



Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD
SEVENTH ASSEMBLY

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

31 MARCH 2009

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Tuesday, 31 March 2009

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

Death of Ms Margaret Spalding OAM
Motion of condolence

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): I move:

That this Assembly expresses its deep regret at the death of Margaret Spalding OAM, a tireless worker who strove to improve the life of those who are unable to advocate for themselves, and tenders its profound sympathy to her family, friends and colleagues in their bereavement.

Mr Speaker, there are individuals whose contribution to their community is so profound and so generous in spirit that their loss leaves us wondering how such an absence can ever be compensated for. Last week the Canberra community lost such an individual with the untimely death of Margaret Spalding. I offer my deepest condolences to Ms Spalding's family, including her children and grandchildren and her brothers and sisters, as well as to the many, many Canberrans who counted her as a friend, an advocate, a colleague and a champion.

Margaret Spalding's professional life was one of service from first to last. For the bulk of her career, that service was rendered to some of the most vulnerable in our community, Canberrans living with disabilities. Margaret Spalding's was a service that was grounded in a position of simple principle—the principle that each of us deserves to live a life of dignity, respect and opportunity; that each of us deserves the opportunity to contribute to our community through our labour; and that each of us deserves to engage in the social, intellectual, economic and creative life of our community, to the extent of our capacity and our desire to do so.

That is a simple enough philosophy, but one that required all of Margaret Spalding's persuasive powers, all of her inspirational qualities, to make a reality for Canberrans living with disabilities. She had a way of drawing people with her and into her plans, a way of getting to those who yield genuine power in this community, those with the capacity to do most in practical terms to ensure that her advocacy bore fruit.

In wielding that power, she effected something quite extraordinary—the creation of a genuine and sincere spirit of private and corporate philanthropy that we do not often associate with this young city. While this support has been indispensable, Margaret knew that what each of us desires above all in life is not the charity of strangers but the fulfilment that comes from contributing to our community and from having our contribution respected and treated with the dignity that elevates it beyond mere labour.

Under her leadership, Koomarri implemented a certified agreement in 2002 that gave workers with a disability the same workplace rights as those of their colleagues who were without disabilities. She also urged upon the organisation the importance of ensuring that Canberrans with disabilities had access to appropriate and secure housing, somewhere deserving of the word “home”.

In these times we hear a great deal about brand recognition. But something sets apart the recognition we accord to a loved institution such as Koomarri from the Pavlovian response we give to a soft drink, a bank or a brand of jeans. The Koomarri brand is not manufactured by marketers but built on the honest exertions of men and women—and, for the past decade, on the exertions of Margaret Spalding and her team. It depends for its reputation and recognition not upon superficial imagery but upon real achievement. It seeks relevance not by idle and thoughtless commentary on the state of the world but by changing the state of the world, one job and one human being at a time.

Margaret Spalding helped change the world for hundreds of Canberrans with disabilities. She did it as CEO of Koomarri, but in a host of other roles as well: through her work as a committee member of National Disability Services ACT since 2005; as a member of this government’s Community Inclusion Board; as co-chair of the future directions oversight group of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services; as deputy chair of the ACT Ministerial Disability Advisory Council; as a member of the Disability Reform Group; as a founding member of the ACT Leadership Development Group; as a founding member of the ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service; as a former director of disability policy in ACT Health and Community Services; as Executive Director of Headway Victoria; as founding coordinator of the advocacy service ADACAS; and as executive director of the respite service FaBRiC—from inside government and from the outside, wherever she could make a difference to the life prospects of those Canberrans for whom her service was given.

Her contribution and the deep integrity of her work were recognised and honoured by her peers, her community, her colleagues, her clients and her friends, and by the many of us who like to imagine that we fit into more than one of these categories.

In 2002 Margaret Spalding was runner-up in the prestigious Entrepreneur of the Year award for her work with Koomarri. Three years later Koomarri and ActewAGL were awarded a Prime Minister’s award for excellence in community business partnerships. Then, on Australia Day this year, Margaret Spalding was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for her service to people with disabilities. She was to have been formally invested in May, just a few weeks from now.

