



Debates

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Wednesday, 25 March 2009

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Wednesday, 25 March 2009

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

Petition

The following petition was lodged for presentation, by Ms Bresnan, from 173 residents:

Taxis—petition No 96

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

This petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly that the ACT Wheelchair Accessible Taxi (WAT) service is woefully inadequate.

Your petitioners therefore request the Assembly to ensure that the ACT WAT service is expanded and made reliable, and that the taxi subsidy provision for people living with disability is increased.

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

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella), by leave: In relation to this petition, we believe it is time that the ACT government worked out a long-term solution to the problems with what are commonly known as wheelchair accessible taxis.

We received a very helpful briefing from the ACT government which confirmed many of the perceptions and much of the information that has been provided to us by customers and taxi operators over the past few years. We also appreciate and recognise the efforts by the ACT government to put in place incentives and other processes to try and address the problem.

Essentially, the situation is that too many of our wheelchair accessible taxis are in the hands of one network and a number of drivers who do not demonstrate a commitment to making the service run. This was the result of a decision taken by government a few years ago which was supposed to improve the service. It was a market-based strategy and the strategy has not succeeded.

The operator of the second taxi network in Canberra should be showing a social commitment to this service. If not, there should be a reconsideration of who should be operating the wheelchair accessible taxis in Canberra. It is time now for the ACT government to look at other models, such as going out to tender for a dedicated and directly funded coordinated WAT service, such as exists in South Australia, or perhaps a dedicated network run by a not-for-profit group whose first priority would be providing an acceptable service.

Transport plays an important role in breaking down the barriers for people who are marginalised in our society and allows them to be active in the community and not socially excluded. We would like to see the ACT government commit to a time frame to put a definite plan of action in place to develop a long-term solution to the issue of delivering this very important service to people with a disability in the ACT.

Unit Titles Amendment Bill 2009

Mrs Dunne, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (10.05): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Last year the Sixth Assembly, under the burden of the government's majority at the time, passed a range of amendments to the Unit Titles Act, many of which are set to commence at various dates this year, some as early as Tuesday next week. Those amendments were passed in the face of much community and industry angst. The angst was because the Stanhope-Gallagher Labor government took its typical bulldozer-like approach to getting its legislative changes through.

I think it is important that we have a quick recap of the history of those amendments. There was an initial flurry of consultation in 2006-07, but that was followed by 12 months of absolute silence. Then, all of a sudden, in the last few months of the Sixth Assembly, an exposure draft of amendments was released with a consultation period of around three weeks. That was subsequently extended to six weeks.

An almost panic-stricken community of unit owners and residents and the bemused strata title management industry then started beating a path to the doors of the opposition and the crossbench members. There was a mood of confusion, anger, misunderstanding, scepticism and suspicion in all those communities.

There were concerns, for example, that the government was going to pool the body corporate bank accounts, bring them under the management of ACAT and sweep the interest income earned on those accounts into the government's coffers to pay for ACAT. That, of course, was such an outrageous measure that the government had to back away from that very quickly indeed. That backing away was brought about by the very effective campaign run by the Canberra Liberals to highlight the duplicity of this measure.

Another example was the concern that anything that a unit title owner wanted to do to improve their unit would have to go before the ACAT for approval. There were concerns over whether pets would be allowed in units; there were concerns over the qualification and licensing of strata title managers; there was concern over how bodies corporate might be able to do their business. And the concerns of stakeholders were not limited to those that I have outlined.

To its credit, the government actually did listen to some of the concerns and made some last-minute changes. But this did little more than heighten the scepticism and suspicion in the minds of stakeholders. This was consultation on the run; it was evidence of a government that could not think things through, a government that could respond only when there was a public outcry.

The suspicion and the scepticism continue in the community. The scepticism and suspicion spawned the formation last October of the Owners Corporation Network. The network was established as a representative and lobbying body for unit owners.

The scepticism and suspicion in the strata manager industry sector continues too. The new arrangements relating to section 75 certificates, for example, according to the industry, will result in reduced efficiency and increased costs for unit owners. In this connection, I note that the Greens were all set to introduce corresponding or complementary amendments to those which I am proposing to introduce today, which would address the concerns in relation to section 75 certificates. The industry very much anticipated and warmly welcomed what looked like innovation from the Greens on this. But in a spectacular display of indecision—I hope not duplicity—the Greens have informed me this morning that they will not be supporting the bill as they said they would. They have also told me that they will not be supporting the opposition's bill, which was their previous commitment.

It seems that the Greens have bowed not to the views and expectations of the community who elected them to serve, but to the politics of their agreement with the Gallagher-Stanhope Labor Party. In stepping back from their commitments they previously made—not just to me but, more importantly, to the stakeholders and the residents of the ACT who were relying on their support—the Greens seem to be showing their true colours.

That brings me to the bill I present today. Unlike the Greens and the government, the Canberra Liberals are willing to listen to stakeholders and to act on their aspirations and their expectations. The bill I present today is in direct response to the continuing scepticism and suspicion of unit owners.

Even this bill has been something of a moving feast over the last couple of weeks. It had been my initial intention—and it was the intention that I flagged at the first annual general meeting of the Owners Corporation Network—that I would introduce a bill to defer all uncommenced provisions of this bill for some time. This was in direct response to the many concerns that had been articulated by the Owners Corporation Network and individual members of that network.

However, after further discussions with representatives of OCN, the Owners Corporation Network, as well as representatives of the Strata Managers Institute and various members of the legal profession—and, yes, even the bureaucrats—the bill was refined to be as it is today. Some of that redefinition was undertaken in the light of my knowledge of what the Greens had said that they would be doing and the discussions that I have had with members of the Greens and their staff. It is unfortunate that the scope of this bill has probably been somewhat limited because of those undertakings, which are no longer good.

The bill that I present today defers for a period of just three months the introduction of the implied warranties for sale of strata title units. This deferral provides an opportunity for the government to do as it should have done when the amendments were first made. That is that it should have used the time of dormancy to mount an information campaign and also to work with unit title owners and managers to bring about reasonable changes in those implied warranty provisions.

There are serious concerns about the implications of implied warranties in the legislation and the new part 7A that would be introduced next week; those issues have not been resolved by discussions with the government, and the community organisations that represent owners and managers are deeply concerned about the implications they would have. It creates an unjust and discriminatory situation where an owner of a unit title will have to warranty the state of the building in a way that someone who owns a freestanding house would never have to do. The implications for that implied warranty mean that people will be able to withdraw from sales in a way that would not happen if one were selling a freestanding house. This is a discriminatory matter, if nothing else. It is unconscionable. It is the standout remaining issue where the Owners Corporation Network wants change from the government.

What this bill does today is give the government the leeway that it needs to talk to the community, to ensure that there are changes to the implied warranties that meet the needs of the whole community and to not put unconscionable burdens on up to 30,000 householders in the ACT.

The government, as I said, should use this time to allay the scepticism and suspicion that still abound in the community. I am sure that in the process of talking to the community the government will find that there are other measures that they need to take to tweak the system, to improve the operation of the system, to improve the community's confidence in the system and to allay the community's suspicion about the departments that have engineered and written this law and the operation of the system.

Now that the Greens have joined with the government in its disconnect from the community and its lack of concern about the community's scepticism and suspicion about these new arrangements, I hope that the Greens also use the time available to acquaint themselves properly with the concerns of the community and that they too can work with the community to help make the unit title system work for the absolute benefit of as many people as possible in the community.

I just need to put on the record that proposing this delay in the commencement of these provisions is not to say that we think that there should not be changes to the unit titles legislation. In the debate last year, we all said that there need to be changes made to the unit titles legislation—but it needs to be done not behind closed doors, as was the practice of the majority Stanhope government, but in full view, with full consultation and full discussion. If this does not happen, it will be on the heads of the Greens and the government when the community comes to realise that neither of these two parties has been prepared to stand up for unit title owners, occupiers and managers.

If this bill is passed, it will need to come into effect before next Tuesday, which is 31 March, and therefore it can be notified no later than 30 March, which is Monday. Therefore, it will be my intention, in the course of this sitting week, to declare this bill to be an urgent bill and to bring it on for debate so that that can be concluded. In giving notice of that, I look forward to the Greens' commitment to supporting the bringing on of that debate. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Unit Titles Amendment Bill 2009 (No 2)

MR SPEAKER: Pursuant to standing order 111, the Clerk has received written advice withdrawing this notice, so we will proceed straight to notice No 3.

Economy—recession

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (10.17): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) with concern that the ACT is currently the only Australian jurisdiction in recession;
- (b) that the Stanhope-Gallagher Government has contributed to the ACT economy going into recession through decisions it has taken over the past seven years; and
- (c) that Mr Stanhope has taken full credit for the favourable economic position of the ACT in past years, but does not take responsibility for the poor economic position this year the ACT finds itself in, that is, the recession;

(2) condemns the Stanhope-Gallagher Government for its mismanagement of the ACT economy; and

(3) calls on the Stanhope-Gallagher Government:

- (a) to take its share of responsibility for the state of the ACT economy and to develop solutions which will stimulate economic growth and protect jobs; and
- (b) to detail its plan and solutions to manage this recession by the last sitting day in April 2009.

Mr Speaker, the purpose of this motion is to do what an opposition is meant to do, or at least one of its important roles: to analyse the actions of the government of the day and to let the community know what the outcome of that analysis is.

In this instance we are concerned about the way in which the Stanhope-Gallagher government have handled the ACT economy, particularly over the last few years and certainly over the last seven years. In particular, we are concerned about how they have responded to what has now become a significant global economic downturn.

Part of our process has been to try to get an insight into the Stanhope-Gallagher government's understanding of a recession. Yesterday I asked the Treasurer to explain the difference between a recession and a technical recession, as she had used the phrase "technical recession" earlier in question time. The Treasurer provided an answer to my question and immediately gave herself a score of 10 out of 10 for her answer. Such humility!

Unfortunately, the Treasurer failed in her answer. She failed in two ways: she failed to compare or contrast the definition of a recession with her definition of a technical recession; and, second, in any event she failed in her definition of a technical recession. Of course, there is a street definition of a recession. A recession is when your neighbour loses their job and, in fact, a depression is when you lose your job. A more considered answer to defining a recession is to acknowledge that there is no universally accepted definition. Such is the world of economics. Is economics a science or is it just an art?

Let us make an attempt to define a recession. That might be a useful starting point for this debate. I will use the definition from the National Bureau of Economic Research in the United States. That is a group of academic economists who say that:

A recession is a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months, normally visible in real GDP, real income, employment, industrial production and wholesale-retail sales.

That is a mouthful and I think it is fair to say that this definition generally applies to a nation. The other accepted definition, of course, is two quarters of negative growth. The points made in all of this are that they are useful starting points. It is interesting that up to this point in time the ACT is the only jurisdiction in the country in recession. The defence of the government seems to be that it is all the fault of the global financial crisis. If that were true, other economies which are more exposed than ours would have fallen first. But they did not. The ACT is the only jurisdiction recording negative growth for two consecutive quarters. If you want to use the term "technical recession" to say it is in a technical recession, it is in a recession.

It is worth looking at the ABS statistics relative to the performance of the jurisdiction over recent times, because this is not something that has just happened. If you look at the last six quarters—the last 18 months—there is a pattern of the ACT stumbling along, bumbling along the bottom of the economic pack. The performance of the ACT economy has been less than spectacular—this despite all the glowing self-praise from the former Treasurer and, indeed, the current Treasurer.

The current Treasurer tells the opposition not to talk the ACT down. Well, we have avoided that, but it is the Treasurer who says her work is all guesswork. It is the

Treasurer who said, “Don’t get your hopes up that this is a stimulus package,” because the Treasurer is clueless.

Consider the recent statistics on state final demand for all states. The ACT is distinguished by its consistent worst performance in state final demand for all states. In the year to the December quarter 2007, the ACT recorded a growth of 2.2 per cent, which seemed pretty good until we realised that this is the worst performance of any state. In the year to the March quarter 2008, the ACT recorded growth of only 0.1 per cent. This was far from good and was the worst performance of any state by a very wide margin. In the year to the June quarter 2008 the ACT recorded negative growth of minus 0.3 per cent, the only state to record negative growth in that year to date period. Again, it was the worst performance by far of any state.

In the year to the September quarter 2008, the ACT recorded growth of 2.1 per cent, but, again, it was the worst performance of any state. In the year to the December quarter 2008, the ACT recorded negative growth of minus 0.4 per cent and, need I say it again, the worst performance of any state. Four quarters out of the last six we recorded negative growth.

This is not a sign of a healthy economy over a very significant period of time. It is impossible to argue against these statistics that are produced by an independent and recognised expert statistical agency. You can use this analysis to show that the ACT economy has not been performing as the Chief Minister might have wished or has said and that the warning signs have been evident that something was not right. The Stanhope-Gallagher government should have responded sooner to what has transpired.

This is what this motion seeks to set out, Mr Speaker. Paragraph (1)(a) notes with concern that the ACT is currently the only Australian jurisdiction in recession. We talk about the cot-case economy that is New South Wales, yet we are performing worse than New South Wales.

Paragraph (1)(b) says that the Stanhope government has contributed to the ACT economy going into recession through decisions it has taken over the past seven years. The Chief Minister will jump to his feet and say, “Look, we took tough decisions in the 2006-07 budget.” They might have been tough decisions, but they were the wrong decisions. They are evidently wrong because we have seen the unwinding of some of those decisions where cuts were made to business programs. They have ceased to exist because this was a government either not interested in or not able to come to the reality of how to diversify the ACT’s economic base. Indeed, one of our key industries, tourism—it is perhaps the biggest private sector industry in this territory—was also cut dramatically. We have seen in recent budgets that that funding is being restored.

We saw the loss of the independent statutory authority Australian Capital Tourism. The body that needs the freedom and the independence to move, and to move quickly, was drawn back into the bureaucracy. It was another bad decision. We are now paying for that. We are reaping what we have sown. We are now paying for these failures. The government has not diversified the ACT economy over the seven years that it has been in office. You only have to look at the statistics of employment patterns in the ACT to see that the government has failed.

When the Carnell government came to office in 1995, 60 per cent of the people in the ACT were employed in the public sector and 40 per cent were employed in the private sector. When it left office in 2001, that had reversed. There was 60 per cent employment in the private sector. This diversified the economy. We were not depending just on the federal government and being a one-business town. That trend has reversed. Let me quote some words from an Access Economics report on that point:

For many years economists have been expecting to see greater diversification in the ACT's sector base—that the degree of over-reliance on the government administration and Defence sector shown in Chart 5 above would fall over time as Canberra became less of a 'one company town'.

For many years that is exactly what happened. Chart 6, which is in terms of employment rather than output, shows that Canberra's economy spent some time through to the late 1990s diversifying its sectoral base. In particular, public sector employment continued to fall as a share of total employment, dipping below 50 per cent in the early 1990s and staying below thereafter.

It has gone back. The latest numbers I have seen now would show that 55 per cent of people are again employed in the public sector. So attempts to diversify have either stalled or gone backwards. That is because of decisions taken by this government which did not build on the earlier successes of previous Labor and Liberal governments—the efforts that they made in the early 1990s.

We see the government's inability to come to grips with diversifying the economic base in the recently released *Capital developments: towards our second century* paper delivered in August 2008. It has totally walked away from the economic white paper which had proposed that actions be taken. It had nine sectors that the government then wanted to develop. What are we reduced to now? We are reduced to three strategic themes: no action, no plans, no ideas. This is a government that is clueless—absolutely clueless—on how to diversify the economic base of the ACT.

I turn to paragraph (1)(c) of my motion. The government for many years has taken full credit for the favourable economic position of the ACT. But when it is not favourable it blames everybody else; we are told that it is a global financial crisis or it is the fault of the federal government.

The Treasurer said that when the times were really good it was to the government's credit that they had done it. But, if you look at the spending, the majority of that spending, in fact, was a consequence of policies of the Howard Liberal government that did invest in the ACT. It built assets here. It sponsored the building boom and now the government blame the federal government for its cutback on spending saying that it is not their fault. You cannot have it both ways.

If in the good times it was federal spending, then give them the credit and say you were simply along for the ride, because that is all that was happening. If it is in the bad times that you want to blame the federal government, then you still must take

some responsibility for not having the wherewithal—when we had an economic boom that lasted for almost a decade and delivered \$1.6 billion more revenue than expected—for not taking the opportunity to diversify the employment base and build this city a future.

It is the failure to diversify that is perhaps the most deadly and the most sad thing that this government have done to the ACT. The bad decisions that they made have squandered the opportunity that will not come along again, I suspect, for a very long time.

We have squandered a boom—an endless boom. I am sure they thought it was never going to end. Let me go back to previous programs such as No Waste by 2010. We were told that No Waste by 2010 offers an opportunity to develop industries based on sustainable economies. The greenhouse strategy that I put out in 2000 said there were opportunities here to develop industry based on a sustainable economy. But what we have had for seven years is a walking away from any attempt to diversify the economic base.

The bad decisions include their follies and their waste, Mr Speaker: \$5 million on a busway that, in the words of John Hargreaves, will never be built while he is alive. Why plan for something you have no intention of building? Why plan and now have that plan languish for so many years that it will need to be updated—if you intended ever to go ahead with it—to such a degree, with further public consultation undertaken, that your original planning is now superfluous? It is absolutely superfluous. An amount of \$5 million was spent.

At the large, that is a perfect example of the folly of this government. In the middle we have the government as the sole seller of land in this city. Yet the LDA had millions of dollars in advertising budgets and spent \$300,000 on a site office; \$300,000! There in the median you have the folly and the waste of squandered millions of dollars. At the small level, it is things like \$40,000 for happy camps; it is stationery budgets; it is about controlling the pennies to look after the pounds.

There is also a question: why are we here? Why do we have the government at all when the Treasurer actually says, “We are too small to stimulate”? Well, if you are too small to stimulate, you do not have the wherewithal or you are that clueless that you cannot, get out of the way. I will quote Mr Barr: “Get out of the way.” Your job is to create confidence. We had the lecture from the Treasurer yesterday about the opposition talking down the government. Yet it is the Treasurer who goes out and says that it is all guesswork. She says, “We are too small to stimulate.” She starts by getting people excited by saying we will have a mini-budget that will stimulate early in the new year. We see it downgraded and downgraded and downgraded and her now saying, “We have a local initiatives package”.

Why are we here? If we are not responsible, if we are too small to stimulate, if we do not want you to get hopes up and if it is all guesswork, why are we here? I refuse to accept any of that, because I know that previous governments have done it. You can have an impact, and the Treasurer and the Chief Minister have an obligation to make sure that it works.

What I am asking in this motion is for the government to tell us what they will do to shoulder their responsibility for their failings and to tell the Assembly by the last sitting day in March—next week—what it is that they will do. We want broad outlines. We appreciate the budget is coming, but we have got this comparison, this contrast with the Rudd government, that says you have to act quickly, you have to act now, you have to throw the kitchen sink at it. And we have got the Stanhope-Gallagher Labor government saying, “You just have to wait until May while we work this out.” Mr Speaker, that is unacceptable. They are in government. They have a responsibility to ensure that they do everything they can to minimise the impacts which the Treasurer yesterday failed to acknowledge are occurring and happening to people in the ACT, even as we speak (*Time expired.*)

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Minister for Transport, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts and Heritage) (10.32): Mr Speaker, the government will be opposing the motion, and I have circulated an amendment which I now move:

Omit all words after “Assembly”, substitute:

“notes:

- (1) that the ACT has entered a technical recession based on the data released on 6 March 2009 by ABS of State Final Demand;
- (2) that the global financial crisis has contributed to this situation;
- (3) the positive results of other recent macroeconomic indicators for the ACT, including the labour market, dwelling commencements and housing finance for individual investors;
- (4) that, in response to the global financial crisis, the ACT Labor Government has conducted industry roundtables, and introduced two supplementary Budget appropriations aimed at supporting local jobs and investing in our community; and
- (5) urges the ACT Government to consider further measures to support the local economy as part of the next ACT Budget.”.

The motion reflects, as we have just seen illustrated in the presentation by the shadow treasurer, a fairly serious lack of understanding of what is happening in the world economy and, indeed, what is happening in the ACT economy. I have to say, coming from the Liberal Party treasury spokesperson, that really is quite alarming. The motion is ill-conceived and in some parts, of course, simply wrong.

Mr Smyth would have us believe that the ACT government has contributed to the ACT economy going into recession through its decisions over the past seven years. It has been described as a technical recession, and the Treasurer did explain quite fully yesterday, to Mr Smyth’s embarrassment, that the strict definition of a recession relates to contraction and output and not to demand. Secondly, recessions are—and

the Treasurer went to this point yesterday as well—characterised by massive job losses and high unemployment rates. Economies, in fact, shed jobs in recessions, and that is how all leading and serious economists describe recessions. If one looks at the national accounts and the range of economic indicators, they are not showing a recession in the ACT.

Thirdly, it is ludicrous in any case to suggest that this government's decisions over the past seven years have resulted in the technical recession. It seems to me that through this motion the opposition actually accuses this government of causing the global financial crisis. One wonders whether President Barack Obama, in announcing his \$1.4 trillion toxic loan rescue package yesterday, actually reflected on the fact that his \$1.4 trillion US package was a result of decisions taken by me and Katy Gallagher. I think not. That claim is really quite absurd from the Liberal Party in this place and I think is a sign of their desperation. I am happy to accept some responsibility, but, I must say, the tortuous logic that the shadow treasurer just presented suggests that he honestly believes that Barack Obama was forced to deliver yesterday a \$US1.4 trillion rescue package in relation to toxic loans as a result of decisions that I have taken here in the ACT.

I think Mr Smyth and the Liberal Party actually accord us in that a status or a capacity just a touch or a tad beyond the reality—that Jon Stanhope and Katy Gallagher are at the heart of the collapse of the mortgage market in the United States of America; that Barack Obama was forced to actually invest \$US1.4 trillion yesterday because of decisions that Jon Stanhope and Katy Gallagher have or have not taken in the ACT. That is really at the heart of this motion today—it is all our fault and that Jon Stanhope and Katy Gallagher led to the collapse of the home mortgage market in the United States of America.

But if we go back just to the local situation for the ACT budget, we do need to acknowledge, and we do acknowledge, that recessions are unpleasant. They are, in fact, very painful, They have very significant effects on people's jobs, on people's families and on people's capacity to engage and to live the sorts of fulfilling lives that each of us has a right to live. In a recession, people who want work cannot find work. Wealth is lost and dreams are shattered, and it is painful and we need to acknowledge and underscore that. That is why we do need to work together. That is why it is important that we do not talk the economy down. That is why we do not actually allow this lack of confidence that the Liberal Party is showing in the ACT and the ACT economy to become self-fulfilling.

We must ensure that we do not allow the Liberal Party to talk us into a recession with these constant ill-founded, ill-directed attacks on the ACT economy, on its inherent strength and on our capacity as a community to work together to find our way through. I think the strongest advocate of this, the advocate within the community who I think is conscious of the damage the Liberal Party is doing and constantly insists that we need to ensure that we do not, through the sorts of motions which the Liberal Party has moved today, talk ourselves into a recession is, of course, Chris Peters.

Just recently, in late January, Chris Peters in a speech said that it is confidence that drives our economy and that:

Of the total impact on our economy, about one-third is driven by economic and fiscal issues—and about two-thirds of it is driven by confidence, or lack of confidence. So, indeed, our economic future is very much in our hands.

In fact, as Mr Peters says, on his assessment, two-thirds of the factors that determine the health of an economy are around the issue of confidence. As far as the effects of a typical recession are concerned—and we went to those issues yesterday quite fully—the ACT can hardly be described as being in recession.

The monthly labour force survey results released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in February 2009 showed trend unemployment at 2.4 per cent, the lowest level of unemployment ever recorded since surveys commenced in 1978. At 2.4 per cent, the trend unemployment in the ACT measured by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in February 2009 is the lowest ever recorded. The Australian Bureau of Statistics have never recorded a lower rate of unemployment than that which they recorded last month—four weeks ago. This is the number one indicator of the robustness of an economy and the way in which an economy is performing.

Employment held through this survey, and the number of unemployed fell slightly. Most notably, and I think significantly, the number of people in full-time employment increased in January. The number of people in full-time employment increased. The ACT was the only jurisdiction other than Queensland and the Northern Territory to record a trend increase in full-time employment in Australia during that period. Now, those are not the marks of a recession. Even at a technical level, care needs to be taken in interpreting the accounts.

Indeed, the *Canberra Times* recently reported ABS analyst, Mr Smedes, saying it was important to be cautious in drawing conclusions from the ACT figures on account of the impact of both imports and the volatile public investment component. This is a time of great economic uncertainty. Many people have experienced falls in wealth resulting from direct investments in equities or through their superannuation holdings in equities. This reduction in wealth has impacted on confidence and spending—of course it has. It is irresponsible, however, to talk down the economy all the time, and most particularly at this time. It is what industry leaders like Chris Peters are rightly counselling most specifically the Liberal Party against. Mr Peters is directly counselling the Liberal Party: stop talking this economy down, stop talking Canberra down.

There are sound, objective reasons to conclude that the ACT economy is sound. It is useful to put these things in perspective. Both the household consumption and private investment components of demand in the ACT recorded positive growth in the December quarter 2008. In seasonally adjusted terms, household consumption was up 0.8 per cent and private investment was up 1.7 per cent.

Victoria was the only other jurisdiction in Australia to record positive growth in household consumption and private investment in the December quarter 2008. Only two jurisdictions in Australia recorded a growth in household consumption and private investment—the ACT and Victoria. Indeed, the volume of private investment

in the ACT in the December quarter 2008 was \$988 million—just \$5 million less than the record achieved in June 2006. I need to repeat that: in the December quarter, the level of private investment was \$988 million, \$5 million less than the highest quarterly level of investment ever in the ACT. Dwelling investments contributed the most to that result at 8.3 per cent.

The strength of the labour market is reflected in the total remuneration paid to employees in the ACT, another indicator of the inherent strength of the economy. In the year to December 2008, total remuneration paid to workers in the ACT was \$15.1 billion, a 10.8 per cent increase from the \$13.6 billion in wages paid in the ACT in 2007, and the largest percentage increase in a calendar year since 1986. Here we are, in recession, yet in the last year the level of remuneration in the ACT increased by 10.8 per cent, the highest level since 1986, to \$15 billion.

An increase of more than eight per cent increase in dwelling investment—once again, close to a record private investment in dwellings—and record low unemployment are hardly signs of the doom and gloom and the recession which Mr Smyth and the Liberal Party believe have gripped the territory.

The ACT economy has shown to date remarkable resilience in the face of a global recession. We do need to work together to maintain that. We know things will get worse, and it is not going to help having the Liberal Party opposing for opposition's sake, talking the economy down, refusing to show faith in the economy and just deliberately, grievously refusing to understand how the economy works here, its impact and its different components.

It needs to be remembered that 22 of the 30 OECD countries have reported contractions in their economies in the December quarter. Along with the \$US1.4 trillion rescue package, I guess the ACT government, Jon Stanhope and Katy Gallagher are responsible for the fact, too, that 22 of the 30 OECD countries are experiencing exactly the same phenomenon as a result of the financial crisis. The Liberal Party would have us believe through this motion that it is all our fault, that it is only us, as a result of local decisions taken here, who are affected by the current situation. It would have us believe that these local decisions, locally driven, are completely and actually distinct or separate from the United States and the 22 other OECD economies that are actually in serious or significant contraction. This is a global phenomenon, and we have been caught up in it.

As Mr Peters noted, this is the fifth economic downturn in his working life. He went on to say:

... and each of those was different ... But this time, the economic downturn is very different to any of the others ... this time it's global—the Global Financial Crisis—and it is without precedence in my life time.

It is not without precedence in the lifetime of Mr Smyth, it seems. This is the global context that we need to have this conversation in, and it is absolutely arrant nonsense to suggest that somehow the decisions of the ACT government have caused the recession in the ACT, a recession that is not actually here.

In the context of a global recession, a context that all respectable economists and industry leaders recognise—in fact everyone except perhaps Mr Smyth and the Liberal Party—the remarkable resilience of our economy to date is a reflection of our highly skilled, highly participative, highly motivated workforce, and our strong record of public and private investment in productive infrastructure, education and skills, the traditional strengths of our economy.

While we are better placed than most to withstand the crisis, it is naive, of course, to think that the territory will be immune to those effects. The pity of it will be if those effects are greater because of the constant talking down of the economy which we see from the Liberal Party, the scaremongering and the talking into recession which is part and parcel of the Liberal Party's agenda.

Contrary to what they suggest, thinking that the ACT government, or any government for that matter, have the ability to recession-proof their economy even through such recession-busting initiatives as the cutting down of the supply of paper, really is just fanciful. The world is a connected place, but we are better placed than many others. Our employment is still holding, thank goodness. Our labour market would have relatively greater stability because of a larger public sector, and the decisions of this government and the federal government have, in fact, cushioned the effects of the global slowdown.

The large increase in dwelling investment is, of course, related in part to the large uptake of the first homebuyers grant, but it is also a result of decisions that this government has taken over the last four years in relation to land supply and a full suite of housing affordability initiatives, the impact of which we are seeing well and truly now in the market.

I touch again briefly, before closing, on Mr Smyth's attempts to talk the economy down, to talk the ACT into recession and to oppose for opposition's sake. I note that he has suggested in a recent media release, which he repeated again today, that we have been skating near disaster for the last year and a half. In 2007-08 the ACT's gross state product grew by 2.5 per cent. The trend level of unemployment rose two per cent over the last 18 months. The economy has grown significantly in that period. Thousands of extra jobs have been created and unemployment has fallen. Sound economists and industry leaders do not believe that this economy is skating anywhere near disaster.

In relation to the ACT's budget, we see that repeated most recently by Standard and Poor's, who actually make the point that our credit rating is absolutely sound and secure. Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (10.47): Mr Speaker, while the Greens share Mr Smyth's deep concern for the current financial situation both within the ACT and nationally—and, in fact, globally—the substance of this motion appears to be covering ground that has already been discussed at length during the Assembly's last sitting period.

When the Greens negotiated the parliamentary agreement with the government, much of the purpose was to embed greater accountability and transparency within government decision making. We believe that this agreement has produced outcomes with regard to increased accountability that the Liberal opposition would be pleased with. Therefore, the Greens will be seeking greater accountability and transparency from the 2009-10 budget, and we believe that the people of Canberra expect this also.

We expect to see in the budget package a detailed plan and solutions to manage this technical recession, and because it is elected government, the people of Canberra will know that it is essential that the government take its share of responsibility for the state of the ACT economy and develop solutions which will stimulate economic growth and protect jobs.

I would also like to put in here that the Greens are very strong on building a green economy within the ACT and that the global financial crisis has also provided opportunities for us to move in that direction. We see that there have been stimulus packages coming down which are increasing the businesses that are providing insulation and other sorts of energy efficiency measures into homes and also extending that into business. So we see that there is a great way to be looking at a way forward as far as diversifying the economy in the ACT. The Greens will be champions in advocating that over the term of this Assembly.

Mr Speaker, the Greens will not be supporting Mr Smyth's motion in its current form as we feel it does not contribute any new information towards what has already been discussed in the Assembly with regard to the current financial situation of the ACT, nor does it bestow upon the residents of the ACT confidence that this Assembly is moving forward and providing solutions to this and other significant issues in a collaborative and effective manner.

I understand that Mr Stanhope has moved his amendment to this motion, so the Greens will be supporting the government's amendment, as we cannot disagree with what is a series of factual points that detail information that has been widely and clearly distributed within the public domain.

I could repeat what I have said within this chamber on the Greens' position regarding this current financial crisis. However, in the near future, the Assembly will debate a third appropriation bill, closely followed by the 2009-10 budget and, of course, undergo a scrutiny process of that budget through estimates. We feel it would be more appropriate and the best use of the Assembly's time to focus on the process, that is, looking at a plan to ensure services and work are continued and ensuring there is a plan in the budget for how the government will tackle the deficit in future budgets.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (10.51): I thank Ms Hunter for her contribution. Mr Speaker, we will not be supporting the amendment moved by Mr Stanhope. There are a number of reasons for that, and I will go into why Mr Smyth's motion is an important one.

Reading through Mr Smyth's motion, it is difficult to find what it is that the Greens particularly and the Labor Party could disagree with. Clearly, there would be concern

in the community about the ACT being the only Australian jurisdiction in recession. With respect to the Stanhope-Gallagher government having contributed to it, to suggest otherwise is to suggest that nothing done here matters. The only way you could argue against that point is to suggest that every decision they have taken has been correct, that nothing they have done has in any way stifled business, economic activity or development, and that none of the taxes they have imposed have been regressive. To try and make that case, which essentially the Greens and the Labor Party are making by opposing this motion, flies in the face of the evidence and it flies in the face of logic. It essentially draws the conclusion that nothing that the ACT government does matters for the economy, when we know that is not the case.

We know that Jon Stanhope and Katy Gallagher are simply going to blame everyone else for our problems. We all know that there are difficult economic times around the world; no-one disputes that. The question is: does what the ACT government does contribute to that and make it worse or does it fight against that and seek to shield the ACT from the worst effects? Mr Smyth made the case very clearly that if it simply was the global financial crisis, if that was the only reason why the ACT is in recession, why aren't other Australian jurisdictions in recession? Why would we be the first? It is actually quite counterintuitive that the ACT would be the first, and it does speak of problems at a local level. We are not as exposed as other jurisdictions to downturns in international trade, and it is simply an argument that does not stack up.

We see in paragraph (1)(c) of the motion that the Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, has taken full credit for the favourable economical position of the ACT in past years. We heard the quote; it was quoted in the Assembly—he did take full credit. He enjoyed taking the credit when the economy was booming. The economy, of course, was booming around the world, it was booming around Australia, and the ACT was doing well. Generally, the economy was doing pretty well, and Jon Stanhope took credit for that. He took credit for the great boom, which was, of course, as a result of massive increases in commonwealth spending. We saw an unprecedented property boom right around the nation and here in the ACT, and Jon Stanhope took the credit.

So I am not sure which part of this motion is wrong. I can understand that the Labor Party does not want to condemn itself for its performance, but it does deserve condemnation. It deserves condemnation because it has squandered the boom times. When you see a boom of the magnitude we have had in the past few years, with the massive revenue coming in, and yet in that time you do not see any tax reform that actually—

Mr Smyth: Meaningful.

