it sounded like was that the government received money in the budget for some furniture at the arboretum, but it wanted money in the third appropriation bill to do the planning to position that furniture, which is cart-before-the-horse stuff.

The second thing was that there are a number of bill posting silos to be funded. It was interesting in that the officials and the minister could not actually tell us how many silos we would get for the money that we were appropriating. If you are going down to the shops to buy some apples and mum says get six apples, six apples is what you get. We, as the committee, could not be told accurately how many silos we would get, and at one stage it sounded like the cost was \$20,000 a silo. But, again, nobody could confirm exactly how much they were.

These were just basic questions that they should be able to answer. I think it is a shame that they were unable to do that. In recommendation 9, therefore, we state:

The Committee recommends that the Treasurer provide the Assembly by the last sitting day in June 2009 a detailed project report on the delivery of these projects
...

These projects are meant to be out the door. They are meant to be spent this financial year. I think it is important that we actually do get that information and get it quickly.

The issue of childcare was raised in the hearings, and on page 38, paragraph 3.49, of the report it is stated:

The Committee draws the Minister's attention to the high need for childcare centres in Gungahlin.

I note that some of the planning that was going ahead was for places in Weston Creek and Belconnen, but clearly the pressing need in the territory is Gungahlin. It is a shame that they were forgotten in this case. There is something dear to my heart,

Mr Speaker, and certainly something dear to the heart of the volunteers. There is a section dealing with the ESA that starts on page 39 and has a recommendation on page 41:

The Committee recommends that the 2009-10 ACT budget provide funds for the planning and relocation and construction of the Tidbinbilla Rural Fire Service.

The shed being referred to here is a donated shed. It is 40 years old. It stands on private ground and it does not look like it has had much work done on it recently. It is important that they receive those funds.

Mr Speaker, on page 53 there is an entire chapter on questions, not answers. We have asked questions and we would like those questions answered and we should have them answered. I thank my colleagues also for their efforts in putting this report together. In particular, I thank Andrea Cullen, the secretary, for her excellent work and her timely work in getting it to us so that we could debate it on this day.

Recommendation 16 states:

The Committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly pass the Appropriation Bill 2008-09 (No 3).

I think it is important to get this money out quickly if we are going to see any results at all this financial year.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 4

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

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee (performing the duties of a Scrutiny of Bills and Subordinate Legislation Committee)—Scrutiny Report 4, dated 23 March 2009, together with the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MRS DUNNE: Scrutiny report 4 contains the committee's comments on three bills, 23 pieces of subordinate legislation, six government responses and one private member's response. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting, and I commend the report to the Assembly.

Climate Change, Environment and Water—Standing Committee Report 1

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (10.31): I present the following report:

Climate Change, Environment and Water—Standing Committee—Report 1—*Report on Annual and Financial Reports 2007-2008*, dated 20 March 2009, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

MS HUNTER: I have tabled today the first report for the Seventh Assembly of the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water. It is our report on these ACT government 2007-08 annual and financial reports and parts thereof which the Assembly referred to the committee for inquiry and report. Many of the committee's recommendations deal with opportunities for achieving better sustainability outcomes in the territory, the most significant of which I will mention. Our recommendations also aim to strengthen territory governance through better respect for the Assembly's accountability role and function.

I am also pleased to report to the Assembly that this committee is working well in a collegial and professional manner and that members shared a consensus on the findings of our inquiry.

The committee considered the annual report of the office of the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment for 2007-08 and the report of the Environment Protection Authority. We also considered those parts of the annual report lodged for the Department of Territory and Municipal Services that dealt with sustainability and environmental policy coordination and sustainability programs and projects.

One of the most significant issues addressed in the report is the operation of the Tree Protection Act and matters which should have been but were not disclosed in the department's annual report. The committee asked to be provided with the legal advice given to the department last year about the expiry of transitional provisions in the act. The committee is also concerned that a range of agencies dealing with the Tree Protection Act seem to be unaware of the influence that the territory's Human Rights Act might have on the interpretation of the act. The committee recommends that the Auditor-General review the administration by the Department of Territory and Municipal Services of the Tree Protection Act.

On other matters of territory governance and the role of this Assembly and Assembly committees, the committee recommends that the long overdue government response to the report of a former Assembly committee on the proposed nomination of the ACT as a UNESCO biosphere reserve be tabled in May this year. This would be before the stakeholder forum that the committee proposes to be held on World Environment Day—5 June—and would allow further discussion on the proposed nomination.

On public sector sustainability, the committee considered the commonwealth government agency environmental network and recommends that an ACT government official seek to attend meetings of that network as an observer. The commonwealth Auditor-General's recent report on green office procurement and

sustainable office management was positive about the role of that network, but the report also suggested that the commonwealth environment department could take a more active leadership and coordination role in promoting sustainable practices in the commonwealth.

We suggest that the ACT government also consider taking a lead in an equivalent state and territory network. We also suggest that the ACT government consider whether the energy efficiency fund can or should support the installation of video conferencing facilities in selected ACT government agencies to save direct and indirect environmental costs of public sector travel. The Assembly may be aware that the commonwealth recently announced public sector travel cutbacks and greater use of video conferencing facilities.

On other local environmental issues, the committee recommends that the Environment Protection Authority monitor air quality in residential areas close to burn-out events at the Summernats Car Festival and make that information publicly available.

The committee thanks the Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water, Mr Simon Corbell MLA, the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Dr Maxine Cooper, and departmental and agency officers for their assistance in the inquiry and for providing their time and expertise as witnesses at public hearings.

The committee also thanks the Chief Executive of the Canberra Institute of Technology, Dr Colin Adrian, and CIT staff for hosting the committee's visit on 18 March 2009. I plan to report to the Assembly on behalf of the committee about that visit later in the week.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Workers Compensation (Terrorism) Amendment Bill 2009

Debate resumed from 26 February 2009, on motion by **Mr Hargreaves**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (10.36): Mr Speaker, the opposition will support this bill, which will extend the sunset clause for coverage of workers impacted by acts of terrorism. After the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, it became difficult or impossible for employers to get workers compensation insurance to cover employees in cases involving acts of terrorism. If they could get cover, it was prohibitively expensive. To fill the gap, a reinsurance fund was established under an amendment in 2002 to the Workers Compensation Act 1951. The effect, quoting from the then minister's tabling speech, was:

... to have the territory stand as a reinsurer in case of an act of terror.

As such, the ACT government would fund, through either an appropriation or borrowing, the entitlements of workers injured as a result of an act of terrorism and

then would levy approved insurers to recover moneys paid out to injured workers. The initial amendment carried a sunset clause of 1 October 2004 for acts of terrorism occurring before 1 April 2004. Later, this was extended to October 2009 for acts occurring before April 2009.

The bill we are considering today would further extend the current sunset clause to October 2012 for acts of terrorism occurring before 1 April 2012. Importantly, Mr Speaker, this bill provides the means for employers to continue to secure cover for employees injured in an act of terrorism. The safety and security of employees must surely be the prime consideration for all employers. It is of equal consideration for governments. This provides a safety net in a world of uncertainty and instability. The bill also gives the insurance industry some further time to determine further insurance strategies, again in the current climate of uncertainty and instability.

Finally, this bill pulls to the top of the mind the need for the government, on a regular basis, to reconsider the risks involved in an environment of uncertainty and instability. However, the question is whether, after seven years of extending sunset clauses, we are now in a situation where this policy has become entrenched. We seem to be saying that we are unable to devise a solution to the problem and that the insurance industry has not changed its position in relation to the risk of terrorism occurring. Mr Corbell, the then Minister for Industrial Relations, said in his tabling speech in 2002:

Whilst the solution offered in the bill provides the certainty needed by insurers to continue to operate, it is not as effective a solution as the return to the market of private reinsurers. To encourage the return of reinsurers to the market, the bill has been given a finite life.

Mr Corbell went on to say:

The two-year period provided for in the bill will give the territory's approved insurers and their reinsurers time to reassess the real risks they face and return to the market an effective and financially viable product for the territory. During this period the government itself will monitor the relative positions of the approved insurers and the reinsurance market.

Well, Mr Speaker, two years came and went, followed by another two, and now we are seeking a further extension. In that time has the government or the industry considered or reached a solution? Clearly, they have not. Indeed, it was a former member and colleague, Mr Pratt, who flagged the potential for the government's complacency that seems to have come to fruition through this bill. Mr Pratt said in the debate in 2002:

We recognise that the proposal is based on a sunset clause of two years. We are not inclined to see the provisions extended beyond two years. We would therefore pretty much demand that, as we approach the setting of the sun, we undertake a full review of the provisions. We would continue to support what measures the government may then wish to put in place, provided that we review in detail the progress and workings of that vehicle.

Mr Speaker, it is time to pursue this matter in more detail, so the Minister for Industrial Relations may care to take on notice that I will be asking him and pursuing

him for more action in this area. For now, however, on balance, the risk of an act of terrorism is likely to be small in the ACT and so the scheme is unlikely to be put under serious stress. So we are happy to support the further extension of time.

Before I finish, I would like to comment on the utterly unhelpful manner in which the minister has handled this bill and provided information to the Assembly. In reviewing the bill and preparing advice for my party colleagues, my office, on 10 March, rather than seeking a formal briefing on the bill, sent an email asking one simple question. That question was:

Can you—

the minister's office—

tell me if other states and territories still have similar arrangements in place as does the ACT and, if so, the sunset dates for those arrangements.

That seemed to be a simple question. My office sent another email on 12 March asking whether an answer would be forthcoming. My senior staff made two phone calls to the minister's office following up on that and finally made a request to the senior staff of the manager of opposition business at the government business meeting to see if we could get an answer to our questions. All of this resulted in a nil return.

My senior staff sent a further email on my behalf to the minister himself on 19 March. After a couple of exchanges during the course of that day, the minister provided a response that utterly failed to answer the simple question originally posed. It consisted of a regurgitation of what was in the explanatory memorandum, which we can read for ourselves, and a statement of the bleeding obvious about the ACT's independence as a workers compensation jurisdiction and claims that the government did not collect interstate information.

Needless to say, Mr Speaker, by this stage I had become completely frustrated by the service provided by the minister's office and the final waffling non-answer, so we decided to ask for a formal briefing so that we could put a simple question to officials. What was the response? Well, there were more emails, but nothing about arranging a briefing, though, until sometime on Saturday when the minister, said, "We'll see if we can arrange something." Then yesterday I got more emails—the day before the debate was about to take place and fully two weeks after that simple question was asked—and my staff got an email that started:

If you bothered to wait, this office was agreeable to providing detail.

This is a fortnight afterwards. It then went on again to regurgitate the material in the explanatory memorandum, but it did provide a tiny bit more information along the lines of what we had asked for. Firstly, it said that there had been consultation on this bill. With whom did that consultation taken place? Did it take place with the Insurance Council? No, Mr Speaker, it took place with the ACT Insurance Authority. So the ACT government consulted itself about the extension of the sunset clause in this bill. There seems to have been no consultation outside the government.

The other thing that became obvious as a result of this further email was that there were further titbits of information, and it did turn out that the ACT government did collect information about what other jurisdictions were doing. We were told that three jurisdictions have similar provisions, but they provided no details on how those provisions worked and whether there were sunset clauses and when they would expire. We were also told that three other jurisdictions did not have sunset clauses in the way the ACT does, whatever that means. A final email arrived this morning suggesting that if I wanted further information I might consult the Assembly library.

So, Mr Speaker, the answer to a simple question took two weeks to come. It resulted in a list of emails as long as your arm, and it provided information which was next to useless. When the minister could not answer the question, it was suggested that I might consult the Assembly library. I would like to contrast this with the service that is generally provided to me from other ministers that I deal with, particularly the Attorney-General's office, where I have never been refused information and have been provided with full and open briefings and every courtesy. When I ask for information, the request is dealt with promptly and professionally. I think the Minister for Industrial Relations could take a lesson from the Attorney-General's book.

The other lesson that I have learnt is that, when dealing with the Minister for Industrial Relations, I will not try and make life easy for people. I will not just ask a simple question. In future, there will be briefings on everything that comes before this place, no matter how small or inconsequential they may appear to be.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (10.46): The ACT Greens will support this bill. It is necessary because commercial workers compensation insurance is still not available to cover the impacts of the acts of terrorism, but time will run out soon if nothing is done to extend these arrangements. It would seem there is no information yet that the insurance industry is in any state to pick up more responsibility for unforeseen calamitous events.

Obviously the global and visible threats of terrorism and the massive financial and human impacts of terrorist acts have brought forward new imperatives, and this bill implicitly makes the point that victims of terrorist acts deserve the same care and consideration as any other worker in our community.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Disability and Housing, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Corrections) (10.47), in reply: Mr Speaker, after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, most insurance companies withdrew products offering coverage for an act of terrorism. The government believes that it has a responsibility to protect the workers of the ACT wherever we can, and our workers compensation scheme here in the ACT is underwritten by the private sector. Private sector insurers are either not offering a product to protect employees from injury caused by terrorist attack or they are offering it at a price that employers in the ACT cannot reasonably afford.

Mr Speaker, you might ask whether workers in other jurisdictions benefit from similar protections. Well, I can tell you that a number of other jurisdictions do provide a

similar protection. For workers compensation purposes we operate as an island in the middle of New South Wales, and I can tell you that division 8 of the New South Wales Workers Compensation Act 1987 provides similar protections to the employees of New South Wales.

I certainly do not want a situation where employees working across the border in New South Wales have protections denied to our own employees. The Workers Compensation (Terrorism) Amendment Bill 2009 will extend the operation of the temporary reinsurance fund in the event of a terrorist incident to 1 April 2012. Interestingly, New South Wales do not appear to have time limited their protection. Of course, it is their responsibility to look after the interests of their employees, just as it is our responsibility to look after the interests of our employees. That is what this bill does. Here in the ACT we believe that the appropriate course of action is to review this protection every few years.

In order for workers in the ACT to remain protected in the event of an act of terrorism, chapter 15 of the Workers Compensation Act needs further extension. It is appropriate to extend the provision for a further three years. As I said earlier, we operate a privately underwritten workers compensation scheme here in the ACT, and this extension will allow for changes in the industry with regard to coverage for a terrorist event. It also provides for reconsideration by the government of the risks involved on a regular basis.

Mr Speaker, I need to address remarks that Mrs Dunne made. Other than my exchange with her adviser, I became aware of the specific details today, and I find the response from my office to Mrs Dunne to be unacceptable, and it will not occur again. I pride myself on my responses to members. I have been in this place for 11 years, and there are two things which I felt were unacceptable. The first one was that the information requested, which was fairly simple, was not provided quickly. The second was the attitude which was conveyed in the emails, and for both of those I extend my apologies to Mrs Dunne publicly. As I said, it will not happen again.

I thank members very much for their support for this legislation. I make this final point, though, with regard to the date. As I said, New South Wales do not have a termination date. I could have come into this place and said we will just leave it open now, we will work on it as time goes by and if everything changes, then fine. But I think it is more important that we time limit our legislation for reconsideration and review and that we do ask our people and the insurance industry to get on with it.

This is a matter, in my view, of a conversation between the insurance agency of the ACT and the private sector insurance companies. My role as Minister for Industrial Relations is to make sure that the legislation actually protects our workers. But I do not believe that it is appropriate that this particular type of thing is open ended, and I think it is appropriate that, from time to time, the Assembly is actually brought up to date with where we are. So, again, I thank members very much for their support.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Standing and temporary orders—suspension

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (10.52): I move:

That so much of the standing and temporary orders be suspended as would prevent order of the day No 2, Assembly business, relating to the Government response to Report 8 of the Standing Committee on Health and Disability (6th Assembly), being called on forthwith.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (10.52): The Canberra Liberals will be opposing the motion for the suspension of standing orders. This is a simple case where the government has no business to fill up its day; it is proposing to bring forward Assembly business from its allotted time on Thursday so that it can cover the confusion in relation to its lack of business, its lack of agenda and the fact that it has not got its act together as a government.

It is a third-term government that is totally bereft of ideas, a third-term government that has less legislation on the table in the bills list than does an opposition. Collectively, the opposition and the crossbenches have more legislation available than the government does, because the government has no ideas. It is true that the ACT is essentially being governed from the opposition and the crossbenches at the moment. The only places where ideas are coming from are the opposition and the crossbenches. The fact that we are going back—

Mr Corbell interjecting—

MRS DUNNE: Yes, it is an important matter. To discuss care and protection in response to a report which should have been responded to in the last Assembly shows that this is a government that has no ideas. I am very happy to debate the care and protection issues that arise—in Assembly business on Thursday, which is the usual time.

If we attempted to do this, the manager of government business would be standing up here, saying: “The executive has so much business to do. This is an important time.” Yes, there was notice given of this at the government business meeting the other day, but this is not the time for Assembly business; this is the time for executive business. The trouble is that this executive has no business because it has no ideas.

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

Health and Disability—Standing Committee Report 8—government response

Debate resumed from 26 February 2009, on motion by **Mr Barr**:

That the Assembly takes note of the paper.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (10.54): Firstly, I would like to thank Mr Barr for agreeing to debate this report and the government response, and to thank his office and departmental officials for providing a briefing to my staff. I would also like to acknowledge and thank the staff in all of the departments, agencies and community services who do so much work to support and encourage families in the ACT.

The ACT, like other jurisdictions in Australia and around the world, is working very hard to improve outcomes for vulnerable children. The Children and Young People Act, introduced last year and now almost entirely implemented, was a mammoth piece of legislation as well as consultation. I have heard from various sources that the changes it brought about are having positive impacts on the ground. I did not, however, want to let this report simply pass through the Assembly without some debate. The care and protection of our infants, children and young people is paramount.

In my previous work life as head of the Youth Coalition of the ACT, these were issues I dealt with on a day-to-day basis. Infants are vulnerable—all infants. This report seeks to ensure that all infants are given the care and support they need to grow up healthy and happy. It seeks to ensure that those infants who are even more at risk due to their family circumstances are given the best possible opportunities from the earliest possible moment.

The key issues raised in the hearings for this standing committee on health and disability inquiry into the early intervention and care of vulnerable infants were fear of the care and protection system, lack of information about services available and a disconnection between the target families and the services available to them, especially to fathers.

The recommendations in the report sought to address these issues and I am pleased to see that in general the government supports them. However, the gist of the government's response suggests that, while the government agree that the recommendations are good ideas, they do not think they need to do much more than they are already doing. Even in relation to the ones they do support—such as recommendation 3, that ACT Health develop a risk assessment tool to screen for domestic violence for pregnant women, and recommendation 6, that the ACT government investigate ways of utilising the Victorian government resource parenting support tool kit for alcohol and other drug workers in the ACT—although they have not been fully implemented the report states that the work is being undertaken, or will be undertaken, dependent on resources and budget priorities. I look forward to hearing more in the coming months about how these initiatives are progressing.

Don't get me wrong: the work being done by the departments of Health, Education and Training and Disability, Housing and Community Services and the relevant community agencies is invaluable. I would like to particularly note the IMPACT program, which brings together the various departments and agencies to assist

families with complex needs and which I have been informed has a high retention and success rate. I look forward to the upcoming evaluation of the program.

The child and family centres are another example of an existing collaborative program. These centres are open to everyone and encourage all families to visit. They offer a wide range of services or referral to services. This inclusiveness is aimed at reducing the fear of attending family support programs by including all families in the group. Healthy, liveable-income families, as well as those who experience difficult social, health and financial circumstances, can struggle with pregnancy and new children. By recognising this and bringing all new mums and dads in to share their problems and successes, the child and family centres, and the many government and non-government programs delivered through the centres, aim to decrease the stigma attached to asking for help, particularly for vulnerable families.

The aim is to support families so that involving care and protection is a last resort and so that parents do not feel afraid that if they ask for help they will be seen as inadequate and their kids will be taken away. And if the general services cannot provide sufficient assistance for particular families, those families can be guided—with their consent—to participate in programs that ensure that their child is provided with opportunities to thrive. In a 2001 article in *Family Matters* Sarah Wise noted:

Providing greater support for families—or balancing approaches to prevention and intervention as determined by need—involves the development of interventions that cover the service spectrum (generalist services that are universally available, services that are targeted at high needs groups, and tertiary services that respond to problems or crises).

She also observes:

... it may be easier for families to accept family support services when the coordinators of such services sit outside the statutory child protection system.

The child and family centres are applying those ideas, and I note that this does somewhat address the fear of care and protection issue raised by the terms of reference of the inquiry.

It is my understanding, however, that the information being recorded by the child and family centres focuses on the number of families coming through, not the background or current situation of those families. So while these centres are helping a large number of Canberra families, we do not know if they are reaching those at risk. This gap in the information being collected and therefore the lack of analysis of the existing programs concerns me. We have multiple support groups and services available to families and we do know the numbers of people attending. What we do not seem to know is a vital piece of information: are we reaching the vulnerable families?

Through the child and family centres, the plans for the early childhood centres, the interdepartmental and inter-agency liaison currently being undertaken by the ACT government and the work of community organisations, we are seeing a commitment to the ideas outlined by Ms Wise and by local, national and international research.

What we are not seeing—yet, at least—is an evaluation of how all these programs are working and, just as importantly, working together. Reviews are being undertaken by the Institute of Child Protection Studies at the Australian Catholic University, and the departments do collect some figures on the take-up of the programs. It seems, however, that the information being collected by the government on some programs is quantitative, not qualitative. We know how many people are using these services, but we do not know the situations of these families.