Through all her decades of service, the side to Margaret most of her acquaintances and colleagues saw was the vivacious side—optimistic; energetic; enthused by a challenge, not cowed by it. But there was another side, one of progressive illness and of compounding challenge. I do not believe we can truly honour and celebrate the whole person of Margaret Spalding, or appreciate her contribution to our city, without acknowledging these things. They, too, were a part of her complex humanity.

Margaret's death was met everywhere in this community with a single, shared outpouring of dismay and distress. I know I speak on behalf of very many of my fellow Canberrans when I extend to her sons, Jonathan and Benjamin, and their partners, her grandchildren, Isabel, Rachel and James, her brothers and sister, Carmel, Fred, John, Patrick and Peter, and her extended family and friends, deepest condolences on their loss. Margaret Spalding will be long remembered and respected for changing the world and the community she came into, and leaving both better for her being here.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition): On behalf of the Canberra Liberals, I express our condolences to the family and friends of Margaret Spalding OAM. I did not know Margaret well personally, but I was well aware of her work and her untiring commitment to improving the lives of others.

Margaret was genuinely one of those who committed herself to improving the lives of other people. She did not come from a background of privilege that led her to this path. Margaret was a butcher's daughter from Forbes, one of six children. From there, she set about a lifetime's work of caring for and assisting others. From grassroots work to senior management and policy positions, she dedicated her energies to the human services field. She worked for government and non-government agencies alike, both at the front line and at the forefront of strategic development.

Her community positions included being Executive Director of Headway Victoria; a founder of ADACAS, a community advocacy service; and executive director of FaBRiC, the family based respite service. Within government agencies, she worked for the ACT Department of Health and Community Services. Her policy and strategic contributions included being a member of the ACT Community Inclusion Board; a member and cofounder of the ACT Leadership Development Group; and a committee member with NDS in the ACT.

In 1997, Margaret was appointed to the board of Koomarri in the ACT, and it is in this capacity that many of us came into contact with her. Her time at the helm of Koomarri has been widely praised for significantly increasing the number of families assisted, rising to over 400, with members who face the challenges of living with a disability and were helped by Margaret's work with Koomarri. She is credited with increasing the services provided and gaining support from colleagues and associated professionals, and from public policy bodies both here in Canberra and throughout the region.

Margaret was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia on Australia Day this year. I quote from her comments to the *Canberra Times*:

I grew up in a family that held very strong values about caring about people in your community and doing something about it.

These are important values, values that we share and which we all should take heed of in our professional lives, especially in the positions we hold here in the Assembly.

One of the most poignant moments in yesterday's service at the Southern Cross Club was Margaret's brother Fred speaking eloquently about how these values should continue to play out in our lives. He was calling for us to love each other more and to care for each other in the community more deeply.

To Margaret's family and to all who were touched by her during her 30 years of community service we offer our deepest condolences, and to Margaret, in her absence, we offer our thanks for a life well lived in the service of others.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens): On behalf of the Greens, I rise to offer our deepest sympathies and condolences to the family and friends of Margaret Spalding. Our thoughts are also with all the workers and members of Koomarri. We are, like many people in the ACT, deeply saddened and shocked at the loss of such an important and inspirational member of our community.

Margaret was, without a doubt, a compassionate and selfless person who dedicated much of her life to helping those who are less fortunate. Today we join the people of the ACT in thanking her for every one of those tireless hours.

In her role as Chief Executive of Koomarri she helped countless individuals with disabilities and their families. To dedicate a large part of your life to helping those in such great need should not be underestimated. We must count ourselves lucky to have had the service and dedication of such a great person. As a lifelong advocate for providing services to the disadvantaged, she was recently awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for her contributions to the disability services sector.

If, as has been recorded in the media, certain events in Margaret's recent past were a dark period for her, this could never overshadow or detract from the 30 years she served the ACT community for. I believe that few of us will be able to claim a legacy of the kind that Margaret leaves us. It is an extraordinary contribution to the ACT community—because to do any less would not deliver her the honour she deserves.