MR SESELJA: any meaningful tax reform that actually sees more money in people's pockets so that they have money to spend. You might be able to get away with that in boom times, but what about making those reforms and ensuring that Canberrans do have money to spend? What about ensuring that businesses do not have regressive taxes that actually in the end do not raise a lot of money and do not bring a lot of money into the territory's coffers but do cause a lot of inconvenience? They are nuisance taxes. This government has not taken any of those away.

Finally, the motion calls on this government to take its share of responsibility. It does not say that it should take all the responsibility; it does not say that no other factors are playing into the economic downturn. But if it will not take responsibility then why is it here? Why is this government here? We heard the Chief Minister, when we found out that the ACT was in recession, essentially taking no responsibility. He was blaming everyone else. None of the decisions that he or his government have taken have contributed. It is all someone else's fault.

If that is the case, people are entitled to ask: why are they here? What are they responsible for? What they are responsible for is building the ACT economy. In particular, looking at some of the areas where there is significant blockage, we see it in the planning system. Construction activity in the ACT is a significant economic driver. And what Jon Stanhope has acknowledged in his speech, in giving some credit to Kevin Rudd for his handouts to first homebuyers, is that the activity that has happened has been as a result of federal government actions, not as a result of ACT government actions. In fact, it has been in spite of the ACT government's actions.

We have this contradiction: the Chief Minister says that it is a good thing when Kevin Rudd gives money to first homebuyers, but giving first homebuyers a tax break is a bad thing; in fact, it is inflationary. It is inflationary when you give a tax break, a permanent tax break, but it is not inflationary, apparently, when you give a short-term cash handout to first homebuyers. He has not addressed that point at any stage, and I suppose it is because he would find it so difficult to argue the logic. We have heard him argue in the past that black is white, and I suppose he will have to do it again on this matter.

We have a government that not only has squandered the good times, but also it has contributed to the challenges that the territory faces. We have a Chief Minister and a Treasurer who want to sheet home the blame to everyone other than them. Of course, we know the key part of their argument is that it is the commonwealth's fault. There is the global financial crisis and there is the commonwealth; they are the two factors which have led the ACT into recession. Nothing that has happened here and no decisions taken here by the ACT government have contributed.

That is not what Jon Stanhope was saying at the time of the last commonwealth budget. In fact, the Chief Minister was cheering on Kevin Rudd and his government as they fought their phoney war on inflation. Remember the phoney war on inflation? They talked up inflation. We know that homeowners around the nation fixed in their interest rates at what now are very high rates because they saw Kevin Rudd and Wayne Swan talking up inflation and they expected that interest rates would continue to go up. So they locked them in at eight and nine per cent, lest they go to 11, 12 or 13 per cent, as they have been under previous Labor administrations.

We saw the war on inflation, and Jon Stanhope was cheering them on. I was at the chamber of commerce's budget breakfast for the federal budget, and when we raised the issue of job cuts in the commonwealth Jon Stanhope said, "Well, we're comfortable; this won't have an impact here in the ACT." Those were his words. There was not going to be any significant impact, yet now those very actions that he

applauded, the actions that he cheered on—whether it was the slashing of the NCA, whether it was the cuts in other places—are the only reason, according to this government, apart from the global financial crisis. But the primary reason is the decisions taken by the commonwealth, which Jon Stanhope supported. He supported it because he said it was about the war on inflation.

Well, we know that was a phoney war. We know it was manufactured by Kevin Rudd to try and mount a political argument. He inherited an economy in fantastic shape, he inherited an economy going gangbusters, and he needed to manufacture a problem. Of course, he did talk it up, and since then, since the war on inflation was no longer going to work, we have heard Kevin Rudd talking the economy down. It will be interesting to see, given that Jon Stanhope supported Kevin Rudd in cutting the public service here in Canberra, whether he will support him further, as we see the federal budget coming. But they are some of the external factors.

It is a nonsense argument from the Chief Minister to now claim that the very problem is the thing that he applauded, the thing that he supported—decisions taken in the commonwealth budget. You cannot have it both ways. The fact is that here locally we still see significant problems in our planning system. We still see nuisance and regressive taxes. We still see a failure to really respond when it comes to things like land supply. We still see a failure to deliver capital works. We see it with the prison. It was a 374-bed facility; it became a 300-bed facility. The artwork is left but the gym has gone. I think the chapel might be back; I am not sure. But it is not open, and we have seen a massive downgrading. We have seen the costs blow out. This is a government that does deserve to be condemned for their performance on the economy. (*Time expired.*)

MS BURCH (Brindabella) (11.01): The Chief Minister has provided a comprehensive response to the motion brought forward by Mr Smyth and has moved an amendment. It is unfortunate that the opposition spokesman on economic matters sees fit to talk down the economy. It is indeed unfortunate that the opposition is talking down the economy at a time when the economy is sound and showing remarkable resilience. The Chief Minister has provided a range of economic statistics on the labour market, the housing market and investment to highlight the strength in our economy. But at a time when people are feeling nervous, at a time of economic uncertainty, for the opposition to down-talk the economy is irresponsible.

It is remarkable that Mr Smyth has not tried to understand the national accounts, for if he did he would have noticed that both household consumption and the private investment components of demand in the ACT have recorded positive growth in the December quarter 2008. In seasonally adjusted terms, household consumption was up by 0.8 per cent and private investment was up by 1.7 per cent. I remind those opposite that the volume of private investment in the ACT in the December quarter 2008 was \$988 million. This is close to the record level of \$993 million in the June quarter 2006. Dwelling investment went up by 8.3 per cent in the December quarter. The reason for our state final demand being negative was a drop in the commonwealth government's investment, and that alone contributed 1.3 per cent.

With respect to the volatility in the quarterly accounts for the ACT, the history of this ABS series for the ACT dates to the September quarter 1985. That is 93 quarterly

changes, of which 63 were positive and 31 were negative. That is a positive trend of two-thirds against one-third negative. Over the seven quarters from the June quarter 2003 to the December quarter 2004, the ACT also recorded four quarters of negative growth in economic demand as measured by SFD. Yet over this period economic production by the ACT economy, as measured by GDP, continued to grow by 3.5 per cent in 2002-03, 1.5 per cent in 2003-04 and 2.3 per cent in 2004-05.

It does help to look at economic data from a range of sources and in some perspective. It is simply wrong to suggest that this government's decisions over the past seven years have caused the recession in the ACT. This government's prudent financial management and investment record is the best of any government since self-government. It has engendered confidence in the economy, and the data shows that. Since the election of this government in the December quarter 2001, the Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that the volume of investment per capita undertaken by this government—that is, investment in real terms per person in the ACT—has been 40 per cent higher than in the previous period since self-government.

This government has made major investments in the territory's infrastructure, with a record capital works program. This government has also invested heavily in the maintenance and upkeep of our existing assets, with an annual maintenance program increasing on average by eight per cent per annum. Planning for the future of our city and the needs of our people has always been a priority, to ensure that Canberra remains a great place to live—the best place to live. This government has also made substantial, long overdue and vital investments in health, education, child protection, community safety, and disability and emergency services.

Almost a year ago now, in the 2008-09 budget, and, as it turned out, before the global financial crisis became an acronym, this government redoubled its investment effort, with a \$1 billion building the future infrastructure investment program and annual capital works program. This represented a new record level of investment in the ACT community to ensure that we are ready for the future, no matter what the future may hold. And, as it turned out, the future was a global financial crisis of unprecedented magnitude.

The sustainability of our economy, our population and our services to the community has depended, and will continue to depend, on timely investments in the territory's infrastructure. This government is embarking on a major program of investment in infrastructure to ensure that the territory's infrastructure is not eroded over time and that it will serve the needs of the Canberra community well into the future. The investment program will further increase the productive capacity of our economy, reduce future costs, provide for the continued growth of the economy and give Canberra a competitive edge against any city and against any urban centre.

The private sector is also investing, and investing strongly, in the ACT. When this government first took office, the volume of private investment in the ACT was running at around \$2.1 billion per annum. In fact, the ABS estimate of private investment in the ACT is \$2.1 billion in each of the years 1999, 2000 and 2001. In 2006, the volume of private investment in the ACT reached what was then an unprecedented peak of \$3.7 billion. It is indeed a strong measure of confidence from

the private sector in the ACT and in the governance of the ACT. This high level of private investment has continued. In fact, the ABS estimate of private investment in the ACT is \$3.7 billion in each of the years 2006, 2007 and 2008. Under this government, the volume of private sector investment is up by 75 per cent. That does not happen if the private sector does not have confidence in this government.

The private sector has confidence in the government and continues to invest in the ACT. As was noted by the Chief Minister, in February 2009 our unemployment rate was 2.4 per cent. That is the lowest ever recorded by the ABS, and that was with an associated trend of growth in employment. It is indeed unfortunate that the opposition continues at this time to talk down the ACT economy. However, it is fortunate that this government has the confidence to do what needs to be done and the ability to best manage the ACT's economy.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (11.09): Madam Deputy Speaker, I will speak to the amendment but not close the debate, in case other members want to speak to the amendment. It is interesting but not unexpected from the government that they would simply take the approach that the opposition has said they have caused the global financial crisis. We are going to hear that a lot over the coming months because the government do not have an answer. I would be interested to see whether Ms Burch has actually read the motion; perhaps she can show me where in the motion I have said that the government caused the global financial crisis or caused the recession.

What we have simply said is that the government has contributed to the problems and that it needs to take its share—I did not say take all of it—of responsibility. I said that it has contributed through its negligence. We should have been better prepared to withstand what has appeared.

It is interesting to go back to the then Treasurer and Chief Minister's statements before the last election:

“I call on the Liberals to commit, today, as I have, to keeping the Budget in surplus in each of the years of the next term,” Mr Stanhope said.

The Chief Minister went on to say that he “pledged that Labor's fully-funded election promises would maintain a forecast budget surplus, for each of the years of the next term”. That was his commitment. They are his words before the last election. Just before that statement was made, Lehman went under. Just after that time, Citibank got into trouble. It was all at a time, in the lead-up to the ACT election, when commentators such as Ross Gittins on 16 June were saying:

My bet is that the economy is slowing, it will continue slowing, it will slow by at least as much as the Reserve Bank is seeking and probably more.

That was in June. In August Ross Gittins again was talking about “in the gathering signs of a slowing economy”. This was not something that just suddenly appeared. The opposition understood that when we took to the election promises to stimulate the economy, to lift the tax burden off first homeowners, off cafe owners, to stimulate business, to support tourism, because we knew that something was going to happen

and it was not going to be good for the ACT. So, if the government can show anywhere in the motion where I blame them for the global financial crisis, I would be interested to see it—because it is just not there.

Ms Burch said we have got a government that delivers infrastructure. Well, does it? Does it deliver infrastructure? The underspend on the infrastructure program in 2002-03 was 37 per cent, 36 per cent in 2003-04, 48 per cent in 2004-05, 48 per cent in 2005-06 and 38 per cent in 2006-07. Indeed, the recent auditor's report says that the government underspends on infrastructure delivery. They are facts. They are simply facts.

This amendment as put by the former Treasurer is quite interesting. There is one statement of fact: "technical recession". One could argue over whether it is technical or not, but people out in the community are suffering. The second is that "the global financial crisis has contributed to this situation". Well, yes, it has. The third is "the positive results of other recent macroeconomic indicators for the ACT, including the labour market, dwelling commencements and housing finance".

The government used to quote the retail figures. They said: "Look at December. The retail figures bounced. The Rudd stimulus worked." But it is interesting that the retail figures are not in this, because, as Access Economics in their retail forecast in February this year, said:

Mortgage debt is highest in NSW and the ACT, and that's Household behaviour has responded sharply to the pressures of 2008 with the return of the conservative consumer. ...

This tells us something of how states will fare looking forward. Where debt to income ratios are highest—NSW, VIC and the ACT—retail sales will be commensurate with conservative household spending behaviour until 2011. That is, despite the financial firepower that lower interest rates bring, it is unlikely to be brought to bear before the second half of 2010.

And the report goes on to say that, as chart 9 shows, the ACT is on par with New South Wales and the now struggling WA economy in terms of slowing negative retail growth over the past year. If you look at that chart of the average retail spending for the five years to 2007-08, the ACT was the lowest; it was the lowest of any jurisdiction in this country. And if you look at the expected average for the next five years through to 2012-13 it is the lowest bar one, and that is the cot case economy of the commonwealth, New South Wales. So retail, which is an eye on the economy, which is something that is a predictor, is slowing in the ACT.

Nobody wants that. This is not talking the economy down; this is talking about the facts. I have spoken to retailers, and the Treasurer and the Chief Minister should go and talk to retailers. Restaurateurs are telling me that people are not buying three courses; they are skipping entree or dessert. They are not buying an expensive bottle of wine; they are going to the house wine. The customers are still there but they are spending less.

I have spoken to retailers in Civic. It is very patchy but some of them have said they have had massive downturns on the previous year—and Christmas did not arrive this

year for some retailers. Indeed, I spoke to one retailer at Fyshwick three Saturdays ago—we met at a dinner—who said he did not make a single sale that day. Saturday is normally his biggest day but he did not make a single sale. He said 2008 was bad but 2009 will be tougher, and he has got shops all over the ACT. So these are the things that we are seeing.

The Chief Minister again quotes the employment statistics. Employment, Chief Minister, is a lagging indicator. The last thing any business does is fire its staff. The last thing any business does is waste the investment it has made of putting together its team to deliver its product and make the business work and generate a profit. The last thing you do is get rid of staff. You cut back on travel. You cut back on everything else that you can.

On 15 March last year—March, April, May, June, July, August—before the Chief Minister said he was going to have surpluses for four years, Peter Martin, an economics writer in the *Canberra Times*, explained this in a couple of paragraphs out of a story he wrote headed “The day we heard the economy snap”. The GFC is not something that just turned up. It did not happen after the election. The election was conducted in a climate of the world sliding and we had a Chief Minister who said, “I guarantee, I pledge that Labor’s fully funded election promises would maintain a forecast budget surplus for each year.” This is the point we make in this motion: we have a Chief Minister in denial. Peter Martin wrote:

Job offers react to spending and investment with a lag—

That is why they are called a lagging indicator, Chief Minister.

six months is one estimate. They tell you where you’ve been, not what lies ahead.

And those who quote employment are putting up a false premise. The article went on:

It’s a lesson the Macquarie Bank’s Rory Robertson says he learned painfully when he worked for the research department of the Reserve Bank at the time when the economy snapped in the late 1980s.

He says once a month at the Reserve Bank’s headquarters in Martin Place Sydney a gaggle of economists (often including the present Governor Glenn Stevens) would huddle around the single news-screen to read the employment numbers, often marvelling at the ongoing strength of full-time employment and still-sliding unemployment.

‘Later, it turned out that the economy actually was heading south, not waiting for the jobs data to catch up,’ he said this week.

That is the problem: if you are going to quote lagging indicators, you are deluding yourself and you are fooling the people of the ACT. What we are saying is that it is time the government outlined what it is they are going to do. In paragraph 4, we find out what the government have done. They have had a series of global financial crisis roundtables. And in response to the first set of roundtables what are we going to have? More roundtables. Paragraph 4 of the amendment says:

that, in response to the global financial crisis, the ACT Labor Government has conducted industry roundtables, and introduced two supplementary Budget appropriations aimed at supporting local jobs and investing in our community;

That was the second appropriation. With the third appropriation the Treasurer herself said, “Don’t get your hopes up.” They attack us. They say we are talking down the economy. But, no, we are talking common sense and we are asking you to detail your solution. But we have got a Treasurer, whose job is to instil confidence in the community, saying: “Don’t get your hopes up. We’re too small to stimulate.” What you are saying is: do not have any confidence in this government because this government are absolutely clueless on what to do.

The amendment continues in paragraph 5:

urges the ACT Government to consider further measures to support the local economy as part of the next ACT Budget.

That is not that different from the action that we have called for from the government in our motion, which is to “detail its plan and solutions to manage this recession”. We are just asking it to tell us now, to give us a context to the budget, so that people understand where the budget will be going. Let us have a context. Let us know your plans. Surely you have got plans now, things in place to make this happen. (*Time expired.*)

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (11.19): Madam Deputy Speaker, the Chief Minister spoke about the responsibilities of an opposition. Well, Chief Minister, we are well aware of our responsibilities, but I question your own responsibility, Chief Minister, your decision, as an experienced Treasurer facing the most difficult economic world situation—that such an experienced Treasurer and Chief Minister would hand the all-important position of the Treasurer of the ACT to Ms Gallagher, a person of limited experience in such an important portfolio. How responsible is that, Chief Minister—to step away from the challenge and pass it to your colleague?

We as an opposition take no pleasure in continually exposing the weakness and the inability of your Treasurer to cope with her portfolio. But as a responsible opposition it is our duty to do so.

Now I move on to my support of the motion by my colleague Mr Smyth, our shadow treasurer with proven experience. As my colleague has said, this motion fulfils a critical role of an opposition. We as the opposition are looked to by the electorate to keep the government of the day up to the mark. A significant focus of this motion is to consider how the Stanhope-Gallagher government has managed the ACT economy in recent years. The global financial crisis and the associated global economic downturn have created a situation in which all states and territories and the Australian government are increasingly concerned about developments in their budgetary situations. This is particularly important for the ACT, as we are such a small jurisdiction.

We want to consider very carefully how the Stanhope-Gallagher government has responded and is responding to this situation. The fiction that the ACT has continued

to perform strongly while the world was collapsing around us is of most concern. In the lead-up to the 2008 ACT election, the Chief Minister and former Treasurer assured the Canberra community that the ACT economy was performing very strongly. In the Assembly on 28 August 2008 the Chief Minister and Treasurer said:

The ACT economy is experiencing a period of sustained economic growth and prosperity.

Let me repeat that, just so we are quite clear what our former Treasurer was telling us:

The ACT economy is experiencing a period of sustained economic growth and prosperity.

And, in case you have missed the important words, let me emphasise them again: sustained economic growth.

While the global financial crisis was reaching full force and governments all around the world were starting to develop responses to this crisis, our Treasurer was in a world of his own. Perhaps something started to gel with our Treasurer soon after he made this statement, because on 9 September, two weeks later, he said on ABC radio that the ACT had a “slowing economy”. The question we asked then, just before the ACT election, was: what was the Chief Minister and Treasurer telling the Canberra community? Did the Chief Minister know that the prospects for the ACT economy, and implicitly for the ACT budget, in financial year 2008-09 were already looking less favourable? If he did, he was not going to say so only a few weeks out from the ACT election. In fact, not only did he not make any suggestions about deteriorating prospects; he said quite the opposite. On 19 September 2008 the Chief Minister and Treasurer said:

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

This was not a Treasurer who could see declining prospects for the ACT economy. This was not a Treasurer who appeared concerned about the changing prospects for the ACT budget for 2008-09, let alone the outyears. On the contrary, it appears that this was a Chief Minister and Treasurer who was living in the aftermath of the very strong ACT economy that he had inherited from the former Liberal government in 2001. As is well known, when the Stanhope-Gallagher government was elected in 2001 it inherited a very strong budgetary position. We also know that the ACT economy continued to perform very strongly over the succeeding years. We experienced a revenue boom of substantial proportions. The ACT received additional revenue of \$1.6 billion over and above that which had been budgeted for in successive ACT budgets.

The tragedy for the ACT is that the Stanhope-Gallagher government squandered that bonus. This bonus, which could have helped prepare the ACT to withstand economic shocks, was frittered away. The state of the ACT budget remained—

Mr Stanhope: What, on health and on education?

MR DOSZPOT: No, on statues, Jon, on statues. The state of the ACT budget remained very strong for the next six or seven years, despite the efforts of the Stanhope-Gallagher government to destroy—

Mr Stanhope: Do you understand how absurd that statement is?

MR DOSZPOT: through reckless spending and wasting the opportunity provided by the \$1.6 billion revenue boom to equip the ACT economy to withstand economic shocks. The ACT was left in a situation—

Mr Stanhope: Pratt by name, prat by nature, two of them—how amazing.

MR DOSZPOT: Madam Deputy Speaker?

Mr Stanhope: You are a prat.

MR DOSZPOT: Can I ask for a little bit of support?

Mr Stanhope: From me? I'm trying to support you, Steve.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Stanhope!

MR DOSZPOT: The ACT was left in a situation where it has less capacity to respond to external economic shocks.

Mr Stanhope: The only person with capacity in the opposition.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Stanhope! Mr Doszpot has the floor.

MR DOSZPOT: We have had more than seven years of failure—

Mr Stanhope: Where were you, Steve?

MR DOSZPOT: If you do not want to listen, Jon, I can understand why you do not want to listen, but you have to, or you can read it in *Hansard* later.

Mr Stanhope: I am praising you, Steve.

MR DOSZPOT: We have had more than seven years of failure by your government. We prepared the ACT economy to cope with economic shocks—listen—be they internally generated or external to the ACT. With the ACT election out of the way, however, we began to see a different picture emerging. On 11 December 2008 a report in the *Canberra Times* revealed that the ACT was facing the prospect of a budget deficit for 2008-09. The following day another report in the *Canberra Times* revealed that the ACT Treasury had warned the Stanhope-Gallagher government that a deficit was possible for 2008-09.

While the global economy was in freefall, the Stanhope-Gallagher government remained in denial. This was demonstrated most clearly when the Treasurer released

her purported midyear budget review on 23 December 2008. This showed that the Stanhope-Gallagher government had acknowledged that the budget outcomes in the current financial year and in the outyears would deteriorate dramatically, from an aggregate surplus of \$244 million as at May 2008 to an aggregate deficit of \$286 million as at 23 December 2008.

This Stanhope-Gallagher government was maintaining the fiction, however, that the outcome for 2008-09 would remain in surplus as this review indicated that 2008-09 would have a much reduced surplus of \$15 million. So the Canberra community was now being treated to the extraordinary spectacle of the Chief Minister saying in September 2008 that the ACT budgets would remain in surplus for the next four years and yet, a few short weeks after this, he and his now Treasurer telling the Canberra community that there had been a turnaround of half a billion dollars in the aggregate budget outcomes—reality, Mr Stanhope, reality; yes, a turnaround of half a billion dollars.

This was a most bizarre situation. The world economy was falling into a major hole. The Australian government, along with all other governments, was developing a substantial stimulus package to respond to the emerging economic breakdown—and the Stanhope-Gallagher government was maintaining the fiction that the ACT budget was still in surplus for 2008-09.

The record of the Stanhope-Gallagher government in managing the ACT budget is anything but sound. They squandered the boom in revenue. They failed to position the ACT economy so that it could withstand buffeting from external economic shocks. They failed to tell the people of the ACT the true state of the budget prior to the 2008 election. They made claims about being able to deliver the budget surpluses even when they knew, or should have known, that this could not be done.

The Canberra community is still looking to the Stanhope-Gallagher government for answers, for its response to the current situation. What do we get from this government? We need to wait till the next budget before this government provides us with its response. That is not good enough and it contrasts dramatically with the response of the federal government, where a substantial response has been developed outside the budget context.

The situation is serious and demands governments to do things differently. The Stanhope-Gallagher government has failed in its response. Mr Stanhope, you are quite right in calling for a responsible opposition, which we are. And it is our task to call you to task to be a responsible government.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (11.29): Madam Deputy Speaker, it is with disappointment that I see that this motion is even on the notice paper today. It is most regrettable that we are in a recession. The recession we are in today is brought about by years of mismanagement. Mr Stanhope can skirt around the fact that it is a recession until the cows come home. He may well say that it is a technical recession. Even Katy Gallagher, the Treasurer, said yesterday that she had doubts about whether it really was a recession, whether it really did have an impact. She said yesterday:

... there has not been a noticeable impact ...

I know of several businesses that have lost staff of late. There has been a noticeable impact for those staff; there has been a noticeable impact for those businesses; there has been a noticeable impact for those clients; and there has been a noticeable impact on the Canberra community. Yes, the Treasurer said yesterday:

... there has not been a noticeable impact ...

I find this absolutely staggering. I am very concerned that the Chief Minister would stand by his Treasurer when she makes a comment like that. The Treasurer went on to say:

I would be surprised if anyone ... is feeling the impact of the technical recession.

I guess that, if you talk about this “technical recession” term that they keep talking about, maybe it is not real; maybe it is just on paper. But the fact is that this recession is hurting Canberrans. It is hurting Australians and it is hurting people all around the world, but the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister or Treasurer will not even acknowledge that that is the case.

Today Mr Stanhope said that it is in fact very painful: that wealth is lost and dreams are shattered; that is what a recession is. Yet, yesterday it was “I would be surprised if anyone ... is feeling the impact of the technical recession”. Mr Stanhope and his ministers are certainly at odds over this situation and as to who is to blame for it. We are in a recession and people are hurting.

On 4 March, the ABC Online website stated:

The ACT is the only state or territory to record two consecutive quarters of contraction in the figures, but economists say the figures may be readjusted as more data is made available.

We are still waiting for that data, but that does not change the fact that it is actually hurting Canberrans.

Yesterday the *Sydney Morning Herald* published the statement:

US Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner has commended efforts by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd ...

I have got some doubts about whether Kevin Rudd is handling the economy all that well, but I wonder how many people would be commending Treasurer Gallagher and Chief Minister Stanhope for how they are handling it. I wonder how many people are publishing and putting on the record that they think the ACT government is handling this recession well. How many people are saying that?

The Chief Minister is very good at coming into this chamber and telling us about all the people who love him. He often reads a list of five, 10 or 15 quotes from people who say that the government is doing such a good job. Where is that list now? Where is that list of people who are talking about how well the ACT government is handling

this recession, albeit technical in the eyes of the government? I have got grave doubts about how the federal government is handling this recession and I have got grave doubts about how the ACT government is handling it.

Last year's election saw a business and economic development policy by the Labor Party co-signed by the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister. At page 1 it says:

ACT Labor will continue to build a strong economy, maintain budget surpluses and provide Canberra businesses with assistance to make the most of our present opportunities, and meet the challenges of the future.

Page 2 goes on to say:

ACT Labor has taken the hard decisions needed to ensure it has the economic fundamentals right—a strong economy, continuing budget surpluses and responsible Government spending.

It goes on to say that ACT Labor:

Maintained a budget cash position that is the envy of other states and territories ...

Is the current economic condition of the ACT really the envy of the other states and territories? How many of the other states and territories are doffing their cap to Mr Stanhope and saying, "You're doing a great job at running the ACT economy"? We are the only one in recession.

At last year's election he was there bragging that he was the envy of the other states and the other territory. We have had soaring property prices that have brought in windfall stamp duty receipts; we had GST receipts go up and up; and we have had the ACT government increase taxes and charges. All that brought about \$1.7 billion of additional revenue.

And what do we have to show for it? We could go through the usual things. We could go through Gungahlin Drive and the Tharwa bridge. We could go through the public artwork. But what happens when you look around Canberra and you think back to what was here in 2001? I do not think many people in Canberra look around and think: "Wow, look at all that infrastructure. Look at that stronger community that Jon Stanhope built." How many people are saying that? It is absolutely absurd. Nobody is saying that. Nobody drives around Canberra thinking, "Wow, this city has really gone ahead in leaps and bounds over the last seven or eight years." No-one drives past big bits of infrastructure and says, "Yes, that's a real trophy for the last government." Nobody does that. Nobody says that.

I found it absolutely amazing that we had Ms Burch get up and give a speech on business confidence. It had to be the most uninspiring speech of all time and probably did more to demotivate business than anything else that has happened in the last seven or eight years. But pushing that aside, let me talk about what would happen if you were to go to YouTube, which I have been to a couple of times to look at the ACT

Labor Party advertisements. On 23 September—that is, after the Lehman Brothers collapse, which Minister Gallagher keeps talking about as being the iconic moment when the world changed: the iconic moment when the world changed and the ACT government suddenly was not responsible—suddenly, from that moment, it was world economic conditions, the global financial crisis; it was not the ACT government's fault.

On 23 September, they uploaded an advertisement. It went for two minutes and 56 seconds, so it was probably only a YouTube video, and not too many people would have seen it. There is a quote from the Chief Minister. He said:

ACT Labor has been able to do all this—

talking about the rant beforehand about all the achievements—

and is able to deliver much more because we have been responsible economic managers who continue to deliver budget surpluses so we can prepare for our long-term future. Labor's prepared to make the tough but sensible decisions if they are in the long-term interests of Canberra and the community.

Where is the extra 20 seconds or 30 seconds on that clip which says, "By the way, if the commonwealth government suddenly does not do what we like or if the global financial crisis gives us conditions that we cannot handle, it is not our fault and it is not our responsibility; the ACT government is not really our beast"? No, no. That was not included in the two minutes and 56 seconds. There was an extra four seconds there to round it up to three minutes, so they might have been able to squeeze something in there, but, alas, they did not. They said in that ad:

We have been responsible economic managers who continue to deliver budget surpluses.

I find that very hard to believe and I think a lot of people in Canberra are thinking that too.

They talk about talking down the economy. We have heard a couple of speeches on how the government is in fact talking up the economy. Most people here know that that is complete bunkum. Nobody would actually buy that. The government tries to wash its hands of everything and, in doing so, claims it is so bad, so dramatic, that it is totally beyond its control. But it is talking up the economy. There are some stark parallels with what the federal Labor Party is doing—a bit of solidarity there with its federal comrades.

"It will be tough, ugly and hard," the Prime Minister has said on a few occasions. Governor Stevens of the Reserve Bank has said:

... about the biggest mistake we could make would be to talk ourselves into unnecessary economic weakness ...

I will say that again:

... about the biggest mistake we could make would be to talk ourselves into unnecessary economic weakness ...

The Chief Minister and the Treasurer constantly talk about how they have got no control over the situation, they cannot stimulate the economy because it is too small, their budget is just a minuscule budget in the grand scheme of things, and all the government programs really do not make too much of an impact. That is one of the biggest mistakes we could make, according to Governor Stevens. I wonder whether the Chief Minister or the Treasurer would admit to that. I doubt it. The Chief Minister and the Treasurer are responsible for our economic situation, and they can take that as an opportunity to get us out of this situation. I certainly hope they take it up.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (11.39): This motion is simply asking for the government to shoulder its share of the responsibility for the things that it has under its control in the ACT. That is not an unreasonable ask of a government. It is asking this government for a clear enunciation of how it intends to deal with the recession, something it has not been able to do.

The Chief Minister says, “Two-thirds of how you combat the circumstances we face is by generating confidence.” The question has to be asked: why do we have a Treasurer who says things like “Don’t get your hopes up; we cannot stimulate this economy”? We start with a mini-budget and we end with a local initiatives package. If there is a speech or a lecture to be given on talking down the economy, perhaps the Chief Minister should take the Treasurer aside and say: “Now, listen, Katy, you’ve got to stop this. You’ve got to stop saying, ‘It’s only guesswork.’ You’ve got to stop saying, ‘We’re too small to stimulate.’ You’ve got to stop saying, ‘Don’t get your hopes up.’” If people are looking to this government for hope, they are not going to find it.

The best way for the government to end this debate is to tell us how they are going to rectify the situation—tell us how they are going to rectify the things under their control or if they will simply throw their hands up and say: “We’re actually not in control. It’s all because of people not in this jurisdiction and not in this country and therefore we are inept, we are useless and we have no idea.”

This motion asks for the government to detail its plans and its solution to manage this recession. That is not unreasonable. It is not as though we did not know that it has been going on for some time. Lehman’s collapse was back in August, but commentators like Peter Martin were talking about this in March last year. Twelve months ago, they were saying, “This is the day we heard the economy snap.” They were the words he used. He points to the day when it turned.

Yet, as both Mr Doszpot and Mr Coe have pointed out so eloquently, we had a government, a Chief Minister who was then Treasurer, blithely continue to say, “We have got unparalleled economic growth; we have got \$3 billion of business in the pipeline; we have got four years of surpluses because of the policies that I put in place.”

Mr Hanson: Guaranteed his surpluses.

MR SMYTH: Guaranteed his surpluses. And it is just not true. That is the problem for the people of the ACT. It is the denial of this government. To give Peter Beattie his due, Peter Beattie said, "I have a problem but I've got a solution to the problem." All Mr Stanhope does is to say, "It's your fault because you're talking it down." Our job is to hold you accountable and our job is to ask you to tell us how you are going to deal with it. We offered a joint discussion. We said, "Let the three parties here sit down and have a chat." It was dismissed by the Chief Minister: "Don't want to do that. Don't want to talk to you. Don't want to know."

You have to look at it and compare. You have to contrast and compare what the Rudd government has done, whether you think it is going to be effective or not. Rudd was saying, "Do it now; be decisive." As Mr Coe just pointed out, the Governor of the Reserve Bank said, "Don't talk yourself out of stuff." That is what this government is doing. Mr Rudd said, "Let's throw the kitchen sink at it." I think he threw it in the wrong direction; there is no need to get rid of the kitchen sink.

The point here is that we have to wait for almost six months of this government since they were re-elected to find out what they might do. The Stevens quote is very important: "about the biggest mistake we could make would be to talk ourselves into unnecessary economic weakness". What has the Treasurer said? "Don't get your hopes up; we're too small to stimulate." She has already done it. She has talked this government into that position of weakness from which they need to recover.

Yesterday we had what can only be the most appalling statements from the Treasurer and the most hurtful comments from the Treasurer to people who are already suffering. In the answer to a question from me about what is a recession, she said:

At the moment I would be surprised if anyone, in a technical recession sense, is feeling the impact of the technical recession.

Well, technically does not count when you are stressed at home because of the economic circumstances you find yourself in.

It is beyond comprehension that a Treasurer who, according to the Chief Minister, is meant to be building confidence—"Let's put confidence into this"—does this. Take her aside, Jon, and tell her, "Don't make these statements." She went on to say:

With respect to the impact on the community—that is, householders—
householders, families, probably working families—

and even businesses to this point—I would say that there has not been a noticeable impact of a technical recession.

Let us forget about the technical sense of it; let us find out what is really going on there in the ACT community. In its submission to the public accounts inquiry into the third appropriation bill, ACTCOSS says this:

The financial crisis has and will continue to have disproportionate impacts on people in the ACT experiencing disadvantage.

It is happening now; that is what ACTCOSS is saying: “the financial crisis has”. What does the Treasurer say? “At the moment I would be surprised if anyone is feeling the impact of a technical recession.” ACTCOSS goes on to say—

Mr Seselja: It is very sensitive.

MR SMYTH: It is very sensitive, Mr Seselja. It is very sensitive for the Treasurer to say: “You’re not hurting. Trust me. I’m from the Jon Stanhope-Katy Gallagher Labor government. Nobody is hurting on this. There are no impacts. Nobody is suffering. Nobody is feeling the pain. There is no responsibility because we have got no ideas.”