It has also been raised with me that, while we do offer a large number of programs, many people are not aware of them. And, with such a large number of programs, how are we ensuring that the people who come into contact with these families—for instance, teachers and healthcare, welfare and community workers—know all about these programs and know who to refer where? The government note that they provide training to mandatory reporters and to staff in the relevant agencies but, in my experience, if you are not using something regularly you will forget about it—and things change over time, so being kept up to date on current programs and eligibility is essential. Is information on these programs provided to all staff? Are staff regularly attending community forums such as inter-agencies or establishing other ways to stay informed of changes to community programs? I will be seeking a meeting with Minister Barr to discuss these questions.

The committee's report calls for education programs, for better assessment tools and for the expansion of the programs and services already available, with the aim of improving the outcomes for the vulnerable infants of the ACT. The government response agrees, but does not seem to offer much more than listing what is already there. I would like to see ongoing in-depth evaluation of current programs and supports to ensure that they are adequately meeting the needs of our vulnerable families and children. I ask the minister to keep me and the Assembly informed.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (11.03): The standing committee reports on early intervention and the care of vulnerable infants. I do apologise to the Assembly: I read before that it was tabled in April last year; I have just looked at it again and I realised it was August. So I do apologise for the comment I made before that it could have been replied to in the last Assembly.

This is an important tool in the whole process of ensuring that we get right care and protection, and the protection of our young children, in the ACT. It is important to note that there is a lot of work that is done in relation to vulnerable children in the ACT outside the care and protection system. It has long been the view of the Canberra Liberals, and it is a policy position that we have taken to successive elections since I have been involved as a candidate and as a member, that one of the most important things that we can do in this area is to intervene with young mothers at risk of falling foul of the system and not being able to provide the care that is necessary to ensure that their children grow and thrive physically, emotionally and developmentally.

There have been substantial improvements and developments in this area in the last four or five years on the back of the Vardon report, the Murray audit of the Vardon report and the Murray-Mackie report. There has been an increased emphasis on providing as many of those services as possible outside the formal care and protection

processes. This attitude has also been reflected in the Wood royal commission into care and protection services in New South Wales, where it was quite openly stated that it is not the job principally of care and protection services to look after our vulnerable children and it is not the job just of government: it is the job of the whole of the community.

Ms Tucker, when she was in this place, was fond of quoting the adage that it takes a village to raise a child. That is the attitude that we are starting to see in the development of our thinking around looking after vulnerable young children and their vulnerable mothers. What we have seen here in the report of the standing committee on health and disabilities and the government response is a move along that way, but I have to echo some of the words of Ms Hunter: I am concerned about the government response, which for the most part is a partial response. Although it says in many places that it supports in principle, it then goes on simply to enumerate what is already being done. Some of that is substantial, but at this stage there does not seem to be the capacity to look beyond what is already being done.

Ms Hunter raised questions about the number of programs and the lack of qualitative information about how we report on programs conducted by child and family centres and other agencies. This is where we need to go and this is where we need to develop to ensure that we are doing the best we possibly can to contact and intervene with vulnerable families as soon as possible so that we do not have to escalate that intervention.

The notion of fear of care and protection—that if you do not look out the welfare will come for your children—is something that we must work against as a community. By building up a range of programs, we must work to increase the confidence of members of the community to approach agencies, whether they be government or non-government agencies, to seek assistance. The involvement of non-government agencies in a range of services across the ACT will help to do that, but we need to encourage people to seek assistance before everything turns to putty and people are confronted with having their children removed in either the short term or the long term.

This, of course, is easy to say but often very difficult to do. It requires a high level of cooperation between agencies, between the parties in this place and between the government and the non-government sectors. There is a high level of goodwill that we should progress along this path, and we need to do everything we can to ensure that we do not have a repetition of events where one agency is working against another—where we are having complaints that there is not enough communication between agencies when issues arise—and that there is a high level of commitment to working together for the benefit of the whole community. In that way, over time, we will see a diminution of the number of children formally in care and protection, formally in the care of the territory, and we will see families who are much more resilient and much more able to look after their own children.

I welcome the government response, but I put the minister on notice that this is not the end of the process. He can laugh all he likes, but this is not the end of the process. Tabling a government response is not the end of the process. It is incumbent upon me

and every other member of this Assembly to ensure that this minister, acting on our behalf, provides the best possible service for our children. If we can do it in a non-combative way, that would be a great outcome for the children of the ACT. The more early intervention that we see, the better we will be able to do that job. That is my view.

I commend the minister for his response, but I hope that we will see the development of more programs, better targeted programs and more comprehensive information about the effectiveness of those programs in the years to come so that we can be sure that the substantial sums of money that we spend in this area are being delivered for the best outcome for our children.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Planning and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation) (11.10), in reply: I thank Ms Hunter and Mrs Dunne for their comments. I am pleased that in the broad they are supportive of the government's response.

Mrs Dunne did seek to call me on a somewhat muted response to her placing me on notice. One would have to question if there is a spirit to work in a tripartisan way on these matters: statements like "placing the minister on notice" perhaps do not necessarily lend themselves to such a multiparty approach. Nonetheless, I will take at face value everything else that Mrs Dunne has said in her response today. I am happy to indicate to the chamber that I intend to deliver a ministerial statement in relation to the government's forward agenda in this area next week.

Mrs Dunne: And we will get notice of that before half past one on the day?

MR BARR: Yes, and I will ensure that the shadow minister and the relevant Greens spokesperson are provided with an advance text of that ministerial statement for next week. We will then be able to discuss in some more detail down the track how we as an Assembly can respond to the many issues and the clearly increasing demand on government and non-government service providers in this area.

It would be remiss of me not to offer one final observation on Mrs Dunne's comments in relation to legislative programs. I did have to smile a little that this is the state of the Liberal Party in 2009—that they judge their capacity and their contribution to public policy solely by the volume of legislation, not by anything at all about the quality of legislation. One might then ask or pose the question as to whether the more appropriate question would be "what piece of legislation has this place abolished; what greater freedoms have we sent to the citizens of the territory?"—if our goal is only to spend the rest of time forever accumulating more legislation. It does strike me as philosophically odd that a member who purports to represent the Liberal Party seeks to measure her output as a parliamentarian based only on the volume of legislation.

Mrs Dunne: I think he might be reflecting on a vote that has passed.

Mr Hanson: Andrew, you know that you haven't brought enough forward.

MR BARR: That is a debate for another day. I note that it has got the response I was expecting it would get from those opposite.

Mr Hanson: It is a ridiculous comment.

MR BARR: It is a ridiculous comment? I think it has hit on a raw nerve, Madam Deputy Speaker. But I am sure that we can continue this debate at another time. I simply note that we should be more concerned with the quality of legislation that we pass in this place rather than the quantity.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

First Home Owner Grant Amendment Bill 2009

Debate resumed from 26 February 2009, on motion by **Ms Gallagher:**

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (11.14): I am happy to speak on this matter. The Liberal opposition will be supporting this bill. I understand that Mr Smyth has commissioned some amendments to deal with some of the comments raised by the scrutiny of bills committee.

The first home owners grant scheme is essentially a piece of legislation which has been brought about by the changes by the Rudd government to the first home owners grant through their temporary boost, which runs out, I think, on 30 June this year. Simply because it is a straightforward piece of legislation and a piece of legislation that brings about amendments which have strong community support, not just in the ACT but across the nation, we will be happy to support the bill.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Corbell**) adjourned.

Roads—speed limits

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) (11.16): I seek leave to move a motion concerning speed limits around shops and community facilities.

Leave not granted.

Standing and temporary orders—suspension

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Minister for Transport, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts and Heritage) (11.16): I move:

That so much of the standing and temporary orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Stanhope from moving a motion in relation to reducing speed zones around shopping and community facilities.

This is a very important motion. It is a motion that responds to discussions that the Labor Party has had, most particularly with the Greens, in relation to the importance of giving due consideration to issues around a proposed enhancement to road safety within the ACT. It is particularly important and it is appropriate that the motion be moved and debated today. The motion is simply to establish terms of reference for a reference to a committee to inquire into a matter of particular significance to this community, indeed to all communities around Australia.

I think the bottom line in asserting the importance of any motion that deals with road safety and the capacity that we have to enhance road safety in the ACT is simply to understand that each year, on average, 14 Canberrans die on our roads and that up to 500 Canberrans are injured on our roads. Indeed, in the five years from 2004 to 2008, indeed in the last term of this Assembly, 78 Canberrans died on our roads. I do not believe there to be a more important issue facing the community. I find it stunning whenever I reflect on it that during the term of the last Assembly 76 Canberrans died on our roads. I find it shocking whenever I consider it or contemplate it.

I believe it is vitally important that we take the issue of road safety as seriously as any other issue. This is a very simply proposal, that terms of reference be agreed for reference to an Assembly committee to enquire into one of the most significant issues which we face. It is a simple matter, a simple motion. It will not take considerably long to determine one way or the other and it is important that it proceed. I think the issue is simply too important to be playing politics.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (11.19): The Liberal opposition will not be supporting the motion to suspend standing orders. As the Chief Minister says, road safety is an important matter and one that we should be dealing with in this place, but this is a cobbled together motion which clearly falls within the purview of Assembly business. This is a reference to a committee, and reference to a committee is clearly, under the standing orders, Assembly business. There is time allocated on Thursday morning for Assembly business. The Chief Minister could just as easily have tabled this motion this morning. It would have been listed by admin and procedures at lunch time today and could have been dealt with on Thursday.

Again, we are doing this because this is a government with no agenda. If this is such an important issue, the minister could have put it on the notice paper at any time to deal with it, but it was cobbled together yesterday and circulated yesterday because they have to be seen to be doing something.

The government have no agenda. They are distracted by something—internal wrangling or the fact that they cannot get their budget together; I do not know—and they cannot get their act together in relation to their legislative program, which is thin, to say the least, and they cannot get their act together in the way they manage the business of the house.

The Liberal opposition will not be supporting the motion to suspend suspension of standing orders. We would welcome this debate during Assembly business on any sitting Thursday.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (11.21): For the second time this morning we have seen the Liberal Party try to obstruct the business of this place. They do so simply because their position is that they will oppose for the sake of opposition. That is the approach that we have from the Liberal Party and the current manager of opposition business in this place. She will oppose for the sake of opposing. She cannot help herself. She will not assist in the smooth running of this place. She will oppose for the sake of opposition—

Mr Stanhope: She always has.

MR CORBELL: and always has, and she has become more and more entrenched in that position over time. As the Chief Minister indicated, this is a motion stemming directly from the agreement entered into between the Labor Party and the Greens in return for the Greens' support of Mr Stanhope's candidature as Chief Minister. The government is seeking to implement that commitment. It is extraordinary that the Liberal Party seeks to stand in the way of that at this time.

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

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) (11.22): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that ensuring the safety of all Canberrans on our roads, including pedestrians, cyclists, drivers and motorcyclists, is of extreme importance for the community as a whole; and

(2) refers the option of reducing speed zones around shopping and community facilities to the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services for inquiry and report by the end of June 2010. The inquiry will consider, but not be limited to:

(a) the use of 40km/h speed limits (apart from school zones) in other jurisdictions, including the criteria used to identify location for the speed limits, any impacts on traffic flows and any issues relating to the enforcement of the reduced speed limit;

(b) the types of shopping centres (town centres, group centres, local shopping centres) and community facilities (child care centres, aged care facilities, community halls, sporting venues) where a 40km/h speed limit could apply;

- (c) a set of guidelines for selecting locations for inclusion in such program/scheme;
- (d) the hours of operation of this reduced speed limit (part-time vs full-time) for each shopping and community facility type;
- (e) the extent of coverage of the reduced speed limit around these facilities (only on the frontage road to a facility vs on all roads in its vicinity); and
- (f) any physical measures (speed humps, threshold treatments, signs, linemarking) required to ensure that motorists' speeds are reduced to the new 40km/h speed limit.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in this city of ours, perhaps the world's first city designed around the motor vehicle, it amounts almost to a heresy to suggest that the car is anything but an absolute good. This past week serious national debating hours have been devoted to the social harm of alcopops and pornographic websites. We have even pondered whether recreational skiers should be obliged to wear helmets on the slopes.

I wonder what our modern caring state might say if an enthusiastic inventor in 2009 came up with an idea for a tin can or a metal container that could travel upwards of 150 kilometres per hour, on a thin ribbon of roadway, separated from similar vehicles travelling in the opposite direction only by a line painted on the tarmac. I wonder what those who administer our safety standards might say if someone came up with the idea of a two-wheeled version, without even the comfort of an encasing, upon which a driver would perch, entirely unsecured, with the express intention of travelling from A to B in the shortest possible time.

I think these entrepreneurs would have a tough time convincing us that their products ought to be legal. If murder claimed as many victims in Canberra as cars did every year, no government would survive an election. If backyard pool drownings claimed as many lives as our roads, pools would be covered up or concreted over, by law. But the moment a government seriously tries to do something about road safety it is as though a sacred right is being infringed—a sacred right to decide for oneself when fast becomes too fast; a sacred right to answer the mobile phone with one hand and steer with the other; a sacred right to attend a happy hour and then head home behind the wheel; a sacred right to regard a 60 zone as actually and practically a 70 or 80 zone, a 40 zone as actually a 60 zone and a 100 zone as a 120 zone; a sacred right to regard Sydney as only 2½ hours away by road.

We need change, a cultural change. We need, like the Swedish parliament, to have the boldness to aim for a day when deaths on our roads are simply unacceptable. We cannot get there without a cultural change. We have the opportunity to start that change today, with the consent of the Assembly.

At the inquest into the world's first road traffic death in 1896, the coroner was reported to have said, "This must never happen again." More than a century later, 1.2 million people are killed on roads every year and 50 million are injured worldwide.

The financial cost can be calculated. The human cost, to families, to dreams and to careers, cannot. We do not have a yardstick equal to that risk or to that task.

Each year about 14 people are killed and 500 are injured on ACT roads. In the five years from 2004 to 2008, that is, during the term of the last Assembly, a total of 76 Canberrans were killed on Canberra's roads. The economic cost to the community of ACT road crashes has been conservatively estimated to be \$220 million a year. Yet we almost seem to regard this as a price we are willing to pay. I want, in this term of the Assembly, to question that price. I want to persuade Canberrans that they are being gypped.

Humans are complex beasts. We are very capable of simultaneously knowing that smoking causes lung cancer yet also believing that we will be among the lucky ones to escape. The statistics are proof that we are not all right. Similarly, we know in a general sense that driving a car involves risk, but we massively underestimate that risk.

In a 2008 book on the science of risk, Canadian Dan Gardener cites the research of a German psychologist who tracked the rise in road deaths in the United States in the 12 months after the 11 September terrorist attacks when Americans en masse shunned air travel in favour of what they assumed was the safety of the roads. The desertion of air travel lasted precisely one year before traffic patterns returned to normal. In those 12 months the road toll rose by 1,595—more than half the total death toll of the 11 September terrorist attacks. To put it another way, more than 1,500 men, women and children died because they seriously, fatally underestimated the risk of turning the key in the family sedan and overestimated their chance of being a victim of terrorism in the skies.

I am certain that everyone here in this Assembly has attended the funeral of or visited in hospital someone whose life has been ended or altered by a momentary lapse of concentration behind the wheel, a desire to beat that red light, an ignorance of the slippery patch around the corner, a crying baby in the capsule in the back, one too many beers at the wedding or one too many mates in the back seat urging the driver on. Speed is a killer—one of many, but a killer nonetheless.

Today we are here to debate what to do with this killer—accept its presence among us or challenge it. I do not think this is a task for just one party in the Assembly but for all of us. That is why I want every party in this place to turn their minds to the debate, not just the government of the day but a committee that represents the breadth of option and spectrum of thought that makes up our community.

To set us on our path, here are a few facts. Lower speeds on the roads mean fewer crashes, simply because road users, including pedestrians, have more time for decision making and vehicles can stop in shorter distances. But that is not all. Crashes that do occur at lower speeds result in less severe injuries because of the lower impact energies involved. If I am driving a car at 50 kilometres per hour and hit a child chasing a ball onto the road, that child is twice as likely to die as he or she would be if I had been travelling at 40 kilometres per hour—a mere 10 kilometres per hour difference, the difference between a suburban street and a school zone. For a motorist it is the difference between getting home at 5.30 pm and getting home at 5.31 pm. For a child it is the difference, perhaps, between life and death.

We design our roads for safety. We design our cars for safety. We impose speed limits and blood alcohol limits and require the wearing of seatbelts. We insist that our sons and daughters are road ready before we let them behind the wheel. And then we undo the good work.

When a government installs a speed camera, its political opponents and others, particularly in the media, cry, “Revenue raising.” How about “life saving”? By a bizarre and circular logic, if these cameras catch speeding motorists, they are deemed revenue raisers. Yet to install them where motorists do not speed and endanger themselves and others would surely be counterintuitive.

I do believe that some Canberrans accept a road toll of about 15 people a year as part and parcel of modern life. But 15 of us, we Canberrans, will die every year, and that is the price we pay for our method of transport. That is not good enough. It is not good enough for me and it should not be good enough for any of us. It should not be good enough for anybody in this chamber.

Across the world nations such as Sweden have adopted vision zero—a vision of a world where no-one is killed or permanently incapacitated as the result of a road crash. I do not know that broadening the reach of 40 kilometres per hour speed zones will save lives, but I cannot see why we, as a parliament, would not want to explore it. I cannot see why this chamber, and in particular the Greens, who argue so strenuously for involvement and engagement in policy making, seem tempted, on a matter so important, to jettison carriage of this policy and have no further involvement in its pursuit. It is inexplicable, and I do look forward to the rationale being made clear.

Here is an issue that has been championed and is championed by the Greens, and I applaud them for that, but I do look forward to them actually owning and defending the issue of extending 40 kilometres per hour speed zones. I do certainly want as part of that to continue to champion the cause of reducing our road toll. That is why I am very pleased, following a meeting with the NRMA and Alan Evans last week, to announce that the government and the NRMA have determined to jointly chair a road safety roundtable that will be dedicated to devising real ways to bring about a cultural change among Canberra drivers—a cultural change on the scale of the one that has so radically altered our community attitudes to smoking, a cultural change that means one road death a year in this town is one too many and a death that must be avenged.

I will ask that one of the topics to be considered by that roundtable is the possible expansion of 40 kilometres per hour zones around the city. I would be dismayed to learn today this is not a matter on which the Assembly itself wants a say. As many as one in three road fatalities involve excessive speed and speed is an aggravating factor in many other crashes. What is beyond dispute is that, if every ACT driver and every ACT rider obeyed the speed limit from this day on, our road toll would be reduced dramatically. It is as simple as that. If all of us obeyed the speed limits all the time it is possible that dozens, if not hundreds, of Canberrans now dead would be alive.

It is a very simple equation—speed kills—and every time we exceed the speed limit we enhance the possibility of Canberrans dying. It is beyond dispute that, if every

ACT driver and every ACT rider obeyed the speed limit from today on, our road toll would reduce and so would the burden of lasting injury. As an added bonus lower speeds mean lower greenhouse emissions.

I believe there is merit in at least considering the wider use of 40 kilometres per hour zones around shopping and community facilities, including aged-care facilities. To be sure, the government's traffic officials and its traffic police can advise and strategise and determine costings and savings. What they cannot say is whether the price—the cultural shift, the learning of new behaviours—is one our community is willing to pay. I cannot say either, though I might have an idea what I might personally say.

Australian speed limits are high by international standards. We ought not to be deluded by what we see on some of those great thriller movies that we all love to watch. Worldwide the trend and the public demand are for lower speed limits, particularly in urban areas. From the 1970s onwards we in the ACT progressively accepted 40 kilometres per hour speed limits outside schools. In 2003 we adopted a 50 kilometres per hour default speed limit in built-up areas. We have monitored with interest the expansion of 40 kilometres per hour zones in other jurisdictions in areas of high pedestrian activity. Are we ready and willing for such reforms here? Will we engage in a proper conversation or will we make this political? One thing is certain: we do not want to copy what others have done for the sake of it. We want to save lives.

As Mr Corbell mentioned, this is an issue that the Labor Party and the ACT Greens agreed to pursue through inquiry in discussions that we held last year. Referring this issue to the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services for detailed consideration and report is, we in the government and within the Labor Party believe, the most appropriate mechanism for consulting the community on this important issue. There will, of course, be the added advantage that the Liberal Party, too, will be able to exert its views and represent its constituency over the course of such an inquiry.

The ACT government assumed government late last year with the views of the community regarding consultation ringing in our ears. It would be an abrogation of everything that we have promised to pursue and which the Greens stand for if today the Assembly does not accept this opportunity to engage intimately in the provision of advice to the government on this important matter. I do hope that all members of the Assembly will support the government and not squander the opportunity that is being held out today to be a part of a very significant and important inquiry which we believe should be undertaken by the Assembly. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (11.36): I thank Mr Stanhope for bringing this motion before the Assembly today. I obviously understand the reasons why he has brought it forward today. While I support the intent of this motion, I do not see it as a matter for an Assembly inquiry. It was agreed between Labor and the Greens, in negotiating the parliamentary agreement after the election, that the next ACT government would consult on introducing 40-kilometre-per-hour speed limits around shops and community centres. That is what we would like to see happening now.

As the Chief Minister noted in his speech, there is already great recognition of the reasons and need behind having set speed limits, particularly around areas used by the community, and 40-kilometre zones already exist in other states and territories. Therefore, the research and thinking have already been done. An Assembly inquiry could serve that purpose, but it is not our view that this is a particularly complex matter of policy. To do so would tie up a committee for some considerable time, as it would be starting from a disadvantage when it comes to familiarity with and expertise over the details.