On a personal note, having worked in the community sector for 25 years, I knew Margaret and was impressed by her tenacity and determination. She was a true champion of people with disabilities and their families. She had great leadership abilities and was happy to support and mentor others. Margaret's loss will be deeply felt throughout the community sector, where people of her calibre are vital if the ACT is to be a place that includes, supports and cares for all its citizens.

As has been stated, Margaret said that she grew up in a family that held very strong values about caring about people in the community and doing something about it. Here was a woman who truly did lots to help the community and so much to help so many families.

Again, Mr Speaker, I offer our most sincere sympathies to Margaret's loved ones in what is an indescribably difficult and sad time for them.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Disability and Housing, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Industrial Relations and

Minister for Corrections): I rise to express my deep sadness at the tragic passing of Margaret Spalding and convey my heartfelt sympathy and condolences to her family.

Margaret was a proud mother to Ben and Jonathan and grandmother to their children. I am sure that this was her most important and cherished role. Perhaps it was the importance of this role that enabled her to reach out to so many of the Koomarri families.

She also understood the importance of looking after yourself and the need to balance her work with an active social and recreational life. I know that she recently took up golf and I know that she had many wonderful holidays with friends.

The Margaret we got to know over many years was a remarkable woman with a deep and active commitment to the city that she loved. And she was a true champion—a champion dedicated to improving the lives of the disadvantaged, especially people with disabilities. She was a wonderful and powerful advocate for the disability sector and was well known for her skills at the discussion table. She was also a tireless campaigner for breaking down the negative stereotypes of people with a disability.

Since December 1997, Margaret was the Chief Executive Officer of Koomarri, an organisation providing community support, housing and employment services for some 350 people with moderate to severe disabilities and their families. Margaret was very much the driving force behind establishing Koomarri as a respected and high profile business and, through this, raising the prestige and participation of people with disability in the ACT.

Prior to joining Koomarri, she was employed in a range of positions in human services, working from the grassroots level through to positions of senior management. She had more than 30 years experience in the government and community sectors and had enormous expertise in service provision and advocacy as well as purchasing and policy.

Margaret worked with the ACT department of health and community care and held community-based positions including being Executive Director of Headway Victoria, family coordinator of the advocacy service ADACAS and executive director of the family based respite service, FaBRiC. She also contributed to the ACT human service industry at a strategic level, with positions held including being a member of the ACT Community Inclusion Board, a cofounder and member of the ACT Leadership Development Group and a committee member of National Disability Services ACT. In this way she took an active and dedicated role in the reform of human services in the territory.

Mr Speaker, I would like to talk for a moment about Margaret's active involvement in the disability reform process, a role that reflected her enormous drive and dedication to the people she served. Margaret contributed to the reform of the ACT disability sector through her involvement in the Disability Reform Group, which provided advice to my government on recommendations arising from the board of inquiry into disability services in 2001. From there she took on the role of co-chair of the Ministerial Disability Advisory Council. The council was established in 2003 to

independently advise and make recommendations to the government across a range of issues in relation to people with disabilities.

She was also the community co-chair of the oversight group established in the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services to establish the priorities for disability policy and services in the territory which would further support people with disability in the ACT to realise their vision and their rights to self-respect, dignity and participation at all levels in the community.

Margaret was a recognised leader in the ACT community and she used the position to raise the profile of the often forgotten but significant proportion of people with a disability in the ACT.

She also served as treasurer of the board of Tuggeranong Community Arts Association, a position she held until just last month. Frank Cassidy, the association's president, remembers Margaret as "an impressive, dynamic and major contributor to the activities of the Association". He also said that people were in awe of Margaret, who went about her activities with an extraordinary amount of energy.

Margaret also was well known for forging close relationships with other leaders in the ACT community to build Koomarri into the respected organisation it is today. It is a remarkable organisation, and its leader was a remarkable person—a visionary who made things happen.

The respect and high regard felt by the Canberra community for Margaret and Koomarri were never more evident than in the aftermath of the fire that gutted its new, almost completed premises in 2006. Canberrans rallied to Koomarri both in spirit and in kind. More than \$200,000 was received in donations, enabling the facility to be reborn.