ACTCOSS goes on:

ACOSS research shows that one in ten ACT residents are already suffering multiple deprivations and missing out on essential items for living.

And this is the important line in my mind:

Financial counselling services are already reporting an increase in demand on their services, as more people fall behind on their mortgages or rental payments and experience financial stress.

Katy Gallagher: “no-one”; “I would be surprised if anyone with respect to the community”; “there has not been a noticeable impact”. ACTCOSS: “Financial stress is happening.” They go on to say:

Financial stress can lead to a range of other health and mental health related conditions.

The submission goes on to say:

As a result of the financial crisis—

not “maybe”, not “possibly”, not “no-one”, not “in a technical sense”, but “As a result of the financial crisis”—

people and families who have not previously sought support in financial counselling, housing or crisis services are turning to community organisations as they find it more difficult to cope.

New people, people not seen before, are turning to these organisations. ACTCOSS goes on:

However many community organisations are reporting they are unable to meet the needs of their current clients, and have little capacity to increase service delivery to people feeling the effects of the economic crisis.

Katy Gallagher:

I would be surprised if anyone, in a technical recession sense, is feeling the impact ...

ACTCOSS:

... little capacity to increase ... delivery to people feeling the effects of the economic crisis.

This is what we are saying. It is out there. It is not talking down the economy; it is repeating what ACTCOSS is saying. Chief Minister, is ACTCOSS guilty of talking down the economy? How dare ACTCOSS tell the truth and talk down the economy!

The submission goes on:

Steps taken in the second appropriation ... to assist community organisations to provide crisis support were welcome. However, organisations who received funding are reporting far higher demand than the funds can provide for. Additional funding needs to be allocated to organisations to assist them to meet the increasing demands on their services in the current economic climate.

That is what the government are responsible for, Madam Deputy Speaker. They are there to take action.

These people cannot wait until the budget in May, the estimates and the budget debate in June, and for the money to roll next year—if the government has solutions at all. There are people suffering now—real people, not technical people; not data or statistics, but real human beings—who are visiting the providers of social services in our community. The community sector is saying, “They are suffering; they are stressed.” And what we have is a government that simply wants to ignore this. What we have is a government that has no aim. What we have is a listless government, a clueless government and a Treasurer who does not believe that anyone is hurting. All we are asking for from this motion is for the government to outline their plan. (*Time expired.*)

Question put:

That **Mr Stanhope’s** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 10

Noes 5

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

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Environment—energy efficiency ratings

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (11.53): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

(a) the lack of:

- (i) auditing of energy efficiency ratings of new houses in Canberra;
 - (ii) sufficient warning to energy auditors to prepare for the new software which will be mandatory from May this year; and
 - (iii) auditing of the ratings as used by real estate agents to regularly disclose the energy efficiency of houses for sale as per the Sale of Premises Act;
- (b) that despite Action 19 in the Government's Weathering the Change strategy, there has been no action to extend energy efficiency ratings to commercial and rental buildings; and
- (c) the potential for confusion as there will soon be two different ratings schemes for households; and

(2) agrees that the Government should:

- (a) immediately start auditing the energy efficiency ratings undertaken last year for new houses and houses for sale;
- (b) set a target of auditing at least 5 per cent of ratings on an annual basis; and
- (c) urgently implement transitional arrangements, in particular:
 - (i) inform ACT energy auditors as soon as possible of the new energy efficiency software which will be required under the Building Code of Australia from May 2009;
 - (ii) clarify which software will be required under the Sale of Premises Act, and inform the real estate industry and energy auditors of this;
 - (iii) implement an education program to explain the two ratings schemes, so users of the ratings, such as home owners and purchasers, understand how the new ratings relate to the old ones and why ratings are important;
 - (iv) ensure that there are sufficient trained auditors by May 2009; and
 - (v) publicly release the energy rating discussion paper published by the ACT Planning and Land Authority last year.

I thank members for giving me the opportunity to talk about the important issue of energy efficiency ratings and how we are using and abusing them in the ACT. So what is an energy efficiency rating? For the sake of convenience, I will refer to this usually in my speech as “rating” or “EER”. The rating scheme used in the ACT is a star rating of the thermal performance of the building shell. It does not include appliances such as ovens and hot-water services, or even the built-in lighting.

The star rating ranges from zero stars to 10 stars and in this it is similar to energy rating labelling of appliances such as refrigerators. A zero star rating for a building is woeful and it means that the building does practically nothing to protect the occupants from unpleasant heat or cold outside. It is the lowest rating, although technically there are some houses in the ACT which would qualify for a negative rating. A five-star rating indicates the house has good but not brilliant thermal performance. There are a number of houses in the ACT which would rate a lot higher than this and basically do not use external energy for heating or cooling—except, of course, energy from the sun.

Energy efficiency ratings are important for a number of reasons. For house occupiers, they can tell them how comfortable it will be to live in the house and give an indication of how much money it will cost to heat or cool it. For house sellers, a recent study by the ABS for the commonwealth government has shown that houses will be worth in the order of an extra \$10,000 for each additional star rating. This, of course, is because people recognise the value of energy stars. For people concerned with climate change, energy efficiency is very important. The more efficient our houses are, the less external energy the occupants need to use.

Weathering the Change shows that 72.3 per cent of the ACT’s energy use is in stationary energy use—largely heating and cooling buildings. The government said that it “will plan our buildings and infrastructure to be more energy efficient and to withstand changed climate patterns”, and noted that “smart building design can reduce the amount of resources we use”. 72.3 per cent of ACT energy is a substantial amount and should be a major focus for the government.

Just to make life a little bit more interesting, there are a couple of separate energy rating schemes. There are a couple of different ones for commercial buildings. These schemes are important but add, unfortunately, to the confusion about energy efficiency ratings and they are outside the scope of this motion.

Energy efficiency ratings are used in two ways with respect to residential properties in the ACT. Again, for simplicity, I will say in this speech “house” when in fact I mean “residential property”; that is, I am talking about both single residences and multi-unit properties. When you build a house it must have an energy rating, and when you sell a house you have to provide an energy rating to the potential buyer.

The Building Code of Australia requires all new houses to have a minimum star rating of five stars, although in multi-unit developments the requirements for some units may be less. When houses are sold, the energy efficiency rating must be part of all house advertising. When a house is purchased a certificate must also be supplied to the purchaser which includes the star rating and a list of potential energy efficiency

improvements. The reason for this is to encourage the purchaser to improve their new home.

Next Tuesday, 31 March, is the 10th anniversary of the commencement of the Energy Efficiency Ratings (Sale of Premises) Act 1997 which was introduced by former Greens MLA Kerrie Tucker. At the time it was a world-leading innovation, and it still is. It has been adopted in principle by the rest of Australia and is part of the national framework for energy efficiency. The commonwealth government is working on ways to implement this nationally. However, I do not think we should wait while the commonwealth scheme is being sorted out. We do not want to erode our local scheme which has been running successfully for a decade.

Energy efficiency ratings are important but there are problems. Houses must be at least five stars to be built, according to the Building Code of Australia. So, of course, there is pressure to ensure they are rated as at least five stars. When a house is rated, sometimes the ratings are based on things like house awnings or floor coverings which are not there in practice. Maybe it is said to have double glazing; maybe it is not double glazing that is actually there. I have even been told that houses have been rated on different climatic zones. Basically, what this is saying is that five stars are not necessarily five stars.

Most consumers, of course, are not in a position to tell if their house is accurately energy rated or not. So the ratings are important, and it is important to ensure that the government audits them to make sure they are right. The government does this for other parts of buildings, such as major plumbing and electrical work, where I understand that 10 per cent of the work is audited by ACTPLA.

When I became an MLA, I started asking questions. In December, I asked ACTPLA some questions about energy efficiency ratings and they responded by telling me that “the energy rating report for the purposes of the sale of residential housing is a requirement of the Civil Law (Sale of Residential Property) Act 2003, which is administered by JACS with assistance by ACTPLA with regard to the energy rating tools”. They also said that the requirements for energy efficiency are enforced by licensed building certifiers, not by ACTPLA.

I followed it up and asked JACS in February how many energy efficiency ratings they have done. They replied this week, saying that they are “not responsible for energy efficiency rating audits on residential homes”, as this is “the responsibility of ACTPLA” and suggested that I might like to approach ACTPLA for a briefing. This was actually back to square one, as that was my first move. So as far as I can tell, the government does not actually know who is responsible for auditing. I have been told by the industry that no systematic audits have been carried out for five years, although I have heard of an interesting one-off exercise.

My motion today recommends that the government immediately start auditing the energy efficiency ratings undertaken last year for new houses and existing houses for sale. They should start by setting a target of auditing at least five per cent of ratings on an annual basis. The most important thing is that a part of the government take responsibility for this and actually start doing it. I would think it would be logical that

ACTPLA should do the auditing, as it is the one that is responsible for other building matters, and it in fact does the auditing for plumbing and electrical work.

The situation is bad enough with respect to the integrity of the rating system, but unfortunately it is going to get more confusing. As I mentioned, the Building Code of Australia, which is the national code that we follow, mandates five-star energy efficiency, and at present it is measured by so-called first-generation software. The Building Code is mandating the use of new second-generation rating software as of 1 May 2009. After this time, we anticipate that the vendors of the first-generation software will no longer be offering support, training or even sales for their software. And the first-generation software will not run under Vista, which is the current version of the Windows operating system.

There is no doubt that the second-generation software is better software. However, it is more complicated to use, as it is more accurate. Unfortunately, as it is more accurate, in some cases the result you will get with the first-generation software will not be the same as the result you will get with the second-generation software.

One of the first things we have to do is to ensure that there are sufficient auditors available in the ACT who can use second-generation software by May 2009. ACTPLA's view, as I quoted before, is that energy efficiency issues are enforced by the licensed building certifiers. So ACTPLA has not done anything, to my knowledge, to facilitate training in the second-generation software, and I have been told that there are only 30 ACT assessors who have undertaken the second-generation training. As I said, the new software will have to be used for all new buildings as this is mandated by the Building Code. However, the situation is not clear with respect to second-hand houses—in other words, houses which are being resold.

In February, the planning minister answered my question on notice in regard to the government's intentions with respect to existing buildings by writing:

The energy rating report for the purposes of the sale of residential housing is a requirement of the Civil Law (Sale of Residential Property) Act 2003. The Civil Law (Sale of Residential Property) Act is an act administered by the Department of JACS with assistance provided by the ACTPLA with respect to the energy rating tools.

The ACT Planning and Land Authority will be consulting with the energy rating community in the first half of 2009 about the most appropriate rating tools for the purpose of EER.

At this time it is not proposed to change the rating tool for EER for the purpose of the Civil Law (Sale of Residential Property) Act when the BCA requirements for new building work commence in May 2009.

It is my understanding from that answer that the government would be consulting now about appropriate rating tools for existing buildings. I understand that ACTPLA wrote a discussion paper on this issue last year which, despite my asking for a copy of it, I do not believe has yet seen the light of day. I would have assumed that would have formed the basis of the consultation. However, contacts in the industry tell me this has

not yet happened. So I assume the situation is that the ratings of houses for sale will use the old first-generation software, as the minister said that it is not proposed to change the rating tool.

This means that the government is planning to have a system where one rating tool is used for new houses and one rating tool is used for old houses or houses which are resold. As the two tools do not always give the same results and there will be no support for the old tool, this is definitely not a good situation. It is a recipe, at the very least, for confusion. Given the situation with the first-generation software, it is just not viable as a long-term solution.

This is an important issue. Only a few thousand new houses are built each year in the ACT, while the existing stock of houses must exceed 150,000. Many more existing houses are sold each year than new houses. I am not here today to tell the government what the technical solution to this problem is. It needs to urgently consult with the energy assessors and the real estate community as to the most practical and effective solution to the problem. One additional complication in this consultation is that the ratings for existing buildings for sale are generally organised by real estate agents as part of the sales process, whereas the ratings for new buildings to be built are organised by the architects or the builder—a different part of the profession.

Some assessors have suggested to me that because an assessment using the second-generation software will be more expensive than that using the first-generation software, there will be resistance to using it for existing houses. It has been suggested that, to overcome this problem, there could be a simplified checklist-type approach. This could well provide useful information to a potential purchaser of a house about how they could improve their home, but it is hard to see how it could be made compatible with new house energy ratings.

Whatever the solution is, it must be found quickly so that the industry and the public who use the ratings can know what is going on. I would like to see an information piece regularly in Saturday's real estate section and on real estate websites which explains to the public what is happening with the energy rating system and what it means in general.

In conclusion, energy efficiency ratings are very important and they need to be accurate. However, the government is not doing any auditing to protect the integrity of the system and ensure the accuracy of the ratings. New software is going to end up requiring changes to the system that we use to rate existing houses, but unfortunately the government has not yet done the consultation and information process with the industry and consumers to tell them what the changes will be.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Planning and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation) (12.07): I thank the member for raising this matter and for her ongoing interest in the energy efficiency rating of houses in the territory. There is no doubt, Mr Speaker, that this is an important issue for the local community. However, it is my sad duty to advise the Assembly that there are a number of misconceptions in the member's motion which undoubtedly need further clarification before I believe the Assembly can properly consider the intent of the member's motion.

The member is not correct in her references to the purposes and processes by which energy efficiency ratings are produced. The building approval processes under the Building Act and the mandatory disclosure of building energy efficiency of residential houses through the ACT house energy rating scheme are two separate processes. The Building Code of Australia is not a house rating scheme. The information provided in my response of 19 March to a question on notice on this matter advised that ratings are not mandatory under the BCA. The ratings are a method of verifying compliance with energy efficiency performance provisions. The government does not recommend this method of verification over other available methods.

All ratings permissible under ACT building and sale of residential property legislation are produced by rating tools within the same suite of tools. The new software that the member refers to in the motion is, in fact, the second generation or later versions of the type of software already in use for the ACT house energy rating scheme and for verification under the BCA. Assessors have been aware of and have been using the new software for BCA compliance since 2006, when the new protocol was first introduced. Under this process, assessors have already been given a three-year phase-out period in which to seek training on and familiarisation with the second-generation software for the purpose of compliance with the Building Code.

Mr Speaker, it is important to note that both generations of tools have been utilised concurrently since 2006. This has not caused confusion in the industry or with consumers, as the output from both generations of tools is broadly aligned. ACTPLA representatives have been actively participating in the process for extending mandatory disclosure through the national framework for energy efficiency, and action 19 of the government's climate change policy, weathering the change, also clearly recognises the government's commitment to ensuring national consistency. It would have been inappropriate for the ACT to progress the expansion of the ACT house energy rating scheme to commercial buildings and residential leases without first having a clear indication of the nature and timing of proposals at the national level.

I am pleased to advise that, as aspects of the proposed schemes have been increasingly clarified, the ACT is now able to progress amendment of the house energy rating scheme to ensure compatibility with agreed national objectives. An energy rating adviser is shortly to be appointed by ACTPLA and will work with existing policy staff to continue the development of an ordered regime for energy assessors.

This will include an assessment of the resources required to carry out a suitable level of auditing. It should be noted that, at this time, officers are limited in their ability to enforce standards for energy assessments as there is no formal legislative framework. This also is being addressed as a priority. To initiate the process, ACTPLA is finalising a discussion paper, which has not previously been published, that will address issues regarding energy assessment and the broader provisions of the ACT house energy rating scheme.

The paper will outline proposals for formal licensing and auditing of energy assessors, addressing issues with broader compliance with the scheme, moving to

second-generation rating software and possible amendments to the Civil Law (Sale of Residential Property) Act, which replaced the Energy Efficiency Ratings (Sale of Premises) Act in 2003, and the Residential Tenancies Act to allow disclosure at the point of lease. Implementation of these proposals will resolve any gaps in the regulation of energy assessment. However, as a number of these proposals require amendments to acts, it would not be appropriate to implement these without the required level of consultation.

The government also needs to be responsible in ensuring that the costs and benefits of the scheme are adequately assessed through a regulatory impact analysis. Given the imminent release of the discussion paper and the resultant amendment to the ACT house energy rating scheme, it would be premature to embark on an education campaign at this time. In the interim, practitioners will continue to operate under the current rules for the ACT house energy rating scheme. While energy assessors and other stakeholders will be kept informed of any changes to ACT legislation, there is, of course, some responsibility on practitioners to ensure that they are complying with their legislative obligations. Due to the length of time the second generation software has been available, it is not expected that there will be a shortage of trained assessors for building plan assessment. The key issue that needs to be addressed is the difference between energy ratings for buildings that have not yet been built, which are required under the BCA, and energy ratings when a building is sold, which are required under the Civil Law (Sale of Residential Property) Act.

I know there are a number of amendments circulating and there is a considerable amount of confusion. The government cannot support the motion as it currently stands. It is certainly not my preference to have to vote against it today. I would suggest that, if other parties are agreeable, once people have given their initial speeches, we adjourn this debate today so that briefings can be provided to the Liberals and the Greens on these complex issues and that we might be able to resume debate on this either in the next sitting week or possibly in May, depending on the complexity of the issues.

There is no desire from the government to try and block the intent of Ms Le Couteur's motion, but we just simply cannot support a number of the points in paragraph (1) that are factually incorrect. The actions that are required in paragraph (2) certainly we cannot support, and I understand that the Liberals are proposing an amendment. So a constructive way forward, Mr Speaker, through you to Ms Le Couteur and to Mr Seselja, might be that, once initial contributions have been made, we adjourn the debate today, we have some more detailed briefings on the issues and we will then be able to come back with a motion that everyone can agree to and an agreed way forward. There certainly is goodwill on the government's part to complete this work. If there is support from other parties to do so then I think that would be a constructive way forward today.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (12.15): I am not sure what the Greens' position is. Given it is their motion, I would like to hear first and foremost whether they would be amenable to the proposal from the minister, but we can have some further discussions as it goes on, and I am sure some notes will be passed.

Mr Speaker, we certainly support part of the intent of this motion. In broad terms, we are prepared to support the first part of the motion, but I have circulated an amendment to the second part, and that is something that I will be looking to move. I am not tied to whether I move it now or later, but I understand that the Greens are looking at supporting the adjournment of the debate. I am getting some nods, so it is worth going into the substance of it first and then we can talk about adjourning the debate.

Certainly, energy efficiency rating systems are an important tool, and we see them used for all sorts of things at the moment—we see them for washing machines and televisions and of course for cars and homes. This particular motion relates to the energy efficiency ratings of new houses, particularly the first part of the motion, and I think it is critically important that we do look at this issue. We have got a rating system for new homes where they all need to be five star, and we are moving to six star. I think there are legitimate questions in the community about what that actually means and whether we are getting the benefit that we would expect from this rating scheme.

You still see in the new estates the black roofs, no eaves and sometimes very poor solar aspects. They are basic things which we should be getting to and which we should be going over and above. So I think it is legitimate to question how well this rating scheme is working for new homes at the moment. I think it is also legitimate to ask the question about how it works for existing homes which are being sold. We have certainly had approaches from industry in recent times as a result of some of the thermal imaging that can be done on homes. We are seeing issues around air loss, and we are also seeing issues around under-insulation where it is assumed that there is full insulation in the walls and the roof, but then when some of this imaging is done, particularly for wall insulation, it is found that there is not the insulation originally thought. So buyers are getting less than what they bargained for. I suppose that is a consumer issue where people are not always getting what they pay for. That is a concern, but it is also a concern from the point of view of houses not being as energy efficient as their rating might suggest. I suppose that is at the crux of Ms Le Couteur's motion today. We certainly agree that that is something worth looking at, and looking at very closely.

At the same time, the second part of the motion is something we struggle to support. I think it is putting the cart before the horse somewhat. I think we need to do the review; we need to see this document which Mr Barr has informed us has not been published but which will be released soon. I think it would be a useful way forward to actually look at the discussion paper and look at what is now needed to reform this issue, of course, taking into account the need to work with our colleagues interstate.

That said, one of the targets set is to audit at least five per cent of ratings on an annual basis. I do not know how many houses that is; I am not sure the Greens do. I do not know how much that would cost, and these are all things that would need to be looked at. Is that the most effective way of doing it? We have suggested an auditing function that is actually done by the environment department. In fact, in discussions that I was having with a representative of the minister's office earlier, it seems a little bit unclear

where some of this sits. We are getting JACS and ACTPLA giving seemingly conflicting versions, and I know the Greens have had some trouble finding out exactly who is the agency responsible. We believe the Department of the Environment, Climate Change, Energy and Water should actually be tasked with providing this audit function. We believe that is a better way to go.

There is considerable potential expense here, and we need to take that into account. We should not be agreeing to motions that are going to cost government money where we cannot even really quantify that cost. That is a particular concern we have with it. So we believe a better way to go would be for this discussion paper to be released. We believe that there is a role for an audit function to make sure these things are working and that this should be part of a broader discussion about energy efficiency ratings, how they are working and how they can actually be improved and looking at all of the issues that go with that.

Getting back to the beginning of the issue, there is no doubt that having homes with proper energy efficiency, whether that is older homes that are retrofitted or whether that is new homes, is critically important not just for the purposes of lowering emissions but also for the many other benefits that we see. By doing this properly, we see homes which are far more comfortable to live in and which cost much less to run. They are two of the critical things, and that is one of the reasons why we took to the election a plan to roll out insulation in public houses and homes owned by people on low incomes, because it has that triple benefit. It has the benefit of lowering energy costs; it has the benefit of making homes more comfortable to live in; and, of course, it has the very important benefit of lowering emissions.

So, in summary, we will not object to debate on this motion being adjourned. We are happy to take the briefings from the minister's staff and/or the relevant public servants. We would be unlikely, though, when it comes back to support most of the second part of Ms Le Couteur's motion as it is currently drafted. I have had discussions with Ms Le Couteur's office, and there are some parts of it, in particular in relation to the energy efficiency software and looking at issues around that, where, if we can get the wording right after our briefings, we may be prepared to support part of that. But the five per cent target for auditing the dwellings we believe needs to be substantiated first. Work would need to be done to demonstrate that that is an effective use of taxpayers' money and that it is actually something that is doable and is worth while doing.

We are happy to get the briefings; we are happy for the debate to be adjourned, if someone will move it in a moment. We look forward to finalising discussions after we have had sufficient briefings. I will formally move my amendment now, and we can come back to discuss the motion as a whole in the context of this amendment. I move:

Omit all words after "should" in paragraph (2), substitute:

- “(a) publicly release the energy rating discussion paper published by the ACT Planning and Land Authority last year; and
- (b) ensure the Department for Environment, Climate Change, Water and Energy undertakes an annual review of the ACT Planning and Land

Authority's energy efficiency rating scheme and make the report publicly available."

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (12.22): I would like to speak briefly on Mr Seselja's amendment. Firstly, I think that it is very important that we have auditing of the energy efficiency system. I could go into anecdotal stories I have heard from people where houses have been rated on different climate zones, where they have been rated as if they had double glazing when they have got single glazing, where they have been rated as if they were insulated when the insulation does not exist, where they have been rated as if there was an awning when the awning is not there. If we do not do some rigorous auditing of the system, it will just fall into disrepute.

Given the situation that exists where, in order to build a house, you have to have a five-star energy rating, you can see why the imperative is there to ensure that every new building has a five-star energy rating regardless of any other attributes the house may have. Given the substantial increase in the price of houses which are well rated when they are sold again, it is also another commercial imperative to ensure that energy ratings are as favourable as they possibly can be. Given this, I think it is really important that the system is audited.

I would also like briefly to comment on Mr Barr's speech, where I think he was, in general, supporting what I said. I do understand the difference between the Building Code of Australia and the sale of premises act. It is just a really complicated situation, and I think one of the reasons that it has got into this state of confusion is because there are two acts. It is complicated, and most people out there unfortunately do not understand the situation. Because it is really important information that all of us have to have about the houses we live in and that the community has to have in the interests of increasing the energy efficiency of our houses, I look forward to having considerably more information put forward when the debate is adjourned and coming back to this place with a better motion some time in the not-too-distant future.

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

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.

Ministerial arrangements

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Minister for Transport, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts and Heritage): Mr Speaker, for the information of members before question time commences, the Treasurer and Minister for Health regrets that she is unable to be in attendance for question time today.

If there are questions that would have been directed to the Treasurer or Minister for Health, I am available to assist if I am able. I am sure that members will understand

that it may be that I will need to take questions on notice if there are questions for the Treasurer or Minister for Health.

Questions without notice

Planning—delays

MR SESELJA: My question is to the planning minister and relates to private sector contributions to the ACT economy. Minister, what is the total value of currently lodged development applications in ACTPLA funded by the private sector?

MR BARR: That would, of course, be a moving feast depending on the day on which the question is asked, so I will obviously have to take that on notice. If the member would like me to take it on notice for applications in the system as of today, I am happy to use this as the time point and I will get back to the member.

MR SESELJA: Thank you, minister. Minister, can you explain why federal Labor's development applications are fast-tracked whilst the private sector is delayed?

MR BARR: Development applications are fast-tracked through the planning system according to which assessment track they fall into.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: The changes to the Planning and Development Act put in place a new development assessment process, and those new development tracks include exemptions where there is no development application required and a co-track whereby if a developer meets the applicable code for a particular type of development, it then does not have a requirement to go through the more complex planning processes. Then, of course, there is the merit and the impact track.

Quite rightly, we have in place a new structure for assessing development applications according to the complexity of the proposals. For all the snide interjections and the implications that come from the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues who are content in this place to oppose everything for the sake of opposition only and for no other reason, the important point to note here is that the exemptions that I have provided through the regulations to assist the smooth passage of the commonwealth stimulus package go simply to extend provisions that already apply either in the residential or commercial sectors into the school sector.

Effectively, what we are doing, Mr Speaker, is creating a schools code. Those opposite have agreed with that. In fact, they agree with the government's approach. So this question is entirely about opposition for opposition's sake. It probably shows the dearth of issues for the opposition to raise today that the Leader of the Opposition has to come back to attack the government on a position that he in fact himself supports, and has said so publicly.

What is the issue here, Mr Speaker? What is the issue? Is the Leader of the Opposition seriously arguing that the provisions the government has put in place through these new regulations should not be there? No, he is not. He supports these provisions. But

if he is suggesting that we should equate major commercial development with putting a fence around a school, installing a flagpole or putting a new sign in front of a school and that they should receive equivalent treatment in the planning system—a major commercial development or a school fence or a major commercial development or a new airlock on the front of a school building—that is where he and I will depart company on what is necessary to ensure the efficient operation of planning and development in this city.

I do not think anyone is arguing that major commercial developments that are already exempt from third party appeals within town centres should be further removed from planning consideration if they are of such complexity, such size and of such impact that they should fall within the merit or impact tracks of the new Planning and Development Act.

I do not think even the Leader of the Opposition, in the great moments when he and the Property Council get together to conjure up the abolition of planning in the territory, would go so far as to suggest that we should be equating minor alterations to school buildings as per the regulations that the government has tabled with \$100 million complex commercial property developments.

Education—special needs

MS HUNTER: My question is to the Minister for Education and Training and concerns the special needs education review. Minister, in the lead-up to the 2008 election, at a public forum on special needs education at Dickson college, you said, in relation to the student centred assessment of needs process, or SCAN process—and I quote:

The Scanning process is overly bureaucratic, it is something we will look at in the review.

When asked again at the same meeting about the SCAN process, you said—and again I quote:

I undertake as part of the review to look at that.

Mr Barr, will you give the parents of children needing the full support of the government to achieve the best for their children under the special needs education program an assurance that this SCAN process will be included in Professor Shaddock's review?

MR BARR: No, Mr Speaker, I won't. I believe the appropriate forum for those issues to be reviewed is the Legislative Assembly education committee's inquiry that was agreed upon between Labor and the Greens and that we agreed should be completed by November this year. I believe that is the appropriate area to look at these issues. I have raised that with Ms Hunter before, and I believe that is where those matters should be considered.

The terms of reference for Professor Shaddock's review were agreed with stakeholders and focus on curriculum and pedagogy. That should be the focus of the

Shaddock review. I would warmly welcome the commencement of the Assembly committee review, and I have argued, and I have said before, that it should have started earlier. It should not have been put down the list. The inquiry that the Assembly committee is currently conducting is of much less importance to the future of education in the territory.

Planning—Deakin swimming pool

MR DOSZPOT: My question is to the Minister for Planning. Minister, in 2005 the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment, a bipartisan committee with two government members, made a recommendation that, prior to development of the Deakin site, a performance bond was to be entered into to ensure the upgrade of the swimming pool. Minister, why did the government ignore the committee's recommendation?

MR BARR: I would note, firstly, that I was not even a member of this place at that time, but I am relying on the government response to that committee at that time. I only have one copy with me, but I am happy to table that at the conclusion of my speech. I would, of course, refer members to *Hansard*, where the response can be found.

It is clear that within the current environment of the leasehold system in the territory for privately leased land, the government would not be in a position under the current legislative arrangement—or that which operated at the time anyway and which still operates—to undertake an activity in line with what the committee recommended and that there just was no mechanism in which to achieve that outcome. It simply comes back to a fundamental point: the government should not and cannot intervene in this particular matter.

The issue for the government in the longer term is, of course, to seek compliance with the territory plan and the lease. I would like to make it very clear, as I have publicly in the media, that the government intends, should there be a breach of the lease conditions, to fully and vigorously pursue this and to take every legal avenue available to it. That is a clear commitment from government.

I know the shadow minister and you, Mr Speaker, have been briefed on these matters, but there are two priorities for the government in this matter. The first is to assist users of the facility, if it does close, to find alternative locations to undertake their learn-to-swim activities. I am very pleased that we have been able to secure additional space at two government-owned pools in Civic and Tuggeranong to ensure that users are inconvenienced as little as possible during what we anticipate will be a closure of the pool.

That said, if and when the pool closes, the government will then be able to pursue fully the compliance actions under the territory plan and under the conditions of the lease of the pool operator. Let me repeat: the government will pursue that vigorously. But there is a legal process and a complex set of legal issues that must be gone through.

Let me make one thing fundamentally clear: it would be appalling public policy for an owner of a private facility to be able to let that facility run down and then expect the

government of the day to come in with millions—and it would be millions; somewhere between \$6 million and \$10 million of taxpayers' money—to bail out a private operator. If those opposite are seriously suggesting that that is the precedent that we should set—that whenever a private business fails the government should come in and intervene—that is an appalling situation.

The recommendation from the committee was not able to be implemented. I would also remind members, of course, that some of the conditions associated with the recommendations of the committee were on the basis that the owner of the facility would go ahead with some major office redevelopments which have not occurred. No development application has been submitted. So there would be nothing for the government, had it been able to accept the recommendations of the committee, to hold the developer accountable to. The only avenue for the government to pursue this matter legally is if the pool closes. Then the owner would be in breach of the territory plan and in breach of his lease, and the government would pursue that matter vigorously.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot, a supplementary question?

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, thank you very much for that correction regarding your involvement in this. I am aware that you would have treated this quite differently had you been minister back in those days.

Ms Porter: Are we having a speech or a question?

MR DOSZPOT: I am simply responding to what the minister was correcting.

MR SPEAKER: I am sorry, Mr Doszpot; you have to come straight to the question.

MR DOSZPOT: My apologies, Mr Speaker; I thought I was allowed the same latitude that the minister had.

MR SPEAKER: It seems not, under the standing orders.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, why has your government allowed this significant community facility to fall into such disrepair, resulting in its imminent closure, when you had the option of putting in place a proactive plan which was recommended by a bipartisan committee, with two of your members—government members—well and truly involved in all those discussions?

MR BARR: Firstly, I need to correct the premise of Mr Doszpot's question. This is a private facility. The person who has let it fall into disrepair is the owner—the owner. Mr Turco is responsible for the condition of his swimming pool, not the government. Mr Turco is responsible for his swimming pool, not the government. The innocent parties in this issue are Deakin Swimming Ltd, who have contributed a huge amount of volunteer time and money to try and keep the pool in working order.

Fundamentally, this is a private facility. The government is not responsible, nor can it be responsible, for the condition of privately owned facilities. Is the opposition

seriously suggesting that, if a privately owned shopping centre ran down—if Westfield let Woden plaza run down—the government would be responsible to step in and provide the capital to upgrade the facility? No, of course they are not. This is opposition for opposition's sake, pure and simple, seeking to get a scintilla of political advantage—and it is only a scintilla; let me assure you of that much: a small amount of political advantage—out of an issue that is distressing for Deakin Swimming Ltd and distressing for users of the pool.

The government will do three things. Firstly, we have been working closely with Deakin Swimming around what we can do to assist users of the pool. We have been working with other pool operators, particularly Belgravia, who have indicated that there is capacity within both Civic and Tuggeranong pools for up to 700 learn to swim places. And we will happily work with other private pool owners in the inner south. I understand, for example, that the Canberra grammar school have made their swimming pool available for some of the users of Deakin as those users have determined that the quality of the facility is in such a poor state that they would prefer to swim elsewhere. The government will also rigorously pursue its legal avenues under the territory plan and the lease conditions to ensure that Mr Turco meets his legal obligations as the owner of the facility. We will happily pursue that matter.

Housing—affordability

MR COE: Chief Minister, I refer you to a key component of your affordable housing action plan, “an innovative and creative proposal to work with institutional investors to develop and rent between 200 and 400 private rental dwellings”. In your progress report released last August, and on the www.affordablehousing.com.au website, it says that expressions of interest have been sought and evaluation is near completion. Why, almost two years from your announcement, has there been no progress on this initiative?

MR STANHOPE: I thank the member for his interest in affordable housing and in the government's initiatives. I regret that he has not maintained that level of interest actually in the outcomes and in the continuing implementation by the government of all 63 of the recommendations included in our affordable housing strategy, an Australian-leading strategy in relation to affordability and a strategy that really has been closely reviewed and, in many instances, mimicked by other governments around Australia. It is a strategy which, of course, continues to return significant dividends for the people of the ACT.

All of the initiatives that we identified are being pursued. Some of them are quite complex and, in their complexity, require quite detailed negotiations. We have made significant advances on all of those Australian-leading initiatives such as land rent, OwnPlace, shared equity and the significant advance in relation to community housing and in relation to, essentially, a broad-scale equity rental arrangement with a financial provider.

Mr Coe: What about the rental dwellings, Jon?