I have to say that, on reading this motion that has been brought by the Chief Minister, it seems very clear that the transport office within the department seems to have a very strong understanding of most of the issues covered. The only matter that has not been included in the list of matters to be considered is safety. It could be that the minister and the department are already convinced that the safety benefits of this speed limit reduction are well established and unarguable, and in the Chief Minister's speech he outlined the reasons behind that. Nonetheless, I think it would be a good idea to formally consider them.

My point is that issues such as the location of traffic calming devices, choices about the hours of application, the streets to which it would apply and the definition of appropriate facilities reflect the sort of expertise that we would see in an office of transport. It is for that reason I have circulated an amendment to the motion which calls on the government to take up this responsibility itself. Madam Deputy Speaker, I seek leave to move both of the amendments circulated in my name together.

Leave granted.

MS BRESNAN: I move:

(1) omit paragraph (2), substitute:

“(2) calls on the ACT Government to consult on reducing speed zones around shopping and community facilities, and to report back to the Assembly with a plan of action by the end of June 2010. Matters specifically considered for the plan of action to include, but not be limited to:”; and

(2) add:

“(g) the impact on pedestrian and cyclist safety.”.

These amendments simply change the focus from an Assembly committee to the government itself. They retain all the specific topics for investigation which I imagine would be par for the course in an exercise of this nature, and add a specific reference to the safety benefits in the interest of completion.

I appreciate that the motion does not specify for the government how it will consult, and I expect there would be expertise within the department to identify interested parties and relevant experts. I would like to make one specific suggestion, however.

Another item in the parliamentary agreement is for the government to revive the small business roundtable. There are many matters that the roundtable could engage government over, ranging from the impacts of the looming recession to the best way to support commercial waste management. The viability of local shops is another issue and the implementation of 40-kilometre-per-hour zones would be another.

Finally, I would like to address the matter of timing. I do not believe that the government needs to give itself until June 2010. I understand the date was suggested in order to ensure that the planning and municipal services committee would have time to do the job properly. My thought is that the ACT government could get it done in half the time and organise any consequent implementation in time to factor in to the 2010-11 budget. But we are mindful that this motion was an initiative of the minister, so we will not be putting forward any time frame.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (11.40): There is no doubt that we must do our best to ensure the safety of all Canberrans that use roads, including pedestrians, cyclists, motorists and motorcyclists. There are many different activity centres that require different approaches to road management to provide for both safe and efficient commuting.

I agree that we need to consider different speed limits for different types of shopping centres and community facilities. A blanket approach will not work and will only lead to increased frustration for commuters where reduced speed limits may not be necessary. It is clear that traffic flow around the Belconnen town centre is substantially different from traffic flow around Manuka and Kingston. Local centres provide another challenge. The hours of operation of reduced speed limits could also vary as the use of each different type of centre varies at different times of the day.

The opposition supports the amendment by the Greens to refer the matter to the government for consultation and report back to the Assembly. Consultation is important in such a matter because of the unique challenges and solutions that may apply at different centres. The opposition also supports the addition of a new item, the impact on pedestrian and cyclist safety, as this is the key reason for consideration of the alteration of speed zones. I understand that other jurisdictions, including Victoria, have varied speed limits at some shopping precincts and I hope we can learn from their experience.

Listening to the Chief Minister's rant just a few minutes ago, you would think that this was absolutely pressing. You would think that we could not waste another day. Yet here we have a motion moved by the Chief Minister which says they are not to report back until 2010. If this is absolutely pressing, as the tone of his speech suggested, why are we waiting for 15, 16, 17 or 18 months to get action? If we report back in 2010, there is a fair chance that it would not actually come on until the budget of 2011-12. He said that this was absolutely pressing. Every day that goes by, we have got unsafe roads, according to the Chief Minister.

He also claimed that he was the champion of this Assembly, this Assembly's rights and this Assembly's consultation ability and everything else. This is the same person who fought against FOI reform. This is the same person who will not release the Costello review. I find it absolutely amazing. It is also the same minister who

answered his mobile phone during the planning committee hearing when he appeared before the committee. He answered his mobile phone during the committee hearing, when he was appearing before the committee. I find it absolutely amazing that this person can then claim today that he is the champion of the Assembly's rights.

If monitoring speed limits around shopping centres is not core business for Roads ACT then I do not know what is. Roads ACT should be able to do this easily. This should be their bread and butter. The minister, by wanting to offload this to the planning, public works and territory and municipal services committee, is in effect admitting that Roads ACT either cannot do this or they simply cannot consult. I might have to guess that perhaps that is actually right, that perhaps both are in fact right. This is an acknowledgement that Roads ACT and his department cannot actually consult.

That said, I would like to see how they go, and I would like to see them get on to this and to do it this year. I look forward to the government's report by the end of the year and to the implementation of appropriate responses for speed zones around shopping centres and community facilities. In conclusion, I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit "end of June 2010", substitute "last sitting day of 2009".

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (11.45): I would like first to support the comments made by Ms Bresnan. The substantive motion which Mr Coe's motion seeks to amend is based, as Mr Stanhope said, on one aspect of the Greens-Labor agreement. The Labor government agreed with the Greens that it would undertake consultation on implementing the 40-kilometre-per-hour speed limits around shopping and community centres. The Greens believe it is appropriate that the government use the expertise and resources in its department to fulfil this part of the agreement rather than deferring the issue to the committee. I fairly much echo the sentiments of my fellow member of the planning committee Mr Coe. Brilliant though the planning committee is, the department probably has considerably more resources than we have to deal with this issue.

I am very pleased that the government would like to see a tripartisan approach on this issue and I think this is still possible while using the government's resources. I expect that the government will be informing the Greens and the Liberals of its consultation strategy and that it will share with us the results and recommendations of the process. I was very pleased to hear Mr Stanhope's positive remarks about this process, and particularly about the roundtable which he envisages with the NRMA and that this would be part of the agenda. The Greens do acknowledge that motorists' safety, as the NRMA would acknowledge, is a major part of road safety.

In the rest of my speech I will talk more about the road safety issues that relate to the 40-kilometre speed zones and which are related not so much to motorists, which is what Mr Stanhope covered, but to pedestrians and cyclists. I would urge the government to see pedestrians and cyclists as an important part of this consultation. Cyclists and pedestrians make an important contribution to society in a range of areas. These include an improved natural environment, improved health—I am a regular

cyclist and one of the reasons why I do it is that I need the exercise—reduced traffic congestion, an increase in the viability of local shopping areas, and a contribution to the vitality of our public places.

Unfortunately, as Mr Stanhope said, the reality is that Canberra, and Australia in general, has established a strongly car-oriented environment. There are many public policy and regulatory factors that favour car use and make other travel choices more difficult than car travel. However, more and more people in the ACT are interested in leaving their car in the garage and getting around our city centres in a more healthy and sustainable way. As an example, the number of bicycles entering Civic during the morning peak hour has risen by almost 50 per cent in the last four years.

Taking direct steps to support pedestrians and cyclists through improved facilities and planning improves the safety of these travellers and also makes the city environment safer and less intimidating. Interestingly, the risk to walkers and cyclists is inversely proportional to the volume of pedestrians and cyclists; that is, it is safer to walk or cycle in a city where there are more walkers or cyclists. The increased visibility means that motorists are more aware of other travellers. So planning our towns to support cyclists and pedestrians is actually a key catalyst for road security. On this note I would also put in a little plea to the people who are planning the upgrade of Bunda Street to look very seriously at putting in dedicated space for bicycles. The physical security of people in our cities is also improved if there are people around. “Peopled” places are safer places.

Mr Stanhope talked about road statistics. It is an unfortunate reality that in Canberra pedestrians are grossly over-represented in road casualty and fatality statistics. Pedestrians accounted for 20 per cent of ACT road fatalities in 2005 and 14 per cent in 2007. In 2007, they accounted for six per cent of ACT road casualties. This is a very sad statistic.

Cyclists are also injured or killed on our roads far too often. A 2004 report on cycling safety from the Australian Transport Safety Bureau reported that around 2,500 cyclists are seriously injured on the public road system each year. Cyclists also account for two per cent of road deaths.

In regard to cycling statistics, the ACT compares fairly well to the rest of the country. This fact can be partly attributed to our relatively good network of on and off-road cycle paths. But there is still an enormous amount of work that we can do in the ACT to improve this situation, not just by improving cycle paths but by thinking more broadly about how to make transport planning more balanced. Examining the options for reducing speed limits around town centres and shopping centres is an important part of this thinking. Speaking as a cyclist again, if the cars are not going that fast around you, it is much less intimidating.

Evidence from around the world shows that low vehicle speeds make a substantial difference in reducing the risk of injury to cyclists and pedestrians. The World Health Organisation has reported that speed is the single most important contributor to road fatalities. Pedestrians and cyclists are at the greatest risk of excessive or inappropriate vehicle speed. The World Health Organisation also examined the probability of fatal

injury to pedestrians from cars travelling at 50 kilometres per hour compared to 30 kilometres per hour. It revealed that, while most unprotected road users survived if hit by a car travelling at 30 kilometres per hour, the majority are killed if hit by a car travelling at 50 kilometres per hour. Comparisons of pedestrian and cyclist casualties between countries that do and do not use traffic calming methods and reduced speed limits also demonstrate this.

Initiatives that reduce traffic speed or calm traffic, such as reduced traffic limits, traffic-free zones or shared traffic zones, are elements of what is called “road danger reduction”. This concept has found popularity overseas, especially in Europe. It is an example of an approach to road safety that tries to improve the environment for pedestrians and cyclists by controlling the threats they face—primarily cars. Road danger reduction is also contrary to the common planning approach that tries to avoid problems by physically separating pedestrians from cars, with barriers.

A good example of the application of road danger reduction principles and practice is found in the city of Kingston-upon-Hull in the United Kingdom. Their approach to road safety was the widespread introduction of 30-kilometre-per-hour zones throughout the city, and it has achieved fantastic results in reducing road casualties. Between putting in the first 30-kilometre-per-hour zone in 1994 and 2001, Hull saw a 14 per cent decrease in all road casualties. This compared to a 1.5 per cent increase in surrounding shires. Pedestrian casualties also decreased by 36 per cent, compared to a 17 per cent reduction in Great Britain as a whole.

In conclusion, I am very pleased that the government is going to be examining this important part of the Greens-Labor agreement. Low speed limits in places like shopping and city centres are a common feature of active transport promotion and participation around the world. They also have the capacity to make significant improvements to the safety of all road users. I note that when considering this issue we anticipate that the government will look at all possible road speed zones. As I have mentioned, in other parts of the world they have considered 30-kilometre-per-hour speed zones favourably. I thank the government very much for raising this issue and look forward to the public consultation on it.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Disability and Housing, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Corrections) (11.54): I would like to make a couple of observation points, if I may. The first one is that the Labor government since 2001 has a fairly reasonable record when it comes to road safety initiatives. I would like to remind the Assembly of a couple of them. It was Mr Bill Wood when he was Minister for Urban Services who introduced the default 50-kilometre-an-hour speed limit in the suburbs. It was, in fact—if my memory serves me correctly—Mr Corbell and I between us who pushed very hard to have the on-road cycle lanes. They, I have to tell you, have been an incredible success. In the first year we had a 17 per cent increase in cyclist traffic on those cycle ways.

We have been putting money into budgets ever since to increase the number of on-road cycle lanes, and it is policy that any new road or any significant new road innovation will have them put in. In fact, I invite members to have a look at the

intention around the airport road and Pialligo Avenue through Morshead Drive. Whilst the construction phase is on, that is a terrible place to ride your bike, but consider what it will be like when it is finished. It will be a particularly useful facility for people wanting to go to work at Brindabella business park. It is an automatic part of the thing.

I, for one, as a former Minister for Urban Services, a former Minister for Territory and Municipal Services and a former deputy chair of the standing committee we are speaking of, feel reasonably qualified to express a view. I do not appreciate the innuendo that Mr Coe comes out with about TAMS's lack of ability to consult. I do not appreciate that at all. I just think that it is the sort of knee-jerk, populist, sensationalist garbage that we normally would expect.

Mr Coe: They could be doing their work, John.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Coe!

MR HARGREAVES: The thing is, he cannot resist it, Madam Deputy Speaker. It takes me three words to stoke Mr Coe. Three words and two seconds.

Mr Coe: I'll happily take that criticism.

MR HARGREAVES: There you go. Madam Deputy Speaker; Mr Coe can happily take whatever he likes, particularly his leave from this place! But let me say this: I confess a slight disappointment that the issue has not been picked up by the standing committee, because, as a member of the opposition between 1998 and 2001 and a member of the government backbench after that, I can remember receiving a goodly number of representations from people who wanted to have speed bumps put in their streets. People wanted to have chicanes put in their streets, and I have to tell you that I am an absolute and unashamed opponent of chicanes. I think they are the most dangerous traffic calming measure that has ever been invented. I do not like the little speed bumps either, but I do like the larger ones; I think they are particularly effective.

For those who live in the Tuggeranong Valley, a trip along Langdon Avenue will show you how effective they are. I was asked to put that speed bump in, even though I was not a member of the executive at the time. I lobbied the government of the day and had it installed, and it was outside a primary school. Notwithstanding the 40-kilometre-an-hour speed zone there, people were not observing it. So it is a bit of an issue. I introduced quite a number of road safety measures across the ACT, and we can do it again. The department certainly has the resources to do these things, but I think there would have been a bit more of a community commitment to the outcome if it had come from the Assembly.

One of the criticisms that I faced when I was Minister for Territory and Municipal Services—whether it be speed cameras, fixed and mobile, whether it be traffic calming measures, whether it be 40-kilometre speed zones around schools, whether it be the lack of them around childcare centres, or whether it be the 50-kilometre-an-hour default speed limit and the lack of signage in some people's minds—was that these things were imposed on them by the department, by some

unnamed person, and it did not come as a request from the community at large. With respect to the Wanniasa Hills primary school, it was a collective of people who lobbied for it. But it was not the community at large saying, "We want this to happen." So I fear that when this plan is brought forward, notwithstanding its endorsement by the Assembly, we will still be missing that 10 per cent of ownership and commitment. I think that is a bit of a shame.

I do understand the workload of the committee. As I said, I was a deputy chair of it for three years. I was on it for longer than that, but that three years is my memory, and I know how difficult it is with variations. It is a bit like the scrutiny of bills committee—you have got so much else to do besides just inquiries. But it is true to say that inquiries such as this, which are largely technical in nature, can actually run concurrently with something else. Indeed, the information that would be forthcoming would probably in the main be provided by the department anyway. The research could easily be provided by the department anyway.

Mr Coe: So why is it going to a committee, John?

Mr Seselja: Sounds like you're speaking in favour.

MR HARGREAVES: They are unbelievable, aren't they? Mr Coe, who has only had his licence for three weeks, has the temerity to come up and talk to me about road safety. I just think it is amazing. Come back and talk to me when you are off your Ps, Mr Coe. That would be good. When you have graduated from bicycle to motor car, you can come and talk about it.

I support the initiative very, very significantly. However, I suppose I want both—I want to have my cake and eat it too. because I want to see the community have the ownership and the result. I might say that when it comes back and the Assembly considers it, you might like to think about how we could actually achieve that. I know it was a difficulty when I was the minister. Thank you very much; I support everybody's intentions.

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) (12.02): I thank members for their contributions to the debate. I am surprised that nobody in the Liberal Party or the Greens wants to be a part of this very important inquiry. I think it just reinforces the perception that we have that most of the members here are here for a good time, not necessarily a long time, and they are not particularly interested in working. I might just say, when listening to Mr Coe, I was for some reason reminded of our dearly departed friend, Mr Pratt. I think we have lost Pratt by name and gained a prat by nature. But you would excuse me perhaps for—

Mr Seselja: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I think that is offensive, and I would ask the Chief Minister to withdraw.

MR STANHOPE: On the point of order, Mr Speaker, I do not think that is unparliamentary. It might be unkind, completely unnecessary and gratuitously offensive, but I do not think it is unparliamentary.

MR SPEAKER: One moment and I will consult my list. Mr Stanhope, I think under standing order 55 it is a personal reflection on Mr Coe, and I would invite you to withdraw it, please. I think it is not the sort of standard we want in the Assembly.

MR STANHOPE: To the extent it is a personal reflection—I must say, I am interested in that ruling, Mr Speaker, and I thank you for that—I withdraw the personal reflection.

I do thank members for their contributions. It is a most important issue, and the government is disappointed that the majority of the Assembly chooses not to inquire into this matter. I do find it interesting that the majority of the Assembly—the Liberal Party and the Greens—have decided to opt out of a very important and very significant inquiry. I think it does raise some important questions about future inquiries and future requests and future motions by the Liberal Party and the Greens asking for the government's support in relation to Assembly inquiries when, on this most important matter, the Greens and the Liberal Party do not wish to be involved indirectly or as part of a most significant inquiry. They would prefer, I guess, an expression of trust in the government that they believe that this inquiry—

Mr Hanson: Are you saying we should not trust the government? Is that what you're saying?

MR STANHOPE: Well, I thank Mr Hanson. I thank the members of the Liberal Party and I thank the Greens for this expression of trust in the government, believing this particular inquiry to be better handled by the government than by them. I guess it is fair to suggest that the Liberal Party and the Greens believe this particular inquiry will be handled more capably by the government than it would be if it were in your hands, Mr Hanson.

Mr Hanson: Well, I appreciate you don't think we should trust you.

MR STANHOPE: Well, I appreciate, Mr Hanson, that you believe the government is to be more trusted than you are to be trusted in relation to this most important matter. Whilst, of course, I welcome the expressed support of the Liberals and the Greens for this particular inquiry, I regret the fact that they want nothing to do with it and that they would prefer that the inquiry be pursued solely by the government.

So, as the little red hen said—I am just a little bit out of date—we will do it ourselves if nobody else wants to. We will do it ourselves. We will do it without you, as we do just about everything else.

Mr Coe's amendment to **Ms Bresnan's** proposed amendment agreed to.

Ms Bresnan's amendment, as amended, agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

First Home Owner Grant Amendment Bill 2009

Debate resumed.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (12.07): The First Home Owner Grant Amendment Bill 2009 seeks to make life easier for Canberrans who wish to enter the property market. We believe any reasonable scheme which is designed to encourage people to enter the property market should be encouraged and we will certainly be supporting this bill.

However, it is worth putting on the record some concerns regarding affordable housing in the ACT. It was reported in the news yesterday that real estate agents expect a rise in the number of properties sold in the next couple of months as first home buyers around the country rush to take advantage of the increased government assistance. While this will prove a temporary boost to the real estate sector in the case of new properties in the building sector, it is unclear how long this boost will last. Simply providing first home owners with a one-off grant is not enough itself to stimulate the market. Long-term strategies need to be put in place to encourage growth in the housing market which will make property more affordable and provide a sustainable boost to the building sector. According to the Housing Industry Association and the Master Builders Association of the ACT, builders have indicated a slowing of business from the middle of this year and the situation is unlikely to improve until mid next year.

The ACT government therefore needs to find ways to stimulate the building industry. One of the most important is to look at the planning system. The Chief Minister and the planning minister were told at their industry roundtable last week that the planning system needs an overhaul in order to streamline the approval process. The Chief Minister and the planning minister have claimed that bottlenecks have been cleared, but we are still seeing slow progress. The current system is not working and developers and builders no longer want excuses; they want action. It is time to look at effective long-term solutions to make the planning system more efficient and effective.

The Stanhope-Gallagher government has even admitted that the planning system is failing. The government has released regulations that exempt certain developments in schools from the approval process so that federal government stimulus money can be spent. If the planning system were working as efficiently as it should, there would be no need to circumvent the system in this way. While we do not object to the regulations the government is proposing, we do object to the Stanhope-Gallagher government creating two classes of builders and developers. If streamlining the system is good for public money then surely it is good for private money. Why is Mr Rudd's money more valuable than ACT residents' money?

The Stanhope-Gallagher government also need to look at so-called affordable housing initiatives and how these are working to stimulate the economy and to get young people into their homes. We are yet to hear from the Chief Minister which lender will provide finance to those hoping to take part in the land rent scheme. Despite claims from the Chief Minister several weeks ago that a lender had provided in-principle

support, we are yet to have the lender named. Has the Chief Minister contacted all those involved in the land rent scheme and informed them he has found a lender? If not, when does he expect to do so? This is a question that remains outstanding.

If the Stanhope-Gallagher government are serious about helping first home buyers, they should look at various ways of reforming the system. We constantly hear from this government about their affordable housing plan. We have seen some of the problems in that plan. We have seen the problems with land rent—the reluctance of banks and other financial institutions to lend under the scheme. But we have not seen the government address some of the core critical issues. They have tried to address it at a micro level, they have tried to address it in targeted schemes, which are failing, but they have not addressed some of the key problems, and some of those key problems are, of course, the slowness of land release and the inability of this government to respond, particularly at times of increased activity. They have not been able to respond as quickly as they should have to increases in demand.

We have also seen, as I have mentioned earlier in my speech, the slowdown or the bottlenecks in the planning system. All of these bottlenecks add to the time it takes to build a home and therefore add to the cost of building a home. Time is money, and delays for builders and developers in getting product onto the market mean that not only we do not see the kind of economic activity that we need at the moment but also over time that inevitably increases the costs. If there are significant delays as a result of the planning system not working, we see an increase in costs. So we see the cost of building more than it should be. We saw the price of land pushed up significantly by this government's squeeze policy on land release. And, of course, we see taxation; this is a government that continues to charge first home buyers outrageous levels of taxation simply for the privilege of purchasing their own home.