The new facility represented more than bricks and mortar for many families. It gave comfort that the services provided by the organisation were sustainable and the organisation in good hands. I know that Margaret and her staff and volunteers were deeply moved by the overwhelming demonstration of community affection and support for Koomarri—affection and support that extended well beyond those directly associated with the organisation.

The standing of the business that Margaret had nurtured and matured was no better revealed than in August 2005, when ActewAGL and Koomarri proudly accepted the Prime Minister's award for excellence in community business partnerships for large business. And, as the Chief Minister said, fittingly, on Australia Day this year Margaret was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for her tireless devotion and services to people with disabilities in the ACT and surrounding region. Anyone who had the pleasure to know her and to see the results of her hard work knows how appropriate this recognition really was.

Former chair of the disability advisory council Craig Wallace once described Koomarri under Margaret's leadership as an organisation that "worked quietly, with deep generosity and a big heart". This is an apt tribute for a woman who, for more than three decades, devoted herself to improving the lives of others.

Margaret Spalding's reputation, integrity and honesty were beyond reproach. It was a privilege to know and work with Margaret Spalding. She is a shining example to us all. She was deeply loved and I shall miss her terribly.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella): Mr Speaker, I reckon Margaret Spalding would be pretty chuffed that we are sitting here today and talking about Koomarri, because she actually would not see today's condolence motion as a means for us to express our sympathy to her family for her loss; she would think it was pretty cool that, for about 10 days now, Canberra as a city has been talking about the organisation that she loved. I think there were two sorts of people in the world for Margaret Spalding: those who are friends of Koomarri and those who are going to be friends of Koomarri. She did not see it in any other light.

I do not believe, in all my years in public life and in this place, that I have ever met somebody with such a single-minded determination to succeed on behalf of those that she worked with. And she worked with them. I think that Margaret's greatest gift to this city, and perhaps to the world, is that she did not see those she worked with in the Koomarri family as people with a disability. She just saw them as people. Everywhere she went, I do not believe I ever saw, and I do not think anybody here could ever define a time when they saw, Margaret Spalding treat anybody differently. In that way, she was the most remarkable woman that you could ever meet. She had put aside whatever prejudice or influences that we have in our lives that make us see people differently. She just saw people.

I was very lucky: I got to go on a one-day tour of Koomarri. If you have never done the tour and they are on offer again at some stage, people should go and do it. Go and see the locations around this city of places that Koomarri, over time, has established. Margaret Spalding, working with people—because she would never take any credit herself—took them to a new height of activity. Whether it be the ironing business, the rag business, the folding, sorting and inserting business or whether it be the other sorts of care that they provided, wherever you went, as you went into that building or that room, as you went to that workbench, lights came on in people's faces. It was simply joy at seeing another human being that made their day. And wherever you went, Margaret made somebody's day.

She knew their names, she knew who their families were and she knew their circumstances. She was able to talk to you—certainly to me, and I am sure to everybody else—about their humanity, what made them special and what drove her to care for them in a way that very few people can do. I think that was her great gift. Putting everything else aside, she was a human being who simply cared for human beings.

Beyond that, she knew that she had an obligation—and an obligation she took incredibly seriously—to not think about today, the life of this budget, the electoral cycle, the economic cycle or whatever else. She was looking decades ahead when it came to the members of her Koomarri family. It is funny; it is one of the few organisations where people talk about “the family”—the “Koomarri family”—because that is what she created. She grew up in a big family with six kids, so she

knew about family. She knew about the importance of family. But she knew that families changed. Her great legacy will be the way that she has set Koomarri up for the future so that it is sustainable. She knew it was a business. It had to be run on business lines. She achieved that: it was sustainable.

But beyond that, she was looking at, for instance, succession planning. When Koomarri was set up, it was set up by concerned parents who knew that, long term, somebody would have to look after their kids. But she took that to a place where Koomarri was signing leases for community housing and all sorts of things. Again, accepting their basic humanity and their equality with all of us, she looked after her clients in such a way that the effects will be seen for years. I think that many organisations could look at the model that she set up on the lines of sustainability, on looking absolutely to the needs of the people that you were there to care for.