MR STANHOPE: Yes, we are dealing, negotiating and, in relation to each of these, progressing them and progressing them extremely well. I think there are probably five

very significant, innovative, Australian-leading and, in many instances, unique initiatives being pursued by this government that, over time, will of course produce a significant—

Mr Coe: Very special.

MR STANHOPE: They are. There are some shared equity schemes in other places in Australia, most particularly South Australia, with a very successful scheme. There is no other land rent scheme such as that which we have modelled and which is actually progressing strongly.

Mr Smyth: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: we are now half way through the minister's answer and he has not attempted at all to talk about private rental dwellings. Perhaps you could bring him back to the question.

MR STANHOPE: Of course I have. I have said there are five innovative initiatives we are pursuing.

Mr Seselja: What is the progress on this one?

MR STANHOPE: It is progressing. We have not yet achieved an outcome but it is progressing. I think it has to be said that the significant advance that we have made is reflected in the affordability rating here; the number of housing starts in the last year; the number of affordable homes that are being sold as a result of a whole range and raft of initiatives which we have pursued in relation to land supply and the mandating of 15 per cent of all greenfield developments; OwnPlace; the land rent scheme; the advancing of a shared equity scheme; and our commitment to community housing. Amongst the suite of initiatives we are pursuing is one in relation to the involvement of a major institutional investor in an englobo release of land on the assumption that a significant proportion of the land—

Mr Doszpot: A secret investor.

MR STANHOPE: Yes. It is not, of course, the greatest environment economically at the moment to be actually attracting investment at the snap of the fingers.

Mr Coe: You started in 2007, Jon.

MR STANHOPE: Yes, and we have had a little thing called the global financial crisis in the midst.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Stanhope, resume your seat. Members of the opposition, there is some catcalling that goes on at question time but you guys are really pushing the envelope today. We need to be able to actually hear the minister's response to your questions. If you are going to make that much noise, do not bother asking the questions.

Mr Smyth: He does need to answer the question.

MR STANHOPE: The answer to the question is that negotiations are progressing and, as far as I am concerned, in the environment we are in and having regard to the innovative nature of many of the initiatives the government is pursuing, they are progressing well, as they are, as is the progress is in relation to community housing, land rent, OwnPlace, shared equity. The cumulative effect of each of these initiatives over time will be incredibly significant in the ACT.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Coe, a supplementary question?

MR COE: Yes. Chief Minister, how many homes have actually been delivered in this private rental dwelling scheme? Isn't this the third housing affordability scheme that you have failed to deliver?

MR STANHOPE: As I indicated, Mr Speaker, the negotiations and planning in relation to each of the innovative aspects of the 63 initiatives within the affordable housing action plan are progressing well. Of course, they stand in stark contrast to the Liberal Party's one and only housing affordability initiative, which is a half-million-dollar, middle-income McMansion approach that actually provides funding most specifically to the Liberal Party's millionaire mates to allow them to actually buy houses for up to half a million dollars with complete exemption from stamp duty. Talk about middle class welfare! Talk about a single one-shop, populist position on housing affordability! The bottom line is that the Liberal Party do not care about young families. They do not care about working families. The continuing—

Mr Barr: Not unless you earn more than \$120,000 a year.

MR STANHOPE: That is right.

Mr Smyth: Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order.

MR STANHOPE: If you earn more than \$120,000 a year, even if you have a million dollars, you are still eligible for Zed Seselja's stamp duty handout—a single, one-shop response.

MR SPEAKER: Chief Minister, there is a point of order.

Mr Smyth: Mr Speaker, the question was: how many homes have been delivered under this scheme or has the system failed? It was not about our policy.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, I am afraid there is no point of order. The second half of Mr Coe's question was clearly of a sufficiently political nature that he invited Mr Stanhope to have a tirade on the opposition's policies as well.

Mr Smyth: On the point of order: under what standing order are political tirades allowed to be delivered in question time, Mr Speaker? Answers must be relevant. The standing orders do not allow for the delivery of political tirades. In fact, they specifically rule against that.

MR SPEAKER: You are correct, Mr Smyth. My choice of words was probably a poor one. I think that the nature of the question does provide some latitude for the Chief Minister to move quite broadly and remain relevant to the point of the question in this case.

Mr Smyth: I disagree. The question simply was: how many homes? Give us a measure of success against the 400. Is it zero or is it 400 or has the system failed? It has delivered nothing 15 months after it was put in place, or 18 months after it was put in place. It is fairly reasonable to assume it is a failure.

Mr Corbell: Mr Speaker, on the point of order: the question clearly invited commentary on the success or otherwise of the government's policy. The minister is responding to that and contrasting it with other approaches that the government does not believe are appropriate. His answer is entirely relevant and Mr Smyth is seeking to debate the matter.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Stanhope, I ask you to provide a specific answer to the first half of the question as well.

MR STANHOPE: I have done that, Mr Speaker. The answer is that the government is negotiating a suite of very innovative housing affordability initiatives. One of them involves the potential englobo release of land to an institution, most particularly a financial institution, on the basis that a set proportion of the housing be available for rent. We are in continued negotiation and discussion in relation to the delivery of that initiative.

It is a very significant initiative involving potentially hundreds of blocks of land in an englobo release, and to suggest that a policy such as this can be initiated, developed and implemented at the click of the fingers really shows a remarkable misunderstanding or lack of understanding by the Liberal Party, and most particularly the member, about how land release finance and housing development occurs.

This is a very complex and challenging position to put, that the government might release, for instance, anywhere between 500 and 1,000 blocks in an englobo release to a financial institution on the basis that, say, half or a significant proportion of those—say, up to 1,000 blocks—released in an englobo release would be available for rental. That is a very big picture response to a significant issue in relation to rental stress within the capital.

It is a significant proposal, and for you to treat it with that sort of hilarity and jocularly and lack of understanding really goes to show that you have absolutely no understanding or conception of land release, housing or finance. You display your ignorance for the world to see if you believe that the government can stump up with a policy that involves potentially the release of 1,000 housing blocks to a financial institution with a tied requirement that up to half of them be rental, overnight, in this environment. What a joke you are.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Stanhope. Your time has expired.

MR STANHOPE: What an appalling lack of understanding. What a consummate display of ignorance by the Liberal Party collectively.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Chief Minister, resume your seat.

Water—security

MS BURCH: I have a question to the Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water. Minister, can you advise the Legislative Assembly on the steps that this government is taking to improve Canberra's water?

Ms Porter: Water or water security?

MR SPEAKER: Would you like to finish that question, Ms Burch?

MS BURCH: Sorry. Minister, can you advise the Assembly on the steps that this government is taking to improve Canberra's water security?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms Burch for the question. I was very pleased earlier today to announce the government's decision—

Mrs Dunne: Re-announce for the 56th time.

MR CORBELL: to improve water security, the security of supply, for Canberrans and residents of Queanbeyan.

Mrs Dunne: How many times do you run the ads and then say, "Oh, this is news"?

MR CORBELL: I know those on the other side do not like it—because they are only interested in objecting, complaining and being in opposition for the sake of being in opposition. They have no alternatives when it comes to securing Canberra's water supply into the future.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Corbell—relevance.

MR CORBELL: Their only policy on water supply, Mr Speaker, has been to build a dam that will never fill. That is their policy and they have presented no alternatives. So perhaps they should just listen to what the government is itself proposing.

The government has agreed to move forward with Actew's recommendation to build the Murrumbidgee to Googong pipeline project and to purchase high security water licences to allow the transfer of water from the Tantangara reservoir downstream along the Murrumbidgee and then piped to the Googong dam. These two important water security projects build on the government's stated policy, already announced and confirmed before the last election, to redevelop the Cotter dam to increase its capacity from approximately four gegalitres to over 70 gegalitres.

Combined with that measure, these two new projects of Murrumbidgee to Googong and the Tantangara transfer will add close to 100 gegalitres of supply to the ACT's

water catchments. It is a very important initiative and one that the government is pleased to be moving forward with. The government has set out clearly the time frames to achieve these projects. We expect construction of the Cotter to commence, contingent of course on planning and environmental approvals, in around August this year, for completion in 2011, and we expect Murrumbidgee to Googong and the Tantangara water supply arrangements to be in place again by the year 2011.

Members of the opposition interjecting—

MR CORBELL: Combined, these projects provide water security for the territory. I am amazed, of course, that those opposite think it is some sort of joke, think it is some sort of laughing matter, some sort of a trivial matter, that Canberrans are going to achieve improved water security. But this government treats those issues very seriously.

There is no doubt that we are seeing a sustained change in rainfall patterns here in the ACT and region, as we are right across south-eastern Australia. There is no doubt that this is a consequence of climate change in association with what is clearly a prolonged period of periodic drought. Combined, it has seen the water inflows into our dams reduce by 75 per cent. So the government has to provide a range of responses to deal with these matters. Obviously demand management and augmentation of supply sources to include non-potable supply for certain uses are all part of the solution, as is an augmentation of the supply network itself. The government considers all of these matters to be important and needing to be addressed.

Mr Smyth: Will it be on time and on budget?

MR CORBELL: Those opposite should be embarrassed by their position on this matter, because their position and their only policy on water security has been to build a dam in the Naas valley, which is in a permanent rain shadow. That is the Liberal Party's policy: to build a dam where it will not rain. That is the extent of their policy—and they have the gall to criticise this government for getting on with the job of delivering water security for Canberrans.

Roads—safety signs

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Chief Minister in his capacity as the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services. I refer to the \$400,000 allocated for a road safety sign and a study into the placement of that sign. How much will be allocated to the study and how much to the sign, Chief Minister? How long will the study take? When will the report be available and where will the sign be manufactured?

MR STANHOPE: This was an issue, of course, that was the subject of questioning during estimates. I am not quite sure that Mrs Dunne bothered to attend estimates, actually to be part of the discussion or, if she did, to listen to the discussion. Mr Smyth certainly asked a number of questions and was satisfied with the level and extent of the questioning and the answers that he received. I believe that is reflected in the report of the committee. I do not know whether Mrs Dunne is expressing a want of confidence in her deputy; I imagine it is about time for the internal wranglings to commence.

Mrs Dunne: Relevance, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Stanhope—

MR STANHOPE: This is a long period without a leadership challenge within the Liberal Party. We are not quite sure how much longer—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Stanhope, the question.

MR STANHOPE: As we have commented previously, and without any wish or desire to be personal, Mr Smyth remains the only member of the Assembly now to have lost three elections in a row.

Mrs Dunne: A point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Stanhope, resume your seat, thank you.

MR STANHOPE: He qualifies as the biggest loser.

MR SPEAKER: Resume your seat. There is a point of order. Stop the clock please, Clerk.

Mrs Dunne: Mr Speaker, I asked a specific question about a sign that the department of territory and urban services was proposing to build, and so far, after two minutes, the Chief Minister has not even addressed the issue of the sign—not even attempted to.

MR STANHOPE: I've addressed other signs that we are seeing.

MR SPEAKER: Order! The point of order is upheld. Chief Minister, I think your comments about the Liberal Party's internal matters are not relevant to the question asked.

MR STANHOPE: They are interesting, though.

MR SPEAKER: They are, however, not relevant, Mr Stanhope.

Mrs Dunne: Say it in the adjournment debate, Jon. Answer the question now.

MR STANHOPE: Mrs Dunne, we know that it has not escaped your observance that Mr Smyth has now, as leader and deputy leader, lost three elections in a row. You can't put up with that forever.

Mrs Dunne: Mr Speaker, please!

MR SPEAKER: Mr Stanhope, are you going to come to the question or are we going to escalate this?

MR STANHOPE: No, I am going to answer it, fully, as always.

Mr Speaker, in the third appropriation, the government, of course, was committed to projects that could proceed and that could provide a level of investment, activity and work within the territory. One of the issues that we are mindful of is the capacity, through roadside signage, to provide a service to the community in relation to notices and notifications across a spectrum of issues. We see them most particularly in relation to water levels within our dams—a number of signs that are currently hired by ActewAGL at some cost, to inform the community, as part of an overarching strategy to educate and inform us all about water consumption. Those signs have, from time to time, been used by TAMS or the government for road safety messaging.

Through that process, having regard to the cost inherent in the continued hiring, the government has proposed to give consideration to installing permanent signage on roads throughout the ACT. We are looking at the prospect of signs—I think the closest that I am aware of to Canberra are those at Batemans Bay. At one approach to Batemans Bay there are overhead road signs. There are two at Batemans Bay that inform the community of a range of issues of importance to that particular council of the New South Wales government in relation to road safety and other community-oriented notices such as water restrictions, fire alerts and warnings, road safety hazards and, most particularly, exhorting the community to drive safely, consistent with the road rules. We are investigating that possibility here. I am advised that, with respect to those signs—as I say, two of which are located at Batemans Bay, and there are dozens, perhaps 100 or more, throughout the city of Sydney—this is an initiative—

Mr Hanson: Exhorting the community not to drink and drive.

MR STANHOPE: Yes, drink and drive messages, speed messages, warnings in relation to double demerits. We are investigating that possibility. I understand that a single one of those signs costs in the order of \$300,000. We are investigating the utility of the signs, their operation, their operational capacity, the implications of just having one or whether we would expand the network. At this stage consideration is being given, in the context of a first purchase, to the site that might best be utilised, to allow this individual sign to be utilised to its maximum potential. TAMS have given me preliminary advice that they believe the Tuggeranong Parkway, to the south of the intersection with Hindmarsh Drive, might be a site worthy of initial consideration.

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, a supplementary question?

MRS DUNNE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Chief Minister, given that you have been unable to answer any of my original questions about the study—how much is devoted to the study, how long the study will take, when the study will be available and where the sign will be manufactured?—can you now answer how many jobs will be created in the ACT by the erection of this sign?

MR STANHOPE: I cannot possibly answer that, Mr Speaker, because the question obviously is a nonsense. The question actually goes to some of the other nonsense being spouted by the Liberal Party in relation to the ultimate purpose. It is about maintaining jobs; it is about maintaining existing jobs. It is not necessarily about

creating jobs. It is about maintaining jobs in an environment where we know there will be enormous pressure on employment.

At this stage, it is really counterintuitive that the unemployment rate in the ACT has dropped from 2.6 per cent to 2.4 per cent over this last month. That really is quite remarkable for the environment we are in where the national unemployment rate jumped from 4.6 per cent to 5.2 per cent. We fell from 2.6 per cent to 2.4 per cent. That is a result, I think, that took everybody that had been looking at the numbers by some surprise.

But the great challenges that we face in the environment we are in—namely, a global financial crisis, a crisis which has escaped the notice of the Liberal Party—are the predictions that unemployment in the ACT will, over this next year to 18 months, potentially grow to 5.2 per cent. Access Economics and the ACT Treasury accept that unemployment will grow and grow significantly in the ACT over the next 18 months, potentially doubling, potentially growing to around five per cent, perhaps to 5.2 per cent.

The great challenge for all of us is to seek to protect jobs to the greatest extent possible. It will be a great achievement if we can keep unemployment below five per cent over this next two years. The government are determined to do everything we can reasonably do within the constraints of our budget to achieve that. We would look for and appreciate the cooperation of members of this Assembly in seeking to achieve that, rather than having the economy constantly talked down, rather than being greeted with opposition for opposition's sake, rather than having serious initiatives pursued by the government treated with hilarity and contempt and great guffaws from a very immature and not engaged opposition in this place. That is what the government is looking for, Mrs Dunne.

It is not about me saying this one initiative will create a job. The installation of a speed sign is hardly likely to create a job, but it will create activity. It will drive the capacity of a particular group of employers within the ACT to maintain their employment rates. That, essentially, is the thrust of everything that the government have been seeking to achieve. We are seeking to stabilise employment. We are seeking to provide confidence and stability to industry and all employers throughout the ACT. We are seeking to reduce the level of unemployment, which we know from all of our advice, will grow. Unemployment will increase over the next year to 18 months. It will possibly potentially double. It will go from the existing 2.4 per cent to potentially 5.2 per cent or thereabouts.

We are doing everything we can as a government with the resources available to us to provide the stability and the confidence that we can provide to ensure that employers in the ACT know that there will be a certain level of activity; there will be a certain and continuing level of investment by the ACT government. In the context of our budget, the size of our budget, the level of our discretionary expenditure, the expenditure we have available around the edge after we take out, for instance, one-third of our entire budget to meet our health care needs, there is only so much that an ACT government of any persuasion at any time can do. We are working hard as a government to do everything within our power. That means providing confidence,

opportunities, stability and, most particularly, an environment in which employers to the greatest extent they can are encouraged to maintain their existing workers and workforce.

Taxis—Canberra airport

MS BRESNAN: My question is to the Chief Minister and is in regard to transport, in particular, taxis, from Canberra Airport. Can the Chief Minister advise the Assembly of the state of play regarding his discussions with the Canberra airport on this issue? Is the Chief Minister planning to meet face to face with the airport's manager to pursue the matter further?

MR STANHOPE: I have had discussions with the airport, most particularly with Mr Stephen Byron. As I think members know and as I think I have indicated previously, I have exchanged correspondence quite directly on the subject of what the government, the taxi industry and the airport together can do in relation to perceptions and some of the reality around difficulties and unacceptable delays and queuing at the airport.

At this stage, I have to say there has not been a meeting of minds between the government, the taxi industry and, most particularly, the airport in relation to what role the airport might play. It is an issue I will continue to pursue with the airport. I am aware, as I think other members are, that in other places where the major airport provides a universal fee for taxis accessing an airport, the airport then invests some of those funds in the employment of commissionaires to assist with queuing and the identification of taxis that might take multiple bookings and relieve some of the stress.

It is a matter of some regret to the government that that has not been achieved with the airport to date. The airport adopts a view that the major issues are around the numbers of taxis and the state of the roads between the city and the airport. The government understands those issues but believes that in relation to taxi numbers, the taxi numbers are now consistent with averages in all other cities in Australia and that to suggest that the issue is about taxi numbers is now not relevant.

The government accepts and understands some of the frustrations and issues that the taxi industry in particular faces in relation to difficulties in accessing the airport as a result of congestion on the road. We understand that. That issue will shortly be resolved.

The third issue we believe is around the attitude of the taxi companies—there are now two companies involved, of course—and the difficulties that are inherent in different attitudes being displayed by the different taxi companies and the view that the airport has adopted.

The government position is that the airport should contribute to the employment of commissionaires. The taxi industry's response is that it would only contribute if there were an additional charge. The government's attitude is that it should not be a role or responsibility of the government to pay commissionaires at a highly profitable taxi point.

They are the range of issues. I do hope we can work them through. I have engaged very closely with the taxi companies and the industry. I am seeking to work through each of the issues that the industry faces. NightLink is another that we are giving current attention to and there are similar issues there. It is difficult, but we will continue to work on it. I remain personally engaged and involved in seeking a resolution.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Bresnan, a supplementary question?

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Has the government set a time frame for resolving the issue?

MR STANHOPE: No, I have not set a time frame. It is one of those issues where I can set a time frame but then what do I do or what do any of us do if a time frame—what is it that we say? “If this is not achieved by this date, then this will happen.” We do not have that sort of fallback position. The government’s position at the moment is a hope that we can negotiate our way through this.

To the extent that the government can impose a deadline on what is an issue of grave concern to the government and to the community, essentially it goes to the same sorts of issues that Mr Barr touched on before. A private pool operated by a private owner represents significant issues to a government in relation to the way in which it is managed. A taxi industry managed by private operators in a commercial environment presents real difficulties for a government in relation to its capacity to intervene in commercial decisions that are taken by all of that range of players that are involved.

These are difficult issues for the government. It is one of those issues of great interest. The role of the private sector in relation to the role of government essentially is “stay out of our way and let us get on with business”—until there is a little bit of an issue, and then everybody pleads for the government to embrace their particular issue and invest in it. We are seeking to find a resolution of these issues, but it is not easy.

Education—vocational and training

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Training. The latest statistics from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research showed that the ACT recorded a four per cent decline in training commencements for the quarter ending September 2008. The ACT was the only state or territory to record both a fall in the number of people starting an apprenticeship as well as a drop in the number of people continuing in training. Minister, why was this so?

MR BARR: One of the key factors, in fact, was an increase in the completion rate in that quarter. The NCVER figures did show an increase in completions. What that means is that more people completed training and, therefore, dropped out of the statistics as formally recognised by the NCVER. However, there are a number of other factors at play in that area. They largely relate, as I understand it, to private training providers and the number of apprentices and people engaged in training with private providers.

The CIT reports increases in the number of people in training. They certainly have increased enrolments. An example that I think is particularly relevant in light of the government and community agenda in regard to increasing the number of people training in the childcare profession is that, as a result of the federal government's fee subsidy, we have seen something like a 140 per cent increase in the number of people in formal training in childcare. That is fantastic news for the territory. It means that, when the 900 additional childcare places come in line over the course of 2009 in this city, we will have an increased potential workforce to work in those centres.

Measures that the government can take both at the local level and at the federal level to practically enhance training are being taken up by the community. That is very good news. There are fluctuations, depending on the industry sector. As you would expect in an economy as diverse as the ACT's and as diverse as Australia's, there are differing trends.

We have been working very closely with the building and construction industry for a while. We are working constructively with the building and construction industry in relation to creating an out-of-trade register to ensure that those apprentices who are part way through their training and may find that their employer has difficulty, given current economic conditions, in maintaining that apprenticeship are then able to be linked up with other employers who will clearly benefit from the hundreds of millions of dollars of government investment in the building and construction industry.

Across the board, across all vocational and education training in the territory, that quarter did show a reduction. It is anticipated that, given the early figures on enrolment for the first quarter of 2009 at our public training providers, we may see a rebound in those figures for the first quarter. Nonetheless, the increased funding provided by the ACT government to the CIT, the increased funding provided by the federal government, the commonwealth government's guarantee of one-third wages for apprentices to enable them to continue and see through their apprenticeship should combine to see a strengthening in our vocational education and training sector.

Of course the government, through the 2008-09 appropriation, provided more money for the CIT vocational college. The government has a range of commitments in relation to school-based apprenticeships. We have a program to target 500 school-based apprenticeships for 2009.

The government has a very strong commitment in the education and training portfolio. Within the department itself, we are currently employing trainees and will continue to do so. I also have a commitment in the sport and recreation portfolio to align some school-based apprenticeships with the sport and recreation industry. Overall, the picture is very strong for vocational education and training.

One of the key factors in relation to the NCVET report for that final quarter was the fact that our completions were much higher in that quarter. People were completing their training. As we have noted from unemployment figures in recent times, in fact they have then been moving into work. Of course, the ultimate purpose of a vocational education and training system is to ensure that we are able to provide

high-quality training that will then lead to viable long-term employment for Canberrans.

I think you could clearly see, from the ABS data on unemployment and the longer term, not just one quarter, outcomes in vocational education and training, the territory continues to perform very well. All the indicators for the first quarter of 2009, through our largest training provider, the CIT, are very positive for the future.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, a supplementary question?

MR HANSON: Thank you. Minister, given that, when will we actually see positive trends rather than negative trends in commencements and people continuing in training?

MR BARR: If Mr Hanson had bothered to listen to my answer, he would not have needed to ask his supplementary question. But, I repeat: the early indications on enrolment for CIT in the first quarter of 2009 are very encouraging. One example I will give—I will repeat—is that in childcare, as a result of the commonwealth government's fee subsidy, there is a 140 per cent increase in the number of enrolments in the childcare training course provided at the CIT campus in Woden. That is very important, as we know, because we are going to have 900 more childcare places in this city during the course of 2009. The government, through its early childhood schools, is opening four new childcare centres around the city, in addition to a number of other private providers and community-based providers. That is just one example of one sector where there is a massive increase in the number of people in training. That is just one example, but, as I say, across many other industry groups, be it construction, tourism and hospitality and a range of other areas—

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Members, I cannot hear the minister.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will, of course, draw the member's attention to the government's significant \$14 million investment in new horticulture training facilities at the CIT campus at Bruce. That is yet another example of the government investing in vocational education and training. There are also the upgrades to the Fyshwick skills centre for the CIT. There are a number of projects and investment in vocational education and training. CIT continues to be the ACT's leading provider of vocational education and training and, in fact, continues to have considerable success at a national level.

Mr Hanson: Mr Speaker, on a point of order on relevance: the question I asked was when, not what.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Barr, perhaps you can try and—

MR BARR: I have concluded my answer.

Tourism—visitor numbers

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation. Minister, the latest tourism statistics have been released by Tourism Research Australia. These statistics show that the ACT continues to perform poorly across all major categories of tourists when compared to the outcomes achieved more than five years ago in the 2002-03 year and the 2003-04 year. Minister, why is the aggregate of day, overnight and international visitors to the ACT, in the year to the end of December 2008, so far below the number of tourists who visited the ACT in the year ending December 2003?

MR BARR: There are obviously different prevailing economic conditions between 2003 and the final quarter of 2008, but there is no doubt that the tourism figures have fluctuated between—

Mr Smyth: So there is an impact?

Mrs Dunne: Not one business is affected—the Treasurer said so yesterday.

MR BARR: Mr Speaker, when they have finished.

MR SPEAKER: You can continue, Mr Barr.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Economic conditions that are prevailing in—

Mrs Dunne: I think I heard it too.

Mr Coe: *Hansard* is just a vague recollection of what was actually said, isn't it? It's the vibe, isn't it?

MR SPEAKER: Order! The minister has been asked a question. Let us hear his answer.

MR BARR: For those opposite, you might want to consider that tourists—that is, people who visit the ACT—domestically will come from outside the ACT, so the prevailing economic conditions outside the ACT are going to impact on domestic visitation. And internationally the prevailing economic conditions of the various countries from which we source our overseas visitors will also be a relevant consideration. There are of course a number of other competing uses of people's discretionary dollars.

The issue is that domestic tourism in Australia has been flat for quite some time across all jurisdictions. There are a number of factors that are influencing that. The health or otherwise of the aviation market is one pretty significant factor. Probably, though, the single biggest issue confronting domestic tourism is the amount of accumulated unused annual leave in this country. The amount of unused annual leave in this country is excessive—something in the order of 70 million unused days. In fact, I think that number has grown. That was a figure from a couple of years back.

You might have to ask yourself what it is about this structure of industrial relations and workplace relations in this country that led to a situation where so much annual leave was accumulated that Australian workers, Australian families, those who are our domestic tourists—and the ACT's key market is families—felt unable, because of the industrial relations system that was in place until only a week ago, and not confident enough to utilise their annual leave. So we are seeing this massive stockpile of unused annual leave.

Those opposite who want to paint with this broad brush around economic policy might want to consider the impact that Work Choices had on the accumulation of unused annual leave and the impact that that has directly had on domestic tourism in this country. There is no doubt. Mr Speaker, you do not even need to rely upon me for this. Simply go to the comments of the former Liberal federal tourism minister, Fran Bailey, who herself commissioned an inquiry from Tourism Australia into this very issue. It was clear that the unused annual leave was accruing at an alarming rate because the industrial relations system was working against Australian families enjoying a decent holiday.

We here in the ACT are significantly impacted on by the feelings and the travel preferences of the surrounding major cities, particularly Sydney. If Sydney families, working families in Sydney, do not feel comfortable and secure enough in their employment that they can take annual leave and take a holiday—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: It is no wonder that those opposite do not like this, because it is a clear impact of Work Choices. A very clear impact of Work Choices was to drive up the amount of unused recreation leave, and that had a dramatic impact on domestic tourism, not just in the ACT but across the country. But we are particularly impacted. Working families in Western Sydney who voted with their feet so strongly in supporting the Australian Labor Party and the abolition of Work Choices back in 2007 have finally seen those policies enacted, with no help from the Liberal opposition. I am aware that there will be a further and significant effort— *(Time expired.)*

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, a supplementary question?

MR SMYTH: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, a key component of the tourism numbers for the ACT is, of course, those that attend Floriade. Minister, why have you taken six months to fail to release this report?

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. In response to Mr Smyth's question, I have not taken six months to release a report, nor have I failed to release a report. The report is available. Media outlets have the report. I released the preliminary data from that report in January of this year. The report has been released. There are media outlets that have this report at this moment.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: It has been released. It is interesting, of course, that that Floriade report showed a 25 per cent increase in overnight stays as a result of a number of innovations to Floriade 2008. That report showed a record number of visitors through the gates of Floriade. It showed that, in combination with a number of other major events—I am particularly grateful to the National Gallery of Australia for the partnership that we have been able to have with them and to the National Museum and a couple of other national attractions, such as the “culture shock” promotion that occurred over the summer quarter—we have had some very positive feedback on the strength of the local tourism industry.

Of course, the government provided an additional sum of money for a winter marketing campaign that will kick in in the winter months over the course of 2009. I look forward to making some further announcements on the territory’s new autumn event, and I am sure Mr Smyth is eagerly awaiting that.

Swimming pools—swimming lessons

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the minister for sport. Minister, given that the government appears to be standing by and watching Deakin Swimming Ltd, which is a not-for-profit operation, collapse, can you confirm that on current estimates at the best only 70 of the more than 1,100 students currently enrolled in learn-to-swim classes in Deakin can be accommodated elsewhere, which means that 400 students will be left without facilities for swimming classes?

MR BARR: I think Ms Le Couteur said 700—

MS LE COUTEUR: I did say 700, yes.

MR BARR: Thank you. I thought you might have said 70. My understanding is that between the Civic pool and the Tuggeranong pool there is capacity for 700 additional positions for learn-to-swim classes. That of course does not exhaust the range of available pools. I am advised that CISAC in Belconnen also has capacity for additional learn-to-swim places. We are of course engaged in a refurbishment of the Erindale leisure centre, another publicly owned facility; the government is upgrading that. There are other private pools that are available, and I would like to commend the Canberra Grammar School for making their swimming pool available—

Member interjecting—

MR BARR: Gee, Mr Doszpot—

Members interjecting—

MR BARR: Well, gee—

MR SPEAKER: Please continue with your answer.

Mr Hanson: I want to take the credit for—

Mr Coe: Give Jeremy the credit, Andrew.

MR BARR: Mr Speaker, I will resist Mr Doszpot's childish interjections in relation to private schools.

Mr Doszpot: Mr Barr, it wasn't me. It wasn't me.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR BARR: Regardless, it is important of course to consider this issue—

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Continue, Mr Barr.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is important to consider this issue in the context of what also would represent value for taxpayers' dollars; in fact, the costs associated with even maintaining operations at the Deakin site in the short term, even to get just 10 more weeks in that appalling facility, appallingly maintained by Mr Turco, who has a clear social and moral obligation to meet his requirements under the territory plan—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: Mr Turco is the owner of the pool. Let me repeat this: Mr Turco, as the owner of the pool, has a very clear moral obligation and an obligation to all of the users and to Deakin Swimming Ltd, to whom he has leased operation of his facility. He has a clear obligation to upgrade that facility. He has a clear obligation to do that. If he does not and the pool closes, the government will be able to pursue fully a legal response. He will be in breach of the territory plan and he will be in breach of his lease obligations. And that is when the government can intervene.

It would not be appropriate for the government to put any—I repeat: any—money into propping up Mr Turco, and that is where the money would go; it will all go to Mr Turco—not to Deakin Swimming but to Mr Turco—and, if anyone in this place thinks that rewarding his poor behaviour by tipping in government money is an appropriate response, let them say so loudly and clearly.

MS LE COUTEUR: Minister, given that Deakin Swimming Ltd are not for profit and that kids learning to swim is vitally important, and given the efforts that parents have to make to get their kids to a swimming pool to learn to swim, could not the government do more to try to keep this important inner south facility available? I appreciate that there are spaces in other places, but people have to get there.

MR BARR: Thank you. Mr Speaker, I am yet to hear a proposal to keep the facility open that does not involve in the short term the expenditure of \$125,000 to buy 10 weeks. All that will do is pay Mr Turco for 10 weeks to keep Deakin Swimming Ltd from being insolvent. Ten more weeks is what the \$125,000 will buy you.

Waiting 10 weeks will not leave any time to solve the issue, which is Mr Turco's significant underinvestment in his asset. Ten weeks will not buy you anything. It will not buy you anything other than putting \$125,000 into Mr Turco's pocket, because that is where the money is going, Mr Speaker.

Mr Smyth: So punish the children.

MR BARR: The government is not about punishing the children. The government is about ensuring that there are alternative venues, and that is what we have secured. That is the important thing here. For those opposite to attempt to interject would seem to indicate that they would prefer to side with a developer who runs down his asset and then suggest that the taxpayers should step in to prop up Mr Turco when we all know what Mr Turco's objective is here. We all know what it is. And if those opposite want to help him to achieve his ultimate goal, let me make it very clear that the government will not—I repeat: will not—put any money towards Mr Turco's facility. It is his responsibility and his responsibility alone. If and when he is in breach of his lease or the territory plan, the government will pursue vigorously all legal action—

Mr Smyth: When?

MR BARR: When he is in breach of his lease.

Mr Doszpot: Is it currently compliant?

MR BARR: No, he is currently not in breach of his lease because the pool is operating. Whilst ever the pool is operating, he is complying with his lease and the territory plan. Only when the pool is closed will Mr Turco be in breach of his lease. That is the point at which the government can intervene, and that is when the government will intervene.

I repeat that for those opposite to suggest for one moment that the government would hand over money to Mr Turco given his behaviour and what has happened on that site is the most appalling public policy suggestion I have heard in this place in some time. It is appalling.

But is there something we do not know, Mr Speaker? Is there is something we do not know about with the relationship between the Liberal Party and Mr Turco? Is there something that they would like to declare at this point? Maybe we need to go through all the electoral returns and see whether there is anything. That would appear to be the only explanation as to why those opposite are suggesting that the appropriate policy response from government is to hand over wads of cash to Mr Turco. That is an outrageous suggestion.

What the government can and will do is source alternative venues and alternative places. The real victims in all of this are the users of that facility and Deakin Swimming Ltd, who have done an outstanding job over the five years they have been operating the facility on behalf of Mr Turco trying to get him to invest in it. They have been trying and investing a lot of their own time and money. They are not at

fault and nor are the users. But the ultimate response to this is to pursue the legal avenues against Mr Turco, but that can only commence if and when he is in breach of his lease and the territory plan requirements.

I am afraid to say that that occurs when the pool closes—if the pool closes. It is, of course, possible that Mr Turco may find an alternative operator for his facility. I think that is unlikely, but that might happen because we need to distinguish between Deakin Swimming Ltd's financial position and Mr Turco's financial position, which I think are clearly very different.