It is interesting that the Chief Minister claims that to reduce stamp duty for first home buyers, to simply not charge them the outrageous levels of taxation that they are being charged at the moment, is inflationary. He claims this is inflationary, but presumably he does not have the same qualms about government handouts to first home buyers that are done for a limited period. So, on the one hand, we have handouts for a limited period—and we support them. We support them because they are doing something to lessen the cost of purchasing a home. For many people it will not even cover the cost of stamp duty, but we do welcome the fact that Kevin Rudd and his government recognise that first home buyers are doing it tough.

Jon Stanhope says that if you get rid of tax for first home buyers, stamp duty for first home buyers, that is inflationary—even though you are doing it over a period of time—so you do not have the rush to get into the housing market. People know that if you get rid of stamp duty for first home buyers for homes under \$500,000, whether they buy this month or in six months time or in 12 months time, they will not be paying stamp duty. We cannot say the same for this scheme and I think that the Rudd government does need to consider in that context whether or not having it in the short space of time is the best policy setting. But, that said, we do support it.

But it is interesting that we have a Chief Minister who claims that cutting stamp duty, actually not charging first home buyers outrageous levels of taxation to buy a home, is

inflationary and wrong, but at the same time he does not believe that in a short-term way handing over cash to first home buyers is inflationary—presumably he does not, because he will be supporting this bill. I understand he will be supporting this bill, as he should. But he should also explain the contradiction in his position. Apparently, if it is a tax cut proposed by the Liberal Party, it is inflationary. If it is a cash handout proposed by the Rudd Labor government, it is not inflationary—despite the fact, of course, that it is handed out over a short period of time, for a limited period, which inevitably will have some effects on people's decision as to when to enter the market and will potentially see a flood of first home buyers trying to get into the market.

That, of course, brings us back to the land rent scheme. If the land rent scheme—and we still have not heard yet from the Chief Minister who this lender is—is not going to go ahead, if there is not going to be a chance of getting finance, these people are running out of time to access the federal money for first home buyers. We are now coming towards the end of March. That is not a very long period for people to make a decision before the end of June to look for a house and land package, or whatever decision they make as a family, if the land rent scheme does not work. It is therefore incumbent upon the government to be clear on where things are at. I have written to the Chief Minister, I think on a couple of occasions, and asked for an indication of where things are at and I have had no reply that I am aware of—certainly nothing that enlightens me as to where this lender is in relation to the land rent scheme.

I go back to the broader issue. The government has focused on things such as land rent and OwnPlace at the expense of getting the basics right, at the expense of looking at the planning system and at how we can fix it, at the expense of tax reform, particularly for first home buyers, and at the expense of doing something genuine about responding to the land shortages that we have seen in the past few years.

We see the next front for development, the Molonglo valley. We hear of delays. We have not heard much said about it by the planning minister, or by the Chief Minister indeed, over the past few months. So we can only assume from that that, even if we do get some whiz-bang announcements, we should take them with a grain of salt, because word in the industry is that that is being delayed, and of course that would be disappointing. We do want to see a northern and a southern front for new development, for greenfields development, and there has been a long delay in that coming on line. So it is important that we see that balance in land release coming.

In conclusion, we support the bill. We do think there are severe contradictions in the government's position and we do think that their record on housing affordability has been one of their great failings. One of their most significant failings has been the extra impost and the burden that they have placed on first home buyers through their policies, through taxation, through planning, through land release. All of these things have contributed to young Canberrans struggling to buy a home. We see some of the false hope that has been offered in a number of schemes that have not been working. But we will be supporting the bill as we support the intention behind it.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (12.17): The Greens have no objection to supporting the facilitation of commonwealth funds to the residents of the ACT under the first home owner grant boost scheme. This is an

important initiative for the ACT as it will allow many to achieve their dream of home ownership as well as boost the local economy and facilitate the local building industry to maintain jobs through these difficult financial times. The Greens welcome this initiative from the commonwealth as it will provide necessary assistance to Canberrans who are embarking on home ownership for the first time.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (12.18): This bill provides for a short-term boost to the value of the grant given to first home owners. The first home owners grant is a policy of the federal government, started, of course, by the previous federal government. The ACT, along with the states and territories, administers this scheme on behalf of the federal government, so to this extent the ACT is simply making sure that those who live in the ACT who are entitled to the assistance receive it and that those who are not entitled do not receive any assistance at all.

As far as this bill is concerned, the additional impost on the ACT government in terms of administration is minimal; provided a person or couple is entitled to a first home owners grant, the original grant and the relevant boost grant will be paid. Nevertheless, the focus of this bill is of some interest. The boost provisions comprise two components. In the case of people who are buying their first home—that is, buying an established property—the boost grant is \$7,000. In the case of people who are building their first home, the boost grant is \$14,000. In the context of the current economic climate, this differentiation in the focus of the first home owners boost is clearly intended to provide a stimulus to builders of new homes and to suppliers of goods and services to those builders.

The latest statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics—soon to be cut by the federal Labor government, of course—suggests that the boost policy is having some effect. The national data on housing finance commitments for January 2009 show that the proportion of dwellings that were being bought by first home buyers reached the highest point since this statistical series was commenced in 1991. According to the ABS, more than 26 per cent of finance commitments for houses were from first home owners. Research that has been conducted by the ANZ bank, however, suggests that first home owners could comprise as much as 40 per cent of all homes being sold.

In the ACT the pattern for the first home owners grant shows that there were 102 grants in November 2008, 201 grants in December 2008 and 223 grants in January 2009, so it is refreshing to see that first home owners appear to be regaining access to the purchase of their own homes, despite, as the Leader of the Opposition has so eloquently pointed out, the failed land rent scheme and other policies of the Stanhope-Gallagher government.

As I noted a moment ago, the boost policy is only intended to be short term. The policy commenced on 14 October 2008 and is due to expire on 30 June 2009. In the way of human nature, we could anticipate a rush as people seek to take advantage of this policy over the next few months. Of course there will need to be further consideration given to this policy as the end of June approaches. It is easy to contemplate a dramatic turnaround in the housing market if there is a combined effect of the cessation of the first home owners boost and a sustained increase in unemployment. This is a broader mix of policy matters that will need to be considered by the federal government as it responds to the looming end of the boost policy.

There are a number of relatively minor matters that are included in this bill. These are intended to ensure that only those who are entitled to receive assistance under the first home owners scheme receive that assistance. Moreover, the bill also contains provisions that enable the commissioner to institute action to recover grants that have been paid when they should not have been.

There are a number of comments in the scrutiny of bills report about this bill. Indeed, Ms Hunter has tabled some amendments. I have looked at the amendments and they mirror very closely amendments that I had prepared, so it may well be a fight as to who gets to their feet first. But in this case we will allow the Greens to move their amendments—I will circulate mine—because they achieve the same purpose as ours and we will be supporting the amendments.

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) (12.22): Mr Speaker, the Treasurer is unable to be here for this debate. She apologises for that, and I will close the debate on her behalf.

I will close the debate simply by thanking members for their contributions. As members have acknowledged, this is a machinery bill designed to facilitate the ACT government's capacity to administer essentially a federal scheme to assist first home buyers in response, most particularly, to the financial global crisis. I think we probably need to put it in that context and understand the context in which the scheme was enhanced by the federal government for a very specific purpose, mostly directed at stimulating activity in a global financial turndown.

There are some arguments about the force and impact of schemes such as this, and the longer term implications of course are a debate for another day in another context. But I thank members for their contributions. I acknowledge the amendments that have been moved. I think the government's attitude is that we are not particularly taken by the force of the amendments but have no real issues with them.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Detail stage

Bill, by leave, taken as a whole.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (12.23), by leave: I move amendments Nos 1 to 3 circulated in my name together [*see schedule 1 at page 1241*].

I am moving these amendments to the First Home Owner Grant Amendment Bill 2009 to reflect the concerns expressed by the scrutiny of bills committee and to convey the Greens' concern that various provisions should include a "reasonable

grounds” qualification in cases where the same act contains other provisions which spell out that a similar decision maker must have reasonable grounds on which to base their decisions.

The Greens are also seeking to ensure that the provisions within this bill provide adequate opportunity for the Assembly to assess any changes that may need to be made in the future regarding the first home owner grant. While the Greens understand that there would be provision for a regulation under this bill to be disallowed should there be cause to in the future, we would prefer that no other territory laws can be amended without consideration by the Assembly.

Amendments agreed to.

Bill as a whole, as amended, agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

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 12.25 to 2 pm.

Questions without notice

Economy—recession

MR SESELJA: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, your colleague Jon Stanhope said in this Assembly on 4 April 2008:

It is a great tribute to the ACT government—my government—that the economy remains as strong as it is.

Treasurer, given your government took responsibility for the economy in the good times, will you now take responsibility for the ACT being the only Australian jurisdiction in recession?

MS GALLAGHER: I should begin by saying that I have just been to the dentist and I cannot really speak; so my answers are going to be fairly short. We do take responsibility for the economy. The ACT is in what is called a technical recession.

Mr Hanson: It is a recession.

MS GALLAGHER: It is a technical recession; that is right. We will be acting responsibly in terms of our response to that. It is important to note that the ACT economy remains very strong and I would encourage those opposite to start supporting the economy, not talking the economy down, because that is what every other commentator and this government are trying to do.

Economy—recession

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, why is the ACT the only state or territory that has been in recession for the last six months of 2008?

MS GALLAGHER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will struggle on; I don't sound great. I would encourage Mrs Dunne to look at what is happening around the world. It has now been called the global economic recession. Nineteen of the 22 OECD countries are actually in recession. The federal government is doing what it can at the moment to avoid the Australian economy going into a recession, although comments from the Treasurer and the Prime Minister recently showed the difficulty they are facing in that regard.

When you look at the technical recession that we are in, the September quarter figures were revised backwards in the December release of the national accounts figures. Commentators have spoken of the volatility of public sector investment and its impact on the ACT economy. And when you look at what was the most significant impact in the figures for the ACT in the December quarter, it was about a 28 per cent drop in commonwealth investment, and that has a 1.3—

Mr Seselja: "It's not our fault"!

MS GALLAGHER: If you look at the impact and read the national accounts, you see the volatility that exists from the commonwealth government and the ACT government at times. Having regard to the impact of public investment, you will see that, almost completely, the 28 per cent drop, which equals about \$121 million in investment, was as a result of the reduction in commonwealth investment. It had an impact of 1.3 per cent.

Our economy remains strong. Our unemployment rate remains the lowest in the country. It is forecast to grow, but we do not expect it to hit the rate of the national unemployment figures. Investment remains strong; household consumption and private sector investment has increased. These are all measures of an economy that has underlying strengths.

The technical recession is there. Nobody is walking away from that, and we need to respond to it. But we also need to support the economy in the language that we use. This is a little warning to Brendan Smyth, having regard to some of the language he uses: our economy remains strong. Yes, we need to respond to the current economic climate, but we will do so in a measured way that will not be a knee-jerk way. We should be supporting our economy by instilling confidence in the community, not by doing what the opposition are doing.

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, a supplementary question?

MRS DUNNE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, if the commonwealth has had such an impact on the ACT economy, why did the then Treasurer, your leader, Jon Stanhope, say on 14 May last year in relation to commonwealth spending cuts that they certainly will not have a significant impact?

MS GALLAGHER: I would have to look at the context of that statement. If it was about the commonwealth investment drop—and we are still seeking answers on what projects that actually was—of \$121 million in the December quarter, what we are talking about is the volatility that that has on the national accounts figures.

The economy here remains strong. Anyone in this place who challenges that is wrong. The economy remains strong. The national accounts have us in a technical recession, but the economy remains strong and we have a challenge here to respond to what we are seeing around the world and around the country. We have an opportunity to respond. That is what we need to be doing. That is what we are doing with the second appropriation and the third appropriation, and when we release our budget you will see our third response.

That is what we need to be doing at the moment—not talking it down, not talking recession, not reducing the community's confidence. We are trying to urge the community to increase their expenditure, to spend and to invest in their community. It does not help when you have the opposition trying to make politics out of this situation.

It is what we expect from you, but rise to the challenge. Face up to the responsibilities that we have in this place to support our community.

Mrs Dunne: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. My question was about the Chief Minister's comments about how the commonwealth cuts would not have an impact on the economy. The Deputy Chief Minister and Treasurer is not directly answering the question. It is not directly relevant to the question.

MR SPEAKER: Yes. Treasurer, come back to the question.

MS GALLAGHER: The Chief Minister has been up at that house almost every week urging the commonwealth government to ensure that their responses in their budget take into account the interests of the ACT community. What have you guys done to protect the interests of the ACT community in the last 12 months? Nothing, zero, zip, apart from having stupid election commitments like reducing revenue and imposing arbitrary savings which will never be delivered. That is your response.

This Chief Minister has always urged the commonwealth to understand the disproportionate effect that decisions they take have on the ACT community. We will continue to push that with our colleagues up on the hill. That is what a responsible government would do in terms of defending the interests of their local community. That is what this Chief Minister does. That is what I do. That is what every minister in this government does. We look forward to the day that you join us in that approach.

Schools—league tables

MS HUNTER: My question is to the Minister for Education and Training. It concerns comparison of like schools to provide analysis of system performance and the information being manipulated by the media and other third parties to form league tables. Minister, I note that 15 of the nation's peak education bodies have written to all Australian education ministers pleading for legislative protection from school league tables. Will you give an assurance that legislative action will be taken to prohibit the creation and publication of league tables flowing from the collection of student and school performance data?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Hunter for the question. Yes, I have received a letter—like all Australian education ministers—in relation to those issues. I am not in a position at this point to provide a government response to that request. There are pros and cons in relation to how any legislation might be constructed.

I understand that the New South Wales parliament did pass a piece of legislation that seeks to address these issues. Obviously, there are a number of conflicts and competing priorities in relation to freedom of speech and our own FOI legislation that would at this point make all of that data available to any organisation seeking to access it through FOI. We need to have a look at whether any such legislation would be consistent with practices that this place has adopted in recent times in relation to access to information.

I, like all of my state and territory education colleagues, have concerns in relation to the potential for the data that is available through the national testing process to be utilised in simplistic league tables. I would like to take this opportunity to make a clear statement that we do not support that. It was on the basis that that would not be possible through the arrangements that the commonwealth and the states and territories have entered into that we felt comfortable in entering into those agreements.

Whether it is necessary to take a further step in terms of a legislative response I think needs some careful consideration but I am mindful that this information is available through FOI at this point. This Assembly took a conscious choice in making the decisions that it did to make this sort of information available and to give the minister of the day no power whatsoever to stop that information from being misused.

Kangaroos—cull

MS BURCH: My question is to the Chief Minister, as Minister for Territory and Municipal Services. Would you please advise the Assembly on the importance of responsible kangaroo management in the ACT?

MR STANHOPE: I thank Ms Burch for the question. This is an important question, the issue of kangaroos and their management. It is an issue which has certainly raised passions and been somewhat controversial in the territory in recent years.

As a consequence of some of the issues that have been raised in the past, over the last couple of years, the government asked Territory and Municipal Services to begin the process of developing a kangaroo action plan. A draft of that plan has now been produced and released for community consultation and information. It is a rigorous, evidence-based, scientific report prepared by experts, ecologists within Parks and Conservation within the Department of Territory and Municipal Services. It is broad ranging. It is a management strategy in the order of 200 pages. It addresses, assesses and analyses the full range of issues and implications of living in a community, as we do, with a significant population of kangaroos. The advice, the evidence or the view from within Parks and Conservation, indeed, is that it is a starting point in relation to any conversation or discussion on kangaroos and their management.

There are, almost certainly in the view of those that study kangaroos, more eastern grey kangaroos within the ACT today than there have been at any time probably in the last 100 years. That is relevant in the context of the nature of the issue that we face. We have a large population of eastern grey kangaroos, a very heavy concentration and a growing population.

There are impacts. There are impacts across a range of spectrums—social, environmental and economic issues—that a detailed kangaroo management plan would seek to address.

As a consequence of the increasing numbers, as a consequence of drought, as a consequence of a narrowing of the areas in which kangaroos can congregate, gather and live as a result of the expansion of the urban area of the territory, issues in relation to kangaroos are becoming more prominent. It is a sad fact that in the order of 1,000 kangaroos a year are killed or struck by motor vehicles within the ACT. We average in the order of 1,000 callouts to attend to dead or injured kangaroos—almost exclusively death or injury—caused by collisions with motor vehicles.

We did, as a relevant and an appropriate part of the development of a draft kangaroo management plan, undertake a detailed, statistically significant survey of Canberra residents. The results of that are very important and very significant in the development of the strategy. They reveal, for instance, the acuteness and the sensitivity that Canberrans have for kangaroos. It is a species that we are all, almost universally, aware of and supportive of and it is a relationship which almost all Canberrans want to continue. We live here in the bush capital in an environment that allows us to live with kangaroos as a very significant part of our community.

There was a recommendation, however, on a range of issues. Over 70 per cent of Canberrans responded to that range of issues—most particularly in relation to pressure on grassland and the damage that kangaroos can cause to vulnerable ecosystems such as lowland grassland and lowland woodland—that there will be instances when they would support a management of kangaroo numbers through culling.

The kangaroo management plan does more than explore those issues, however. It gives detailed consideration across all the different geographic regions of the ACT in relation to specific issues based on specific localities as a result of existing numbers of kangaroos. It provides a detailed assessment and analysis of other steps to be taken in management such as fertility trials and controls, the exclusion of kangaroos from particular areas and management regimes, including of course the regretful necessity or prospect of culling being used as a management option.

The report then explores the most humane method of culling of kangaroos and does conclude that, on the basis of all scientific advice, the most humane way of culling kangaroos is by their being shot which is, of course, confronting and regrettable. That is the best advice currently available. (*Time expired.*)

MR SPEAKER: Ms Burch, is there a supplementary question?

MS BURCH: Yes, and I thank the minister for outlining that. Are there other steps that this government is taking to ensure that kangaroo populations are managed at a sustainable level?

MR STANHOPE: I will not delay the Assembly for much longer in relation to the issue, other than to say this is an issue which is of the utmost importance. I say by way of an aside, and without wishing to be provocative or political, that the Liberal Party, in its election promises, included in its range of cuts a cut to the proposed development of a kangaroo management plan. I just say that as an aside. This is not an issue of any significance to the Liberal Party. Interestingly, in the context of the debate we are currently having, I remind members—I am sure that nobody has forgotten—and the Canberra community that amongst the \$200 million worth of cuts, which would have resulted in 200 job losses, which were part and parcel of—

Mr Hanson: Oh? So we wouldn't be going into deficit then.

MR STANHOPE: Wouldn't be going into deficit? Amongst those promises, of course, was a promise to retrospectively legislate to reduce stamp duty revenues by \$35 million. Wouldn't be going into deficit? Pull the other one!

MR SPEAKER: Order, Chief Minister!

MR STANHOPE: But it is relevant to note that the Liberal Party is so concerned about this issue that its election promises contained a promise to abandon a kangaroo management plan.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Chief Minister, one moment please. Chief Minister, the question was about what your government is doing on kangaroos. Could you return to the relevant answer, please.

MR STANHOPE: Well, it is relevant to provide an environment in which the government operates in relation to these issues—an environment of sustained opposition to good management and good government. But it is relevant that, in addition to the development of a detailed, evidence-based, science-based kangaroo management plan, the government did ask the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment also to undertake a detailed assessment of the impact of kangaroos most particularly on our lowland grasslands, an ecosystem that is significantly at risk. Significant vulnerable and endangered species of both flora and fauna across the ACT are at serious risk in some localities of local extinction, as a result of the depredations caused by overgrazing by kangaroos. Most particularly, we experienced that at Lawson, where a number of species—the golden sun moth, the Ginninderra peppercress and the perunga grasshopper—are all essentially threatened with local extinction as a result of overgrazing by kangaroos. And that is repeated at a number of sites around the ACT.

The commissioner has, in the last week, provided a copy of her report on lowland grasslands to the minister, Mr Corbell. Mr Corbell will, of course, take advice on that and provide a response. He will certainly provide advice to his cabinet colleagues, to

me and to the community in relation to the recommendations which the commissioner has made.

I think it is relevant, having regard to how difficult and distressing issues around the killing of any animals are, and the deliberate killing, the culling, of kangaroos through a kangaroo management strategy, to say that it is difficult and distressing. It is the sort of decision that no politician and no public figure would wish to be particularly associated with, but it is the responsibility of ministers, and in the past we have not shirked this particular responsibility. We have taken the difficult decisions. I think the Canberra community needs to accept that at the moment, as a result of the ferocity of the drought, the numbers of kangaroos and the depredations on some of our most threatened ecosystems, this government faces the very real possibility, subject to final consideration by Mr Corbell of the commissioner's report, that we will have no option but to engage in a perhaps quite significant kangaroo management exercise in this autumn and coming winter, and perhaps in years to come, including next year, which will involve the culling of quite significant numbers of kangaroos.

The commonwealth, in respect of its responsibilities in the Majura Valley, has already given indications through the parliamentary secretary, Mr Kelly, that it will engage now, already, on a kangaroo culling exercise within the Majura Valley. These are issues that we need to understand, engage with and accept as unfortunate, regrettable, unpleasant but necessary.

Economy—recession

MR COE: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Treasurer. Has the Treasury done any modelling on how long the recession will last in the ACT? If so, what did the modelling indicate?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mr Coe for the question. Treasury are involved in a whole range of discussions nationally in terms of how the Australian economy is placed. Excuse me; I am still struggling with my dental work. Having a nerve pulled in the surgery was more pleasurable than being here, I can assure you—no offence. This is one of those very difficult questions to answer, particularly because of the small—

Mrs Dunne: I would have thought yes or no.