She never thought of anything for herself. As the Chief Minister touched on, people in the main are unaware that Margaret had a number of long-term illnesses that were causing her some grief, and at no time did it seem to slow her down. At no time did it quench her passion; at no time did it make her think of herself. In fact, I think it probably spurred her on. I think she knew that perhaps time was limited and that she had an obligation to keep going, because she always put others first. Hopefully, somebody will rewrite a dictionary one day so that the word “selfless” will just read “see Margaret Spalding”, because of that selflessness that she put into place. You could hear it yesterday in Amie Cossens’ speech at the ceremony. She just set the example and the standard that she expected of all, and she was demanding of herself.

My wife Robyn and I met Margaret Spalding at social events. We were always quite delighted to get to a function and find we were sitting next to Margaret. That was always fun because you knew you were in for a good laugh. She was happy, she was joyous, she was cheerful, she liked a good drink and she always had a good story. She just added something to a room that very few people can do. So from Robyn and me in particular, I would like to offer her family our condolences on her passing.

Pat Power yesterday spoke at the funeral about judgement day. I do not think I know—maybe someone can enlighten me—but I suspect that, as one of six kids, coming from Forbes and having a Catholic bishop doing your funeral, Margaret was possibly Catholic, so the sense of judgement day would be there. It is interesting that the reading spoke about judgement day. It was the lines out of Matthew where people were challenged: “Did you look after the poor? Did you look after the hungry? Did you look after those who needed assistance?” The response is: “When did we look after these people, Lord?” Margaret Spalding looked after them every day of her working life. For those of us who believe in the life hereafter, in judgement day, Margaret may get one of those special passes that just lets you straight in.

It is a sad time for those of us that are left. I think it is perhaps a joyous time for her. I do believe in the life hereafter. I know that Margaret certainly believed in life. We never discussed what might happen after death, but in my view of heaven, if somebody like Margaret Spalding does not get in then there is no hope for any of us.

To her sons, to her brothers and sisters, to her grandchildren, I offer my sympathies and condolences. To the Koomarri family, I think that will be her legacy. I think

Koomarri will continue. I think Koomarri will be stronger because there will be a determination there to make sure that the work of the last 12 years continues. And name any other organisation, particularly in the community sector, where the CEO has been there for 12 years and has been able to achieve, to keep it fresh and keep it moving in the way that Margaret has. I think you would be hard pressed.

With respect to a legacy, it is not that she would want it, that she would even think of it or countenance that somebody would say that Koomarri is her legacy, because she knows that Koomarri is a family and Koomarri is about people—those 400 families that make up Koomarri. I think what we will see out of Koomarri is something even better, because I think people will be inspired by the example of Margaret Spalding. I think people will ensure that this occurs. You need only to look at the board, under people like James Service, with the assistance of John Mackay and others. I am certain that the board will remain in place and will ensure that the good work that has been done over the 12 years of Margaret's tenure there is not diminished.

To those of us that are left, we will always remember Margaret as our friend. I do not think anybody who knew Margaret did not come away thinking they were special for having met her.

MS PORTER (Ginninderra): I would like to join my fellow Assembly members in expressing my deep sorrow at the passing of Margaret Spalding OAM. First, I would like to apologise to Margaret's family for not attending the memorial service, the celebration of her life, as I needed to chair the Scrutiny of Bills and Subordinate Legislation Committee meeting which was due to meet at 11.15 am yesterday.

I knew Margaret Spalding for over two decades through my work in the community sector and then more latterly as a member of this place. As well as knowing of the wonderful work that Margaret carried out in and for the community, and which the Chief Minister and others in this place have so well outlined, I also valued her personal friendship. Though not close, nonetheless it was one that I valued very much.

As we have heard from other people here this morning, all who met Margaret could not be anything other than immediately attracted to her love of life, her compassion, her loyalty and her understanding. I saw Margaret's values in operation over and over in the way she related to her friends, her family members, her work colleagues, her community and others who were fortunate enough to get to know her. Margaret was one of those "can do" people—a "can do" person who knew that, if you wanted to get something done and you have the support of your community, you can get it done. And she did so, over and over again.