Housing—affordability

MS PORTER: My question is to the Chief Minister. The latest figures from the Real Estate Institute again show that the ACT remains far and away the most affordable jurisdiction in which to buy a home. Can the Chief Minister tell the Assembly how the policies and initiatives of the ACT government contribute to this position and of other policies of which he is aware?

MR STANHOPE: I am very pleased to have an opportunity to respond to Ms Porter's question and to acknowledge Ms Porter's interest in housing affordability, unlike the Liberals, who treat the issue as one of great hilarity and something to joke about. I guess that is reflected in their single, one and only policy. They have one policy of their own and they oppose all 63 of the initiatives which the government is pursuing through the affordability action plan.

It really is quite stark—the one, single, middle-class, middle-income tax break which the Liberal Party will offer to those earning in excess of \$120,000 to allow them to buy houses of least up to half a million, and probably more. It is a great single policy. Just as they only have a single response to the global financial crisis, and that is to stop buying paper, they have a single housing affordability initiative—a stamp duty holiday.

Just because they only have single ideas in relation to these two issues, I do not know why they oppose everything that everybody else does or suggests. I find it quite remarkable. You have got no other ideas and you are fixated on a tax break, but cannot you support other policies that are quite obviously and evidently working—innovative policies that have a real potential contribution to make to the issue of housing affordability and diversity of stock here within the territory?

Having said that, it is interesting—of course, it is due to a combination of relatively high incomes which Canberrans enjoy and issues such as the reduction in interest rates and the relative level and capacity of ACT householders—that the housing affordability index, as reported by the Real Estate Institute of Australia, has dropped quite remarkably, to the point where the ACT has advanced even more significantly as a jurisdiction in relation to which the proportion or percentage of disposable income required to pay mortgages has dropped even more, to 18 per cent.

In the ACT now, in an average Canberra household—of course, we always accept in relation to averages that there are a significant number of Canberrans under enormous stress—for those of us that fall within that description, 18 per cent of our disposable income is required to meet our mortgage commitments as against the national average of 35 per cent. The difference is as stark as that. According to the Real Estate Institute of Australia housing affordability index, we pay, on average—we accept that large cohort of Canberrans under significant stress—18 per cent as against the national average of around 35 per cent.

One of the other aspects in relation to this issue of land affordability is, of course, the extent to which there is still significant activity against national comparatives here in the ACT as against other places around Australia. Over the last year to January, residential building approvals rose in the territory. The number of housing finance commitments, while they fell in all jurisdictions, had the lowest fall of any jurisdiction here in the ACT. We had the second largest increase in the number of dwelling commencements—6.7 per cent.

On some of the indicators over the last year there remains room for some confidence that the lower house prices and the level of activity within the housing sector will continue. We are at this stage continuing to buck the trend, and let us keep our fingers crossed that we can maintain that.

In relation to specific initiatives I am pleased to be able to report the significant progress that has been made. At the moment, for instance, as a result of larger land releases and the 15 per cent requirement we make in relation to all greenfield developments, we see that around Canberra at the moment there are in excess of 350 blocks or house and land packages for sale in new estates and new developments.

I have seen some commentary over the last couple of weeks about just the LDA's contribution to that and things that the Leader of the Opposition has been saying about that, reflective, he says, of the fact that there is no land available, that land supply has not kept up with demand. He ignores, of course, all of those other developers who now are contributing significant proportions, particularly through englobo releases. There are, in fact, today, I am told, in excess of 350 dwelling sites and house and land packages for sale around the ACT. That really is a reflection of all of the initiatives which we pursued through our housing affordability strategy.

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

Supplementary answer to question without notice Roads—safety signs

MR STANHOPE: Mr Speaker, it has been drawn to my attention that the statement I made before that Mr Smyth is the only person in this place that has lost three elections in a row is not correct. I have been advised that Mrs Dunne has also lost three elections in a row, two as a member and one as a non-member. So I apologise to Mrs Dunne for inadvertently leaving her out of the description of the greatest loser in the territory.

Answers to questions on notice

Questions Nos 29, 30 and 73

MRS DUNNE: Mr Speaker, under standing order 118(a) I ask the Attorney-General for an explanation or a statement as to why he has not provided an answer to my questions on notice numbered 29 and 30, whose 30 days expired on 12 March, and also in relation to question on notice No 73, whose 30-day period expired on 14 March.

MR CORBELL: I apologise to Mrs Dunne for the lateness of those answers. I have been chasing them up in my office and I am aware that they are outstanding. The reason for that is some of them required some detailed compilation of figures and coordination within my department that has taken longer than expected, but I expect an answer to be with her very shortly.

Supplementary answer to question without notice

Multicultural Youth Services

MR HARGREAVES: I undertook yesterday to provide some information to Ms Bresnan regarding Multicultural Youth Services. I would like to advise that the draft multicultural strategy 2009-2012 does not specify a financial amount for programs addressing multicultural young people's needs, nor does it specify an organisation or organisations that will deliver the programs. The needs of young people in the community will be determined through the current consultations with community stakeholders.

The ACT government is looking forward to hearing from the community through the current consultation process on the effectiveness of existing services and programs for multicultural young people and on what is required to address any gaps in the service provision going forward into the future. Multicultural Youth Services receives funding from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs through the newly arrived youth support scheme program to provide mainly casework at the Multicultural Youth Services drop-in centre for 12 to 21-year-old migrants and refugees who have arrived in Australia within the last five years. Funding for the ACT component is approximately \$150,000 a year.

For the past four years the ACT government has provided significant funds to support vulnerable young migrants in the age bracket 22 to 25 years. Multicultural Youth Services received \$231,233 from 1 January 2005 to 31 December 2007. Under the community inclusion fund an additional transitional amount of \$118,200 will be provided from 1 January 2008 to 30 June 2009.

Additionally, Multicultural Youth Services has received project funding this year for a newsletter of \$500 and \$4,000 for driving lessons for young migrants under the 2008-09 multicultural grants programs. Furthermore, the organisation leases permanent accommodation at the community rate in both the Griffin Centre and the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre. The Multicultural Youth Services drop-in centre for young migrant people is housed in the Griffin Centre, which is ACT government owned. The drop-in centre caters for migrant and refugee young people from 12 to 25 years.

Paper

Mr Speaker presented the following paper:

Commissioner for the Environment Act, pursuant to section 22—Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment—State of the Environment Report 2007/08—Letter to the Speaker from the Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water regarding the timing of the Government’s response, dated 23 March 2009.

Health—general practitioners

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (3:22:): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that the Stanhope-Gallagher Government has failed to adequately address the decline in general practitioner (GP) numbers across the ACT; and
- (b) that of specific concern to the Opposition is the Government’s unwillingness to:
 - (i) take responsibility for the decline;
 - (ii) convince the Federal Government to provide adequate resources to arrest and decline; and
 - (iii) provide a clear strategy to reverse the current situation; and

(2) recognises:

- (a) that the ACT has the lowest number of GPs per capita in Australia;
- (b) that GP clinics across the Territory continue to close;
- (c) that the number of aged and ageing in the community in need of access to GPs for ongoing primary care is increasing;
- (d) that over seven and a half years the Government has failed to attract and retain appropriate numbers of GPs to the ACT and that this failure has placed immense stress on our public hospital system; and
- (e) the merits of further investigation into:
 - (i) GP clinic closures since 2001;
 - (ii) the current level of GP shortages in the ACT and the reasons pertaining to this shortage;

- (iii) how to arrest, and reverse, the decline in GP numbers in the short and longer term; and
- (iv) strategies to attract and retain GPs in suburban clinics.

My motion deals with GP numbers here in the ACT. We need to take a closer look at the reason why we have had such a continued decline in numbers and what we can do about it. As the motion makes clear, this is an issue that has gone unaddressed for far too long in the ACT. Given the recent closures that we have seen, we cannot allow this situation to go under the radar any longer.

I think we are all well aware of the disastrous situation in the ACT. We are about 60 GPs short. According to statistics released by both the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Primary Health Care Research and Information Service, Canberra has the lowest number of GPs per capita in Australia. That statistic is particularly alarming given that over the last two years there has been a per capita increase in GP numbers across Australia.

Coupled with this decrease in the number of GPs has been the closure of GP clinics. So it is not just the total number of GPs but the way GPs are employed in the ACT. The closure of GP clinics has accelerated in the last few years. Members will recall that in the lead-up to the 2008 election the Wanniasa medical centre closed. In recent times there have been closures in the north-west of Canberra—in Macquarie, Kaleen and O'Connor. Last week the clinic in Kippax closed and this week the family practice in Belconnen closed its doors.

These clinics have buckled under the weight of administrative procedures and process and just the lack of support that they have been receiving from the ACT government and the federal government. Some of the GPs have moved to larger clinics. That certainly happened in the south with the Phillip centre and a centre that is due to open in Belconnen. But there are significant issues with that model. It is not an ideal model. We need a dispersion of GPs throughout the suburbs, both in super clinics and locally. To rip the local GPs out of local communities and suburbs and put them all in one place really does not service a community.

It is also of great concern given what is coming to us in the future. Remember that by 2020 we are going to see a significant increase in Canberra's population and also an ageing of that population. We are a young jurisdiction at the moment, but as time goes on and as the population ages the need for GPs, the importance of GPs in the community and the importance of those GPs being located near to where people live will increase. If we do not have GPs in clinics where people can access them then the issues that plague the elderly, such as chronic illness, will go unaddressed. We will see a lack of preventative measures and a lack of early intervention in our elderly.

It is pretty clear that the lack of GPs is having a significant effect already in the community, but what really worries me is the impact as we move forward. If we continue with the current trend of a decline in the number of GPs we have got per capita and the closure of GP clinics, the impact on us in future years, essentially as we get older, is going to be enormous.

Of course, it is not just the fact that people cannot access the GPs and that they are not providing the service we need. There are significant flow-ons throughout our health system. This is most evident, I think, in our hospitals. We are all aware of the problems that people are having in accessing a GP and so they go to an emergency department. As a result we have some of the worst waiting times; in fact, the worst waiting time for category 3 and 4—urgent and semi-urgent—in Australia. A major cause of that is the lack of GPs that we have in the community. I imagine that this is only going to get worse. A number of GP clinics have closed recently in Belconnen. People will not be able to go to a GP, because there simply is not one there to service them, and they will go to the emergency department of Calvary. There is nowhere else for those people to go.

The lack of GPs also has an impact on bed rates. At the moment we have a bed occupancy level of about 90 per cent, and we know that anything above 85 per cent is dangerous. A lack of GPs has a flow-on effect. It flows on to elective surgery. If we do not have GPs treating people, preventing illness and providing early intervention and advice, what could have been treated by early intervention becomes chronic and requires elective surgery. Waiting lists grow. People that need elective surgery will not be able to get onto those waiting lists. We know that we already have for elective surgery category 2—people who present and are treated within 90 days—the worst rate in Australia.

What effect does this have on the health of the community? I have mentioned some statistics, but it is important when we allude to statistics to be mindful that every statistic, every person on that list, every one per cent of people on that list is someone who is not receiving treatment, and often they are in dire pain. If we do not have GPs in our community we are going to become an unhealthy society. We are very lucky at the moment because we are young and we are one of the healthiest jurisdictions in the country. But as we become less healthy, as we age, the reality is that if we do not have the GPs to provide the early intervention and the preventative measures to treat people then we are going to become the least healthy jurisdiction. We will move from the healthiest to the least healthy. Everyone else will have more GPs than us.

I have emphasised the role of GPs, but they are only a part of the primary health continuum. If we do not actually address this issue, there will be a failure across the whole health continuum. We are putting pressure on the bits that really are there and that have to be there—the hospitals—because we do not have enough GPs.

What are we going to do about it? We do not hear much from this government. A lot of their targets and ideas that we do hear about seem to be aspirational. I hope that if this government eventually present some form of policy and introduces measures, they are more than just aspirational targets. I have noticed that some of the health targets in the Greens-Labor agreement—the 12 per cent of funding towards mental health and the 30 per cent of funding within that to go to community organisations—seem to have gone wobbly and now are aspirational and no longer real targets. We heard the health minister say that in the Assembly a little while ago. It is good to see the health minister here. Welcome back.

If we look at the health system in its entirety, we can see that if we do not get enough GPs we are going to have an increased burden on our already failing emergency departments and elective surgery rates. Despite this, I think, well understood and well-known requirement for GPs in our community, if we actually look at the government's record we see very little action that has been taken in this regard. In fact, the minister pleads that it is not her problem. She fails to take responsibility for this. She essentially blames the federal government for not having done enough. If it is not the federal government then it is the healthcare providers themselves.

Last week, when the Kippax family centre closed, the health minister said, "All we can do is, I guess, seek the corporate goodwill of some of these providers." If the minister's response to the closure of yet another family GP clinic is to say that all we can do is to seek the corporate goodwill then that is not enough. There is nothing to stop this minister lobbying her federal colleagues to seek assistance in this regard. After the 2007 federal election we got a commitment to the end of the blame game; the blame game was over. I see little evidence of that. Already this minister has said that she has written to her federal colleagues and sought support to get additional programs, but that her federal colleagues will not even acknowledge that we have a GP shortage in the ACT. They say that we do not have a GP shortage here.

What are we missing out on? What other programs are we missing out on? What initiatives are we missing out on? Under the district of workforce shortage initiative of the commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, international medical graduates can get essentially waivers so that they can, not shortcut, but circumvent some of the process to get registered. There is the commonwealth's Australian general practice training program, prevocational general practice placements program and the general practice after-hours program. The minister has simply failed in her approach to the federal government. She is continuing to play the blame game.

I wonder why that is. Is the minister just incapable of mounting the argument adequately or is it that we in the ACT are being treated with disdain? The federal Labor government know that they have got a couple of safe seats here and the Stanhope-Gallagher government has been re-elected here for four years. "Why should we bother?" seems to be the attitude. Certainly, the minister has been unable to convince her federal colleagues that we do have a shortage here.

There is nothing to stop the development of new ideas. I think there is a lot more that could be done. At the last election we took forward a raft of policies that would have gone a significant way towards increasing the number of GPs here in the community. There were some recommendations made after the Wanniasa medical centre closed, but the government is yet to respond to that. There is a lot more that could be done by this government that is not being done.

We had a policy of free bulk-billing GP clinics for the suburbs, including Belconnen. It was scoffed at by the government during the election campaign. We pledged support for the community health centre that has yet to be opened at Belconnen. We said that we would support it with all the funding that it required—the \$200,000 plus another \$200,000. It would be open by now if that had been supported by the

government and taken forward at the last election. But they mocked those policies. It strikes me that it is almost a case of Nero fiddling while Rome burns or, in this case, the minister playing with her abacus trying to sort out issues in Treasury while GP clinics close.

It is not good enough. It is something that we need to give our full attention to, and clearly this government is not. We have seen the minister's limp response when GP clinics close. She is not paying full attention to this. We need to investigate this issue further. I think it is dawning on the community and this Assembly that we need to conduct further investigations into this issue.

The government have failed to take responsibility for this issue. They have failed to come up with an adequate response. We need to find an alternative method to provide fresh, new ideas to the government. In my engagement with Minister Gallagher I have heard things like, "Jeremy, just get over it." We need an organisation that can actually go forward to the minister and provide her with some credible ideas.

Ms Gallagher: You still cannot. Write me a letter.

MR HANSON: I cannot get over what is such an important issue to the community. Maybe you can; I cannot. I am not going to get over the need for more GPs in the community.

Ms Gallagher: No, that was not what I said. That was not what I said, mate. Just get over my workload. Everyone else has.

MR HANSON: You get over it. You worry about your \$200 million deficit; I will worry about GP clinics. The way we can move forward on this is to refer this matter to the standing committee on health, and it is my intention to do so. At this stage my intention is to write a letter to that committee to recommend to them that they conduct an inquiry into the shortage of GPs that we have here. My motion addresses the shortage of GPs and the way that could be addressed.

I believe that there is some consensus forming in the Assembly that would support such an inquiry. That support is coming from the crossbench and the government backbench. I understand there is an amendment foreshadowed to my motion. I will wait for the government backbench to speak to the issue. If that is the case then I welcome that. We want to see results. We want to see ideas. We want to see progress on this. It is not about who takes the credit. We certainly know where the blame lies. I await the response of the crossbench and the government.

It sounds encouraging. I am very hopeful that what we will get is a committee inquiry that can come up with the ideas that this government so sadly lacks so that we can move forward and see a reversal in the trend of reducing numbers of GPs and GP clinics closing.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Treasurer, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Services and Minister for Women) (3.37): Thank you, Mr Doszpot. It is because you were so nice to me earlier in the day that I get 15 minutes to speak. I am

very pleased to be debating the motion brought forward by Mr Hanson today relating to general practice. It is something that the Assembly has shown considerable interest in. It is something that the government is working very hard on; so we welcome the Assembly's buy-in and constructive views around improving the community's access to primary health care.

This is something that has been a key part of the ACT government's overhaul of the health system. We want to look at how our primary healthcare sector works and how it relates to our acute health sector. That is why a large component of our rebuild of our health system involves a considerable reshaping and refocusing on our community-based health services that provide, outside of general practice, a number of primary healthcare services to the community.

Of course, the motion by Mr Hanson is politically targeted. That is clear from each of the different elements of the motion. I believe my colleague has foreshadowed an amendment to the motion and I would certainly encourage the Assembly to give the amendment to the motion due consideration when it comes on for debate. I think the issue of access to general practice is one that the community is concerned about but at the same time we in the ACT government and in the ACT Assembly have to understand the limitations that we have to influence GP numbers and how GPs conduct their business here in the ACT.

It is interesting that we have recent statistics from DOHA that show that the full-time equivalent number of GPs working in the ACT divisions has actually increased from 200 in 2004-05 to 232 in 2007-08. When you look at such figures, and then you look at what is happening in the community, it is hard to reconcile the situation because I think there is general agreement that if you do not have a general practitioner it is very difficult to get on the books of one.

This is where there is a long history to the shortage of our general practitioners in the community. If you talk to doctors, they will tell you that it stems very much from the restriction on doctor training places in universities. Some of that has been seen to be addressed, or it has been sought to be addressed. That was led by John Howard under the previous commonwealth government. It spent billions of dollars over a whole range of years to boost GP numbers and bulk-billing rates across the nation. However, we still face here in the ACT a situation that is not replicated across the country. Particularly in large metropolitan areas across the country, we have an oversupply of GPs and certainly much higher bulk-billing rates than we have here in the ACT.

The amendment to the motion that has been circulated, but not yet moved, seeks a tripartisan approach to inquiring into a whole range of issues relating to general practice. Indeed, my colleague Mary Porter is going to discuss this subject again later this evening. I think there is general agreement that further investigation into these areas is needed.

I have to say from the ACT's point of view that when I look at the criteria in Mr Hanson's motion I can honestly say that we have been undertaking investigation into all of those areas. I think the politically motivated one of GP closures since 2001 caught my interest. I note that there is not another item there that notes the sacking of

GPs from our community health centres back in 1995. This happened under a Liberal government. That certainly changed the landscape. However, that did not quite make it into their short list.

The current shortages in GPs and how to arrest them, and reverse them if we can, are something that we have been working on with the Division of General Practice in the AMA, the GP advisers and the GP liaison unit for some time. I think it is relevant that we put all that work together. I am pleased that it appears the standing committee will do an inquiry into this. They did inquire into the Wanniasa closure at the end of the last Assembly and came up with a few recommendations, none of which go to the areas that it is sought to be inquired into.

Certainly from ACT Health's point of view, we will appoint the executive director of policy and our GP adviser to head up the work. We have a number of areas that we are working on across ACT Health. We will pull that work together and we will provide that work to the Assembly in September. I think that this will cross over with an inquiry by the standing committee, but I think that that is not a problem. The government will provide a submission if that is the will of the Assembly.

But on top of that we will run a concurrent process that will pull in all the stakeholders from across the community, including individual general practice. We will look at all the legislation and see what can be done in terms of any amendments to protect patients. We will talk to individual general practice about what their future plans are. We will seek to involve corporate providers—I have to say that the corporate providers at that level are cooperating very well with ACT Health—and we will continue to lobby the commonwealth.

I have to say also that the commonwealth have been reluctant to treat the ACT as a special isolated case, which is something that I have been arguing for for some time. I was unsuccessful in those arguments with Minister Abbott, who refused to even listen to them. I am making slow but steady progress with Minister Roxon, including a meeting tomorrow that I am having with her office about how the closure of Kippax family practice occurred; the impact that that has had on our community; whether that is something that is on their radar; whether it is something that they have been witnessing across the country; whether they have any concerns about it; and whether they have any intention to address some of the concerns that have been raised here by the community.

There is a lot going on, but I think we have to be realistic. While this is a politically difficult argument to run, we have to be realistic about the ACT government's ability to pull the levers in relation to regulation of general practice. We do not provide the provider numbers; we do not run Medicare. They are the two significant levers that influence general practice and decisions that general practice makes, including the cost of being a general practitioner.

There will be many arguments from general practice that the costs of being a general practitioner in a stand-alone business are too much based on the workload that they are experiencing. I think that is part of the challenges that we are witnessing here in the ACT as suburban general practice moves into larger corporate models.

In relation to some areas of hope and progress, at the end of this year when we have our next round of graduates—that will be our third year—we will be exporting doctors for the first time. That is a very important part of growing our own local workforce. We have graduates coming in who are traditionally older than medical students in other jurisdictions. They come in as graduates. They have often got family already here and, as we saw last year, they are all wanting to stay here.

What we have done is to increase our GP training opportunities for junior doctors to actually be exposed to general practice so that they can see what general practice offers them. Hopefully at the end of their training some of them, or a few of them or more of them than has been the case, will choose a specialty career in general practice.

The ANU Medical School is working along the lines of what we had always hoped. We have got a GP workforce working group. This was established back in 2003. The after-hours locum medical service was actually established arising from one of the recommendations from that group. I think everyone will admit that CALMS—a service which operates at both hospitals—has been very good in meeting the needs of some Canberrans.

We have worked with general practice in a recruitment campaign trying to get doctors from outside the ACT to come here. One of the benefits of the recruitment campaign that we funded last year—I think it has been funded for about 15 months now—has been the ability for that project officer to cut through a lot of the red tape and of the time practices were spending in terms of recruiting doctors from outside the ACT into the ACT.

This officer, who is working out of the Division of General Practice, was recruited in May 2008; so that is only a year ago. Since that time, 11 area-of-need authorisations have been approved, 39 genuine calls of interest from potential GPs have been received, five new GPs have commenced and up to 13 other GPs have been offered positions to commence in 2009.

We have, through ACT Health, the GP adviser who provides advice to the ACT executive on GP issues. That officer works very closely with the peak body, the division and the AMA. In fact, that general practitioner will be heading up the ACT government's investigation and will report back to the Assembly in September.

We have been working very closely with the division and the AMA on the nurse-led walk-in centres. I am very pleased to be able to say that, based on discussions I have recently held with both the AMA and the division, they have lent their in-principle support to such clinics. They will operate in the first instance within the hospital and then we will evaluate the success or otherwise of the clinics before we make further plans about expanding the program. I think there is a fair bit of work the Assembly can do. I welcome the Assembly's interest in the issue. If there are constructive responses outside of the issues that I have already outlined and that Health are already investigating on my behalf, I would welcome that.

It is important when there is an issue like this facing the community that does not have clear black-and-white solutions—and let us accept that we cannot wave a magic

wand and just fix this automatically—that we do work together in the interests of our community to look at whether there are other ways that the ACT government or the ACT Assembly, through legislative reform, can improve the situation.

The ACT government has made a number of election commitments around support for general practice. Of course, those are all being considered in the context of this year's budget. They were, again, around longer-term solutions which involve support for general practice to take on medical students and to open up their practices. It does cost them money. They do have to keep appointments free in order to take on that mentoring role. But it is something traditionally that general practitioners have taken very seriously.

In times when workloads are very high and costs are high, it is difficult to wind back work and take on a volunteer approach to the training of medical students. But unless we train the next generation of medical students and encourage them into general practice there will not be a solution to this. It is not simply about going overseas and removing doctors from areas where they are needed as well and bringing them to the ACT so the ACT does not have a problem any more. That is one approach and a measured way of doing things in terms of how we accept international medical graduates into our GP practices. It is an important part of continuing to address workforce shortage but it is not that easy and it is not that simple.

When you see a workforce shortage like the one we are experiencing, there is no quick fix to it. But maybe there are ways to work better. Maybe there are ways to support our existing general practitioners better so that they have more time to do their work. There are continuing discussions that I will be having with the commonwealth and I am very happy to raise this issue again at ARMAC. I have been raising it and other jurisdictions have been raising it where similar workforce shortages occur—for example, in the Northern Territory and other jurisdictions where there are large, remote and rural locations.

It is not something that is peculiar to the ACT and we should remember that. This is something that is affecting the nation. In some ways the nation's response is needed. But if there are things that the ACT government can individually do to improve the situation, to support general practice, to encourage more students into training opportunities and encourage more students into a life as a general practitioner, then they are the areas that we have been working on. They are the areas we will continue to work on. If there is further legislative reform that we can implement that does not unfairly target general practice, let us have a serious look at that as well.

That is the commitment I give the Assembly in terms of pulling together the work that I have been doing over the past 12 months, bringing in some additional expertise and reporting back to the Assembly in September. If there are concrete recommendations that come out of that work, they will be placed before the Assembly for its consideration.

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (3.52): Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker.

Ms Gallagher: You are not going to be nasty again, are you, Steve? You do not have Zed's speech there?

MR DOSZPOT: I am sorry?

Ms Gallagher: It is just that I heard on the grapevine you were a bit nasty this morning.

MR DOSZPOT: Nasty to you? How could I be? I rise in support of Mr Hanson's motion today. It is an important issue, perhaps one of the most important issues we as a community need to deal with but one which this government has manifestly failed to deal with in their nearly eight years in government.

Perhaps I have been more exposed than other members to the suffering that the community has been subject to as a result of the chronic shortage of GPs in the territory. I know, for instance, that the people of Calwell, in my electorate and my home suburb, have been left with no alternative but to rally together to try to set up a clinic ourselves due to the lack of interest by this government. Ms Gallagher, if you listen to what I am about to say, it might give you a little bit more of an insight as to why things will get a bit nasty.

At Calwell, our local GP closed in January 2007, with the practice at Richardson following in the middle of 2007. Monash also closed around this time, resulting in the loss of three GP clinics in the space of two years. The closure of the Wanniasa medical centre in 2008 was the final straw for the entire Tuggeranong community.

Ms Gallagher, you were conciliatory about all the attention and the urgency that you were paying to this GP issue. You have had the report of a bipartisan health committee, the Wanniasa report, before the government now for over five months. Where is that report? Mr Hanson has referred to it. We are waiting for a very crucial response from the government on the very fact that we are trying to debate at the moment, the issue with GPs.

Maybe if we suggest a statue of a mythical GP on the Monaro Highway we might get Mr Stanhope's attention—a statue of a mythical GP that is rapidly disappearing from our community. Maybe that is one way that we can get you to pay attention to a fact that is of so much concern to our community. There it is; there is the challenge: put a statue of a mythical GP on the Monaro Highway, Jon.

I have personally been aware of the doctors4Tuggeranong project since well before my election to this place. In fact, along with Nick Tsoulias, a Calwell business proprietor who has been the primary mover behind this initiative and founder of this initiative, I attended a community meeting last week which highlighted the difficulties associated with getting a GP clinic up and running here in the ACT. Our initial meeting last week went a long way towards addressing some of the challenges.

But I see how difficult it is to attract GPs to the territory because it is so hard to set up a practice here. I see the impact of Katy Gallagher's failure to convince her federal colleagues that the ACT has a GP shortage. I envy the people of neighbouring Queanbeyan who, courtesy of their swinging voter status, get their very own super clinic. I see how our community suffers when bigger corporate organisations come to

town and buy our local GPs, shut them down and consolidate these new assets. I see the immense pressure that our existing suburban GPs work under to preserve the local family GP model of health delivery and the huge sacrifice they make in order to do so.

I must say that times are getting pretty desperate when local communities cannot rely on their own elected governments to make the necessary provisions of services as essential as a local GP. But the situation is bad and getting worse. We are 60 to 70 GPs short and we have practices closing every month now.

This government clearly has no strategy to deal with the decline in GP services in our territory. They have no plan to engage our existing GPs, to identify what their needs are, to stem the tide of local GP clinic closures. The minister's statement last week following the closure of the Kippax family practice was both remarkable and pathetic in content. I am still stunned at Ms Gallagher's utter disinterest and lack of control in the delivery of primary health services in the ACT, as exemplified by her statement: "All we can do is, I guess, seek the corporate goodwill of some of these providers."

The minister has finally revealed what this government's policy is in relation to securing GP services for the community. I repeat for Ms Gallagher's attention, "All we can do is, I guess, seek the corporate goodwill of some of these providers." What an absurd government policy their policy is. "We do not have a policy except to write a few letters to corporate health providers and seek their goodwill." What a disappointment for the people of Calwell! What a disappointment for the people of Wanniasa! What a tragedy for the people of Richardson, Kambah, Theodore, Monash and Oxley! The list goes on, and this is only in my electorate of Brindabella.

Recently we have seen GP clinic closures every week in parts of north-western Canberra. I feel for those people. I do not know how that community will absorb the impact of these closures. I am conscious that some of our most vulnerable and needy live in these areas.

Mr Stanhope: How many years was John Howard Prime Minister? Just remind me again.

Mr Coe: You keep on blaming the Howard government.

Mr Stanhope: Do you understand who is responsible for GP practice, Alistair? Come on, Sebastian, tell us. Do you know? Do you understand the structure of healthcare delivery in Australia?

Mr Coe: You are solving the problem, Jon.

MR DOSZPOT: Could we stop the clock?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Burch): Gentlemen! Stop the clock. Mr Doszpot has the floor.

Mr Stanhope: I was trying to assist. I beg your pardon.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Stanhope. Mr Doszpot has the floor.

MR DOSZPOT: I thank you for your offer, Jon. I think I can manage, okay? Thank you.

Mr Stanhope: You are not managing, Steve, but—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Stanhope, please.

Mr Stanhope: I beg your pardon.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you. Mr Doszpot, please proceed.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker. Recently we have seen GP clinic closures every week in parts of north-western Canberra. I feel for those people. I do not know how that community will absorb the impact of these closures. I am conscious that some of our most vulnerable and needy live in these areas and it is a reflection on this government's failure—failure, Mr Stanhope—to attract, support and retain our primary health workforce that they are suffering the fate of people in my own electorate. It does beg the question: how many times will we see this process repeated and replicated throughout Canberra before the government will assume any responsibility for this crisis?

Ms Gallagher has already made abundantly clear that her best weapon in relation to the protection of existing GP services is to do simply nothing. “There is absolutely nothing I can do,” she said. She has said it on more than one occasion and has repeated it passionately. “There is absolutely nothing I can do.” And I do not need Mr Seselja's speechwriters for this, by the way.

We know now that the longstanding position of this minister and this government has been to do absolutely nothing. I and, indeed, my colleagues simply do not accept that there is nothing that can be done. We, in fact, took a suite of very good, sound and forward-looking policies to the last election in relation to health delivery, with a huge focus on primary health. We were prepared to invest significantly in our community and primary health sector to make it one of the most accessible and equitable jurisdictions in Australia in terms of, Ms Gallagher, delivering more GP services, taking the strain off our hospital emergency departments and providing after-hours bulk-billing services to the families that need them most.

I must say that I cannot help but feel a tinge of regret that this government failed to copy or adopt any of our health initiatives as they did with our capital works, education and planning initiatives, which you have done a good job of copying. The health of our fellow citizens is absolutely our highest priority and I challenge anyone sitting here today to argue otherwise. While the government is quite happy with the status quo, we in the opposition will continue to advocate strongly on behalf of the community to protect their interests. We remain committed to designing policies which actually serve the needs of the community, that will take us into the future, that will meet the ever-growing demand that we expect to see in the coming years.

Unfortunately, because of the neglect by this government of the community health sector, the ACT is in a position where we cannot even meet the current needs of the community. We are literally at bursting point. The capacity of this government to deliver services in line with community expectation worries me greatly and its ability to secure more GPs and primary health services to meet future growth is in serious doubt if the last 7½ years is any guide.

We know, for instance, that by the year 2020 our population will be 370,000 and demand for acute services, that is, hospital services, will double. This is assuming, of course, that no more GP clinics close their doors. The primary and community health sector is a vitally important element in the health and wellbeing of any jurisdiction. Some would argue that it is the most important. Indeed, the need to move toward a more community-oriented and primary-focused model of healthcare delivery is recognised in a number of ACT Health policy documents. It therefore astounds me that this situation has been allowed to be developed over such a long period under this government. (*Time expired.*)

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (4.03): I thank Mr Hanson for bringing on this motion today. The topic is both timely and important as the closure of small medical practices is an issue that is affecting more and more Canberrans. The Greens believe that access to quality health services is a basic human right. In an ideal Canberra, everyone would have access to bulk-billing general practitioners in a timely manner.

I note that a number of amendments will be moved later in the debate and the Greens will support these amendments. We do seem to have a bipartisan agreement in this chamber about the depth of the problem and a conviction to find solutions, which we welcome.

Discussion of the GP problem requires a distilling of cause and effect. The nature of the problem is complex and must be well understood if we are to implement effective solutions. It is an issue that requires attention at a state, territory and federal level and it is an issue that is being experienced across the country. The closure of the clinics in Kippax and Wanniasa is distressing for the patients that attend these practices, as people lose that key relationship of trust with their GP that they have built up, often over many years.

The first part to this problem is the seemingly diminishing number of general practitioners available to the Canberra community. It appears that our population is growing, our people are ageing and we want a continual improvement of the health services provided to us. Our primary healthcare system is experiencing stress. There are ways to address this in the short term, including establishing nurse practitioners so that people do not always have to see a GP, and providing space for GPs in community health centres. Taking GPs from regional areas in Australia or indeed from overseas is not an idea I am entirely comfortable with, as these regions more often than not suffer much more when it comes to accessing basic medical services than we do.

The second is the federal government funding an incentives model for general practitioners. This has lent itself to the closure of smaller neighbourhood-based

medical centres in favour of the development of larger medical practices. The Greens are not opposed to the idea of having larger medical centres that provide a range of primary and secondary care services. But we want the consumer, our community, to continue to have a range of choices about the types of medical services they access. The delivery of primary health care by GPs has very much moved towards a business model and away from an approach that best serves the needs of doctors and consumers.