Mr Smyth: Have you done any modelling? It's not hard.

MS GALLAGHER: Treasury are monitoring this all the time. I would be interested—

Mr Smyth: Is that a yes?

MS GALLAGHER: If that is what you want, yes. The answer is yes.

MR COE: Given that you have just admitted that you are doing monitoring and modelling, will you table this to the chamber?

MS GALLAGHER: No.

Cats—desexing

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services and concerns the desexing of cats. Given that the RSPCA has recently noted the increasing numbers of kittens arriving at its facilities, how is the government looking at improving its monitoring and policing of the legislation which makes desexing compulsory? Will it increase assistance to the RSPCA to deal with this problem?

MR STANHOPE: Thank you for the question. I think I had best take the question on notice, Ms Le Couteur.

The government has been working closely with the RSPCA. We have a very good relationship. I think you are aware that, as a result of pressures that the RSPCA faced, most particularly in the lead-up to Christmas, the government provided an immediate injection of funding assistance to the RSPCA in the second appropriation bill which was designed to meet a significant spike in, I think, both cat and dog presentations to the RSPCA.

The issue of desexing and monitoring is a significant issue. We have a long way to go. I sometimes think that, in terms of depredations, it is quite possible that feral cats do almost as much damage as kangaroos. Perhaps it is an issue that we need—

Mr Hanson: I thought he was taking it on notice.

MR STANHOPE: Well, I do not know the specific answer. Perhaps you do not want information. I think the Greens probably do. I can understand that the fly-by-nighters, the one timers and termers like Mr Hanson that currently occupy the opposition bench probably do not care much. Ms Le Couteur, I am more than happy to take—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR STANHOPE: They are the good timers, not the long timers. That is how we now refer to them. They are here for a good time, not a long time. It could be Mr Hanson's campaign slogan, I suggest. Some of their slogans are unparliamentary I heard this morning. The word "prat" I cannot believe is a personal representation, but I do respect the Speaker's direction on that.

Ms Le Couteur, it is a very serious issue. In the context of our lowland woodlands, feral cats most particularly have had an impact. Some of the species are disappearing as we speak. Of course, it was the activity and the damage that cats had done that led us to institute, I think, Australian-leading cat exclusion suburbs in Forde and Bonner. I have asked just recently for advice on extending the cat exclusion suburban arrangements to all new greenfield estates bordering all nature reserve areas within the ACT.

I believe there is reason for extending that. At the moment it has been limited, almost accidentally or by default, to Forde and Bonner, but Casey is abutting Kinlyside. The new suburb of Crace is adjacent to nature reserves. I think we need to extend our thinking quite dramatically in relation to cats and the damage that cats, most particularly, do in our suburbs and our environment. They are very big killers, cats, and we do need to control them far more responsibly than we do. I will provide the detail of the information you seek, Ms Le Couteur.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Le Couteur, a supplementary question?

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you. Chief Minister, Could you also look at north Weston as a possibility for another cat containment area and north Watson? Is the government considering, possibly through the RSPCA, subsidising cat desexing? The money is presumably one of the reasons it does not happen.

MR STANHOPE: I will take some advice on that. It is an issue that I recall Mr Linke raising on a number of occasions. In the context of our overall funding of the RSPCA, I am not quite sure whether we, particularly in the last injection of funds that we made, specified in any way how the money might be used. There might be an opportunity for the government to provide some targeted funding in relation to the desexing of cats.

I know that it is an issue that has been considered previously and raised with the government in the context potentially of the capacity to provide funding for the desexing of cats. It was a program that has previously been raised with the government in relation to perhaps the institution of a means tested approach to cat desexing. It is an issue that I am happy to continue to explore.

Special education review

MR DOSZPOT: My question is to the minister for education and relates to the review of the special education needs of the ACT. Minister, after delaying this study for many years, why have you moved forward with the study while specifically telling the review there will be no extra money to implement their recommendations?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Doszpot for the question. Mr Doszpot has fundamentally misunderstood the terms of reference and the nature of the review. The review is into special education provision in public schools and in the public system. It relates principally to curriculum and pedagogy. It is not an exercise in castles in the sky grand policy design; it is looking at specific issues within the delivery of special education, focusing on curriculum and pedagogy, what we are teaching and how we are teaching it, and looking at whether we are effectively implementing—using the existing resources, effectively delivering services, and whether, in responding to a range of increased demands on the special education system and provision within our public schooling system, we are utilising the latest in teaching techniques and accessing all of the capability that exists within the ACT public education system. It is not an exercise in reviewing the SCAN process; it is not an exercise in reviewing the amount of money that is available within the sector. It is around utilising existing resources.

One would presume that in any evidence-based policy approach you would not just write a blank cheque and say, “Go away and come up with whatever and then come back and we don’t mind. We don’t set any parameters around the budget implications.” My very clear commitment in relation to this review was during the election campaign last year—that it would be a priority for this government in this term of the Assembly. We are not even six months into this term of the Assembly, we are not even three months through this calendar year, and we have in place a team, a time frame and a range of experts in the field to provide advice in relation to existing special education provision.

That is an appropriate way, an evidence-based way, to make public policy. For Mr Doszpot to come into this place today following the shooting off at the hip yesterday, suggesting somehow that this government lacks commitment to special education—

Mr Doszpot: I think you protest too much.

MR BARR: I might remind Mr Doszpot that there was no mention in the Liberal Party’s election commitments of any funding—any increased funding—for special education in the public sector. There was \$250,000, a one-off top up, in non-government schools—nothing for the public education system, nothing for special education provision in the public education system. For Mr Doszpot to suggest that this government lacks commitment to special education when only a matter of months ago the Liberal Party refused to commit one extra cent in expenditure for special education in the public system strikes me as just a little hypocritical.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot, a supplementary question?

MR DOSZPOT: Interesting to hit a raw nerve, minister—very interesting. Should the review panel suggest urgent initiatives that would require additional budget allocation, can you tell us which current services will be cut to make way for such recommendations?

MR BARR: The question is largely hypothetical, but, in responding to the second part of the question, I would make the obvious observation that, in order to set a set of terms of reference that do not require the cutting of other services—that is what I said—work within the existing budget envelope. The second you come in with an overrun and say you must spend more money in other areas, you are faced with a choice of either cutting from another area of government or another area of education or raising more revenue. That is why I have set the terms of reference in such a way as to ensure that we are, firstly, utilising the existing resources to their full effect.

That seems to be a very sensible approach to public policy making. It is again fascinating that the first call from the Liberal Party in response to anything is “spend more money”, yet they spend a lot of their time in other policy areas criticising the government for investing.

Mr Doszpot: Not statues, special needs.

MR BARR: Oh, no.

Ms Gallagher: Throwing good money after bad.

MR BARR: Indeed. Again, when they were given the opportunity to go to the people, and they did in the 2008 election, with a policy in this area, there was not one cent of additional funding commitment from the Liberal Party for special education in the public sector. I remind members that the public sector educates the vast majority of students with special needs. Far and away, students with special needs are educated in the public system. That is why we are reviewing special education provision with a particular focus on curriculum and pedagogy.

Multicultural Youth Services

MS BRESNAN: My question is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and is in regard to the Multicultural Youth Services. It is my understanding that current funding for the award-winning youth multicultural service will end on 20 June 2009, with no assurances past this date, despite the incredibly high demand this service experiences. What commitment does the ACT government have to continuing to fund the Multicultural Youth Services?

MR HARGREAVES: I thank Ms Bresnan for the question. I am not aware of any change in the funding arrangements for the Multicultural Youth Services. I can say this: a lot of the initiatives that this government has actually delivered over the last four years have been in partnership with various sectors of the multicultural community and it is significant that one of the outcomes from the 2005 multicultural summit was the need for us, as a community, to engage with the younger people and ask them what it is they feel is necessary to go forward in this multicultural community.

This government actually funded a multicultural youth summit in itself. The agency—and we will call it that for a minute—that actually provided the foundation on which that particular summit was mounted and provided the support and direction for it was the Multicultural Youth Services. They were able to marshal the forces. They were able to bring the young people together. They were able to come up with a strategy to go forward. They were able to articulate, from the information given to them in that summit, the way forward that the young people in the multicultural community wanted to go.

An example of that and of the value of the Multicultural Youth Services, which I hold particularly highly, was that they identified a need for us to have a better conversation with the police on their attitude when it came to patrolling the city, Manuka, Kingston, Dickson and various other places. The young people said, “When you come across a bunch of really dark-haired young people who might be a little bit olive in complexion in a bunch of blokes”—hitherto there had been an attitude that this was a gang waiting to have some sort of a rumble; such was not the case necessarily; it is quite possible that they were just a bunch of young people out enjoying each other’s company—“there needs to be an attitudinal change in the police.” The result that

came out of the multicultural youth summit—as I say, guided by the Multicultural Youth Services—was that the MYS actually addressed the police recruiting college on this particular issue. It affected a change in the processes of training at the AFP police college.

I will find out for Ms Bresnan. I will be very interested to find out what may have been the case. We will see.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Bresnan, a supplementary question?

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Given that the minister has stated there will not be any change in funding arrangements—

Mr Hargreaves: No, I didn't say that.

MS BRESNAN: That is what I thought I heard you say. With respect to the suggested commitment of one-off funding, which is noted in the draft multicultural strategy, of about \$100,000, is that funding which will go to the new service, which is in fact less than they get now, and how is it going to be determined what the needs will be?

MR HARGREAVES: I will need to get some information on the detail and bring it back to the Assembly. What is going through my mind, though, is whether or not we are talking about one-off funding—

Mr Seselja: That's a scary statement!

MR HARGREAVES: Well, it would scare you, but you're easily scared. Mr Speaker, it would not take very long to frighten him, either. You can do that in the blink of an eye. I would be interested to know whether the funding referred to in the document Ms Bresnan is talking about is project funding or whether it is ongoing core funding. That is the question that is going through my mind, and I will need to take some advice on that.

A couple of years ago we walked away from core funding because that was the way in which the rest of Australia was going. We also did not have particular faith in the way multicultural advocacy was being delivered in this city about three or four years ago. We went to project funding so that the amounts of money that the ACT was paying out for multicultural services had a determined outcome which was measurable and had deliverables attached to it. There was an open slather prior to that. I found it unacceptable that the ACT would be providing funding with no idea of where it was going and what it was going to be spent on. So we started putting the agenda out there, and project funding it.

Once the multicultural community had actually got its act together, there was always an intention on my part to see if we could return that responsibility to the sector, provided that they could outline to us exactly what outcomes they could achieve from what we wanted them to achieve. The multicultural strategy, which is out in draft form for consultation at the moment, is a conversation with the community, to tell us

where we should go in the future. The previous one indicated certain directions and it told us about those particular projects that we needed to fund. It was not something that was dreamt up; it was something that the community came forward and told us about in the context of the multicultural strategy. I suspect that there is a lot of that in this.

We need to understand that the document that Ms Bresnan refers to is the draft multicultural strategy. It is not the final document. In fact, we want feedback. With respect to the sorts of questions that Ms Bresnan is raising, I want those raised and brought forward to us. One of the questions that could easily be raised is: should we be allowing core funding in certain aspects of multicultural service delivery, should we be funding projects or should we be doing a combination of both and, if so, what is a reasonable amount to apply? You could also ask whether or not the fringe festival is part of the Multicultural Festival. That is a very good question, isn't it? We need to have that conversation out there in the community.

I will find out some detail. I will try to get the information back for question time tomorrow. If I do not make that, I have, with the grace of the opposition, received a pair to attend a ministerial council meeting on Thursday, so what I might do, with the Assembly's permission, is to find out the answer, have it written down and then circulate it to each member of the Assembly outside the session, if that is okay.

Hospitals—women's and children's

MR HANSON: My question is to the Treasurer and relates to cuts to the ACT budget. Minister, the women's and children's hospital was a flagship of your re-election promises. Can you guarantee that there will be no cuts to the scope, infrastructure or operating budget of the women's and children's hospital that you announced during the ACT election?

MS GALLAGHER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The women's and children's hospital is a \$90 million project, and it remains one.

Mr Hanson: On a point of order—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, would you like to just ask a supplementary question or are you on a point of order?

Mr Hanson: On the question I asked, I was not asking about the cost of it. I was asking whether there were any cuts proposed to the infrastructure or the operating budget.

MR SPEAKER: Why don't we take that as a supplementary question?

MS GALLAGHER: Well, it is a \$90 million project. You are asking if we are cutting it and I am saying it remains a \$90 million project. That means there is no cut to the project.

Mr Seselja: He said operating budget. He said scope.

MS GALLAGHER: How many questions do you want—

Mr Seselja: He is not just talking about the cost of building, Katy, just to make that clear.

MS GALLAGHER: The women's and children's hospital is a \$90 million capital project. There is no cut to that project. In terms of operating costs, that is, the recurrent cost, you will know—and this was rather a big issue of difference in the election—that this government has faxed in \$550 million of additional money to the health budget over the forward estimates period. There is no intention to cut that because that is what it is going to cost us.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, you have had your supplementary question.

Economy—recession

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, earlier in question time today you said that the ACT was in a technical recession. Treasurer, what is the difference between a recession and a technical recession?

MS GALLAGHER: The main issue is that, in general, a recession usually refers to a contraction in output as measured by gross state product rather than contraction in demand. As the ABS does not publish quarterly GSP figures for the ACT, hence the drop in SFD—that is, state final demand—has been referred to as a technical recession. And I get 10 points for guessing the little smart Alec question from Mr Smyth.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, a supplementary question?

MR SMYTH: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Seselja: If you'd answered it on your own, you would have got your points.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Smyth has the floor.

MR SMYTH: Normally it is manner, method and subject, so we will do the scoring later. Treasurer, the supplementary question is: what is the difference in the effect on the Canberra community between a recession and a technical recession?

MS GALLAGHER: At the moment I would be surprised if anyone, in a technical recession sense, is feeling the impact of the technical recession. That is measured by household consumption going up, unemployment remaining low, and jobs at 197,100 and rising. They are the measures, because usually it is when people lose their jobs that the impact of a recession is felt. It is felt by the loss of wealth in households, and that loss of wealth is normally felt through an income earner losing their job. At the moment, we have a technical recession, but we are not seeing unemployment rise or

people lose jobs, which is when the impact of a recession is felt in the community. I am not saying there are not impacts of the global economic situation and its impact here—

Mr Seselja: Oh, okay.

Mr Smyth: Oh, so it's the global doing it.

MS GALLAGHER: Have you guys got your heads in the sand or something? Have you not seen what is happening around the world? Have you not listened to what the IMF, the World Bank and the US Reserve are saying?

Mr Seselja: Are you responsible for anything that goes on here, Katy?

MS GALLAGHER: If we take your line and your interjections, you are trying to run the line that the ACT government is responsible for the global financial recession. Taken to its point, that is the argument that these people over here are running. I have answered the question. With respect to the impact on the community—that is, householders, and even businesses to this point—I would say that there has not been a noticeable impact of a technical recession. I am not saying that they won't come. I think we are in for challenging times, and the challenge to the opposition is to start working with us to deliver, stop harping on the sideline, stop pointing the finger and stop blaming. The only idea that you can come up with to deal with the recession, the technical recession, is to cut the stationery budget. Well done, Mr Smyth! And guess what? We are going to start with you. In the budget, we are going to have a special line that says "Liberals' stationery" and it is going to have a big negative next to it.

Education—special needs

MR SPEAKER: I call Ms Porter.

Mr Hanson: A real recession buster.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Ms Porter has the floor.

MS PORTER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. My question, through you, is to the Minister for Education and Training. Would the minister advise the Assembly of the steps the government is taking to further improve the provision of education of children with special needs in ACT public schools?

MR BARR: With pleasure. I thank Ms Porter for her question and for her ongoing interest—

Mr Coe: Ten points for getting her to ask it.

MR BARR: I must say that it was unusual that Mr Doszpot broke from the herd and actually asked a question on his portfolio. All credit to Mr Doszpot for having the power within the Liberal Party room to break ranks from the strategy that must be oh so carefully crafted by the Leader of the Opposition's office. It is a devastating strategy.

Mr Stanhope: They are political geniuses!

MR BARR: Yes.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: When they have finished, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Order! I cannot hear Mr Barr.

MR BARR: The government is committed to ensuring that every student in ACT public schools and, in fact, across the entire education system is able to access the best possible education. This means getting on with the job of delivering improvements in our education system. That means, particularly in relation to special education, responding to the significant changes in the nature of and demand for special education services in the territory.

With this in mind, last year I announced, as part of Labor's election commitments, that a re-elected Labor government would instigate a review into the provision of special education in the territory. I am very pleased that Professor Tony Shaddock has accepted our invitation to lead an expert review team to help us determine the way forward in this very important area of education.

Professor Shaddock brings to this role international respect as an expert in improving the education opportunities for students with special needs. He is a registered psychologist in New South Wales and the ACT. He has published over 100 articles, papers, chapters and books on education, special education and service delivery. As a result of his research on inclusive practice, Professor Shaddock is a frequent keynote speaker at national and international conferences. He works part time at the University of Canberra as a professor of special education.

He was the project manager of the recently released research project entitled improving the learning outcomes of students with disabilities in mainstream classes and is providing advice on implementing the national healthy children with autism package. Professor Shaddock has a long record as an evaluator of services and has recently conducted major reviews of special education and student services in Hong Kong, Sydney and Brisbane. In addition to Professor Shaddock, all members of his review team are recognised experts in special education.

In relation to the review, there are a number of broad phases of consultation. The first will provide the opportunity for data collection and consultation in the development of a discussion paper. This phase is due to be completed by mid April. The second phase will see the discussion paper itself released later that month and there will then be an opportunity for public feedback on the discussion paper until about 5 June. This feedback will then help inform final recommendations to government.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank those community, education and carer organisations who already had their input into the review by consulting on the scope

of work and, importantly, the terms of reference of the review. I encourage parents, educators and carer groups to make a submission to the review so that it reflects the widest possible spectrum of views and experience. I look forward to the final report and examining how best to continue to meet the needs of students with special needs into the future.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Porter, a supplementary question?

MS PORTER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Would the minister advise the Assembly of any community reaction of which he is aware with regard to the government taking further steps to improve the provision of education for children with special needs in ACT public schools?

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am aware of a range of views in the community in relation to this review. I am pleased to say that my office has already been contacted by a number of members of the public and carers groups looking to make a submission to the review, and I thank them for their interest and look forward to receiving their submissions. I think that this indicates that members of the public see this review as a real and positive opportunity to look at what we currently do in special education, at what works and how we can aim to improve on that fine record.

I am aware that Elizabeth Singer from the P&C association has welcomed the review and has described the review panel as a great team. I am also aware, though, of a range of other views from groups that purport to represent the community, most notably those opposite. It is unfortunate that those opposite, even on this important issue, have adopted what is now their set policy response, which is simply opposition for opposition's sake.

The shadow minister, as I have indicated earlier, was straight out of the blocks with criticism. He had nothing positive to say. It is opposition for opposition's sake, purely and utterly. That is the default position now for the Liberal Party. They have settled in. They are pretty comfortable and wearing some pretty firm grooves in the chairs and in the carpet on that side of the chamber. It is no wonder. It has been eight years, with four more to come and probably four more after that, the way they are going. It is all about opposition for opposition's sake.

We are very, very pleased to be able to continue to pursue the government's reform agenda in education. This is another plank in what is a considerable piece of work across all areas of public education provision, and also moving into other important areas of reform. As I indicated in my response earlier to Mr Doszpot's question, the focus of this review and why it has been so positively received by the community is its focus on curriculum and pedagogy. They are key and important areas in the delivery of special education—in a nutshell, what we are teaching and how we are teaching it. That is why it is so important that we are able to engage constructively with all stakeholders.

It is disappointing that the opposition have chosen the response they have. I think it does stand in marked contrast to the position put by the crossbench, who have indicated broad support for the review. I am concerned, though, that an opportunity

for the Assembly's education committee to have a look at these matters as well has been postponed and, in fact, put down the order of priorities. This was a matter that was subject to the parliamentary agreement between Labor and the Greens and a matter that I thought there was very strong support for in both parties to progress.

I am surprised that the Assembly committee of review has not commenced at this point. I have indicated that. It is disappointing that issues that perhaps look backwards rather than looking forwards have been prioritised. Nonetheless, I am optimistic that the combination of this review and the Assembly review, once it finally commences, will lead to some very positive outcomes.

Some of the issues that the Greens have raised outside the scope of the Shaddock review can and should be considered in the Assembly review, and I certainly encourage the Assembly committee, in line with the parliamentary agreement, to fast-track the review of special education. It clearly is far more important than some of the other reviews that that committee has taken on to date.

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

Papers

Mr Speaker presented the following papers:

Standing order 191—Amendments to:

Adoption Amendment Bill 2008, dated 3 March 2009.

Revenue Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 (No 2), dated 3 March 2009.

Road Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 (No 2), dated 3 March 2009.

Executive contracts

Papers and statement by minister

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Minister for Transport, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts and Heritage) (2.56): For the information of members, I present the following papers:

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

Short-term contracts:

Adrian Walsh, dated 9 February 2009.

Anthony Polinelli, dated 18 February 2009.

Craig Hooper, dated 16 December 2008.

Danielle Krajina, dated 12 February 2009.

Frank Duggan, dated 19 January 2009.

Gregory Newton, dated 20 January 2009.