I extend my condolences to all those people who Margaret's life has touched in some way, whether it be family, friends or through her community work. An American President once said that people who gave without seeking reward are like the stars in the sky—points of light shimmering in the dark. One of those lights has just gone out, but like a star that dies, we can see the light long after the source has left our sky. I think that Margaret Spalding will shine on through her legacy.

Question resolved in the affirmative, members standing in their places.

Personal explanation

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

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms Porter. Please proceed.

MS PORTER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I wish to correct the record regarding comments made by Mrs Dunne last Thursday, surrounding reports in the *Canberra Times* relating to the motion listed in my name on the notice paper last Wednesday. Last week, during the adjournment debate on Thursday, 26 March, Mrs Dunne said, in relation to an article in the *Canberra Times* on general practitioners, that I had issued a media release. Mrs Dunne claimed:

She put it out. She put it out and said, "This is what I did today." She did not have the decency to tell the reporter that she did not quite get round to it.

Mrs Dunne obviously did not check her facts. If she had, she would have discovered that I did not provide a media release to the *Canberra Times* or to any other media outlet on this matter. On Wednesday of last week, my office was contacted by a *Canberra Times* journalist, who sought to clarify the wording of the motion listed under my name on the notice paper. The journalist indicated she was not in the Assembly on that day to follow proceedings. Following on from this conversation, confirmation of the wording of my motion was provided to the *Canberra Times* by my staffer via email.

Following on from this email, the journalist contacted my office again and once more highlighted the fact that she was not present to observe proceedings and thus sought confirmation that my motion had been or would be moved. My staffer indicated that my motion was the eighth and final item on the agenda and its consideration depended on how much time debate on the other items preceding it on the notice paper took up.

Following on from this conversation, the journalist sought confirmation once more that the motion had been moved, this time via email. As my staffer had left the office to attend an appointment and did not return to the office that afternoon, the email was not responded to and confirmation was not provided. My media adviser was not contacted by the journalist to confirm the status of the motion. My media adviser did not issue a media release relating to the motion because (a) I have found embargoes surrounding media releases are not necessarily respected, even when one expressly withdraws the media release and (b) such a release would be premature given that my notice was last on the notice paper and unlikely to be reached.

On Thursday, the *Canberra Times* falsely reported that my motion had been moved and consequently included a correction to this report in Friday's *Canberra Times*. However, they claimed that this error was a result of incorrect information provided by my office. I wish to correct the record in relation to whether my office provided confirmation that the motion had been moved. It did not. I agree with Mrs Dunne that one should always maintain good relationships with the media, and that is why I rang

the *Canberra Times* chief of staff on Friday to inform him of the error that was included in the correction, so that he was aware and so that the record could be corrected. I would like to thank the chief of staff for the respectful manner in which he received my call.

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 5

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

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee (performing the duties of a Scrutiny of Bills and Subordinate Legislation Committee)—Scrutiny Report 5, dated 30 March 2009, together with the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MRS DUNNE: Scrutiny report 5 contains the committee's comments on five bills, nine pieces of subordinate legislation, two government responses and one regulatory impact statement agreement. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Standing and temporary orders—suspension

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (10.36): I move:

That so much of the standing and temporary orders be suspended as would prevent the Financial Management Amendment Bill 2009 being determined during this sitting period.

I understand that the Treasurer has been in discussion with members in relation to this bill. The bill does require passage in this sitting. It is a reasonably straightforward technical bill; nevertheless it does require passage in this sitting. I understand that members have agreed to its passage in this sitting.

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

Financial Management Amendment Bill 2009

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

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (10.37): This is a remarkably short and simple bill relating to Australia's goods and services taxation policy. I thank the Treasurer and her officials for the briefing that was provided to me at quite short notice.

Australia's system of GST has now been in place for nearly nine years. Apart from some reasonably significant amendments that were made in the first couple of years of the operation of the GST to bed down the new policy, there has been little change to the overall policy since that time. The most significant change to affect the GST occurred late in 2008, although this has not had any effect on the GST policy itself.