I would also encourage that this issue be taken to and looked at strongly by the Australian healthcare ministers conference and the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council, as it is an issue which does require attention at a federal level, and I am encouraged to hear that the health minister has made sure that this will occur. I also welcome the announcement of the task force by the health minister and the referral to the health committee. This will allow all parties in the Assembly to look at this very important issue and give the community, particularly with the health committee inquiry, the opportunity to have input into an issue which greatly impacts them all.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (4.06): It is clear that the Stanhope-Gallagher government has failed to adequately address declining GP numbers across the ACT. The minister, Ms Gallagher, is refusing to take responsibility for the decline and is also refusing to provide a clear strategy to reverse the current situation. Presumably she has been tied up looking at more palatable sounding synonyms for recession while the Health portfolio is screaming for attention.

GP clinic closures have and continue to have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of the community. The closures in Macquarie, Hall and more recently in Belconnen and Kippax have increased the burden on those clinics that remain open and forced patients to travel further to already crowded clinics with long waiting times. The Stanhope-Gallagher government has shown total disregard for the health needs of the community.

I understand that west Belconnen has one GP for every 3,274 people, compared to one GP for every 849 people throughout the rest of Canberra. This disadvantage of west Belconnen will continue to be exacerbated until the government takes seriously the matter of GP numbers. The minister may think it is well and good to simply give up and blame anyone but themselves and expect the people of west Belconnen to trek across Canberra to find another GP.

This is of particular concern for the elderly in my electorate who rely on their local GP to look after their often complex health needs, which sometimes require long-term care. One of the last things the elderly need is to have to travel further, which is difficult for those who are infirm or suffer from serious ailments. In addition, changing doctors and building new relationships with different medical professionals can also be quite stressful for the elderly in our community.

The unavailability of GP services also sometimes forces people into the hospital system, which is often the Calvary Hospital in Belconnen. Hospitals are far too strained as it is and emergency departments far too congested without having to

shoulder the additional burden of health care that can be much more effectively provided by GPs. But if there are no GPs and the hospitals are overburdened, where does that leave us? Where can people go to find adequate care?

The government, as has become usual practice, is hiding behind false promises and shallow media statements to deflect blame for the crisis. During the campaign last year, Ms Gallagher said: "There is no quick fix to the GP worker shortage. However, there are realistic and workable things we can do locally to respond." If that is the case, why, five months after the election, are we still 60 GPs short when the rest of the nation has seen a growth in GP numbers? No matter how you rearrange business models or move clinics and doctors, there is no action from the government to stem the tide. They are happy to sit back and watch it go out.

I thought it was interesting when the federal minister for health, Nicola Roxon, joined the Chief Minister and Minister for Health to launch their GP package at the last election, because federal Labor has some form on this issue. Between 1983 and 1996, when the Australian population grew significantly, the number of GPs being trained was static, with approximately 1,200 graduating from Australian medical schools each year. That was when Australia's population was around 14½ million and, when Australia's population started to age and reached 18.5 million in 1996, the number of doctors trained was the same. A four million increase in the population saw no increase in the number of doctors being trained. There was some catching up to do.

The Howard government provided new funding and initiatives in 2005. Around 1,500 doctors were graduating, and this figure is expected to increase to up to 3,000 in a few years time. This was after working with the Australian Medical Workforce Advisory Committee. The Liberal Party has a record of working with the sector to ensure the best health care can be delivered.

What have we got to show for the last election from federal Labor? A failing health policy that seeks to centralise doctors when they are needed in local communities the most. And what have we got to show for the re-election of ACT Labor? Another day, another local GP clinic closing. If we are serious about the provision of health care, we need to be looking to the care at the primary care level and early intervention to reduce the burden on the system and use our healthcare resources effectively.

This is an issue that needs serious consideration to determine the root cause of the problem, a problem that sits squarely with the ACT government. We need to fix this problem. We need to encourage GPs to stay in the suburbs and remain an important and integral part of our community. I would urge all those who have an interest in the long-term health of our Canberra community to support this motion.

MS BURCH (Brindabella) (4.11): What surprises me most about this motion is that it comes from a party that, when it was last in power, actually closed down our free public bulk-billing clinics. Mr Coe made mention of federal policy. I ask him to go back to Minister Wooldridge's days and see how he decimated and then restricted access to GP training places. Significant work was needed, and an increase in numbers, to come anywhere near the needed national GP numbers.

This motion comes from a party that has little concern for our community. How could it, when it ripped out 114 beds from our hospital system when it was in power? It had so little regard then for our ageing population and growing demand for health services. This motion comes from a group of people who left our mental health services almost at the bottom of the national funding league table.

Over the last 7½ years, we have provided a clear strategy to reverse that situation. We have spent funds on infrastructure in order to grow our own medical workforce. Not only have we replaced the 114 beds that were ripped out of our public hospitals by those opposite, but we have added more. By the end of 2008-09, we will have added more than 200 beds to our hospitals since we first came to government. We have added almost \$50 million to increase access to elective surgery, providing record levels of access to surgery over the last five years. In addition, we have established the sub and non-acute service at Calvary Hospital and the Medical Assessment and Planning Unit at Canberra Hospital.

This government is providing more services to the community and also new ways of providing care to better meet patient needs. We have increased the capacity of our cancer services by funding additional doctors, nurses and beds as well as commissioning a third linear accelerator. We have committed \$300 million to begin the total renewal and redevelopment of our healthcare infrastructure to enable the delivery of quality healthcare services to the ACT through to 2022 and beyond.

Some of the items funded out of the \$300 million over the next four years include a women and children's hospital; a mental health acute in-patient unit, at \$23 million; a new community health centre at Gungahlin; a secure adult mental health in-patient unit; a 16-bed ICU, high dependency unit and coronary care unit facility at Calvary Hospital; redevelopment of community health centres; and an additional 24 beds at the Canberra Hospital. The list is exhaustive. What I am trying to show those opposite is that we on this side of the chamber understand what our responsibilities are. We know what the ACT government responsibilities are and what the commonwealth responsibilities are.

What is the opposition's strategy to increase GP numbers? I ask them to show us their grand plan. It is not starting a training school, is it? I think we have accomplished that. Is it about supporting junior doctors to undertake intern placements in local GP clinics? That is something this government has done. This government focuses on marketing and recruiting GPs to the ACT, and on building partnerships with GPs in their organisations across the ACT. The opposition seems to want to take funding away from ACT responsibilities and what the ACT can do, and to spend it on commonwealth responsibilities.

Notwithstanding that, we do not shirk our responsibilities. We are working on a comprehensive range of programs and activities to address the GP shortage. We are doing all of this with the understanding and acknowledgement that GPs in Australia work in private practice, and that their education, training and distribution across Australia, including in the ACT, is a federal government responsibility.

I note the minister has announced that the government is looking comprehensively at GP services within Canberra, and I commend that activity. Finally, I move the following amendment to Mr Hanson's motion that has been circulated in my name:

Omit all words after "That this Assembly", substitute:

"(1) recognises that:

- (a) the ACT has the second lowest number of GPs per capita in Australia;
- (b) GP clinics across the Territory continue to close; and
- (c) the number of aged and ageing in the community in need of access to GPs for ongoing primary health care is increasing;

(2) refers to the Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services to conduct an inquiry into access to primary care services and that this inquiry may include:

- (a) role of nurse practitioners in providing primary health care;
- (b) role of allied health assistants in providing primary health care;
- (c) GP clinic closures since 2001;
- (d) the current level of GP shortages in the ACT and the reasons pertaining to this shortage;
- (e) how to arrest, and reverse, the decline in GP numbers in the short and longer term;
- (f) strategies to attract and retain GPs in suburban clinics; and
- (g) linkages between Government and NGO providers; and

(3) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) seek to include the issue of funding for GPs on the agenda for the Australian Health Ministers Conference and its Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council; and
- (b) report to the Assembly by 17 September 2009."

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (4.17): Speaking to the amendment, I will discuss some of the points made by Ms Burch. There was a lot of discussion about hospital beds; the issue that we are discussing here is primary health care—GPs. I dispute some of the stuff she was saying, but I want to make sure that she does focus on the issue at hand. She also referred to the issue of elective surgery and to what this government is doing. This government currently is running the worst rates of elective surgery category 2 in the country, so I am not sure that claiming credit for elective surgery rates is something that supports her argument.

With respect to the money that is due to be expended by this government, the \$300 million mentioned by Ms Burch, I am concerned that we are not going to get what we have been told we are going to get in election promises and so on. Some of the proposals put forward in terms of mental health units and so on have already been subject to change. If we look at this government's record on delivery of major projects, we see that they often keep the dollar figure the same but we see a significant reduction in scope.

Yesterday, when I asked the health minister about the women and children's hospital and any potential reduction in scope, we got the continual argument that we are spending \$90 million, but there was no commitment that they were going to stay within the scope. We saw that with the Alexander Maconochie Centre, which has been delivered with some 75 beds short of the original scope, without the gym, without the outer perimeter fence, without the chapel and so on.

Ms Burch also asked questions about what our strategy was. At the last election we took forward a number of very good proposals for attracting and retaining GPs here in the ACT, with incentives to attract 60 GPs from interstate and overseas to plug the hole that we have got here in the ACT. There were guaranteed internships in our hospitals for graduates from ANU, so that they would not go off to Melbourne, Brisbane or Sydney where, once they have done their internship, they are likely to stay. They are unlikely to come back to the ACT.

There were also financial incentives and business support for young graduates to set up their own GP clinics here in Canberra. When you talk about business, I think that is a very important element. It is clear that this government is not friendly towards business, particularly small business. I do not think it is any accident that the small business practitioners, essentially the family clinics, the family centres, are all closing in what is a very unfriendly environment for small business here in the ACT.

There is no doubt that more can be done. You would not believe it from listening to Ms Burch and her adoration of the government's policy. But I find it interesting that she also agreed that we need to have an inquiry to address what more can be done. Clearly, there is more that can be done. I do not think we have got a mortgage on all the good ideas, and certainly the government does not. We have to make sure that we speak to the experts, to the people in the community who can make a difference. We need to get some ideas together to give to this government, which clearly have run out of sufficient ideas. The evidence is pretty clear that they have run out of ideas when you look at the facts in terms of the number of GPs and so on.

We welcome the amendment and the opposition will be supporting it. The intent that I have is to make sure that there is an outcome from this process, that we have an inquiry that can investigate these issues and present ideas to the government. Although the preamble will have been lost, which I think was quite relevant and did highlight the failings of this government, I understand why you would want that removed. In the interests of making sure that we do have an inquiry, I am happy to see that removed, so that we get the result that we need.

Certainly, there were some interesting negotiations over the development of the amendment. I am a little bit disappointed about the way that occurred. It is not about who takes the credit for this; it is about essentially getting the process done. We already know who we can blame in terms of our GP numbers and the results we are getting at the moment. So the fact that we are moving forward—and I understand that the crossbench will also be supporting this—in a tripartisan way to get a GP inquiry going is good news.

The terms of reference have actually been expanded by the government backbench, so there is acceptance that there is a problem, and also that primary health care encompasses more than just GPs. I do acknowledge that there are other elements and we need to look at the broader scope. Certainly, given the problems we have had recently with the number of closures of GP clinics, it is probably the most significant element of that. But I certainly appreciate that it needs to be looked at in a holistic fashion and I welcome the expansion of the terms of reference.

The other issue that has been put forward, which I believe comes more from the crossbench than from the government backbench, is about the issue of GPs being included on the agenda for the health ministers conference. I support that; I do not have any objection to it. I note that a report based on that will come back to the Assembly in September, so I look forward to seeing that report.

In the terms of reference for the inquiry I would have used the language “should include” rather than “may include”. I find that a bit wishy-washy in this amendment, but I accept that the committee will understand exactly what the issues are that need to be addressed. I have great faith in Mr Doszpot, the chair of that committee, who has been involved in this debate, to take that forward. So I welcome the amendment and the opposition will be supporting it.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (4.23): I would like to speak briefly on this issue. I thank Mr Hanson for initially bringing this motion forward. I think it is critically important that we as an Assembly continue to look at this issue and continue to look for ways to arrest the shortage of GPs that we are experiencing in the ACT, and that we have been experiencing for some time.

In the end, it is one of those things—the question of credit that Mr Hanson touched on. There are a lot of people who want to claim credit, but in the end the important thing will be that this will be properly examined. We are very hopeful that the committee process can actually come up with some good solutions.

Clearly, we have a problem; we have an issue. When we look at the recent closures in Belconnen and last year’s closure in Wanniasa, we know that small GP clinics are being bought up or that the doctors are moving on. I have spoken with doctors recently who talk about some of the incentive payments that they are being offered to join some of the big providers. I have heard numbers as high as a \$750,000 sign-on. I do not know if that is correct, but that is what is being talked about. That is pretty hard for a lot of doctors to resist, I imagine. These are some of the tough economic realities that we face in dealing with this issue. It is by no means an easy issue. There will be no easy solution that will solve our GP shortage.

We do need to continue to look at why we have a GP shortage. It does seem somewhat anomalous that the ACT, being such a wonderful place in which to live and having such a highly educated population, would struggle to attract and indeed to keep GPs over a period of time. We are very hopeful that, by referring this to the committee, we can see some outcomes and solutions.

We cannot have the situation where we once again blame external factors—that is, the commonwealth. We know that the commonwealth plays a major role but, having said that, this is one of the modern realities of politics, and something that many federal, state and local politicians would have found. Simply saying that it is the commonwealth's responsibility or the commonwealth saying that it is the state's responsibility does not get it done. In fact, one of the core messages of Mr Rudd prior to being elected was ending the blame game.

Locally, there are things we can do, and there are significant things we can do. We can assist GPs to locate here, we can keep our graduates here, we can look at ways that we support local practices. There are a whole range of measures that need to be looked at. As I say, none of them are going to be easy in the sense that we have doctors who are offered big money, but in some ways they are two separate but intertwined issues—the issue of GPs moving from smaller clinics to larger clinics and the broader issue of the number of GPs that we have.

It is important that we have a good geographic spread. One of the key things we talked about last year in our policies in particular is to ensure that west Belconnen, which is so underserved, is serviced, particularly after hours, and to ensure that south Tuggeranong and Gungahlin are properly serviced. The geographic issues are important, but the broader issue of why the ACT has such a low number of GPs is important and needs to be looked at in a separate way. I imagine that some of the solutions will come up against each other.

There are things that can be done. Yes, incentives can be given for people to stay or to set up practice. There can be support for things like the west Belconnen clinic; we can look at setting up specific clinics, particularly after hours. One of the significant issues we have in our emergency department is people presenting to emergency who really just need to see a GP. That is one of the clear messages we have received from the community, and that is most apparent in our outer suburbs.

Members interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mrs Dunne): Order, members! There is too much conversation.

MR SESELJA: I think that west Belconnen is the most stark example of a part of the community that is underserved by GPs. We saw that with the recent closure in Kippax. West Belconnen has been dealt a very poor deal, I think, in terms of its access to GPs. We also have significant numbers of disadvantaged Canberrans living in parts of west Belconnen. All of those things coming together mean that there are some urgent decisions that need to be made by the ACT government. They need to not only work with the federal government to address these matters—

Mr Stanhope interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Order, Chief Minister! Can you keep it down, please?

MR SESELJA: but also to come up with measures at a local level that will assist this process. We have put forward a number of ideas, and I am sure that the committee will be looking at that in their processes. I am sure that all committee members will come to this with an open mind, because I think that is what we need. We need to have new and interesting solutions. There may well be things that no-one has yet thought of that will assist us in attracting GPs, in keeping GPs and in dealing with some of these geographic issues that we know are so significant, particularly in west Belconnen, south Tuggeranong and Gungahlin, where we know that there are the most acute shortages.

Once again, I commend Mr Hanson for bringing forward this motion. He has been leading the charge on a number of issues in health. We are pleased that there is now tripartisan support for the establishment of a committee process to look into this very important issue. But we simply cannot sit on our hands. We cannot do as the minister has done—

Members interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Could you sit down again for a minute, Mr Seselja. Chief Minister, Ms Gallagher and Ms Porter, I have asked you not to conduct conversations in the chamber. It is extraordinarily difficult to hear. If it is so important, you can go out into the lobby.

Mr Stanhope: There was nothing worth listening to, though, Madam Assistant Speaker.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Chief Minister, if you want to have conversations, go out into the lobby.

MR SESELJA: I suppose it is a little bit different from the last time we spoke about this and when, in fact, the Chief Minister got thrown out of the chamber. He was so upset that they had not put forward any reasonable policies in this area and had been beaten to the punch that he apparently could not hear the Speaker when he told him to shut up; so that is interesting. The difference in approach is also interesting. We have seen a government and a minister who simply have said there is nothing they can do on these issues, and they have really offered nothing.

Government members interjecting—

MR SESELJA: Sorry, I am struggling to hear the interjections. There is too much noise here; it is really difficult. If only one person could interject at a time, it would be easier to hear the retorts from the health minister.

Nonetheless, we are pleased that there is tripartisan support now for this position of a genuine inquiry. We are very hopeful that there can be some good ideas and some ways forward that come out of this. The people of the ACT are not looking for excuses; they are looking to us as their local representatives to act; they are looking for us to come up with solutions that will ensure that they do have access to GPs and, hopefully, that they have access to GPs somewhere within their area, particularly for our most disadvantaged Canberrans. That is something that we will continue to fight for. That is something that I am very hopeful will be able to be advanced in the committee process.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (4.32): I commend Mr Hanson for what he has put here as a motion before the Assembly, because it is a very important issue that affects each and every member of the ACT community. One of the great things that used to be available in the ACT at large was immediate access to your GP. I think the health of those living in the ACT has been impacted by a number of factors—things like we were younger, we were fitter, we were healthier—but we were also very well served. A number of GPs have said to me that part of the problem for them as GPs and part of their frustration of operating in the ACT, firstly, as doctors and, secondly, as small businesspeople is that they are part of a system that does not deliver what they need for their clients—their patients. That is often in relation to access to the hospital, where doctors who would normally refer patients to the hospital instead send them home because they cannot get quick treatment in the emergency department at the hospital because of the wait times.

I notice that paragraph 2(e) of Mr Hanson's motion refers to how to arrest and reverse the decline in GP numbers in the short and longer terms, and the motion also refers to the reasons pertaining to the shortage. Part of the shortage is that, when you are casting around to set up your practice in this country, you look for these facilities for the infrastructure and the backup that you require to be able to do your job properly. Whilst all GPs would not like to see their patients in the acute care part of the system, they do know that, at times, patients will have to go to the hospital. It is access to the hospital that causes them a great deal of grief in the speedy treatment of their patients.

We all know that the longer that you wait for treatment, the worse the outcome that you receive. The stories of long-term waits and poor wait times and delayed surgery are legion. I suspect that part of the reason that it is hard to attract people to Canberra to practise their medicine here is the fact that the system no longer has the reputation that it enjoyed. We should have the premier health service in the country. We do not have the dissipation of service over vast areas like, say, in Western Australia or Queensland. We do not have the huge health problems that the Indigenous population faces in places like the Northern Territory and parts of South Australia. We are not isolated like Tasmania. As a city/state, we all live within a reasonable distance of the major hospitals in this territory. But, although you live within a reasonable distance, the problem is that you often cannot get in.

It is the way that system works at the acute end that I believe has a significant impact on the desire of doctors, whether they be GPs or specialists, to actually come and operate in the ACT. You only have to look over the years at the fact that communities

like Wagga Wagga were able to come together and build cancer clinics with a full suite of oncology services needed when the ACT languished after Jon Stanhope and then Simon Corbell and then Katy Gallagher, the health ministers, were not able to provide those services. We have caught up.

Mr Stanhope: After we tried to replace the 114 beds that you closed.

MR SMYTH: That is an unsubstantiated number.

Mr Stanhope: We concentrated on the 114 beds that we had to replace.

MR SMYTH: We always go back to this, don't we?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, do not respond to interjections, please.

MR SMYTH: One should not, because he is wrong. If he can point to where the cuts were done, that would be a change, instead of just rabbiting on as he does.

Their failure to deliver key services in the acute sector and care of patients with grave diseases and illnesses is obviously a raw nerve for this government. If you were a doctor graduating and you had a choice of where to go, if you were a doctor who had been in a practice as a junior physician and who was starting out on his or her own, or if you were a doctor who wanted to leave the hospital system and go somewhere else, you would have to ask yourself where you would choose to go. Where would you want to go and practise your medicine? Where would you want to be if you had patients with life-threatening illnesses or conditions? You would have to say that, over the last seven years, you would not want to be in Canberra.

We saw the hospital waiting list blow out from a record low of 3,488 in September 2001 to the point where it has topped the 5,000 mark under this government's regime. That is a disgraceful record in terms of people languishing on the waiting list. The wait times blew out; the wait times in the emergency room blew out; the wait times in the categories blew out. Every report that comes out is a sad commentary on the health system in the ACT designed and operated by Mr Stanhope and Ms Gallagher.

That is, I think, one of the big problems for people who want to be in medicine in the ACT. They look at the system, they look at the backup, they look at the environment in which they may wish to work, and they find this environment wanting. We need to get back to where the health system was seven or eight years ago; we need to get back to delivering the premier health service in the country, for which we pay. We pay per capita an enormous amount above all the other jurisdictions.

It is important that we create the right environment in a health sense and in a business sense. I notice now that we have abandoned the economic white paper. We no longer are unashamedly pro small business and pro business. That has gone out. We have themes instead of sectors that we want to work on. But it is also about the ability to set up and be a compliant business. That is not easy in any jurisdiction; we have got federal and territory regulations in our case. But it is also about making sure that doing business in the ACT as a small business person is as easy as we can make it.

I notice that, in his motion, Mr Hanson refers in paragraph (2) to the current level of GP shortages and the reasons pertaining to this shortage and to how to arrest and reverse the decline in GP numbers in the short and the longer terms. If you talk to the Division of General Practice, they are concerned about the enormous cost to set up any practice, the return on investment and the deterrent that that is for people to actually practise their profession. It is critically important that the committee look at this. I note that Mr Doszpot, as someone from the business community, knows this, and I know that Mr Doszpot will be heavily interested in this. I will wait with anticipation to see the result and to see exactly the recommendations that the committee will make in regard to—

Members interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Order, members! Ms Gallagher and Mr Seselja, your interjections are not even relevant to the debate. Mr Smyth has the floor, and he will be heard in silence.

MR SMYTH: Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker. When considering the issues raised in subparagraphs (2)(d) and (e), it is important to look beyond strictly the medical. We certainly have to look at the small business environment, the costs of setting up and how that is done. We took some excellent policies to the last election about the assistance that is required, and I am sure that Mr Doszpot will be able to table them before the committee. In our policy, a healthy choice, we understood, as the federal president of the division of GPs has said on many occasions, that there are so many impediments now to getting into your own practice as a GP that it is a deterrent and that the return on investment over the long term is not what it used to be.

I do not think any GP gets into it for the money; I do not think anybody becomes a doctor for the money. Clearly, you want to care for people and you want to help people when they are in trouble, particularly with poor health. GPs are fundamental to primary healthcare; they are fundamental to keeping people out of the hospital system; they are the first port of call for so many people with physical health conditions, mental health conditions and personal problems; they are the ear that you go and speak to; they offer advice that people take with a great deal of seriousness. But there are other things beyond just being a GP, beyond the medical system and beyond business aspects of being a GP, and I look forward to seeing the results of the work of the committee.

I know that Mr Doszpot has an intense interest in this as the chair of the committee, and there will be much discussion on it. It is important we get some reasonable recommendations to ultimately assist everybody in the ACT. If we can get people into GPs quicker, we can take pressure off the health system and, long term as the population ages, we can do something to assist in containing the costs of the health budget in the ACT.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Treasurer, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Services and Minister for Women) (4.42): I do not want to delay the

Assembly any further, but there are just a couple of points to make in response to Mr Smyth. What we heard from Mr Smyth—and we are used to it—was a talking down of the public health system. I have stood here since I have been health minister and said that if you are going to get sick anywhere, Canberra is a very good place to get sick, and you will be well looked after by the hospital. The argument that Mr Smyth was running was that it is because the hospital is so badly managed that GPs and doctors in general do not want to come and work here. If that were the case, I would ask Mr Smyth why we have managed almost full recruitment across a whole range of specialties, including 84 specialists over the past two years, of which 43 are brand new positions to our system.

People want to come and work in the ACT public health system, and the new specialists that I have spoken to about why they want to come here have said it is because the ANU medical school is here, the fact that the ACT government has committed to a \$1 billion rebuild of the health system, acknowledging the costs that are a part of that, and the fact that we need to be serious about meeting the health needs of our community in years to come and the preparedness of the government to put that plan on the table. We do not have a problem recruiting doctors to the public health system, nor do we have a problem with people using the public health system.

We have the highest private insurance rates in the country and the lowest utilisation of it. Why do we have that? Because people, when they get sick in the ACT, want to be treated in our public hospitals. That is because they have faith, Mr Smyth, in our public health system. So everything that you have just said is incorrect. We are recruiting doctors; doctors are coming to the ACT to work, and they are coming to work in the public health system because it is the system of choice in the ACT, Mr Smyth.

Mr Smyth: Right, I'll go back and tell the GPs I speak to that their opinions are wrong because you said so.

MS GALLAGHER: The argument that you were putting forward was that the health system here is so broken that GPs do not want to work here.

Mr Smyth: No, I didn't say it was broken. You're sure I used the word "broken"?

MS GALLAGHER: I listened to your speech, and you said because of—

Mr Smyth: You always slide around.

MS GALLAGHER: No, I do not.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Perhaps, minister, if you would address the chair rather than, Mr Smyth.

MS GALLAGHER: So says "Slimy", as he is known—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: That is disorderly. Withdraw it.

MS GALLAGHER: It is an affectionate name for someone who twists words.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Did you withdraw it?

MS GALLAGHER: I did withdraw it, yes. I withdraw it.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Perhaps if you would address your remarks to the chair, it would be easier, Ms Gallagher.

MS GALLAGHER: Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker. The point here is that you cannot accept Mr Smyth's line, because it is not supported by the evidence. It is not supported by utilisation rates in the public hospital. It is not supported by measures of utilisation of private health insurance. It is not supported by the number of doctors that we have recruited to the system and the reasons why those doctors are coming to work in the ACT. We have 43 new specialists who have made the decision to come and work in the ACT public health system because of the commitments the government has made about being serious about creating a health system that will meet this community's needs for the future.

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (4.46): I am closing the debate. I have been asked to be brief because we want to get through all the business today. I notice that the last item listed on the program is a motion to note that the abrupt closure of the Kippax family practice has caused significant concern and disruption to staff and patients of local communities. So I look forward to getting to that one, and I will, accordingly, be as brief as I am able.

I thank members for their comments in the debate today. Certainly, it has been a vigorous debate and, as is the nature of this place, there have been different points of view put forward. But the singular argument put forward that is recognised by all of us is that there is a problem and something needs to be done, and that the most appropriate venue to do that is in the Assembly's health committee. So if I could summarise the debate in that regard, then I think it has been a positive outcome. Although it has disagreed on some of the detail, it is good to see that the Assembly has agreed on the substance of the matter, which is that we are in a dire situation in the ACT, both in terms of GP numbers per capita and the number of GP clinics that have closed over the past few years. Of late there seems to be an accelerating number, particularly in the north of Canberra in Belconnen.

There is a broad understanding from the debate, I think, of the impact on individuals, and the pain and suffering caused—I say those words because they are quite real words in this case—as a result of not having a GP, not having access to a GP and the consequences of that. There is understanding of the impact on the health and wellbeing of our community and on the impact of our broader health system, in particular, and the pressure that that puts on our hospitals. Then there is the fact that the government has not done enough, and that has been broadly acknowledged today. By virtue of the fact that we seem to have support from the crossbench and the government bench, that indicates that the government has, to some degree, run out of ideas and that it does need help in this regard.

I welcome Ms Burch's amendment, and I thank her for it. I note her passion for health matters as a former nurse. Indeed, what this motion does is move us towards a debate

about the future. We have got a dire situation in Canberra at the moment, but this debate has moved us one step forward to solving the situation we have now and, hopefully, into the future, solving some of the problems that we have and making sure we plan for the impact of the ageing community that we have got.

As a last point, I would note that Mr Stanhope—who seems thoroughly distracted; he is probably talking about his deficit with the Treasurer—once again said during his hectoring of Mr Doszpot that this is a federal issue. That was a line we heard throughout the election campaign on the issues of GPs. Whilst we were talking about GP bulk-billing clinics in the suburbs, whilst we were talking about incentives to attract GPs to Canberra, whilst we were talking about keeping our interns here in the ACT, whilst we were talking about financial incentives to set up GP clinics, the Stanhope rhetoric was “not our problem; it’s a federal problem”. That was what was directed again at Mr Doszpot. It seems to be Mr Stanhope’s line at the moment—nothing is his fault; it is all a federal problem or it is the global economic crisis.

In summary, clearly there is acknowledgement that there is a problem, that the government is not doing enough and that there is something more that we can do. We need to generate ideas; we need to put those ideas to the government and to the minister, who remains distracted by her Treasury portfolio responsibilities. We see in this important debate that she is probably working out how she can take us further into deficit and how she can blame the GFC. Is it the providers? Is it the federal government? I am sure she will come up with someone else yet. Anyway, I look forward to the committee’s report. I look forward to being in some way engaged in that process as the shadow health minister, and I thank members again for their contribution to this debate.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Order of business

Ordered that notice No 6 private members business relating to social and community housing be postponed until a later hour.

Nicholls shops—car park

MR COE (Ginninderra) (4:52): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the continuing delay in upgrading the carpark at the Nicholls shops is a considerable concern and frustration to Nicholls residents and businesses;
- (b) that the Government’s consultation with Nicholls residents and businesses has been inadequate; and

- (c) that the current plans do not reflect the needs and desires of Nicholls residents and businesses; and
- (2) calls on the Government to ensure the plans for the upgrade of the Nicholls shops carpark take the needs of the community into account by:
 - (a) conducting genuine community consultation;
 - (b) considering widening the carpark to provide for safer use of the carpark;
 - (c) ensuring two way traffic can continue through the main entrance to the shop at the Kelleway Avenue and Lexcen Avenue intersection; and
 - (d) not directing all traffic through Paisley Street.

The Nicholls shops car park is another example of this government's litany of infrastructure failures. I move this motion today because the continuing delay in upgrading the car park is of considerable concern and the cause of significant frustration amongst the businesses and residents of Nicholls. It is also clear that the consultation process was a complete sham.

Unsurprisingly, Madam Assistant Speaker, like so many times before, the current plans for the upgrade of the car park do not reflect the needs and desires of Nicholls residents and businesses. This Stanhope-Gallagher government does seem to have a problem with Gungahlin, whether it is the Gungahlin drive extension, traffic in the town centre, bus services, suburban planning, block sizes or community infrastructure. It is one thing after another. There is one thing that we can say about this government with regard to Gungahlin, and that is "absolute failure".

The Stanhope-Gallagher government have been consistent on infrastructure. Like every other project the government have failed on, we have seen the same ingredients. They promise something will be done; they announce consultation will begin; inevitably, they fail to consult properly; there are further delays to the work when they realise the community will not accept their bungled attempts to cover up; and there is a re-announcement in an election campaign.

In December last year I placed a question on the notice paper regarding the Nicholls shops and in January I was advised that work would commence by the end of February. In March I raised the fact that the work had not started and was advised that it would be further delayed. The problem with the Nicholls shops car park is simple: it does not have enough capacity for the size of the shops, there are no loading zones, and the car park is too narrow, which creates safety issues and causing many accidents.

The government's plan is to make the traffic through the car park move one way, have all traffic diverted through Paisley Street to exit the shops, make parking 45-degree-angle rather than 90 degree and construct a footpath to the adjacent Gold Creek school car park. This plan creates more problems than it solves. The Gold Creek school car park is about 100 metres walk from the shops and walking that distance is not practical for a suburban shopping centre. People go to suburban shops to get in and out quickly. Such a walk would quite literally drive people away.

Paisley Street was not designed for such a traffic load and there is poor visibility where it meets Kelleway Avenue. Indeed, the current main entrance to the shops at Kelleway and Lexcen avenues is a roundabout designed for the high amounts of traffic that a local shopping centre generates, a much more appropriate entrance than the Paisley Street T-junction. Just yesterday, the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services gave us a sermon about the importance of road safety around shopping centres, whilst at the same time his department advocated directing all outgoing traffic through this T-intersection and through a street not designed for the load, against the wishes of the residents.

Had the government engaged with the community properly in the initial consultation, they would have realised these issues were significant issues for the Nicholls community. In a stunning admission on ABC 666 radio, Chief Minister's talkback on Friday, 20 March, the Chief Minister admitted the consultation involved a "perhaps not overly extensive" letterbox drop. I repeat: "perhaps not overly extensive" letterbox drop. The plans that were on display at the shops were not a substitute for wide-ranging consultation.

It is my understanding now that the government has delayed works due to considerable objections of local residents and plans to conduct a meeting in April or May. We are yet to hear about this formally, though. I hope this time the government will take into account the needs of Nicholls businesses and residents by conducting this next round of consultation genuinely, by considering the width of the car park, by ensuring two-way traffic can continue at the main entrance to the shops and not directing all traffic through Paisley Street.

I would like to thank all of those in Nicholls who have contacted me regarding these issues and I look forward to the government taking into account their concerns by upgrading the car park. Indeed, the fact that such a large number of people have contacted me about this project is evidence that the consultation did not work.

I would like to circulate this motion here and this amendment to a motion that I believe will more broadly encapture the views of this Assembly. The Nicholls shops car park has been an issue for a number of years and it is extremely important that we do solve this issue as soon as possible. I call upon all people in the Assembly to accept this amendment and to move for progress for the people of Nicholls.

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*) (4:57): *Madam Assistant Speaker, I thank Mr Coe for raising this motion today. I think we do need to go back to taws. This car park was built in 2000. It was built under the watch of the minister then responsible for territory and municipal services, Brendan Smyth, and it was built under the watch of the then minister for planning, Gary Humphries, and his chief of staff, Vicki Dunne.*

Mr Coe has just described in some detail all the deficiencies and everything that is wrong with this car park. I presume that Mr Smyth will come in here and actually

defend the car park as the minister responsible for its construction and that Vicki Dunne, as the then chief of staff of the—

Ms Porter: It is indefensible.