James Henry, dated 20 January 2009.
Leanne Power, dated 8 January 2009.
Loretta Zamprogno, dated 23 January 2009.
Martin Hehir, dated 17 February 2009.
Penelope Farnsworth, dated 10 February 2009.
Simon Kinsmore, dated 21 January 2009.
Stephen Ryan, dated 19 December 2008.
Sue Hall, dated 21 January 2009.
Susan Northmore, dated 3 February 2009.
Tania Manuel, dated 12 February 2009.
Timothy Swift, dated 9 December 2008.
Wayne Chandler, dated 20 January 2009.

Contract variations:

Catherine Hudson, dated 20 February 2009.
Christian Sanchez, dated 27 January 2009.
David Evans, dated 9 February 2009.
Gary Williamson, dated 27 January 2009.
Geoff Bell, dated 9 February 2009.
Glenn Bain, dated 19 February 2009.
Joanne Howard, dated 22 February 2009.
Lana Junakovic, dated 4 February 2009.
Liesl Centenera, dated 20 February 2009.
Patrick McAuliffe, dated 27 November 2008.
Sandra Lambert, dated 16 February 2009.
Stephen Ryan, dated 19 January 2009.
Sue Morrell, dated 13 February 2009.
Tom Elliot, dated 11 February 2009.

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

Leave granted.

MR STANHOPE: These documents were tabled in accordance with sections 31A and 79 of the Public Sector Management Act 1994, which require the tabling of all chief executive and executive contracts and contract variations. Contracts were previously tabled on 10 February 2009. They represent 18 short-term contracts and 14 contract variations. The details of the contracts will be circulated to members.

Papers

Mr Stanhope presented the following papers:

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

Part-Time Holder of Public Office—Part-Time Presidential Member—ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal—Determination No 1 of 2009, dated 30 January 2009.

Part-Time Holders of Public Office—Part-Time Non-Presidential Members—ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal—Determination No 2, dated 30 January 2009.

Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Act, pursuant to section 7—Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Amendment Regulation 2009 (No 1)—Notifiable Instrument, dated 12 March 2009.

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 13—Annual Report 2007-2008—Land Development Agency—Independent Audit Report, prepared by the Auditor-General, dated 9 September 2008 (circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting).

Financial Management Act—instrument Paper and statement by minister

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

Financial Management Act—

Pursuant to section 16—instrument directing a transfer of appropriations from the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services to the Chief Minister's Department, including a statement of reasons.

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

Leave granted.

MS GALLAGHER: As required by the Financial Management Act 1996, I table an instrument issued under section 16 of the act. The act allows the Treasurer to authorise for a service or a function to be transferred from the entity to which the appropriation is made to another. Section 16(3) of the act requires that within three sitting days after the authorisation is given the Treasurer must present a copy of the directions in the Legislative Assembly.

Consistent with the administrative arrangement orders announced on 10 November 2008, this instrument facilitates the transfer of appropriation for the community engagement function from the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services to the Chief Minister's Department. I commend the paper to the Assembly.

Territory plan—variation No 296 Papers and statement by minister

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Children

and Young People, Minister for Planning and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation) (2.59): For the information of members, I present the following papers:

Planning and Development Act, pursuant to subsection 79(1)—approval of Variation No 296 to the Territory Plan—amendments to Water Use and Catchment General Code, dated 5 March 2009, together with background papers, a copy of the summaries and reports, and a copy of any direction or report required.

I seek leave to make a brief statement in relation to the papers.

Leave granted.

MR BARR: Draft variation No 296 to the territory plan proposes to amend the water use and catchment general code at section 11.8 of the territory plan. In 2007, the ACT government received a \$10 million grant from the commonwealth government for the national water initiative with a target to achieve a three gegalitres per annum of potable water saving by 2015.

Stormwater harvesting and reticulation projects have been identified as the most cost-effective options to develop a non-potable water supply by the CSIRO in its draft of the Canberra integrated waterways feasibility study. The water use and catchment general code identifies the purposes for which water may be used in different parts of the territory. The purpose of the changes is to enable the implementation of a range of stormwater harvesting and reticulation projects under the auspices of a national water initiative.

These approaches to water management were not envisaged when the water use policies in the territory plan were originally formulated. Draft variation 296 was released for public comment in July of 2008 and attracted three public submissions. The main issues raised in those three submissions related to the role of the Environment Protection Authority, the quality of stormwater being injected into aquifers and the impact on catchments and rivers' natural water flow due to water harvesting.

A report on consultation was prepared by the ACT Planning and Land Authority responding to the issues raised in the submissions. Under section 73 of the Planning and Development Act, I have chosen to exercise my discretion and not refer the draft variation to the planning and environment committee. I have decided this on the basis that the issues raised in public submissions have been satisfactorily responded to in the consultation report or can be resolved through ongoing consultation with key stakeholders relating to the design of subsequent stormwater harvesting and reticulation projects. The committee, however, was briefed on the variation by ACTPLA officials.

Territory plan—variation No 261 Papers and statement by minister

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Children

and Young People, Minister for Planning and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation): For the information of members, I present the following papers:

Planning and Development Act, pursuant to subsection 79(1)—Approval of Variation No 261 to the Territory Plan—Part Blocks 2 and 3 and Block 5 Section 75 Watson—changes to Commercial CZ6 Leisure and Accommodation Zone, dated 18 March 2009, together with background papers, a copy of the summaries and reports, and a copy of any direction or report required, and incorporating:

Planning and Environment—Standing Committee—Report 35—Variation to the Territory Plan No 261—Part Blocks 2 and 3 and Block 5, Section 75 Watson (Sixth Assembly)—Government response.

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

Leave granted.

MR BARR: Draft variation No 261 to the territory plan proposes to rezone part of block 2 and 3 section 75 Watson from commercial CZ6 leisure and accommodation for residential purposes—residential RZ1 suburban—as the land is considered suitable for residential development.

The majority of the land intended to be rezoned is known as the Australian Heritage Village, which was originally built as a tourist facility. Many tourist uses have been tried on the site and have failed, apart from an operating motel and petrol station which will be retained on site under the current commercial zoning.

The Australian Heritage Village would now require major refurbishment to operate as originally intended. The proponent has proposed that the site will be redeveloped as a residential development of approximately 300 dwellings and will incorporate portable housing. Part block 2 section 75 Watson is currently unleased territory land and is zoned commercial CZ6, leisure and accommodation. The ACT government has approved a direct grant of part of block 2 subject to the outcome of this territory plan variation process. This parcel will also be zoned RZ1 and is intended to be developed contiguously with the former heritage village for residential purposes.

The variation also proposes to rezone block 5 section 75 again from the commercial CZ6 leisure and accommodation zone, but this time to urban parks and recreation, PRZ1—urban open space zone—as this site contains memorial plantings and is managed by the Department of Territory and Municipal Services. This rezoning is proposed to better accommodate the existing use of the site for memorial plantings.

The draft variation was released for public comment on 12 October 2007 and attracted 433 public submissions, 408 standard letters—form letters—and 25 submissions from individuals or organisations. The main issues that were raised in the public submissions related to the loss of the Australian Heritage Village, its buildings and heritage values and the loss of related arts, community, social and tourist uses from the area. There was also more general concern expressed at the loss of land zoned for leisure and accommodation for a tourist venue on the north side.

Concerns were raised in relation to urban sustainability and the potential impacts of the proposed residential development, including impacts upon native flora and fauna, bushfire risk and protection as well as issues with the direct sale of part of block 2 section 75 adjoining the Canberra nature reserve.

There were concerns raised about infrastructure capacity, traffic impacts, visual amenity and noise resulting from the proposed residential development. Issues were also raised in relation to the affordable housing proposed and the associated social considerations. This included concerns relating to the servicing of the development in terms of access to shops, facilities and public transport.

Issues were raised in relation to the public consultation processes, perceived preferential treatment given to the developer, requirements for a preliminary assessment-environmental impact statement and alternative land use proposals.

A report on consultation was prepared by the ACT Planning and Land Authority responding to the issues raised in the submissions and a copy of that report is included with the documents I have just tabled. This consultation report responds in detail to all of the items raised in the submissions and the site has been determined as suitable for residential development.

I referred the draft variation under section 73(2) of the Planning and Development Act 2007 to the previous Legislative Assembly planning and environment standing committee. The committee tabled its report No 35 on 19 August 2008 in which it made nine recommendations, including a recommendation that the government proceed with its implementation.

The government has considered the issues that the planning and environment committee raised and prepared a government response that addresses the committee's recommendations. I will now provide a brief outline of the government's response to report No 35 of the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment. The committee's first recommendation was that the proposed variation to the territory plan No 261 proceed, subject to the recommendations below. The government has noted and agreed to that recommendation.

The committee's second recommendation was that the ACT Planning and Land Authority undertake a strategic assessment of all remaining CZ6 zones in the ACT to determine current supply. This is noted but not agreed, as ACTPLA undertook a strategic analysis of CZ6 zones in the ACT in 2006. The supply at the time was 231 hectares of which 107 hectares is unleased. This includes 52 hectares of unleased land in north Watson. The supply of unleased land in aggregate is sufficient to accommodate expected demand.

The committee's third recommendation was that future variations to CZ6 zones in the territory plan be assessed by ACTPLA at a strategic level and that consideration be given to the impact on the entire stock of CZ6 zoned areas rather than on a site by site basis. This recommendation is noted and agreed by the government.

Draft variation No 261 was assessed at a strategic level and as part of this analysis ACTPLA concluded that the loss of 6.2 hectares of leisure and accommodation-zoned land would not hinder the ability of the territory to respond to demands for tourist accommodation or attractions. It also noted that many leisure and accommodation uses can be accommodated in other zones.

The committee's fourth recommendation was that the ACT Planning and Land Authority ensure that any further loss of CZ6 zoning is compensated for elsewhere in urban Canberra, including in new greenfields development. This is noted and agreed in part. CZ6 zoned land has been incorporated in variation No 281 for Molonglo, which commenced and was incorporated into the territory plan on 12 December 2008. When determining zoning for future urban areas or rezoning land, ACTPLA will assess the projected need and demand for land uses under the CZ6 zone. It will also be considered whether leisure and accommodation-type uses would be better provided for by alternative zoning—that is, in the commercial CZ1 core or in CZ5 mixed use.

The committee's fifth recommendation was that the 2004 Navin Officer Cultural Heritage Assessment recommendations be adopted. This is noted and agreed. This will be a matter for consideration at the development assessment stage when a conservation management plan will need to be approved by the Heritage Council.

Recommendation 6 was that part blocks 2 and 3 and block 5 section 75 Watson be included in the built-up urban areas tree management precinct prior to any development work commencing on the site so that the site is covered by the provisions of the Tree Protection Act 2005. This is also noted and agreed. This site was included in a Tree Protection (Built-up Urban Areas) Declaration 2009 that was proclaimed on 16 February 2009.

The committee's seventh recommendation was that cat containment be mandatory for any new residential development bordering the Canberra Nature Park. This is noted and it is agreed that further investigation will be undertaken. The Department of Territory and Municipal Services has agreed to undertake an assessment of the north Watson development area to determine if it meets the requirements of the Domestic Animals Act 2000 and whether the minister would be justified in making a declaration of the north Watson development area as a cat containment area.

The committee's eighth recommendation was that the ACT government review current parking provisions at the Watson local centre and future parking needs. This is noted and agreed. Roads ACT and the Department of Territory and Municipal Services conducted a parking survey at the Watson local centre in 2006. A report recommended that missing signs be replaced and that unrestricted parking be converted to a two-hour parking limit. These recommendations were implemented and there have been no further complaints regarding car parking at the centre since this time.

As a result of the committee's recommendation, Roads ACT consulted traders from the Watson shops about the introduction of two-hour parking restrictions on Gwynne Street next to the shops to discourage long-term parking and improve the turnover.

There were no objections to this proposal, and accordingly Roads ACT erected two-hour limit parking signs as part of the minor new works program which was completed in the final quarter of 2008.

The committee's final recommendation was that the sewer capacity in north Watson be reassessed and upgraded if necessary. This is noted and agreed. ActewAGL indicated that the current capacity of the sewer would be able to serve the additional approximately 300 dwellings proposed for the site. It is aware that any residential expansion beyond this point will require major works to upgrade the system, and this will be scheduled into the works program when required.

I am pleased to table the government response to the planning and environment committee report No 35 on draft variation 261, and also table the variation to the territory plan and associated documents. I thank the Assembly for hearing me out.

Papers

Mr Corbell presented the following papers:

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Health Professionals Regulation—Health Professionals (ACT Nursing and Midwifery Board) Appointment 2009 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-18 (LR, 19 February 2009).

Planning and Development Act—

Planning and Development (Fees) Determination 2009 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-19 (LR, 25 February 2009).

Planning and Development Amendment Regulation 2009 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2009-3 (LR, 24 February 2009).

Planning and Development Amendment Regulation 2009 (No 2), including a regulatory impact statement—Subordinate Law SL2009-8 (LR, 20 March 2009).

Race and Sports Bookmaking Act—Race and Sports Bookmaking (Sports Bookmaking Venues) Determination 2009 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-25 (LR, 5 March 2009).

Road Transport (General) Act—Road Transport (General) (Application of Road Transport Legislation) Declaration 2009 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-20 (LR, 26 February 2009).

Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) Act—Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) Regular Route Services Maximum Fares Determination 2009 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-24 (LR, 5 March 2009).

Utilities Act—

Utilities (Electricity Feed-in Code) Determination 2009—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-23 (LR, 27 February 2009).

Utilities (Electricity Retail) Licence Conditions Direction 2009—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-21 (LR, 27 February 2009).

Planning for positive ageing Ministerial statement and paper

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Disability and Housing, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Corrections) (3.13), by leave: I present the following paper:

Planning for positive ageing—Ministerial statement, 24 March 2009.

I move:

That the Assembly takes note of the paper.

I thank colleagues on this side of the chamber, including Mrs Dunne who is now on this side of the chamber. I thank all of her friends too. As you can see, her friends are in abundance on the other side of the chamber! How sad is it to have only those few friends!

Following this year's Seniors Week celebrations, today I bring to the Assembly's attention the government's response to the ACT's ageing population. Older Canberrans are vital to our community as family members, carers, friends, neighbours, volunteer workers and consumers.

The ACT government is committed to responding to the needs of an ageing population, as reflected in the Canberra plan—towards our second century 2008. We recognise the many positive attributes of an older population, for example: increased employment opportunities, a more flexible workforce and the wide pool of volunteers available to participate in all areas of the community.

Ageing is relevant to everyone in our community and across all areas of government. Many ageing issues are interrelated and can affect the health and wellbeing of individuals. Expectations about lifestyles and services are changing as the first wave of baby boomers move into the 60-plus age group and start to retire from paid work, not unlike the Liberal Party opposite who appear to me to have retired from paid work.

To assist the government in planning for the challenges and opportunities that an ageing population brings, we are developing a strategic plan for positive ageing. This will be a whole-of-government plan which will be developed in partnership with the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, older Canberrans and other key stakeholders.

Positive ageing is about maximising the quality of older people's lives and assisting them to maintain their social networks and continue to participate in the community, also known as active ageing. The World Health Organisation defines it as "the process of optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age". The European Union has stated that "active ageing is about adjusting our life practices to the fact that we live longer and are more resourceful and in better health than ever before." It is all about seizing the opportunities offered by these improvements.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics data indicate that the ACT has one of the fastest-growing populations in Australia of people aged 60 and over. The ACT government population projections predict that from 2006 to 2016 we will see a 5.2 per cent increase in the percentage of people aged 60 and over, moving from 13.7 per cent of the total of the ACT population to 18.9 per cent. Almost one in five people in 2016 will be over the age of 60.

Mrs Dunne: That is you and I, John.

MR HARGREAVES: I can picture Mrs Dunne in 2016. What a picture!

Mrs Dunne: What about you, Johnno? Do not start that thought. You could play that all the way through the chamber.

MR HARGREAVES: I shall be looking outward from my face and not inward at it but it will be a sight to behold, let me tell you, because I will be here, in this place, in this job, in 2016.

Earlier this month I held three community forums to seek input on the strategic plan for positive ageing. The discussion at the community forums was focused on the five key areas of health and wellbeing for older Canberrans, including the impacts of disability; housing and accommodation; support services for older people; transport; and work and retirement, including ongoing employment opportunities and planning for retirement.

The feedback from these forums has proven very informative for the government. Feedback included issues and ideas about improving access to information, such as about support services, volunteering opportunities and superannuation; increasing accessible housing to allow people to continue to live relatively independently in their homes; promoting positive images of older people; supporting people to maintain health and fitness.

Mrs Dunne: That goes for you too, Johnno.

MR HARGREAVES: I can imagine no more positive image of someone over 55 than my good self. We are about supporting people to maintain health and fitness, for example, through regular exercise. Indeed, we get so much of that here, do we not? It is about supporting flexible work arrangements for older employees—which is probably why Mr Doszpot is not here; he is adopting those flexible working relationships and arrangements—and considering a range of transport issues, which is why indeed Mr Hanson is not here; he is on a train out of town.

The strategic plan will be a blueprint for action and will include measurable strategic indicators that tell us whether we are achieving our goals. Notice, if you will, Madam Assistant Speaker, who is of my party, that we have two people on the crossbench. Notice, if you will, that both of the other parties in this chamber have double the number of members that the Liberal Party has at the moment. As well as providing a pathway for action, the strategic plan will form a basis of a monitoring tool to gauge

the impact of government policies and programs on the quality of life for older Canberrans.

This strategic plan will be set within a framework of social inclusion and will be consistent with the United Nations principles for older persons, and they are: independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity. As we age, our health and wellbeing can determine the extent to which we can stay active and connected with our community. It may also have a profound effect on our general sense of happiness and contentment with life.

Increased longevity of the population is in part due to a decrease in some diseases and improved public health programs. However, as more people live longer the prevalence of many chronic diseases such as arthritis, heart disease, breathing diseases, depression, diabetes and osteoporosis will increase.

As well as the personal effect on individuals and their families, this has significant implications for our healthcare services, both in terms of costs and the availability of a healthcare workforce. Health services will need to respond to the changing health status of older people in a way that is person centred and accessible as well as being cooperative, coordinated and cost effective.

Perception of safety and the confidence it brings are important considerations for older people as they decide how and where to participate in the community. Also, as a society, we must not tolerate any abuse of older people, whether it be physical, emotional or financial abuse or by neglect. I hope you are listening to me, Mrs Dunne.

We are aware that accommodation needs and circumstances may change as people grow older. For example, non-home owners living on an age pension or on a small self-funded pension may need access to secure affordable rental housing. Some people may need their home modified to help them cope with frailty, while others might want to downsize or move to a retirement village. Many older people may prefer to remain in their existing home. If staying in your own home is not an option, many older people will still prefer to at least stay in the vicinity of an existing neighbourhood where they have established networks of friends and neighbours.

Services are important at all stages of our lives, whether it is to get our car fixed, borrow a book or see a doctor. As people grow older, they may need additional support services such as health and transport services. Older people often prefer or need services that are tailored to their changing needs, such as groups that provide programs of physical activities which are mature-age friendly. They also appreciate buildings that are accessible to them and services that come to their home, like shopping deliveries.

Access to safe, flexible and accessible transport options is a key factor in older people's ability to stay independent and actively participate in their communities. As people age, they may find that they are no longer able to drive or may choose not to. Others may lose their spouse, who was the active driver, or they may not be able to afford to maintain a private vehicle.

Meaningful activity is vital for our physical and mental health at all stages of our life, including in retirement. Increasingly, people are staying in the paid workforce past what used to be regarded as retirement age. Others may seek out voluntary community work opportunities or pursue other recreational activities.

The last Australian Bureau of Statistics survey on volunteering, in 2006, found that the ACT had the highest rate of volunteering in Australia. The main reason people volunteer is to help others and to gain personal satisfaction. They also stated a desire to help family and to do something worth while.

The ACT government acknowledges that, as in society generally, there is a great diversity amongst older people. For example, there is a wealth of diversity in lifetime experiences, countries of origin and associated cultural customs and beliefs, first language and the extent to which they can communicate in English, their relationship status and the extent to which they have family or friends. Other important areas of diversity to recognise in an ageing population are their health and disability status and their economic circumstances, especially the extent to which they are homeowners and have adequate retirement incomes.

Over the past few years the government has been actively addressing the needs of older people in the ACT and it will continue to promote the interests of older Canberrans. We appreciate the importance of hearing the views of the community on the main issues affecting older people and on what we, as a government, should be focusing on.

Submissions on the strategic plan will continue to be taken until 17 April 2009. Community input will then be collated by the ACT Office of Ageing and used to inform the development of an ACT strategic plan for positive ageing. An interdepartmental committee for positive ageing has been convened to steer this process in partnership with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing. Agencies represented on this interdepartmental committee are the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, the Chief Minister's Department, the Department of Treasury, ACT Health, the Department of Territory and Municipal Services, the Department of Justice and Community Safety, ACT Planning and Land Authority and the Canberra Institute of Technology.

The government plans to produce a draft strategic plan for positive ageing later this year for further consultation with key stakeholders. The Stanhope government is working with older people, service providers and other parties to develop comprehensive responses. We recognise that, in order to succeed in this work, we must plan. We must find new solutions to the issues so that we can not only support older people within resources but support them to age more positively, actively and meaningfully. As the years are being added to our life spans, this government is determined to add life to those years.

I would like to finish by expressing my appreciation to the officers in the Office of Ageing in guiding this process—they have done an excellent job—particularly Meredith Whitten, Pam Jenkins and Lindsay Burge. I also would like to express my

appreciation to the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing under the chairmanship of Alan Hodges AM.

This is yet another case of the government working with the community to find solutions to problems yet to emerge. I would like to see us develop the solutions into which the problems will grow, not the other way around.

Government expenditure

Discussion of matter of public importance

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

Reducing wasteful expenditure in the ACT Government.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (3.28): In the years to come, when our community in Canberra reflects upon this Stanhope-Gallagher Labor government, what will it say about its time on the government benches? Will it say that the Stanhope-Gallagher Labor government took a prudent approach to the management of the territory's finances? Sadly, the answer will be a very definite no.

When this government came to office in late 2001, it was handed a bank account with money in it. After this government came to office, it reaped the rewards of a booming economy. After this government came to office, it raked in record GST revenues. What has this government done with the spoils of that booming economy? Quite simply, it has squandered it. We, the people of the ACT, have nothing to show for the record revenues that came the way of the Stanhope government between 2002 and 2008.

The government squandered it in a multitude of ways. It squandered it on the \$5 million busway study. Had that project proceeded, it would have been a \$100 million project. What would the benefits have been? Saving bus commuters from Belconnen to Civic less than five minutes in travel time. That was wasted expenditure.

The government squandered the spoils of a booming economy on incompetent budget management of significant road infrastructure. With the GDE it gave the people of Canberra a single-lane carriageway for twice the budgeted cost of the dual-lane carriageway. Here is another example of the Stanhope-Gallagher government's wasted expenditure. Its incompetent budget management of the GDE now has us staring down the barrel of a \$20 million upgrade for Flemington Road to cope with the inadequacies of the GDE. More wasted expenditure.

We had the prospect of increasing wasted expenditure because, almost before the bitumen was dry on the GDE, the Stanhope government was forced to admit that it

had to duplicate that road—at a much, much greater cost than would have been the case if we had built the four-lane road at the outset. I recall during estimates inquiries in 2004 Mr Stefaniak and me asking questions of Roads ACT in relation to the duplication of the GDE if we went ahead with the duplication of the GDE at that stage. At that stage, to have duplicated the GDE would have added \$30 million to the budget of \$100 million that the government had already expended.

We are now in the situation where, four years down the track, the Stanhope government is going to begin this duplication of the GDE and it will cost something in the order of \$100 million—\$100 million of revenue from an unprecedented boom wasted on a road because of bad management. We have got half the road at twice the cost—and that cost is rising every day that we delay the duplication of that road, a road which should have been built and finished many years ago and which should have had four lanes. The GDE will become an icon of the shameful waste of the Stanhope government.

The Stanhope-Gallagher government has squandered the spoils of the booming economy in a range of ways, as I said. We have seen the \$50,000 temporary sign for EpiCentre. I know that governments constantly spend more and more money on signage, and we have seen that in the not-quite-stimulus package that we will be debating later in the week. The Stanhope government's preoccupation with signs is one of those things that make the average taxpayer scratch their heads. Some \$50,000 on a sign for EpiCentre!

We saw the squandering of the spoils of the booming economy when the government built a site office at Harrison at a cost of \$300,000. It should have cost \$30,000. If you ask any other developer around town that has a site office and sales office on their development, they will tell you exactly how much it will cost, and at the end of that process they will pull it down and move it on to the next place. This is not happening here. Look at Harrison and the amount of irresponsible spending that went on there. One person involved in the landscape industry told me that through the main drag of Harrison there are about 100 tree guards around trees, on street trees. Each one of those tree guards costs the ACT taxpayer \$1,000. That is \$100,000 in tree guards alone.

You have to ask what the priorities of the government are when children with disabilities are being told today by the minister that they will not see any more money to meet their needs but we can afford to spend \$300,000 on a site office and \$100,000 on tree guards. It says a great deal about the wasteful mentality—the propensity to waste—of the Stanhope-Gallagher government.

And what of the prison, a facility that has a per-bed cost that is the second highest in the country, at around \$430,000 for every individual prisoner who will be housed in that facility. That facility was opened as an election stunt on 11 September 2009. It is ironic that Canberra has its own 9/11 as well. It is a facility whose delays will be costing the Stanhope government millions of dollars. We know that, and we know that the current minister responsible has already fessed up to in excess of \$3 million in costs as a result of the delays. This is a facility that has a full complement of staff but no prisoners. This is a facility that has \$75,000 available for prisoner clothing but no prisoners to wear it.

Not only does the jail show wasted expenditure; it shows a gross mismanagement of projects which is sheer incompetence. Indeed, it reads like Canberra's very own live episode of *Yes, Minister*. We have a prison but no prisoners, because prisoners would get in the way of the efficient running of the prisons.

Then there is the extraordinary cost of the Bimberi centre. Bimberi is an important facility in the ACT, but it does leave people in the ACT scratching their heads at the per-bed cost of \$1 million. People often scratch their heads about the \$400,000-odd per-bed cost for the Alexander Maconochie Centre; but we have to remember that Bimberi costs the taxpayer twice as much—more than twice as much per bed as the AMC. At any one time there are 40 beds in that facility. It was originally proposed that that would be a \$20 million facility; then it became a \$40 million facility and eventually it became nearly a \$44 million facility. The list goes on.

In addition to that, we have to look at the Stanhope government's incapacity to collect money that is owed to it. We have seen that with the torch relay. The Chief Minister went on and on about how we would collect this money. It has now quietly gone under the radar. They have Buckley's chance of getting that money back from the commonwealth. It does leave open the question of how much money the Stanhope government will eventually receive in relation to liquidated damages in relation to the prison.

The list of wastage goes on and on. Some of the more current ones are the \$40,000 contract to deliver the "art of fun" team building training for JACS staff and another \$20,000 for "getting there first" training for JACS staff. These are the costs available on the government's website, but it does not indicate how much money was spent in transporting people to these courses and whether there needed to be fill-ins to allow people to go on courses, whether there was overtime available et cetera.

Over the last eight years, this government has had a record of behaviour which has caused morale at JACS to plummet. It has made substantial changes to JACS. When we have got to the absolute nadir of morale in the department, we come along and we have team building exercises as a means of turning around the morale in a department which has been diminished substantially by the work of the Stanhope-Gallagher government.

And can we forget the waste of public moneys on the Grassby statue or the poorly targeted per cent for art scheme, which, as we all know, is not even targeted towards ACT artists. I spend a lot of time—and it is a great privilege for me—going around the arts community and attending galleries and artistic events around the place. The per cent for art scheme is a constant topic of conversation. The criticisms of it centre on two things: that the per cent for art scheme is only for public art—so there is nothing for theatre, nothing for dance and nothing for the written word—and the fact that it does not in any way support Canberra artists. Many of the pieces that have been bought through the public arts scheme are off-the-shelf pieces from overseas or interstate artists. This is something that the people of the ACT object to very strongly. In addition to the dubious taste of some of the items put up, there is the sheer waste of money and the fact that that money is directed away from the ACT.

It is worth touching on the government's financial management policy in relation to major projects. A policy of a prudent government would be one of generational funding for major projects. This means that projects would be funded and paid for over the economic life span of those projects so as to avoid financial strain on individual budget cycles.

Contrast this with the government's approach when it asked Actew Corporation to pay for three major water infrastructure projects from its reserves at a total cost of \$300 million. Lumping the present generation with a funding shortfall of such magnitude does two things. Firstly, it is unfair and discriminatory against the current generation, who are now expected to fund infrastructure for many, many future generations. Secondly, it leaves Actew with reduced reserves—a doubtful financial management strategy for an organisation of its nature—and therefore leaves the current generation with reduced means for meeting other more immediate needs such as major repairs or maintenance projects that may be required.

I now ask: what is it that allowed the Stanhope-Gallagher government to squander the spoils of a booming economy? Is there anything that the government has done to create this booming economy? The answer is no. The booming economy that the ACT experienced up until late last year was on the back of a booming economy nationally. This is demonstrated by the growth in GST funding enjoyed by this government. In 2007-08, GST funding for the ACT was some \$856 million, almost one-third of the entire budget income. This has grown by \$250 million since 2002-03. In fact, the average increase in GST funding enjoyed by the Stanhope-Gallagher Labor government since 2003 has been \$43 million—\$43 million a year in unexpected revenues which this government has wastefully squandered.

The bottom line is that this Stanhope-Gallagher Labor government's finances have been propped up for year after year by the effects of a booming GST revenue base as a result of prudent federal government policies. There is nothing that the Stanhope-Gallagher government has done to create the boom in the ACT economy. It seems that now it is standing back and watching helplessly as the economy goes into reverse.

What else could the Stanhope government have done? They have utterly failed to broaden the economic base. They constantly bemoan the narrowness of the ACT's economic base and its limited capacity to raise revenue. What happened when the government was presented with the opportunity—(*Time expired.*)

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Treasurer, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Services and Minister for Women) (3.43): What we have just heard is the usual 15 minutes from the opposition trying to argue a case that this government is symbolised by and judged on its record waste, enjoying the boom times and not making provision for the down times. I think this is an argument that, no doubt, we are going to hear for the next four years from the opposition as they continually suffer from relevance deprivation syndrome over on the opposition benches.

The question that is constantly put by the opposition is: what have they done with it? Then we get the series of projects that they rattle off: \$50,000 for a sign, \$300,000 for

a site office, \$1,000 per tree guard. Then they start: what about students with a disability? Why have they missed out?

Mrs Dunne: Good question.

MS GALLAGHER: Mrs Dunne, I would challenge you then to go back and have a look at budgets where we invested more than any other government in special education. We are not talking \$100,000 here, which is how you link the two. The \$1,000 tree guards you then link to special education. Special education services do not cost \$100,000; they cost millions of dollars. In two budgets that I distinctly remember, we increased the special education budget by \$4 million. There is no mention of that, is there, in balancing out the opposition's attack.

There is this crazy scenario that Bimberi costs \$1 million per bed. To run that argument, you would have to say that, over the life of that building, only 40 children will live in that, which is a ludicrous argument to run. It is a 40-bed facility and it cost \$40 million; therefore the opposition have got their calculator out and it obviously costs \$1 million per bed. How ridiculous, and you know it! So you stop counting once the 40 children have been through it, which they already would have been.

We then go to staff training in JACS, \$20,000 and \$40,000. We can all get petty here and nitpick and go through individual agency lines. We can do the same thing with you guys. We can have a look at all that wonderful media training that a group of you went on a couple of years ago and we can add that up. Maybe that was a waste. Obviously it was. You did not win the election and your media performance certainly did not help. Come on! Let us go through it line by line. You can pick out a little project and make fun of it.

Then we have got Mr Smyth going on about stationery. Certainly in my office—and Mr Hanson will probably come in at No 2—the FOIs that you would receive would be a large contributor to stationery costs in the ACT public service. We are more than happy to stop photocopying for that. That would be a sizeable saving. I can see it now in the budget: FOI savings from the ACT opposition. They are going to stop putting in their monthly requests that give them hundreds of pages of paper which no doubt they turf in the bin after they have put out their standard media release.

Let us go to the issue of the savings that we in this government have implemented and let us go back to the functional review. You guys opposed every single one of them. Every single one of those savings measures that we introduced in the budget off the back of a review of government services, you objected to—\$100 million worth of savings built into agency budgets. I know this, because I manage two departments that have savings built into their budget. Where were you then championing the savings measures that this government introduced? There were bigger savings measures than finding a few reams of paper—\$100 million factored into the forward estimates—which are still delivering. The opposition at the time objected to all of them.

Then the question, interesting in its omission from Mrs Dunne's speech, was: what has the government done with it? We have doubled health expenditure. That seems like a pretty good place to put a fair bit of money—more than \$44 million a year, which is the GST boom that we have been receiving.

We have put more money into education. Here is one that is strange to the opposition: we have paid reasonable wages to our staff. We did not factor one per cent into the budget for our nurses. We have actually factored in reasonable pay outcomes for public servants as part of our premium financial management of the territory's budget.

Millions and millions of dollars have gone into child protection. There is no complaint about that from the opposition, I do not think. Millions have gone into disability services. That is waste, is it? Child protection is waste; disability is waste. What is it, good money after bad? Disability services, child protection, doubling health, that is all wasted public finances. I do not think so.

We have increased indexation to the community sector. Is that wasted too? I imagine anyone could go through and find little things that they object to—a \$50,000 sign that they object to.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sit down, Mrs Dunne. I have just stopped the clock. I noticed that, while Mrs Dunne was speaking, she spoke without interruption for perhaps most of the time. There has been nothing but comment and interruption from the opposition benches since Ms Gallagher has had the floor. Ms Gallagher has the floor, in case you had not noticed, and she will continue to have the floor for the next nine minutes. I wish for you to be silent. Thank you.

MS GALLAGHER: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will assist by directing my comments through you.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you.

MS GALLAGHER: This government is very proud of the record investments that we have made in education, in health, in addressing neglect in services to vulnerable members of our community. I challenge the opposition—and I do not think they can; they can give indications of \$20,000 staff training that they object to and \$1,000 tree guards—when you actually look at 95 per cent of the increases in expenditure and where it has gone, to state whether they object to it. Do they object to the hospital beds that are staffed hospital beds, teachers, police? We know what they think of the prison.

Mr Hanson: If you look at 95 per cent, it is okay.

MS GALLAGHER: Well, 95 per cent of the increased revenue is significant amounts of money and it has gone—

Mr Hanson: Five per cent wasted.

MS GALLAGHER: I am not saying that, Mr Hanson. I am going to ignore that. But it goes into areas that they never talk about. It is all very easy to talk about administration services, the Land Development Agency and things like that—the core attention grabbers for the opposition—but, when you look at what the ACT government delivers in terms of health, education, community safety, community

services, there is nothing from those opposite. They do not address those areas because they actually know that that increased expenditure into those areas is very worth while and they cannot object to it; so they play the small line. They go and find the things that are going to get them the political headline and that they can run a case against—waste and neglect.

Yet, when you actually look at the argument on its merits and you look at the savings that we have imposed—\$100 million worth of savings into agencies' budgets since 2006—they object to those as well; so they cannot have it both ways. You cannot object to built-in savings measures to make sure that we run the most efficient and the most effective public sector that we can.

There is always room for improvement. And we are constantly looking at ways to improve the efficiency of our public services. If you take health as an example, several years ago health costs were running at 130 per cent of the Australian average. They are now down to around 110 per cent and coming down further. That is a 20 per cent improvement in efficiency over the last four years, and that is pretty significant when a third of your budget is your health budget. That is the kind of area we are focused on, making sure that we manage our resources most efficiently.

I am not saying that we do not look to other areas of government to continue to make sure that we are targeting our dollars into the best place. We will do that and we continue to do that in the budget. In terms of this year, in terms of the challenges that the Australian economy faces, perhaps it is more relevant than ever that we make sure that every cent of government expenditure is targeted to the area where it is going to deliver the most for the community. And we do that. We do that as part of our budget and we do that as part of our job, mindful of the role that the ACT government plays in the ACT economy.

I have gone to this: we are always looking for room for improvement but we are also committed to delivering high-quality public services. And that means investing in community services, investing in health, investing in education, investing in community services and investing in our assets, more across the board. If that involves signs and some tree guards that yes, become political footballs because of the attention and the headlines they can grab, then we will continue to do those things because it is important that we do them for the community.

We have some significant challenges ahead in terms of this budget. I am not sure what the position of the opposition is in terms of what they expect to see. They seem to be running different lines: more money here but we have got to run savings and efficiencies in other areas. I am not actually sure what type of budget they would have brought down had they won the last election but we are very mindful of the fact that during difficult times such as this it is the responsibility of government to invest but to target that investment and make sure that that investment delivers for the community, not only in the short term but in the long term. And that is what we have been trying to do with our third appropriation and it is what we will do with the ACT budget as well.

We look forward to the opposition's new-found support for the efficiency savings that we have implemented over the past two years and that are built into agencies' budgets.

We will continue to look at efficiencies across the public service, as we do. But we are very mindful of our responsibilities to provide a very solid response to the issues that the ACT economy is facing in this, our first budget of our new term in government.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (3.56): It is a pleasure to come and speak. I had not planned to speak so early but I did feel that, in response to Ms Gallagher's commentary, it was worth putting a few things on the record. We heard the classic argument from Katy Gallagher just then: it is not about what we do with the money, it is about how much money we spend. That is the essential argument put forward by the Treasurer here today. It is: "We've spent hundreds of millions on health, therefore, we have done a good job in health. If we spend hundreds of millions in education, we have done a good job in education." But we actually see—

Ms Gallagher: You stand up and say that when you provided the worst service ever in the health system.

MR SESELJA: It is difficult. I know it is hard for the Treasurer but the reality is that a number of the key indicators have been going backwards. The reality is that that is a fact—a number of the key indicators, particularly waiting times, have been going backwards. We hear always about how much money is being spent but we do not hear from this Treasurer and from the government in general about what are the improved outcomes as a result of the investment. Part of the reason is that they rarely target the spending as well as they should.

It is the most simplistic and basic argument to say, "We're spending more on education than anyone ever has and we're spending more on health than anyone ever has." The budget is 60 per cent bigger than it was when they came to office. They are getting more revenue. The economy has grown. Of course, the budget has grown faster than the economy but that is a story for another day. It is a ridiculous argument to use that as a measure of success. By that measure, virtually every government would be better than the one before. Whenever more tax is received over time, that is therefore better. That is a ridiculous argument. It is a simplistic argument, and it does not actually go to the point of the matter of public importance brought forward by Mrs Dunne today. I thank her for bringing this forward, because it is an important issue.

The Treasurer's rhetoric has changed somewhat but we did hear rhetoric from her early on in her time as Treasurer essentially implying that in a slowing economy any government expenditure is good. It does not matter whether it is targeted; it does not matter what it actually achieves; any spending is good because it stimulates the economy. That is simply not true. That has been the very strong implication in some of the Treasurer's comments, particularly those made before Christmas. Presumably after that time there was some further advice from Treasury saying, "Actually, not all government spending is as effective as other government spending in stimulating the economy, and not every dollar of extra government spending is worth doing." Of course, if that were the case, we would just keep increasing budgets. That would be the answer to every economic question. We would increase taxes; we would increase spending; and that would be how we ensure that things remain stimulated. That is simply not the case.

When going into a budget which we know will be in deficit going forward, I think it is critically important that we as community and we as an Assembly actually cut through the spin. We know what Katy's argument is going to be when she delivers her budget in May. We know that; we can write the lines now. It will be this: it is not our fault; the problem is the global financial crisis and the problem is the commonwealth.

Ms Gallagher: That's all rubbish, is it, Zed? Is it?

MR SESELJA: If I can finish. We are on the record as saying—and I will say it again just to make it clear for the Treasurer—that the slowing of the world economy will have an effect on the ACT. Commonwealth spending will have an effect on the ACT. All of these things play a part. But people did not elect the Labor Party so that they could say, "It's not our fault. We're not responsible." There are plenty of things that this government is responsible for.

When we hear the cries that this budget deficit and this recession are not the fault of this government, first, we need to say that, yes, there are external factors that will play a part. But the question is: what are you doing in your backyard to try to protect the economy? What are you doing in terms of how you spend money? For every dollar you spend that is not targeted, that does not deliver the core services, that does not serve to stimulate the economy, that is money that cannot be given back to the community in tax cuts and cannot be provided in stimulus.

These are simply budgetary matters but we are not going to allow this government to simply blame external factors. Yes, the external factors are there. Yes, they will play a part. We all understand and acknowledge that.

Ms Gallagher: How much, Zed? How much do they play a part?

MR SESELJA: If we are to accept the logic of the Chief Minister, then nothing the ACT government does matters. We heard him on WIN news saying no decisions his government has taken have led to the budget being in deficit. It is an outlandish claim. This government has wasted money, and Mrs Dunne has gone through some of the litany and we will go through more of it. There are significant savings. Of course, when we proposed savings during the election campaign all we heard—

Ms Gallagher: Two hundred jobs gone.

MR SESELJA: That is not what Treasury said.

Ms Gallagher: Say that outside.

MR SESELJA: It is interesting that she likes to contradict the Treasury modelling. If the Treasury believed that there were job cuts as a result of those savings, there would have been money for redundancies. That has to be factored in. That would have been factored in but it was not because there were not any cuts and there were not any redundancies. They did not have money for redundancies.

But, getting beyond that, apparently they have made all sorts of savings. And what Katy Gallagher has said is that the efficiencies have gone as far as they can; therefore, any further efficiencies are bad and any further efficiencies put forward by the opposition will lead to job cuts. We heard ridiculous claims. Remember that we heard from the Chief Minister that it was going to kill Christmas, it was going to kill Kenny Koala and the kangaroos would run wild. The claims were outlandish.

Of course, we should take a moment to reflect, though, on the credibility of what this government has said on economics. Remember we had the “It’s a fact” document. It was apparently produced by Treasury but I would not assign blame for that document to Treasury. I put the blame for that document on Jon Stanhope and his office. There is no doubt that they gave the wrong information to Treasury.

I think Treasury does a reasonable job; it does a fairly good job on modelling and on being able to count. Clearly, the same cannot be said of the former Treasurer, who came out with a document that claimed the election commitments would put us into the red by hundreds of millions of dollars and Jon Stanhope was going to keep us in surplus. But, of course, we know it is a promise he never intended to keep, and one of the reasons for that is that they simply cannot keep control over spending.