MR STANHOPE: Well, Mr Coe has described it in terms that it is essentially outrageous, indefensible, a safety hazard and a safety trap. I wonder what Mr Smyth and Mrs Dunne were doing at the time that the car park was built. I think it behoves Mr Smyth, as the minister responsible for territory and municipal services at the time, to say how he allowed this outrageous car park that Mr Coe has moved this important motion on today to be built in this configuration. How did Vicki Dunne, as the chief of staff to the then minister for planning who actually approved the plan, allow this to get through?

Ms Porter: And what has she done about it in the meantime?

MR STANHOPE: And what have they done about it? But I guess at the end of the day Mr Coe is urging this government to fix the problem that his party created. We have an amendment to the motion as moved. However, we accept its good intent. We know Mr Coe is out there wanting to work with the government to right the wrongs, to fix the mess that his predecessors within the Liberal Party created through this car park. Once again, as with inquiries into road safety, the government stands ready to get out there and do the work.

So thank you, Mr Coe, for the motion. We accept that it must have been difficult for you to draw the community's attention to the failings of Mr Smyth, your deputy leader and your one-time leader. I guess that Mr Smyth is not all-conquering. Here is a car park that he is responsible for that you describe as an absolute disgrace, a hazard and a danger to the public, and you are calling on my government to fix it. We will fix it for you, Mr Coe. It must have been doubly difficult for you to accept that Mrs Dunne, as the then chief of staff to the then minister for planning who approved it, I presume must have had the file cross her desk. It must have been hard for you, Mr Coe. I admire your integrity and your courage for raising in this place this important motion asking me, my government and Roads ACT to fix a mess that Brendan Smyth and Vicki Dunne made. I move an amendment to the motion just to refine its intent somewhat. I move:

Omit all words after "That this Assembly", substitute:

"(1) notes:

- (a) the continuing delay in upgrading the carpark at the Nicholls shops is a considerable concern and frustration to Nicholls residents and businesses; and
- (b) that the Government is continuing to consult with residents and businesses in Nicholls and that there will be a public meeting on 29 April 2009 to further address these concerns; and

(2) calls on the Government to ensure the plans for the upgrades to the Nicholls shops carpark take the needs of the community into account by:

- (a) considering the needs of the concerns of the community; and
- (b) expert engineering advice from Roads ACT.”.

I look forward to both Mr Smyth and Mrs Dunne explaining how they could have been so involved in this dreadful car park that Mr Coe is so keen for us to fix.

Mr Hanson: Is anything ever your fault?

Mr Stanhope: Well, your party are responsible for this car park. We are happy to fix it, Jeremy.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Burch): Is leave granted for Mr Coe to move an amendment to his motion?

Mr Stanhope: Yes, leave is granted in a spirit of cooperation.

Ms Hunter: I don't think I have seen it.

Mr Stanhope: I have circulated and moved my amendment. Of course, we will give leave when Mr Coe is ready to circulate and move his.

Mrs Dunne: It is all my fault?

Mr Stanhope: How did you allow this through?

Mrs Dunne: I mean, you do have a sycophantic admiration for my capacities to influence things.

Mr Stanhope: I am surprised it got past you, Vicki. I am.

Mrs Dunne: Your admiration is noted, Chief Minister.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: All right; we need to go back to Mr Coe's amendment. We will quickly need to get it circulated—

Mr Coe: Thank you.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: and then we will deal with that and then we will come to Mr Stanhope's amendment. Can the chamber just bear with us for a moment while we get Mr Coe's amendment circulated. In the interim, I call Ms Porter.

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (5.02): Madam Assistant Speaker, I welcome the opportunity provided by Mr Coe's motion to discuss in the Assembly the parking and traffic issues at the local shops in Nicholls and I support Mr Stanhope's amendment. I cannot speak to the amendment that I understand Mr Coe will move as I do not have it in front of me. I run regular mobile offices in a number of shopping centres in my electorate, Nicholls being one of them. As a result, I am constantly available to the community and in communication with local residents and shop owners.

This is a new issue obviously to Mr Coe, but I can assure him that it is not a new issue for me. It has been receiving my attention for quite a period of time. Of course, this came to my attention in my first term. During my first term I was approached by local businesses at the Nicholls shops to see whether some improvements could be provided to them in terms of parking arrangements at a particular car park. The shopkeepers had concerns, and continue to have concerns, about the safety of the existing car park and sought to increase the supply of parking spaces as well.

The car park, as we know, is very narrow and as a consequence cars back up to and around the roundabout at the entrance causing a traffic hazard. Additionally, if one stands as I do outside the Nicholls shops on a busy Friday evening, one observes the difficulty traffic has in backing out of the parking spaces and entering into parking spaces safely. This unfortunately leaves open the risk that a pedestrian crossing the car park or walking between cars will be injured, perhaps severely. Further, numbers of customers raised these same issues with me along with their constant frustration of not being able to find parking spaces at all during busy periods of the week. Consequently, I frequently observe people parking illegally.

As a result of the growing concerns around traffic banking up around the roundabout and unable to access the car park, dangerous reversing practices in a narrow space, lack of sufficient parking spaces, cars parking illegally, lack of vision and possible risk of pedestrians being injured while in the car park, I made representation to the then Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Mr John Hargreaves. He arranged a meeting with me, Roads ACT and the shopkeepers at the Nicholls shops.

In these early discussions with business owners and shopkeepers, two broad options were identified, one which would widen the existing car park in one of two ways, and the other which would convert some car parking spaces into timed parking to discourage long stays. I am aware that options to widen the car park were expensive and impacted on a number of existing services on the one hand or involved filling in a long, wide gully and possible diversion of stormwater on the other. I was therefore supportive of the other option, being timed car parking spaces, as something that could be progressed in the short term.

After the initial meeting I organised a further meeting with Minister Hargreaves in attendance with his departmental officers and other stakeholders, including the shopkeepers. The minister then instructed his department to review the situation again and find ways to address safety and other concerns as further representations were being made to me by users of the car park.

At the second consultation with Roads ACT and the minister it was suggested that in addition to timed spaces a one-way option be explored to allow for angle parking. This would obviously make entering and leaving the car spaces a lot safer and increase the number of spaces available. Additionally, a large, empty parking area is available some short distance away. However, it is not linked to the shopping centre car park except by a dirt path across the gully that I referred to earlier.

Obviously this car park, as Mr Coe said, is not necessarily one that people who are just popping into the shops want to avail themselves of. However, it is an option for

people who are going to be parked in the vicinity of the shops all day. This, of course, includes shopkeepers and people who are maybe having a longer appointment at the hairdresser or eating in the restaurant. This further proposal was drawn up by the department in August 2008 and was put on display in the front window of the local IGA for several months.

I continued my mobile offices at Nicholls shops over the subsequent period, directly beside the shop window where the plans for the proposed changes were displayed. I was approached by a number of residents and shopkeepers in their support of the plans. Very few residents—only one to the best of my memory, possibly two—approached me over the number of months to tell me they were unhappy with the proposal. So as I said, the majority of people that approached me at my mobile offices or by email or phone to my office at the time were in favour of and in support of the plans.

However, there were, as I said, some people who were not. This is a short snapshot of the consultation that the ACT government and I have conducted. I consider, Mr Coe, that this is not a sham. However, the concerns I have just mentioned were of note and mainly in regard to the one-way traffic arrangements proposed. I, of course, relayed these concerns to Roads ACT through the minister's office. I also suggested to those people with these concerns that they could contact Roads ACT directly if they wished and I gave them that information.

At the same time, letters were delivered on behalf of the government to 80 local residents in the vicinity of the shops asking for their comment and feedback on the proposal. Of course, this included the street in which the question of the one-way traffic has been proposed. The people in that particular street were given a letterbox drop about the proposal. Of course, the map was just around the corner on the IGA shop window. I also did a letterbox drop in the area around the Nicholls shops about this issue in the last term.

Perhaps Mr Coe's parents thought that it was part of Labor Party propaganda and may not have realised that it was their member keeping them informed. Perhaps they do not discuss such issues with their son. But if they had discussed the letter with him, Mr Coe would have been well aware that this issue had been discussed by me with the government for quite some time.

More recently, the department conducted a second letterbox drop at the time when consultation was coming to a close. Again, the general response was positive but a number of objections were raised by some residents. I understand that these concerns again revolved around the one-way traffic. In fact, one of these people that raised this issue with me was the one that raised it at my mobile office previously. Indeed, I have had representations made to me by one resident, as I said, at my mobile office and two others by email.

The road engineers are seeking a viable solution to the issue as a result of the objections raised by some constituents and the ACT government has postponed the work on the car park upgrades. Roads ACT will meet with local residents and traders after Easter at a date to be confirmed, and the only hold-up with that is just arranging

a date that residents are happy with to discuss their concerns in order to find a way forward.

Work on the footpath linking the car park and the adjacent Gold Creek school park that I mentioned before will continue, as it has no impact on the parking or traffic arrangements. I am pleased that the work on this footpath will continue, as it has no impact on the arrangements. This will give some immediate relief to the parking issues, as it will help residents and shopkeepers alike with regard to their concerns and it will, of course, provide some long stay car parking.

In light of the recent disquiet by some residents, I am fully supportive of the action being taken by the department to put the work on hold until a public meeting is held and further opportunities provided to residents to discuss their issues and their concerns. I am sympathetic to the frustration of the shopkeepers and other users of the car park who thought that the current difficulty in arrangements was about to be addressed. However, I know they understand the reasons for the delay and they know that I and my government are seeking to find the best solution possible.

This is an important matter and it is important that the reasonable concerns raised by the residents are considered in full. I will continue to push the matter to be resolved but the department must be given time and, indeed, the support of this Assembly to consult adequately with residents on what is a very important local traffic matter for people who utilise the Nicholls shops. Is the consultation adequate and is the public meeting necessary? I would have to say yes to both questions, given the local nature of this matter.

Good governance is a balance of consultation and leadership, and I am happy to say that this government is addressing both of these aspects. I intend to attend the public meeting to hear the comments and suggestions that residents and shopkeepers have. As soon as I have confirmation of the date, time and venue I will provide this information on my website. If time allows, I will conduct a letterbox drop myself.

I urge this Assembly to support the department in their decision and efforts to consult with residents on the concerns they have raised about the current proposal for the Nicholls shops car park.

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (5.12): I will not speak at length on this issue. I merely point out that it brings into play the important principle which the Greens had put in our parliamentary agreement with the Labor Party. I am talking here about neighbourhood planning. This is the second incident during this term of the Assembly where we have had a significant local issue brought to the floor of the Assembly to be resolved. That cannot be the right process to do planning in the ACT. The proposal that the Greens put on the table as part of the parliamentary agreement was neighbourhood planning so that neighbourhoods would get together with ACTPLA and work out in a calm, non-confrontational way—

Ms Porter: It is not an ACTPLA matter.

MS LE COUTEUR: Sorry. I will try to speak up, Mary.

Ms Porter: It is not an ACTPLA matter, not this one.

MS LE COUTEUR: Okay.

Ms Bresnan: Just keep going.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes, I will keep going. The point that the Greens would like to put forward is that what we need to do is stand back from the local problems and have neighbourhood planning so that even—

Mr Hanson: If that is in the agreement, why is that not happening?

MS LE COUTEUR: I am hopeful that it will happen. The second comment I would like to make on Mr Coe's original motion is that this Assembly has many skills but road traffic engineering is probably not one of them; so I do not feel that the original motion was supportable, because it was simply far too proscriptive. However, as I understand the amended motion, I will be happy to support this. Obviously the Greens are in favour of community consultation and, given that we understand the meeting will be happening and we understand that there clearly is a problem with the car park, we look forward to a positive resolution of the situation.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (5.15): I am pleased that Ms Porter managed to struggle up and speak on this constituent issue. I suppose she was embarrassed after the Hawker experience where she had to go on radio and justify why she did not need to speak on the Hawker matter. Of course, the thing was that she said, "People do not need me to speak on that because they know what a good job I do."

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Burch): Mrs Dunne, are we talking to the amendment and Nicholls?

MRS DUNNE: And on Mr Coe's amendment in relation to the Flynn shops. Ms Porter managed to struggle to her feet, because obviously she realised that people in Nicholls may not realise that she is the self-styled Saint Joan of Ginninderra or perhaps the Maid Marion of Ginninderra, who is always out there fighting the gutsy little fight for constituents. Ms Porter has been actually sussed out by the community because they know that what she does—and it has been revealed—is that Ms Porter puts out press releases about events that she attended before she attended, and of course she—

Ms Porter: That was embargoed, Mrs Dunne.

MRS DUNNE: They are embargoed. "I embargoed the fact that I put out a press release about an event that did not happen." The event did not happen but Ms Porter was there telling everybody, on an embargoed basis, so it is all right. It was all right to embargo the fact of how much you enjoyed handing out prizes that were not handed out. And this is the thing that happens all the time. Ms Porter likes to have a few things to say. She likes to talk about the "charny carny" so that she can put out a community newsletter about her words.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, can you get to the point.

MRS DUNNE: She was smoked out the other day.

Ms Porter: On a point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker: relevance.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I cannot find the relevance. Can you get to the point, Mrs Dunne.

MRS DUNNE: The point is that this is an important constituency matter and Ms Porter has form on the way that she deals with constituency matters. What she has done here today is basically come down on the side of the government, on the side of Roads ACT, what Roads ACT wants to do, rather than on what the people of Nicholls might want for their shops.

Madam Assistant Speaker, you may not be aware of the Nicholls shops because you live on the other side of town, and that is reasonable. The Nicholls shops entrance and egress are a nightmare. After seven years of Stanhope government, when this is Jon Stanhope's own constituency, his own electorate, the proposals put forward are preposterous.

We actually have the situation where we are going to create one-way traffic flows. One-way traffic flows are often a solution. The solution put forward by the Stanhope government is to have all the traffic exit through a very narrow residential street which was designed to take half a dozen cars an hour. The solution will be a mess. And it is only because the Liberal members for Ginninderra are taking up the issues and addressing the issues that after seven-odd years something might happen.

Ms Porter turns up there every now and again with her mobile office; she stands for a little while and leaves again. And she says that that is consultation. I have had people talk to me about Ms Porter's consultation.

Mr Coe: A sham consultation.

MRS DUNNE: It was a sham consultation, where they ask you to do things. She writes a letter to the responsible minister and that absolves her of doing anything else. She never takes up the cudgels. She never goes to the Chief Minister or one of her ministers and says, "We have got a problem here; fix it." She never uses the ability that she should have in the Labor Party to really take up the cudgels for it. She is a post box.

What we have seen here today and what we saw in the recent issue in relation to Hawker is that Ms Porter cannot work out what the solution could be, not even to the extent of saying, "How about we sit down and talk with the community," until somebody else in this Assembly raises the issue. And suddenly, there she is, all ready to fix the issue. But in the meantime Ms Porter has been the apologist for Roads ACT and their flawed plan to fix—

Mr Stanhope: How many votes did you get in the last election, Vicki?

MRS DUNNE: More than Ms Porter, actually.

Mr Stanhope: Did you exceed the donkey vote?

MRS DUNNE: Many more than Ms Porter and an increase on the vote that I had the previous time; so I would not go there, Chief Minister, if I were you.

Mr Seselja: He is having a go at your votes, Mary.

MRS DUNNE: He is having a go at anybody he can have a go at, because for seven years this man has been the Chief Minister and has ignored the needs of his constituents. The people who live in Nicholls, whether he likes it or not, are his constituents. Perhaps he finds it inconvenient that people who live in Nicholls and who do not vote as a majority for the Labor Party should have his attention, because it is only today, when this issue has been raised in the Legislative Assembly, that this minister can show any interest at all in his constituency and the constituent matters that are important to the people of the ACT.

The Chief Minister was speaking very emotionally yesterday and on radio today about road safety. This is a road safety issue. The way that the Nicholls shops parking is configured is a road safety issue and the solution being put forward, of having people reversing out of their car parks, just compounds that. Having people being forced to exit through a very narrow residential lane, which is not really a street designed for the purpose, is a road safety issue. I do not want to be alarmist about this but there are accidents that occur in shopping centre car parks. The Chief Minister has shown no interest in the subject until today. And suddenly he has an interest in it. Mr Coe needs to be congratulated for taking up this issue on behalf of his constituents, for asking the questions, for pursuing the issues.

The other thing that needs to be noted, of course, is the way in which the Labor Party has attempted to nobble Mr Coe on this issue. When he raised this issue and took it to the media, media advisers from the government went to the media and said, "No, it has all been fixed. There is no story here." The usual approach of the Labor Party is to say, "Move along there, lads, nothing to see here."

What we have actually seen is that the Labor Party, as they did with Mr Doszpot's issue in relation to stamp duty charges on disability vehicles, as they did with Mr Coe, told the media there was no issue there; they moved people on. Of course, there is an issue here. There is something here. Jon Stanhope and his advisers told the media there was no issue here; it was all about to start; and all the work would be effectively done. As it turned out, it was another falsehood peddled by the Stanhope government to the media and the community of the ACT. The media and the community of the ACT have been led down the garden path again by the Stanhope government media machine.

We on the Canberra Liberals side will be holding the Stanhope government to account. We want to see proper consultation on how to best improve the car park at the Nicholls shops. If we have to widen the car park to make it more serviceable, so be it.

There is space to widen the car park. And there is not really space to cause the considerable amount of traffic, especially after school and on Thursday and Friday nights and Saturday mornings, to go through a narrow residential lane to get out. It has an impact on those people who live in those residences. It is too narrow and it is unsafe.

The Stanhope government needs to come clean with the people of Nicholls. They need to openly consult and go there with an open mind and maybe the people of Nicholls will have a solution which is better than the one put forward by the Stanhope government. I commend Mr Coe for bringing this matter forward and I hope that we will end up with a good outcome for the people of Nicholls.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (5.24): I will not speak very long on this motion. Ms Le Couteur has already covered some key concerns from a planning point of view, particularly around neighbourhood planning and the importance of getting back to some good neighbourhood planning processes.

For me, it does bring up that we recently had the Hawker situation and we now have one out at Nicholls. For me, that is about neighbourhood planning and reinstituting some neighbourhood planning so that we can be looking in a comprehensive way at community hubs such as shopping centres and so forth—looking at them in a comprehensive way so we are going to get some good planning outcomes. The changes outlined by the government for Nicholls cannot be a temporary short fix. We really do need to see a lasting solution put in place.

I would also like to make the point—it has been raised this afternoon—that this car park has been around for some time. From the outset, adequate parking should be planned for and built at shopping centres and future growth should be taken into account and addressed at that point—not further down the track, when you end up with a problem that has obviously caused some great difficulties for the people of Nicholls.

I do hope, however, also that the Liberals will not be contesting every planning and territory and municipal decision made in the Assembly.

This comes back to consultation systems at both ACTPLA and TAMS—ensuring that we have some robust, sound consultation processes in place. But before that, or going hand in glove with that, is this idea of neighbourhood planning so that we do get a comprehensive, well thought through, well considered plan to begin with—and one that has engaged with the community.

Neighbourhood planning is not just a one-off event; it is an ongoing event. Neighbourhoods change, and needs within neighbourhoods change. Therefore, there is a need to have some sort of ongoing mechanism where you can engage with citizens within the neighbourhood, where they do understand those processes and how they can engage. That is all part of good community engagement.

We will be supporting the amendments, the motion that has been put up by Mr Coe, but we will urge that neighbourhood planning become a thing of the present, not just a thing of the past.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Burch): The question is that Mr Coe's amendment be agreed to.

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Minister for Transport, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts and Heritage) (5.27): Just speaking on the amendment, the government will not support this. Has my amendment been moved yet? I am totally confused.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: No; we had a mix-up. We need to deal with Mr Coe's and then we need to—

MR STANHOPE: I cannot even move mine until his is dealt with. I am just a bit intrigued as to the order of this. He did not move it; then I did. Has mine been withdrawn? Has mine been unilaterally ruled out of order?

Mrs Dunne: It has not been dealt with.

MR STANHOPE: I moved an amendment and I am now told that I did not. I just wonder what the process is for deciding that my amendment was not moved. I am not quite sure by what authority the Speaker determines that an amendment I moved was not moved.

Mrs Dunne: Because there is one amendment on the table and you cannot move yours until the other one is dealt with.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, there was a mix-up. At the end of Mr Coe's speech he did move his motion. Before we were able to clarify that, Mr Stanhope tabled an amendment. What I would like to do now is deal with Mr Coe's amendment and then move straight to Mr Stanhope's amendment.

MR STANHOPE: I will speak on Mr Coe's amendment, but—

Mr Seselja: You have already spoken, haven't you?

MR STANHOPE: I did not know it had been. I am just confused.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Given that it was a mix-up, is leave granted—

Mrs Dunne: We will give you leave to speak again.

MR STANHOPE: I do not know how I can speak to a motion that had not been moved or circulated.

Mr Seselja: You spoke to the original motion.

MR STANHOPE: Mr Coe attempted to move a motion which had not—none of us knew the wording to it; it had not been distributed. There was a stuff-up. Mr Coe got a bit ahead of himself.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Leave is granted.

MR STANHOPE: I must say that I will have to actually ask for a ruling on this.

Mrs Dunne: You gave leave.

MR STANHOPE: This is a motion that he purported to move—

Mr Coe: You gave leave. You gave leave, Jon.

MR STANHOPE: No, but you did not move it. You did not have it.

Mr Coe: Yes, I did.

Mrs Dunne: Yes, he did.

MR STANHOPE: No, he did not. He did not have one available. There was no document. There was nothing for me to actually address. I think we need to clarify this. My amendment was moved before Mr Coe's. He did not have one. He just said, "I move an amendment." He did not move anything. He moved just nothing.

Mrs Dunne: Just sit down and let the Assistant Speaker make a ruling.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: What we are trying to do is overcome—

MR STANHOPE: A stuff-up.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I will not use those words, but I think that that is what it amounts to. What I would like the chamber to do is deal with Mr Coe's and then, by leave—because at that point leave was granted and Mr Stanhope tabled his amendment as well.

Mrs Dunne: Yes.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I would like to deal with Mr Coe's.

Mrs Dunne: I think that is the wrong answer, by the look on the Chief Minister's face.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Then we will go to—

MR STANHOPE: I said that the government would give leave when Mr Coe was in a position to move his motion. I did not give leave. I said I will give leave when Mr Coe actually gets himself organised and is in a position to move his motion.

Mrs Dunne: It is taking four people to sort out the Chief Minister's hissy fit.

MR STANHOPE: I thought you would actually accept the importance of process and due process. This is about appropriate and due process. Mine was worded appropriately. Mr Coe did not have a motion; he did not have an amendment.

Mr Seselja: It was circulated.

Mr Coe: You should have a copy in front of you.

Ms Porter: We do now.

MR STANHOPE: I do, but it was circulated and moved subsequent to mine. In fact, I do not believe that it was ever formally moved.

Mr Seselja: That is not what the Speaker—

Mr Coe: I moved it. I moved it in my speech. You should have a copy in front of you.

Mr Seselja: He moved it in his speech.

MR STANHOPE: You were not here, Mr Seselja. You actually did not see the depth of the confusion that Mr Coe was suffering at the time.

Mr Seselja: I don't think it was his confusion. If the Speaker accepts that he has moved it, he has moved it. That is who rules on whether he has moved it.

Ms Porter: Can you move something you have not circulated and you have not even got?

Mr Coe: I gave it to the clerks to do that.

Mr Seselja: When he moves it, he hands it to them. They can circulate it. There is nothing that says you have to—

MR STANHOPE: No, you didn't. You rushed off to the back of the room. What you did was rush off to your office.

Mr Coe: That was the motion before.

Mr Hanson: We sought leave; you gave leave.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: This is how we are going to proceed. It was a mix-up rather than a stuff-up. We will deal with Mr Coe's motion, then we will come back and deal with Mr Stanhope's motion. Can we just assume that the speeches and the deliveries that we have had can be dealt with and we just do bang and that, please? The question is that Mr Coe's amendment be agreed to.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (5.33): I will not speak for long, given how long we have been held up on this procedural point, which we all believed to have been settled but it appears that the Chief Minister is not happy with the resolution of that.

We will keep it simple. We will deal with Mr Coe's motion. Mr Coe's motion essentially is calling for action from this government. It is saying that the consultation

process has not been adequate. The original motion talks about the continuing delays, the government's consultation with Nicholls residents and businesses having been inadequate, and the current plans not reflecting the needs and desires of Nicholls residents and businesses.

That goes to the heart of it. We have a hardworking local member who is taking up these issues on behalf of his constituents and doing an outstanding job of it. What we have alternatively is a government that has not properly consulted. We heard Mr Stanhope say on radio that the government did "perhaps a not overly extensive letterbox drop" on the issue. I do not know exactly what that means: "perhaps a not overly extensive letterbox drop". I do not know if that is 50 houses, 20 houses or none, but it is clearly not adequate consultation.

That goes to the heart of this issue and the heart of why Mr Coe has felt the need to bring this to the attention of the Assembly. The sort of hissy fit we have seen on Mr Stanhope's amendment is a bit of a distraction from the fact that the government has got this consultation process wrong.

The business owners at Nicholls and residents of Nicholls are concerned. They would like to see a resolution. This calls for a resolution of the progress and for proper consultation. It is eminently sensible; it is an eminently sensible motion. It was properly notified and moved. I understand that the amendment was moved, and it was accepted by the Assembly and by the Speaker. We have wasted a lot of time going back and forth on what Mr Stanhope did not like about the rulings.

But at its heart it is about better consultation; it is about getting this process right. To date, this government has not got it. Even Mr Stanhope, on radio, has essentially acknowledged that the consultation was not as extensive as it should have been. I commend Mr Coe for his motion. I will be very happy to lend my support to the amendments that he has circulated.

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Minister for Transport, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts and Heritage) (5.35): I think I need to seek leave to speak to a motion that actually had not been moved at the time I spoke before and that it was impossible for me to speak to. I seek leave to speak.

Leave granted.

MR STANHOPE: There are just a couple of points that I will make in relation to this. I will go back to the other point, the fundamental point, which it is important that we all understand in relation to this car park. It has been variously described by Mr Coe—and repeated by Mrs Dunne, who actually was an officer in the office of the then minister for planning that presumably approved the car park—that this is a Liberal Party car park. I guess it is a reflection on the quality of administration of Brendan Smyth as the then minister for territory and municipal services and the office of the then minister for planning and the chief of staff of the then minister for planning that we now have Mrs Dunne actually describing—

Members interjecting—

MR STANHOPE: I just think it is interesting in the context of the public conversation and debate around this car park that at no stage has Mr Coe or Mrs Dunne, in their media commentary on the Nicholls car park, actually mentioned the salient fact that the car park was built in 2000 under the stewardship and on the watch of the then minister, Brendan Smyth, and the then minister for planning.

Mr Seselja: It is always someone else's fault. Seven years and you have got nothing right.

MR STANHOPE: Well, we need to accept that. No wonder Mr Seselja is a little bit upset and seeking to drown out this commentary and refusing to accept the responsibility of the Liberal Party for this car park. I think it is the most salient fact that we are here debating what Mrs Dunne has just described as a dangerous car park—and it was a car park that was approved by her then boss, the minister for planning, Gary Humphries, a car park that was constructed at a time that Mr Brendan Smyth was the relevant minister. Those are pertinent and salient facts.

Let me go to some of the issues. There was a consultation. Territory and Municipal Services did do a letterbox drop of 80 houses, those immediately within the street and within the area. I understand that from that initial letterbox drop of 80—I think, from memory, and I am going on memory—there were six responses to Territory and Municipal Services to the proposal—

Mr Seselja: Not an overly extensive letterbox drop, I think.

MR STANHOPE: Well, 80 houses, those most close geographically and within the street. Of the 80 households that were directly contacted—

Mr Hanson: They are so close they probably would not need a car park.

MR STANHOPE: Of the 80 households that were directly contacted, six responded, and the responses were essentially evenly divided. As a result of further consultation and engagement, TAMS quite reasonably and appropriately committed to additional consultation. It has letterboxed the whole of Nicholls, as I understand it, and TAMS has now committed to a full community consultation on all the possible options on 29 April. That is what TAMS has done. In the context of the amendment that Mr Coe has allegedly moved to his own motion—

Mrs Dunne: Point of order, Mr Speaker: Mr Stanhope's comment that he was speaking in relation to Mr Coe's amendment which was allegedly moved is a reflection on the ruling of the chair and is hence disorderly and should be withdrawn.

MR STANHOPE: That is just nonsense. In the context of the motion which—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Hang on, Mr Stanhope.

MR STANHOPE: we have been told Mr Coe has moved—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Stanhope, have your seat, thank you. Sorry, Mrs Dunne; can you make your point again?

MRS DUNNE: My point is that, at great length, Ms Burch, when she was sitting in the chair, ruled about the way this would be dealt with. Mr Stanhope is continuing, as when she was in the chair. He kept questioning her. He is now questioning her again. That is a reflection upon her ruling that this is the way this matter will be dealt with. We are dealing with Mr Coe's amendment.

MR STANHOPE: To be of assistance, Mr Speaker, I will withdraw the word "alleged".

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Stanhope. I think we are in an awkward situation but we will just do our best from here.

MR STANHOPE: No, it is just nonsense, but I withdraw the word "alleged" and replace it with "that we have been told"—that Mr Coe moved. It is interesting to look at it, because essentially what it does is call on the government to conduct a community meeting, which the department has already said it is conducting. I am just bemused by motions which call on the government to conduct a community meeting when the government has announced that there will be a community meeting on 29 April. Let us just remember these things in the context of responses that members make.

To move an amendment to his own motion calling on the government to conduct a meeting which the department, through Roads ACT, has announced it is conducting is really just superfluous and really just arrant and very cheap and shallow politics. The government is being called on to conduct a meeting which it has announced that it is going to conduct—and it has given the date of the meeting; the meeting is on 29 April. It has all been arranged and it has all been announced. It wants the government to take into account engineering advice from Roads ACT, the organisation that will be undertaking the upgrade to fix the problems that the Liberal Party did not have the gumption, when in government, to recognise as problems and which we now, in government, are determined to fix.

We need to just put these amendments in some perspective. TAMS have consulted. They are quite happy to consult further. They have already announced a community meeting but we are now to be called on to conduct the meeting which we have announced we are conducting. And Roads ACT is to be asked to rely on its own expert engineering advice of itself. TAMS, when they do something, even when it is just correcting Liberal Party mistakes, will, of course—can I just give an assurance that Roads ACT, in conducting the meeting and designing the engineering requirements of an enhanced and safer car park, will take into account its own views.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (5.42): Mr Speaker, I seek leave to make an explanation of certain words under standing order 47.

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, given that we have a slightly confusing situation, is that important at this point or can we proceed to try to sort out the situation we are in?

MRS DUNNE: Otherwise I would have to have leave later on. I will be precisely one minute or less.

Mr Stanhope: On the point of order, Mr Speaker, it is the convention of the place that these sorts of explanations are made at the conclusion of a matter, not in the middle of it, or we will never, ever conclude the matter. That has always been the convention.

MR SPEAKER: Yes. Mrs Dunne, I was not trying to be technical. I was just trying to be practical, but—

MRS DUNNE: I understand.

MR SPEAKER: Please go ahead.

MRS DUNNE: I would just like to put on the record that the Chief Minister said twice in the debate and most recently in his last speech that I worked for the person who approved the planning for the Nicholls shops. I worked for Gary Humphries, who at the time of the development of the Nicholls shops was not the planning minister. The person that I worked for had nothing to do with the approval of the Nicholls shops. Therefore, even though the Chief Minister likes to confer huge powers on my capacity as a staffer, I had no involvement in the planning for the Nicholls shops.

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Minister for Transport, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts and Heritage) (5.43): I apologise to Mrs Dunne. I will find out which minister it was and who the particular chief of staff at the time was, now that Mrs Dunne has drawn our attention to it. But it certainly was a Liberal minister.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order, members! Members, we will now proceed as Madam Assistant Speaker Burch suggested.

Mr Coe's amendments agreed to.

MR SPEAKER: We will now move to Mr Stanhope's amendment. Mr Stanhope, do you want to proceed with your amendment?

Mr Stanhope: No. There is no sense in proceeding. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: The question now is that Mr Coe's motion, as amended, be agreed to. I call on Mr Coe to close the debate.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (5.44): In closing the debate, I want to reply to some of the earlier comments in this debate. I think some people have lost track. This is about a car park. It should be a simple thing to fix. It should be. Sometimes errors do occur, and we accept that, but you can fix them. The Nicholls shops car park is a classic case where a department should very easily be able to identify the problem and fix it.

The amazing thing, which nobody mentioned, is that in 2004 Roads ACT came out and said they had fixed the job. They came out and changed the entrance and said, "It's done. It's fixed." All the people at the Nicholls shops, all the business owners and many, many people in Nicholls complained that it was not fixed. All they did was make the entrance a little less tight. They made it a bit straighter, but they did not change the fact that the car park was still too narrow. So here we are, four years on, and the government says, "We will have consultation. We are going to consult about how to fix this car park."

All they had to do was increase the width by a couple of metres and it would have been fixed. They could not do that, so in 2008 they announced that they were going to be doing a consultation. Not many people knew about this consultation. They letterboxed a few houses and called that a consultation. Mary Porter went to Nicholls shops and said, "I'm consulting. Look at me. I'm consulting." Then a few people put in objections, because not many heard about it; not many people knew that a consultation was taking place.

A few put in objections. Some of them did not even get acknowledgements from Roads ACT to their objections. Then, soon after, they were notified that the proposed changes to Nicholls shops car park had been approved—the government would be putting in 45-degree parking, making it one way and pretending that it was all a done deal.

They forgot to actually consult the people of Paisley Street. They forgot to consult the people of Decima Street. They forgot to consult the people of May Mills Street. They forgot to consult the people of Kelleway Avenue and the surrounding streets, including Lexcen Avenue. All those people were ignored. It is typical of the Stanhope government. They ignored the people who have the biggest stake, the biggest claim to having a smoothly running car park.

Let us go over a typical ALP infrastructure program. There is a promise. Then there is an announcement. Then, after the announcement, there is bad consultation. Then the work is delayed. Then they re-announce the project as an election promise. Then they do a cover-up. Then Mary Porter puts out a press release saying that she saved the day. That is the typical progress of an ALP infrastructure program. There is a promise and an announcement followed by bad consultation. The work is delayed. It is re-announced as an election promise. There is a cover-up, and then Mary Porter puts out a press release. I am guessing that either tonight or tomorrow morning we will see a press release by the member for Ginninderra, Mary Porter, saying that she saved the day again for Nicholls residents.