One of the things that the Treasurer is going to have to do when she delivers this budget—apart from blaming everyone else—is: when we get to the point of which bits she actually controls, which bits this government actually controls, she is going to have to say why it is not important to cut advertising in the LDA so that you can target spending in education or in health. She will have to explain why Actew’s spending should not be looked at and why certain parts of the Chief Minister’s Department, particularly central agency functions, need to be growing as fast as they are in the outyears at the expense of other more important priorities or at the expense, indeed, of a far bigger budget deficit. These are the things that this Treasurer will have to explain. She will have to explain why some of these basic savings could not be made.

We can go through the millions for public artwork. We can look at some of the budget blow-outs, with the way that capital works have been treated. Indeed, looking more broadly than even the budget, we can look at economic management. We can look, for instance, at planning and how much is delayed in the system currently as a result of a dysfunctional planning system. That not only leads to less economic activity but, of course, it then leads to less revenue coming to government over time because there is not the economic activity to underpin it, and so fewer taxes will actually be collected because they are stifling activity. These are the questions that the Treasurer will have to answer. She is not going to be able to hide behind global circumstances and commonwealth spending.

We know that there are challenges out there. But people elect members of the ACT parliament to act in the best interests of all Canberrans and not to look for excuses as to what they cannot do and why they are responsible for absolutely nothing.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (4.06): The ACT Greens consider the ACT government has a significant part to play in making

the ACT sustainable and, as such, can accelerate the process by being an example for other governments to follow. We see initiatives such as reducing the use of paper, waste production, water usage and greenhouse gas emissions as key elements in our aim of greening our government.

Rather than concentrate on examples of waste that with proper management can be eliminated, the ACT Greens have three key areas which will produce long-term savings. The first of these is the retrofitting of energy and water efficiency technologies into buildings owned by the ACT government and working with landlords to retrofit these technologies in buildings leased by the ACT government.

The second involves purchasing 100 per cent of ACT government electricity from renewable sources such as wind and solar generation. Along with these initiatives, there is a need to develop strong, sustainable procurement guidelines covering all ACT government decisions. We have no doubt that, if you look hard enough in any organisation, you will find areas where improvements could be made in relation to expenditure.

Areas within the ACT government do need to come under proper scrutiny in this regard, and we urge the government to pay close attention to this. The Greens expect that those responsible for heading departments would, when preparing budgets, be mindful of curbing unnecessary expenditure. We also expect that in developing the upcoming budget the ACT government, particularly in these difficult economic times, would be considering ways of reducing expenditure to only essential items and eliminating items which fall into the category of “nice to have but not essential”.

In relation to some government bodies, we acknowledge that it appears public funds have not been used as appropriately as they should have been. Totalcare and Rhodium are good examples of this. In committee hearings and through questions on notice, we have asked those responsible for these government bodies for explanations on any expenditure which appeared to be excessive or inappropriate. We feel the committees and detailed questions on notice present the best opportunity to query what appears to be wasteful expenditure.

While it must be an active function of government to closely monitor expenditure within the public service, the ACT public service is quite streamlined in comparison to other state public service bodies in terms of numbers and is under constant threat of losing staff to the commonwealth. We know that, at this time, ACT public servants are under additional pressure to quickly deliver aspects of the Rudd government’s nation building and jobs plan. This is in addition to the elements of the second appropriation bill and the third appropriation bill, if passed.

In conclusion, the ACT Greens support the need to reduce any wasteful expenditure when identified. We would like to see the ACT government work towards the greening of government, as I outlined, by adopting greener measures to ensure a reduced ecological footprint and a better bottom line.

MS BURCH (Brindabella) (4.09): This afternoon the Treasurer outlined the government’s achievement in improving the efficiency of services and making record investments in health, education and other important services. Of course, listing all

these achievements within the time is not permissible but I will make note of some prominent matters.

One thing the government cannot be accused of is being wasteful; it is the opposite of being wasteful. This government has delivered structural reform to the ACT budget, has made government service delivery more efficient and has invested in the future.

The opposition could learn a lesson from this government's investment in education. This government has addressed longstanding inefficiencies in the delivery of education services in the ACT. It has reduced waste, while at the same time it has increased its investment in education. This government has committed to providing—

Members interjecting—

MS BURCH: The cross-dialogue is somewhat distracting—please. This government has committed to providing high-quality education for all students in the territory, no matter what their background or where they live. Committing to high-quality education for all, rather than almost all, is not wasteful or inefficient; it is fair, it is decent and it is a prudent investment in Canberra's future.

Education is one of the most important foundations for building a better city and a stronger community. Quality education is an investment in the future prosperity of our community. This government has invested more than \$350 million in building new and upgrading public schools, invested more than \$200 million in improving teacher quality, raised teachers pay by between 39 per cent and 60 per cent since being elected, introduced lower class sizes for children K-3, invested \$15 million to establish four new early childhood schools, committed an additional \$3.3 million to a suite of strategies designed to improve the literacy and numeracy of Indigenous students and increased funding to non-government schools by over 35 per cent since being elected. I wonder what the opposition would term as wasteful in this significant investment. Would it be the \$200 million for improving teacher quality? Could it be the \$3.3 million for improving literacy and numeracy for our Indigenous children?

The reality is that this government is the opposite of wasteful. This government has improved the efficiency of services in the ACT and has been able to increase investment in education, health and other important areas.

Health is another area where this government has improved performance and increased investment. I note Mr Smyth's recent media release—his wasteful media release—that did not go anywhere near the government's investment in health and education. Rather, his media release—his important thought for the week—attempted to attack justice and community safety. It was an unjust attack. This government has undertaken significant law reform across a wide range of policy areas. Through these reforms, this government has ensured more equitable access to justice and removed discrimination. This government has strengthened the ACT human rights framework and it has achieved tort reform and the reform of numerous areas of criminal law. Such reform is far from wasteful. Such reform is hard work and time consuming but it is certainly not wasteful, yet the opposition would begrudge investment in staff development for justice and community safety.

This government is focused on delivering services to the community with a staff that is equipped to do so. This government will not resort to false economies such as in training for our public service. The government is not about sifting through rubbish bins looking for half-used biros or unused paperclips. We will use the opposition to do that.

I make note that Mrs Dunne raised the issue of public art, which she described as a waste of money. Only yesterday, I was talking to members of a group of Civic centre businesses; they applauded the government for its investment in public art. It just goes to show that one cannot account for taste.

As a committee member on the recent review of annual reports, I would like to highlight the tremendous job done by the various departments and agencies. The work and the programs being delivered were not a display of waste. Rather, they were a display of effective services and work practices. I commend the people involved in delivering those services. And on the matter of paper usage, I note with concern that those opposite indeed have a problem with the amount of paper being used. Perhaps that explains why their policy platform was so thin during the last election. Perhaps they did not want to use the paper.

I will make note of Ms Hunter's call for retrofitting energy and water saving units in government facilities.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms Gallagher: You only come down and make jokes. Just go back. I'm sure there's someone waiting for you.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Smyth: It keeps us entertained.

Ms Gallagher: I know; I can see that. It's your own little team-building exercise, is it, a happy camp over there?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Ms Gallagher, Ms Burch has the floor. Can we stop this dialogue across the room? Mr Seselja. Mr Smyth.

MS BURCH: I note Ms Hunter's call for retrofitting energy and water saving devices in government facilities and I note that the third appropriation is allocating over a million dollars for ecologically sustainable development upgrades in schools. That is not wasteful; that is forward thinking and a good use of resources.

This government is about rebuilding our health infrastructure for the next decade and beyond. This government will continue to develop an education system that we need now and into the future. This government is mindful that it has been entrusted by the taxpayers of the ACT with their money. The government's record on improving the efficiencies of its operations is unparalleled; the government will continue to deliver

the best value for money. The reality is that this government is an efficient government and it is investing in Canberra's future.

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (4.16): Like all members of the Assembly, I want to reduce wasteful expenditure in the ACT government. What I and the Greens would like to see is sustainable expenditure which addresses triple bottom-line issues. I am glad to hear the support of the opposition for this. I would like to talk about some areas of expenditure. Ms Hunter has already spoken on some areas which the Greens would regard as non-wasteful expenditure. I will start off by referring to cycleways. Mrs Dunne mentioned cycleways as an example of wasteful expenditure.

Mrs Dunne: No. I am sure the word "cycleway" did not actually—

MS LE COUTEUR: I am afraid that is what I heard, but I am very glad to hear that the opposition does not regard cycleways as—

Mr Smyth: We had a better cycleways policy. It was in our policy.

MS LE COUTEUR: Great.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Ms Le Couteur, address your comments through me.

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair; I will continue. The issue I would like to talk about next is energy use. As members may remember from my maiden speech, in my previous job I was an IT manager, so I will start speaking about green IT as an example that I know something about.

The ACT government could use thin client machines rather than PCs. Thin client machines are machines that have just enough intelligence on them to run what is needed. You are probably all familiar with them in effect: if you log on from home using a Citrix terminal facility, which I imagine most of us do, you are effectively having a thin client computing experience. Thin client machines cost a lot less money to buy than a full PC and they use a lot less energy. They use about 10 watts versus about 70 watts. They also save considerable money on maintenance, because there is basically no intelligence down at the client end. If any problems occur, you just put a new image on the computer and you do not require the Richards or Deans of this world to come and fix it for you.

Getting a little bit more technical in the computing line, one of the things the ACT government also could do more of is what is called virtualising servers. Instead of having separate physical computer boxes for each application, as it were—each server—modern technology allows you to have multiple servers in one physical server. It is called virtualised machines. This is an area where I believe the ACT government has made small steps, but not yet big steps. Again, this is an area where you save money and you save electricity—and you save greenhouse gases because you are saving the electricity.

Another IT example is in printing. It would be very easy to set all the printers in the ACT government to print double sided by default.

In the Assembly, another simple one which would not only save money but also save annoyance would be to get rid of the fax machines. All they produce is ads from Dell or from people I do not particularly have any need to correspond with. We would save paper and we would save electricity, because they are on all the time. The few faxes that we wanted to get we would have electronically, which for people like me would be easier to refer to in the future.

Another area I will move onto is efficiency of buildings. Ms Hunter talked about that briefly. We have in front of us the report of the standing committee on climate change and energy. They quote the Australian National Audit Office from 2009 as saying:

... significant emissions and cost savings can be delivered through sustainability reforms in the building sector ...

We are about to demonstrate that with the third appropriation. Members may remember that one of the significant expenditures in this—and I say significant because it is going to be spent on the building which we are all inhabitants of—is replacement of the chiller unit. The PAC report said that the Acting Speaker advised the PAC that an audit:

... estimated that a replacement unit could reduce chiller energy consumption by about 33 per cent or 10 per cent of the building's total annual electricity consumption.

The report continued:

This would equate to a saving of 120 tonnes of CO₂ and \$15,000 per year.

Currently we have an example of wasteful expenditure but we will shortly, hopefully, have an example of less wasteful expenditure. This is just a small example of the things that could be done in the area of green buildings and green government buildings.

Again drawing back on my previous experience, I was one of the directors of Australian Ethical Investment, which is a medium-sized company based in Canberra, now based in Bruce. When we moved to Bruce, we refurbished our building. We did not have any excess money, so we did not do this as a showpiece so much as do something which would be both environmentally and economically sustainable. For the cost of a normal refurbishment of a building, we moved the building up to six green stars. Compared to the previous energy use in that building, we reduced energy by 75 per cent, and we reduced CO₂ emissions by about the same amount. And we did this for the normal cost of refurbishment.

Basically what we did was spend the money on double-glazing and a more intelligent building management service instead of putting a lift between our two floors. I point this out to show that some of the expenditure of the government currently is wasteful. It could be improved. We need to invest our money in improving the ACT government's building stock, which in the long term will lead to reduction of waste, saving of CO₂ emissions and saving of finances.

Another example I would like to look at is in building construction areas. One thing that has been brought to my attention fairly recently is the red granite that is being mined from the quarry in Ginninderra. This is the red granite that we see commonly around Canberra. It is on nature strips and it is in public buildings such as Calthorpes House, Lanyon Homestead and the High Court. One of the results of this is that it impacts quite negatively on Ginninderra Creek and the catchment area. There is heavy machinery which is used to mine this granite and then the trenches are refilled with crushed concrete, which is all a bit bizarre when in many cases this crushed concrete or crushed brick could be used as the gravel material in the ACT.

I speak again with experience; I have crushed red bricks in the gravel path in my household. Has the government considered alternative, less wasteful sources for its gravel needs? If we were to use the crushed red brick, it would be recycled products; it would be local expenditure; it would have the same purpose without the environmental impact.

In conclusion, I would like to say that we should be looking at all of our expenditure to see whether it is wasteful expenditure. Does it waste water? Does it waste energy? Does it waste natural resources? Does it waste the time of our public servants? Does it waste and pollute our natural parks? Does it waste the time of ACT citizens? I look forward to the government examining all of its expenditure in light of long-term sustainability and thus reducing wasteful expenditure.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (4.25): The would-be Chief Minister and Treasurer retreats from the chamber. Ms Gallagher said we spend more than any other government. She is right—because you get more money than any other government. No budget ever goes back. There is this argument about inputs—“We have put more money into every issue”—but there was no issue where the Treasurer walked to this place and said, “This is where we achieved a better outcome.” That is how you reduce waste. If you want to spend more, that is fine, but make sure you get more for it. And before you spend more, also make sure that you have got the sustainability in your economy to ensure that you can get it year after year. Otherwise, it is not efficient.

Ms Gallagher described the opposition as petty and nitpicking. She said, “On paper you are wasting all that paper in those FOI requests.” The only reason that there are FOI requests is that the government refuses to share the information—information that former governments willingly put on the table. Whether it was capital works records or monthly hospital figure updates, it was freely given in this place on a regular basis. This is the government that shut down scrutiny after saying they would be more honest, more open and more accountable. Do not blame us for holding you accountable; if you are sure of what you do, put these reports on the table.

One notable waste of money that we have not discussed yet is the hospital pay parking. This is probably the only government or organisation in the Western world that ran pay parking at a loss. They lost money on the hospital pay parking scheme and at the same time caused immense grief to people visiting loved ones in the hospital. Absolutely shameful!

It goes on and on. What we have from this government is wasteful measure after wasteful measure, particularly in the way they deliver new initiatives.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: The time for this discussion has expired.

Adjournment

Motion by **Mr Hargreaves** proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Catholic Schools Week

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (4.28): Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the great pleasures in having been elected to the Legislative Assembly is the opportunity to meet an incredible cross-section of our community, especially in my shadow portfolio areas of disability, sport and recreation, multicultural affairs and, of course, education and training. Indeed, I am looking forward to meeting finally in the next few weeks with the principal of the new Kingsford Smith school in Holt.

It was my great pleasure this morning, at the invitation of school principal Mr David Austin, to attend a community breakfast at St Michael's primary school in Kaleen in honour of Catholic Schools Week. I would also like to acknowledge the presence at the celebration at St Michael's of Ms Moira Nadjeki, Director of the Catholic Education Office, and Mr Mark Hogan, Deputy Director of the Catholic Education Office. Also, it was good to see a very good representation from parliamentary colleagues at St Michael's, including the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Zed Seselja, and the Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope. Senator Gary Humphries and the Hon Bob McMullan were also there, along with many other representatives of the community. David Austin was proud to relate the history of St Michael's, including that it is in its 27th year, after opening in 1982, and that it currently has 212 students from 145 families.

Catholic Schools Week is celebrated every year across the nation and is a great way to celebrate the important part that Catholic schools play in and the contribution they make to our communities. Across the ACT this week Catholic schools will all be participating in their own individual ways, with events ranging from concerts and performances to fundraising activities and open days which showcase what the Catholic schools have to offer.

The theme of Catholic Schools Week this year is "youth in action". David Austin, principal of St Michael's, welcomed the week as an opportunity to strengthen relationships between all who have an interest in Catholic schools—students, staff, families, parish members and the wider community.

There are 55 Catholic schools across the Canberra-Goulburn archdiocese. The Catholic Education Office website tells us:

Catholic schools seek to contribute to the creation of an Australian community that is highly educated, skilled and cultured with an ability to promote and embrace a critical analysis of social issues, the expansion of knowledge and the pursuit of truth. Such a community will be marked by vigorous intellectual and cultural life accessible to all. Education has individual and private benefits, but it is also very much a public good whose benefits enhance the whole community. Catholic schools emphasise the contribution of education to the common good of the Australian community.

I was also impressed with the information that Ms Nadjecki, the Director of the Catholic Education Office, presented in her speech this morning. She said:

This week provides an opportunity for Catholic schools to showcase what is done every day in their classrooms and playgrounds and to invite the community in to experience teaching and learning at its best.

On our website I found listed the following events for the week

Amaroo, ACT—Good Shepherd Primary School

We are staging a challenge between representatives of the Brumbies, Raiders and Capitals and students from Good Shepherd and Holy Spirit. The challenge will involve some physical tasks ... Holy Trinity—CURTIN Literacy Rotations ... St Benedict's—NARRABUNDAH Religious Education in action ... St Jude's—HOLDER Movie making

Rosary—WATSON Teaching for sustainability—energy efficient schooling—grassroots projects.

I must say that, for all of the information that we received about Catholic education and about education in particular, it was a shame that the Minister for Education and Training, Mr Andrew Barr, was not amongst those who attended the breakfast. I am sure his presence would have been gratefully welcomed by this vibrant Kaleen school community. I look forward to broad ranging discussions with public, independent and Catholic schools alike. I remain keen to build my knowledge of all aspects of the education and training sector in the ACT.

Mr Barr, in his inimitable sarcastic style, has developed a monologue that is becoming boring and sadly mischievous, with assertions that I am there for the afternoon tea when I seek briefings and visit public schools. I would like to reiterate for Mr Barr's benefit that there will be plenty of scones and cakes left for him, as I do not share his passion for confectionery. The only thing I would like to share with him is the opportunity to learn my trade as shadow minister for all of ACT education and my genuine desire to have a better firsthand knowledge of the challenges faced and the needs of the whole of the ACT education sector within my portfolio responsibilities. Hopefully my visit to the Kingsford Smith school on 9 April will be the first of many such visits to public schools across the ACT.

Charnwood carnival

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (4.33): On the weekend I attended the “charny carny”. I know Mr Coe was there. I am not quite sure if any other of my Assembly colleagues

was there. The “charny carny” has been going now for quite some considerable number of years and has grown in strength and the numbers of people that attend and the activities that are held during the whole day. It was a very warm day, which might have discouraged some people to come, but that was not the case. There were large numbers of people there, in particular large numbers of families enjoying the day. In fact, it was very difficult to find a car park when we arrived.

I would like to put on the record my thanks to the community groups that actually get together every year to put together this wonderful program, and I mention in particular Michael Pilbrow and all those people that help him as volunteers. I would like to thank the public and primary schools for the way they engaged in the “charny carny” and also, of course, the neighbourhood churches, the Belconnen Community Service, the Charnwood community health committee and the people that run the various food stalls. Emergency Services and the police always attend, much to the delight of the children, of course, and first aid workers also attend should there be an unfortunate incident where someone is injured or becomes sick at the carnival.

I was very impressed by the children’s artwork and the children’s school bands and jazz bands that were there. They always have a lot of fun competitions. Everyone is able to join in and it is a lovely family day. I would like to congratulate—

Mrs Dunne: It is a shame about the “charny idol”, though.

MS PORTER: Mrs Dunne may be bemoaning the demise of some of the competitions; I am not quite sure from that interjection. I know that they used to have a mullet competition. I think that that one might have disappeared. But there is certainly a lot of activity on the day and I was very, very pleased to be able to attend once again. I wish them well for their plans for next year.

Charnwood carnival

MR COE (Ginninderra) (4.35): Last Saturday I had the pleasure of attending the “charny carny”—the Charnwood community carnival. The “charny carny” is a great example of what can be achieved when the community comes together in a spirit of cooperation and goodwill. The “charny carny”, as I am sure many members will be aware, came about because parents realised that by working together they could raise more money for their three groups—the Charnwood-Dunlop primary school, St Thomas Aquinas primary school and the Mount Rogers scout group. I acknowledge John Burke from the St Thomas Aquinas school and Frankie Dowling from the Charnwood-Dunlop primary school for their leadership.

The community has worked together to put on a great carnival that includes musical entertainment, market stalls, carnival rides, scouting activities, RAAF balloon rides and food stalls. By combining together to create this carnival, the community has been able to raise much more money than would otherwise be the case. Through raising this money the schools are able to invest more in their programs and facilities for all their students.

I would especially like to thank Michael Pilbrow for inviting me to join in the festivities of the carnival and congratulate all of those involved in putting on such a successful event. It was great to see local groups getting involved in the event, including Charnwood Capital Chemist, the Uniform Shop, ActewAGL, Belconnen Community Services, DUC Marquees and community groups like the Canberra Christian Life Centre, Ginninderra Rotary Club, the Belwest Foxes, Belconnen Bullets fly ball team, the West Belconnen Health Cooperative, ACT Policing, Emergency Services, a number of school bands and, of course, the Mount Rogers scout group.

Once again I congratulate Michael Pilbrow for his dedication to his community and commend the team of volunteers for putting on the event. It was a great event and I thoroughly enjoyed my time there.

The Assembly adjourned at 4.38 pm.

Schedule of amendments

Schedule 1

First Home Owner Grant Amendment Bill 2009

Amendments moved by Ms Hunter

1

Clause 6

Proposed new section 24C (5)

Page 7, line 20—

after

if the commissioner is satisfied

insert

on reasonable grounds

2

Clause 6

Proposed new section 24F (2)

Page 9, line 1—

omit

(including in relation to another territory law)

3

Clause 6

Proposed new section 24F (3)

Page 9, line 6—

omit

or another territory law