She has been fighting for them for four years and she still has not been able to get the car park widened by a couple of metres, but she saved the day. I take my hat off to Mary Porter. Nobody hits the forward button on an email like she does. Nobody does it better than she does. Nobody diverts the voicemail through to the minister's office like Ms Porter does. She is an expert at it. She clocks up the stats so that she can put out a flyer in the election campaign which says, "I'm the hardest working person because I hit the forward button 1,300 times." I take my hat off to Ms Porter and I am

sure the good people of Nicholls take their hats off to this government for the work that they have done over the last seven years in not fixing a problem that needed to be fixed.

The core reason why the car park should be upgraded is safety. There are rear collisions time and time again. If you speak to people at the takeaway shop, the IGA, the Chinese restaurant, the Italian restaurant or the beauty salon, they will tell you that they regularly see cars backing into each other. Yet here we are, four years on from when Ms Porter was elected and seven years on from when the government was first elected, and they still cannot fix the problem in spite of claiming they did so in 2004. They claim that they fixed it in 2004, but it was not fixed at all. Mary Porter thought that by clicking forward on the email it would be fixed, but I am afraid it was not fixed at all.

Let us go on to the concerns about sending all the traffic one way through Paisley Street. Paisley Street was never designed for that sort of traffic. It was never designed for up to a couple of hundred car movements a day. I am told that is what Roads ACT expects, that there will be 200 extra car movements through Paisley Street, as it currently stands. However, what Roads ACT have not factored into this is that a couple of thousand people are going to be moving into the suburb of Casey.

The suburb of Casey is right next to Nicholls and a lot of people from Casey will be going to the Nicholls IGA. They will be going to the Nicholls takeaway, the Nicholls Chinese restaurant, the Italian restaurant and the beauty salon. All those people will be using the Nicholls shops car park and creating far more than 200 additional car movements per day through Paisley Street. I hazard a guess that it may well be double that. This is a suburban street. It is a very quiet street that has a number of houses backing onto it, yet the Stanhope government is going to divert all the traffic through that street.

The people of Paisley Street did not know it was going to happen. The people of Decima Street did not know it was going to happen. The people of May Mills Street did not know it was going to happen. But Mary Porter still hit the forward button and gave herself a big tick. She said, "I've consulted. I've done the right thing. I've got another one towards my 1,300 total."

When it comes down to it, it is about whether this government is actually committed to Canberra suburbs. It is about whether this government is actually committed to improving the lives of local residents and supporting small business. What this proposal says is that the Labor government does not care about small business; it does not care about retail. If they cared about retail, they would realise that this car park is having a negative effect on those businesses. They would realise that people in Nicholls avoid going to those shops. They avoid going to those restaurants because of the car parking situation there.

I find it staggering that here we are, seven or eight years on from when the Labor Party was first elected, and they are trying to blame a staffer from 2000 for this problem not being fixed. They have had eight years to fix this. They have had eight

years to add a couple of metres to the width of the road, and they still cannot do it. That is too big an infrastructure project for them. It is no wonder they could not do the GDE wide enough if they cannot do the Nicholls shops car park wide enough. It is no wonder that the Gungahlin Drive extension is falling apart. They cannot even do the Nicholls car park properly.

I find it amazing that this government holds the people of Nicholls and Ginninderra in such contempt. I think the way that Ms Porter and Mr Stanhope have treated this issue is appalling. They have totally ignored the wishes of the people of Ginninderra for an improved car park in Nicholls.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Housing—social and community

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (5:54): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the Council of Australian Governments' Nation Building and Jobs National Partnership Agreement of 3 February 2009 that will provide \$102 million for new and upgraded social housing in the ACT;
- (b) the Australian Government requirement that this new housing meet six star energy efficiency standards;
- (c) the Australian Government proposal that a significant proportion of housing stock constructed under stage two of the Nation Building and Jobs Plan be transferred to the community housing providers by 30 July 2014; and
- (d) that non-government affordable housing providers are not a subsector of social or community housing; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) establish an expert reference group to advise it on the commissioning and construction of affordable energy efficient low emission housing in order to ensure these dwellings reach the highest possible environmental standards; and
- (b) support capacity building within the community housing sector to assist in its future management of some of this new stock, by:
 - (i) establishing a consultative forum consisting of community housing providers, key community service agencies, and relevant advocacy and peak representative bodies; and
 - (ii) planning the Nation Building and Jobs Plan investment in social housing through engagement with the forum and implementing that plan in partnership with the sector.

This motion I bring forward today is about adding value. Our intent is to ensure the ACT draws on the best—

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Sorry, Ms Bresnan, one moment. Members, I invite you to continue discussion in the corridor if you need to. Ms Bresnan you have the floor.

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will start again. This motion is about adding value. Our intent is to ensure the ACT government draws on the best available local skills in making the significant social housing investment that the commonwealth government is funding. We have been well briefed by the government on the project to date and are confident that the initiatives we are trying to kick off here will add value to that project, both in terms of the quality and design of the resulting dwellings and in the purposes to which they will be put.

We are asking the government to set up an expert reference group to assist in getting the best-performing buildings possible. We are also asking that it convene a consultative forum consisting of the Canberra community housing providers and those key agencies that work or advocate for residents in the community so that the identification of appropriate projects will be well informed and subsequent tenancing and management can expect long-term success.

Recognising the complexity of this commonwealth-state agreement and the undeniable fact that a certain proportion of the details relating to commonwealth expectations have not yet been sorted through, members are aware that I am happy to amend this motion to add a new clause which reads:

That the Assembly recognises that the Nation Building and Jobs Plan must meet the requirements of and be delivered within the time-frame set by the Commonwealth.

I think it is important that the ACT government takes on the responsibility to work with local experts to ensure the best performing and most affordable dwellings are designed and built through this project and takes a partnership approach to deciding on the housing projects themselves.

I think it is fair to say that this support will make a bigger contribution to stage 2 of this massive housing project, given the deadline for stage 1 applications has already passed. And while there is no doubt that there is experience and expertise in the ACT that could assist in the construction process at a later stage, without a doubt the best contribution from the proposed expert reference group will come at the front end of this project. Similarly, while community sector input will be continuously useful and the benefits to the community housing providers themselves through expansion and capacity building will be ongoing, the forum will make a particularly valuable contribution at the planning stage. Given the commonwealth's deadline for the expected competitive tender for stage 2 of this project is the end of this financial year, the urgency for this motion then is obvious.

I think we should recognise that this stimulus investment is an extraordinary opportunity that would not have occurred if the commonwealth government had not decided that it needed to invest rapidly in the Australian economy in response to the international economic crisis. I also think we should recognise that the six-star benchmark that has been set for the second stage of this housing project is the result of the Greens' influence in the Senate and, indeed, is just one of the benefits that have flowed from the government minority in the Senate.

Given the unique nature and unprecedented scale of this project, the ACT government should have automatically looked for community support in order to ensure it was well used. I appreciate that everyone in the ACT government who was involved is under enormous pressure to deliver very quickly on this initiative. And so it might seem to them that just getting on and locking up the deal is the only task of importance. But the houses, once designed and built, will be in place for 40 or 50 years or more. And if a significant proportion of these properties are to be handed over to community organisations, as the commonwealth has indicated, then the sector needs to be up to the job and they need to have some ownership of the projects in place.

In that context then, we would like to be sure that the ACT government recognises the difference between community housing and affordable housing providers. There are currently about five community housing organisations in the ACT who target their housing at low-income people with particular needs. Along with high-level tenancy management, the community housing organisations provide coordination and delivery of services that are particular to the groups they house, including students, people with disabilities, refugees and single parents. Rent is normally charged at a rate of 25 per cent of the tenant's income.

Alternatively, CHC is now seen as the core non-government provider of affordable housing in the ACT, servicing low and moderate-income households. In 2007-08, about 20 per cent of CHC's tenancies were managed under the affordable housing model where rent was set at 74.9 per cent of market rent. The remaining tenancies were managed under the community housing model where rent was based on 25 per cent of household income. According to CHC's 2007-08 annual report, CHC's transition towards an affordable housing provider is gaining momentum.

At 6.00 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly having been put and negatived, the debate was resumed.

MS BRESNAN: Where I was up to? A strong focus for CHC is to deliver against the objectives and targets established by the affordable housing action plan. From here on in, it is my understanding that the growth market for CHC will be in the area of the construction of new housing which will then largely be sold at an affordable level to low to middle-income earners or, to a lesser degree, rented out at 75 per cent of market rates.

The need for affordable housing in Canberra is recognised and valued. And the ACT government provision of a \$50 million rolling loan to CHC is to be applauded.

However, CHC Affordable Housing, as it is known, is no longer a member of the community housing sector as we see it. CHC Affordable Housing is a supplier of housing to community housing operators but it does not manage housing in a community housing model itself.

In debate on the Housing Assistance Amendment Bill last year, the minister for housing acknowledged the difference between community and affordable housing providers, stating:

It is the government's intention to develop separate and tailored monitoring guidelines for the two different tiers—affordable and community housing providers—which will ensure that the guidelines are appropriate to the activities being undertaken by providers in each tier.

In 2006-2007, the ACT government changed the funding models for the management of community housing from a set budget amount for each program to a set service-based amount for each tenancy based on the room occupancy rate. This meant that in real terms there was a fall in the level of government funding to community housing organisations.

It now seems that the ACT government has relayed its intention to introduce a rental charge of 35 per cent of market rent on its properties subleased by community housing organisations from Housing ACT. With the government push to increase the number of tenants paying more than 25 per cent of income, there will be further pressure on the availability of community housing for people on genuinely low incomes or with special needs.

Let us also not forget that, after only about three years of receiving funding for staff, CHOACT, which is the sector's key body, was de-funded by the minister for housing through the 2006-07 budget. Community housing providers have been rather shaken up by this government in the past few years. There may have been some greater efficiency achieved but there also has been a lot of capital, such as expertise and a good working relationship, lost in the process.

So the need for capacity building has been compounded both by the changes the government has driven through and the way it has done so. In short then, it is our view that the government needs to build a partnership with the community housing sector and peak groups representing service providers and consumers if it is to be able to meet the commonwealth's requirements and capably deliver the housing mix that Canberra needs.

This is the point of the proposed consultant forum and the call for government to subsequently take a partnership approach to the implementation of new housing programs. It may well be that the government officers are confident they know what is needed on all fronts. I have to say that we do not share that confidence.

We are talking here about identifying a range of housing needs. There is a demonstrated need, for example, for well-designed, energy efficient, affordable houses for very large families. At present there is almost no such stock in the territory

as builders have no incentive to build houses that are both large and affordable. We understand that ACT Housing ends up spot-purchasing six-bedroom homes that have expensive gas-ducted heating, many windows and halogen downlights. This project offers an opportunity to create a long-life stock of large houses for social housing.

There is also an ongoing issue on the future for Causeway residents. Despite the tight time frame, it would be possible to put an innovative mixed housing solution in place which would see Causeway residents offered the opportunity to live, along with others, in a leading-edge, energy-efficient, low-emission, contemporary development.

It is conceivable that all these things will be done. Presumably those members of the community sector who are well connected enjoy informal contact with key government decision makers and, with a bit of luck, some of the important components of an adequate housing plan will get put in place. But the key point here is ensuring that community expertise does shape the housing plan. Given that plan has to be put in place by the end of June, one would have thought the government would be keen to take on board all the information that it can.

The same thing applies to expertise in environmentally sound, low-energy, affordable buildings. Canberra is full of well-informed and creative expertise, ranging from Energy Strategies to Derek Wrigley, via the Green Building Council, and the Institute of Architects, among others. The feedback we get is that well-organised and well-considered purchasing plans with clever design can deliver cheaper and better performing buildings.

I am aware that the government is pleased with the processes its officers have in place and does not see a need to get any guidance from external experts. I appreciate the very evident concern that any commitment to a consultation process threatens to slow the very tight commissioning process down. It would seem that this government is very confident that its processes always cover the necessary bases. However, the Greens believe that this motion is an attempt to structure in some constructive assistance.

However, I understand that neither the government nor the opposition will support this motion as it is presented. That is unfortunate, as the Greens do believe that drawing on community-based expertise is vital to achieving the best possible outcomes. Community experts in the energy efficiency and emission reduction field are often frustrated by slow government processes. Similarly, many of the community sector organisations who are at the cutting edge of service delivery are not convinced that the government has all the understanding and support. That is why we are calling for action now, at the front end of this project.

Consequently, following extensive discussions with the minister and his office and discussions with Mr Coe from the Liberal Party, we have put together some amendments that take on board the concerns expressed to us by the other parties. I would still prefer the more specific and concrete approach that the original motion reflects but would rather see something constructive within this tight time frame than nothing. So I seek leave to move the amendments to my own motion circulated in my name.

Leave granted.

MS BRESNAN: I move:

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

“(d) that non-government affordable housing providers are not necessarily a subsector of social or community housing; and”;

(2) omit paragraph (2), substitute:

“(2) recognises that the Nation Building and Jobs Plan must meet the requirements of and be delivered within the timeframes set by the Commonwealth.”; and

(3) add:

“(3) calls on the ACT Government, prior to issuing tenders for stage two of the project at the end of this financial year, to:

(a) conduct a consultation forum to provide further advice on the commissioning and construction of affordable, energy efficient, low emission housing; and

(b) initiate an ongoing process of engagement with community housing providers, key community service agencies, and relevant advocacy and peak representative bodies on issues pertinent to social housing issues, including the proposed mix of housing projects and the capacity of the community housing sector.”.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Disability and Housing, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Corrections) (6.08): I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion. Before I do, though, I would like to put on the record one thing that I think is a misunderstanding, perhaps. Other members who are not familiar with the arrangements may also not be aware of it. When community housing providers charge 75 per cent of the market rate they do not necessarily charge the tenant 75 per cent of the market rate. The tenant actually is in receipt of the commonwealth rental assistance, which picks up the difference. The community housing provider actually gets 75 per cent of the market rate but there is a portion from the tenant and the rest is from commonwealth rental assistance. So that needs to be taken into account when we consider the thing.

There is no doubt that the federal government’s nation building and jobs plan establishes a clear agenda for reform, and I welcome the reform direction for social housing. It is the direction we have been going in the ACT for the past five years under the Stanhope government. Reform direction embodies choice for tenants and support appropriate to their needs. It is also about providing housing that is water and energy efficient so that the energy costs of those on low incomes can be contained. And of course, governments and community are able to tackle the problems of climate change.

The message from the Prime Minister could not be clearer. We need to do something about homelessness and this is a down payment of 20,000 houses nationally, which should get us in just two years halfway to our target of halving homelessness by 2020. It is also about jobs, constructing homes which will build this nation and stop unemployment in the construction industry as a result of the worldwide crisis.

Let us be clear about what we are doing here. This is a response to homelessness; it is not about community housing. It is about homelessness; it is not about affordable housing. It is about homelessness. And it is not about crisis accommodation; it is about homelessness. It is about where the response to homelessness sits. The SAAP providers—and this is something I think members do not know—have been voluble about their preference for a transition from crisis accommodation to public housing as a permanent solution. This is our challenge. Where does it sit? Who has the viable organisational structure to deliver?

The Prime Minister has told us to spend the money, build the houses, build them with six-star ratings, create those jobs or lose the money. Time is of the essence and we have acted accordingly. We have already identified a great provider of affordable housing in the ACT, CHC Affordable Housing, and they are supporting their financial growth through the direct transfer of stock, ongoing provision of new housing, and there are one-off payments and traditional funding as well as access to a \$50 million revolving line of credit at government rates—ACT AAA rating. They are yet to put the runs on the board.

We thought we had some confidence in other large providers. They do not instil in me a great confidence either. In fact, handing back 200 units of the easiest piece of real estate management in the ACT's history is not engendering confidence in this little black duck, let me tell you. And the others are not of such a size that they have a viable organisational structure to be able to cope with it yet—but let us talk about building that capacity at another time.

Our Treasury have worked closely on their financial modelling and their business plan and they are contracted to achieve significant growth in affordable rental and affordable home ownership. In return for this support, it is committed to more than doubling its size in four years and the growth to 1,000 properties in 10 years. That is an ambitious growth target for CHC. We will see at the end of the day, through our initiative, an extra 1,000 units in the community housing sector.

The ACT has already legislated a regulatory framework and is preparing the operational guidelines to enable registration of providers by midyear. I welcome the commitment to increase the range of housing providers and products, and in this area the ACT has already taken significant initiatives. We have been working closely with specialty tenancy managers, including those focusing on young people, people with a disability, men coming out of institutions, people moving out of primary homelessness and women and children escaping domestic violence. We have provided support to those housing providers to develop housing and support policies and procedures, including assisting them to become accredited. And we have embedded specialist staff from Housing ACT to build their organisational capacity. We have started the process of capacity building.

We have also been working very hard in the area of public housing to meet the needs of the broad range of people that think of public housing as their home. We are providing a range of tenancy options for young people and have set up a youth housing program. This includes working with NGOs to establish supportive stairwell models where young people can live together with support and are able to return to education and training and, ultimately, employment. Officers from the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services have already visited the Winteringham model in Melbourne for vulnerable older people who have experienced homelessness and have scheduled discussion about how to establish this model in the ACT.

The ACT's approach of pepper-and-salting public housing so that it is distributed throughout the community is the embodiment of the achievement of mixed communities. In addition, the joint venture redevelopments of our multi-unit sites have already created mixed communities of public and community housing, aged accommodation and private residential accommodation.

Members will be aware of the ACT government's climate change strategy in which it committed significant funds to make public housing more energy efficient in advance of the nation building and jobs program. We have provided a 10-year program to improve the energy and water efficiency of our stock. This work has reached the stage where we are already starting to roll out the work scheduled for the 2009-10 financial year. We will achieve a six-star energy rating where possible and will design homes on universal housing design principles.

We are already talking about these matters to the people who will be building the homes under the nation building and jobs program. We do not have the energy efficiency expertise in-house, which some people seem to think we do. We contract out to consultancies to tell us how to deliver efficiency in our building program. I will say that again: we contract it out to consulting companies to tell us how to do it. So we do not need another expert group because we are already doing that with an expert group.

The motion asked that we conduct a consultation forum to provide further advice on the commissioning and construction of affordable, energy efficient, low emission housing. And we would be happy to, subject to clause (2) of the motion, which now reads:

(2) recognises that the Nation Building and Jobs Plan must meet the requirements of and be delivered within the timeframes set by the Commonwealth.

We must be absolutely clear that the federal government has established the ground rules. The stimulus package has specific requirements regarding energy efficiency components to ensure this. There are deadlines, rules, targets, all set by the federal government, which we are bound to comply with. And we need to move quickly. We have to be absolutely sure that we establish a consultative process that is going to allow us to move quickly, given the commonwealth requirements in relation to achieving a six-star rating. This work will need to be delivered by engaging

appropriately qualified technical consultants. This is the most efficient way to deliver this requirement in a timely way.

In fact, the consultative mechanisms used by DHCS for both housing and homelessness are outlined in volume 1 of the annual report, from page 116 on, and include the youth homelessness working group. The ACT Youth Coalition received funding of \$30,000 to provide secretariat services under the guidance of Meredith Hunter as executive director. And I pay credit and bow very profusely to Meredith Hunter sitting in the gallery. The chief executive's homelessness roundtable meets quarterly with homelessness service providers. Supported accommodation assistance program forums meet bimonthly and are jointly chaired by the department and the sector. In regard to homelessness pathways meetings, there are four service groups which meet on a regular basis: women's, men's, young people and families.

The joint community government reference group meets six-weekly with government and peak organisations. It was previously chaired by Meredith Whitten in her role as the executive director of the Youth Coalition. I take back what I said before. I have promoted the delicious and delightful Meredith Whitten, who is an executive director with the Department of Housing and Community Services. I have mistaken her for the equally efficient Meredith Hunter from the Greens, the Greens coordinator, and I apologise to both of those ladies for mixing them up.

Housing ACT also has standing committees for tenant participation. The Joint Champions Group meets twice a year and its three subgroups meet quarterly. Community participation, public housing reforms and neighbourly behaviours is another. ACT Shelter is funded over \$130,000 a year to provide advice to government on housing policy and to hold policy forums in the community to provide feedback to government. Right now I would like to say thank you to Geoffrey Dalton, because the stuff that he has been coming forward with and advising government on has been particularly valuable and fits absolutely beautifully in our notion of the way to go forward. We are meeting with the Causeway residents quarterly.

There have been a series of workshops over the past four months with community housing providers and other supported accommodation providers to develop the guidelines for registration of providers under the Housing Assistance Act—something that an adviser to Ms Bresnan asked me about while we were here. We are still having those workshops and evaluating those workshops on the registration of providers. I undertook that we would not introduce the regulations until the community consultation and stakeholder consultation had been completed. It has not been completed yet and I further give that undertaking: I will not sign any regulations on this issue until such time as I am satisfied that the consultation has been expansive, transparent and honest.

Builders, of course, have been engaged already to start on the houses under stage 1 of the nation building and jobs plan. Plans will soon start to be submitted for approval. This is for information. This sort of urgency is required to meet the deadline of 75 per cent of houses built in 2010. It is important that the government responds quickly, otherwise we will lose the money. Losing the money means fewer houses are provided for those people on low incomes, people who need a home to live in, and it also means fewer jobs for Canberra.

I signal my support for the amendments circulated under Ms Bresnan's name and I thank her office for—I was going to say “concession”; that is not quite the word—being agreeable to a conversation which has ended up with a better expression of what we were both trying to achieve. I also express my appreciation to Ms Bresnan's office for taking a very verbose intention on who has ultimate and supreme authority in this and bringing it into a concise, plain-English way of putting it. And I thank that office for that.

With respect to the new paragraph (3), there are a couple of words in there that actually give me hives. However, in the interests of honouring my word, in the interests of furthering the spirit of cooperation and wanting to move forward in partnership, with or without a parliamentary agreement—I think that we are all trying to achieve the same things—I am grateful to Ms Bresnan and her office and to Mr Coe for their time today. I have actually briefed both offices on where we are hoping to go—we have actually been doing things in the housing area for the last five years—and I hope that has been able to put an environment on it so that we are actually all trying to move forward in the right direction.

I have undertaken with the Greens and with Mr Coe that we will have a forum. We can call it a think-tank, we can call it a summit, we can call it a forum. We will have a gathering, a gathering of the minds, on these things which is, in effect, what was being asked for in paragraph (3)(a). We had intended to have a forum on the regulatory framework. We will now change that and include it as a significant item in the forum, because I do not think we can actually talk about community housing and its role without having that conversation about the regulatory framework.

One thing that I picked up was that there does not seem to be agreement on the definition of what community housing constitutes, what is affordable housing. Maybe there is a bit of both. That conversation may very well enable us to clear that up so that we have a common definition and are actually on the same page of the same book.

With respect to Mr Coe's amendment, I thank him very much for giving it to us early enough for us to actually give it some thought. I cannot support it but I do wish you to understand that it is not just being bloody-minded. The original paragraph (2) that Ms Bresnan has put forward and that we supported is about the supreme authority. We have to work within the framework the federal government actually put down. We cannot put other restrictions on.

What I need to convey, even though we are not going to support the actual wording of the amendment, is that we do move forward in engaging with the community and with the experts in this area anyway. All of these things that Mr Coe has put down, his (a)(i) to (v), we are already doing and are quite happy to extend, as I indicated before, with both offices. I am quite happy to have my offices and me engaged so that we can move forward.

As I said before, this is about homelessness. This is about people in despair. This is not a political footy. We can talk about political footies in another area but when you are talking about someone who is living in the shrubbery just outside the Legislative

Assembly we need to give that person an opportunity to have a home. And that is what this is all about. Regretfully for the Liberals, I cannot support their amendment but I do again thank Mr Coe for his good intention and for giving us the time.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (6.23): I move the following amendment to Ms Bresnan's proposed amendments:

Omit paragraph (2), substitute:

“(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) support the community and social housing sector by frequently and regularly engaging with providers to discuss issues of concern, including:
 - (i) energy and environmental standards;
 - (ii) Nation Building and Jobs Plan investment;
 - (iii) maintenance;
 - (iv) acquisition; and
 - (v) other relevant issues; and
- (b) ensure that a majority of the Nation Building and Jobs Plan investment is committed to community housing including both nationally accredited organisations in the ACT.”.

This issue is one of particular importance to the people of Canberra and it is a very timely issue as well. The federal government's stimulus package included \$6.4 billion for public and community housing, and that is of course time-critical, as were all other components of the stimulus package. The money has been set aside for social housing. The federal Minister for Housing Tanya Plibersek said very clearly that it was to go to “social housing”. “Social housing” is a broad term and does not necessarily mean only public housing. It is a broad term and it is very important to note that she did in fact say “social housing” and not “public housing”. If the intention was that 100 per cent of the money in all circumstances would go to public housing, she would have said that. Instead, she said “social housing”. Social housing would include public housing but it would also include community housing.

I understand that we are very much in the hands of the federal government when it comes down to this sort of money and perhaps how it can be spent. However, I do understand that there is some scope to tinker with the breakdown of the money so you can determine whether it goes 100 per cent to public housing, 100 per cent to community housing, or whatever the case may be, whatever the breakdown might be. So I think it is very important that the ACT government gets the balance right between investing in community housing and investing in public housing.

While we are talking about community housing, I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to the good work done at Havelock Housing and also by Community

Housing Canberra. Both these organisations really do typify what it means to be in a community such as ours. These are not-for-profit organisations, often with a large pool of their resources coming from volunteers, contributing to their community to make it better. And they do it in a pretty efficient way, I might add.

Dr Jon Hall, who is a senior research associate at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, did a study on Havelock Housing's efficiency. It is interesting that ACT public housing costs on average \$3,356 for overheads, whereas Havelock Housing, per house, per dwelling, is \$1,791, so approximately \$1,600 per dwelling cheaper than the ACT public housing sector. If you go into maintenance, maintenance at Havelock Housing properties is \$3,237 per property; in ACT public housing it is \$2,509, so an extra \$800 is spent per dwelling on maintenance in Havelock Housing properties and they do it at \$1,600 less than the ACT government. This is all in the work done by Dr Jon Hall, so those figures do have a fair bit of integrity behind them and are certainly worth considering when taking into account the fact that there is \$102 million for this government to divvy up to community housing and to public housing.

I understand that, of that \$102 million, \$96 million will be spent on new acquisitions whereas \$6 million will be spent on maintenance. I am told that \$96 million will buy approximately 286 dwellings—286 dwellings for \$96 million. That comes in at a cost of \$335,664 per dwelling. That to me seems like a pretty high price when you consider that a lot of these will in fact be units. If you go and buy a one or two-bedroom unit off the plan from Independent or from some other agency that is selling off the plan, you will actually get a one-bedroom unit in some places for under \$300,000 whereas this average is \$335,000 per dwelling. I realise that that is an average and if they are all four-bedroom houses or five-bedroom houses that may well be a bargain, but I would think that quite a number of those would be units and really should come in less than \$335,000 per unit.

I did actually request a briefing on the stimulus package as it affects Housing ACT and Community Housing and the meeting was cancelled. That was a few weeks ago. I do appreciate the fact that the minister did give me a half-hour briefing today, but it would have been nice if we had had that a couple of weeks ago, as was originally scheduled.

Last year in the territory election the Liberals put out a commitment to community housing. One of the comments that we did draw to people's attention is the fact that the ACT is the only jurisdiction in Australia which is not seeing any growth in community housing. We are not seeing any growth in community housing, which I think is a shame given how efficient they are. Last financial year we saw approximately 100 properties transferred from Housing ACT stock to Community Housing Canberra stock, and I understand that they are meant to use that as equity to take out loans so they can then reinvest in community housing. What that did was give a big tick of approval to the work that Community Housing are doing. They transferred 100 properties to Community Housing Canberra, to CHC, and said, "You can manage these and you can own them." That is a real tick of approval.

Havelock Housing are registered as a nationally accredited organisation when it comes to providing community housing and they are doing very good work. So it does

disappoint me that I do not think Havelock Housing have the complete confidence of the minister at this stage with regard to the expansion of their stock and their management of their stock. I think Havelock and Community Housing Canberra are doing very good work and it would be a shame not to see their work expanded through the stimulus package, through the \$96 million.

The amendment that I moved puts a particular focus on community housing and investing in it but it also did not state that a very thorough engagement with the sector would be required prior to receiving the stimulus package and determining where the money would be spent. I think it would be a great shame, a tremendous shame, if this motion moved today does in fact hamstring the ability of the ACT government to allocate this money. If the ACT government is not able to give out \$96 million as per the state, territory and federal government agreement, it would be a tremendous shame and it would simply be this Assembly's doing, I believe, that would hamstring that process.

I understand that it is possible that not all the states and territories will be able to spend their money in time and that there may well be an opportunity for the ACT to go around in a second phase to get any money that was not spent. There is a tremendous opportunity there not only to spend the \$96 million properly and to spend it quickly but to possibly get an additional round of funding—possibly \$10 million, \$20 million, \$30 million. The amount we will not know until the other states and territories have actually allocated their funds and constructed their dwellings.

I understand that COAG agreed to a reform agenda at the end of this week. I believe the ACT minister for housing and his colleagues from around Australia will be meeting to talk about this and about how they can implement it. I do hope that the minister does strongly consider community housing when he goes to that meeting and I do hope that community housing is given a fair go and is treated on a level footing when the money is being allocated.

I cannot stress enough that I am very concerned that this motion could in fact limit the ability of the ACT building industry to construct homes. I am very concerned that this might be the case. That would have a huge negative consequence for us. It would not only affect the number of public housing and community housing stock that we would have available here in the territory but would also not provide the stimulus that it is meant to do. This is meant to provide a stimulus by injecting money into our community, into our building industry, which will then flow on through the rest of our economy.

If this motion does in fact restrain our ability to give out this money and to invest in public housing and to invest in our economy, the Assembly will only have itself to blame, and I do hope that is not the case.

In conclusion, I would like to once again put my and the Canberra Liberals' strong support for community housing and the excellent work that Havelock Housing Association and Community Housing Canberra are doing in our community, and I hope that their work will be supported in this stimulus package.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (6.34): Mr Coe's proposed amendment is not acceptable to us. In the first instance, it does not actually deal with energy efficiency design. Secondly, it only engages with housing providers, not the wider social service sector, and, finally, the amendment directs the allocation of resources in a manner which is not, in our view, acceptable, functional or useful.

In relation to the point which Mr Coe made about somehow hampering the rollout of this funding, I do not share or understand Mr Coe's view that it will hamper building, as there are quite clear time frames that the ACT government has to fulfil, which is built into the funding from the federal government and we have no intention—I believe this motion shows that—of holding that up. It does specifically state that those time frames must be considered in anything that happens.

Mr Coe's amendment negatived.

MR SPEAKER: The question now is that Ms Bresnan's amendments be agreed to.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (6.35): In closing, I just have a few comments. The Greens do acutely recognise the reasons behind the federal government's large investment in housing, which is, as the housing minister has noted, to address homelessness.

Having worked in the area of mental health, I know the crucial role that housing has in addressing other areas of people's lives. I also know in relation to this how important it is to have a number of housing options, including public housing and community housing which includes support services for people, particularly those who have high-level needs.

I also understand the minister's point about contracting out for advice on energy efficiency. However, there are people in this field doing much innovative work in this area and who would make a very valuable contribution to this area.

I also appreciate Mr Coe's points about maintenance costs. However, public housing serves a significant need in our community and there will always be people, because of a variety of circumstances in their life, who need public housing. There will also be people who need community housing. It is about not having a one-size-fits-all approach. It is about meeting the needs of vulnerable people in the community.

This is a significant investment in housing in Australia and for the ACT. We, like the government, want to ensure that this is done with a long-term vision that looks to supporting a viable future for community and public housing in the ACT. This is also an opportunity to build strong relationships with those involved in and with an interest in the needs of people requiring access to community housing in the ACT.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 10

Noes 5

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

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Question put:

That **Ms Bresnan's** motion, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 10

Noes 5

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

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Adjournment

Motion by **Mr Hargreaves** proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Death of Dr William Robert Scowcroft

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Treasurer, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Services and Minister for Women) (6.42): I just rise briefly to talk about a man whose funeral I went to today, Dr William Robert Scowcroft, also known as Bill Scowcroft around Canberra's circles, and to put on the record my condolences to his wife, Caroline, and his children.

The funeral, as funerals go, was lovely today. Norwood crematorium was packed out and we heard stories of Bill's life growing up in West Wyalong and then the very adventurous life he led across the world. He was a very bright man who had a PhD. He was a geneticist. He worked for Campbell's soups. He spent many years in California and then went off to Canada. He worked for the CSIRO. He spent time in Kampala and in Colombia and eventually came home to Canberra, or back to Australia, in 2001.

The reason I met Bill was that he was a lobbyist and advocate for the domiciliary oxygen scheme. Throughout Bill's life he was a smoker and he did contract a

respiratory disorder, COPD as it is known, from his smoking. He became a strong advocate of giving up smoking; anyone he could speak to to talk about the bad effects of smoking he would do so.

In fact, I understand he gave up smoking many years before his illness and he ended up in hospital in Canada with pneumonia, when he spent 70 days in a medically-induced coma, on a ventilator. He really surprised the doctors when he came out of that; he was not expected to live. He took the decision that he wanted to return to Australia and spend his remaining years in his own country.

He was on oxygen 24/7 and whilst he was on oxygen 24/7 he lobbied 24/7 around access to oxygen. He was a very strong advocate. In some ways I thought he was following me around last year. In their bright green t-shirts, he and his colleagues would come to community cabinet and they would come to community meetings where I was. I went and spoke at their Lung Life Support Group, to listen to them talking about the need to provide free oxygen to people based on clinicians' recommendations to allow them to enter pulmonary rehabilitation programs and actually live their life. Bill spent a lot of time at the Canberra Hospital but all the time he was in there he was teaching and telling people about the importance of pulmonary rehabilitation and living a full life and of his need of oxygen to do that.

It was obvious from the speakers today at his funeral that he was a much loved man. He was a very strong lobbyist but he was very polite and very committed to making sure that we delivered the best oxygen scheme that we could. In fact, it was the week just before he died that we made the reforms to our oxygen scheme here which basically gave Bill what he was wanting. So a wonderful Australian, very much a wonderful man in terms of the community health sector here and a very strong advocate for patient-led care and healthcare consumers being involved in the care they receive.

He will be very sadly missed. His wife did a wonderful job at the funeral today. I know how much she will miss him and my thoughts are with her.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.46 pm.