The commonwealth and the states agreed on a new IGA, a new intergovernmental agreement. As part of this agreement, there were some changes made to the way in which the GST policy is to be administered and the particular change that is the subject of this bill relates to the way in which the commonwealth is paid for the collection and administration of the GST.

Under the previous IGA arrangements, the commonwealth government collected the GST revenue and each month passed these funds through to the states. As a separate set of transactions, the states then paid the commonwealth for the administration of the policy, again on a monthly basis. This seems to be a wasteful arrangement, as the states had to make separate payments to return funds to the commonwealth that the commonwealth had just handed over to the states.

The proposal in this bill will put in place the provisions of the new IGA whereby the commonwealth will net out the monthly payment of GST to each state, the amount that covers the cost of administration for that state or, in this case, territory. This seems an eminently sensible and important issue to ensure there is appropriate transparency in the transfer of these funds. I have been assured that transparency will be retained. We will know what the administration fee will be, how much will be paid by each state each month and when the transaction will take place.

I think it is also pertinent to note that the GST has been a boon for the states and territories in terms of revenue that it has generated and, apart from the first two years when the policy was settling down, the GST has delivered significant gains for the ACT, as it has done for the other states. In the case of the ACT, for the years 2002-03 to 2007-08, there has been a gain ranging from \$10 million to \$96 million for the initial estimate of GST for each particular year. It is a very simple bill to put these amendments in place and the opposition will be supporting the bill.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (10.39): The Greens will be supporting this amendment to the Financial Management Act 1996, as we appreciate that the commonwealth is seeking to alter current arrangements with regard to the administration of costs payable by the ACT for the provision of GST payments. We understand that the amendment will enable the commonwealth to deduct administration costs payable by the territory regarding the receipt of GST payments.

The Greens also understand that the government is seeking to have this bill dealt with in an urgent manner as there are provisions that need to be made with regard to the upcoming 2009-10 budget. The Greens will support this request in order to allow adequate time for ACT Treasury to make appropriate arrangements.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Treasurer, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Services and Minister for Women) (10.40), in reply: I thank members for their contribution to the debate. The government requested the Financial Management Amendment Bill 2009 be urgently debated as the passage of this amendment impacts the appropriation required to be included in the appropriation bill for 2009-10. As you would be aware, this is the last sitting week before the budget is brought down in May.

The bill addresses an appropriation issue which has arisen due to the intergovernmental agreement which was signed late last year. The IGA implements a new model of cooperative federalism. It provides improvements in the quality and responsiveness of government services by reducing commonwealth prescriptions on service delivery and streamlines the administration of grant payments.

One of the improvements made under the IGA is to simplify the administrative arrangements for the goods and services tax. Prior to the IGA commencing, the commonwealth paid the territory its monthly GST revenue and then the territory paid back to the commonwealth our portion of GST administration costs.

The new and simplified agreement is that the commonwealth will net our GST administrative costs from our GST revenue, thereby reducing two payments to one. In order to fully benefit from the streamlined arrangements, this amendment to the Financial Management Act will allow the netting of GST administration costs to occur without the territory having to appropriate for these costs. Without this amendment, the territory would have to continue to provide appropriation for this expense, even though cash is not required to make the payment, and this would be a very inefficient practice.

This proposed amendment will not erode financial management controls as the territory has very little discretion in relation to this expenditure and the amendment has been narrowly drafted to only apply to GST administration costs. Transparency will also not be eroded as the GST revenue and GST administration costs will still be reflected separately in both the budget and financial statements.

Although this is a small amendment, it will ensure that the territory's financial management practices remain as efficient and as effective as possible. I thank the Assembly for dealing with this today.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Exhibition Park Corporation Repeal Bill 2009

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

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Motion by **Mrs Dunne** put:

That the debate be adjourned.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 6

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

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Debate adjourned.

ACT Policing—investigative powers

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services): I seek leave to move a motion relating to police investigative powers.

Leave not granted.

Standing and temporary orders—suspension

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (10.37): I move:

That so much of the standing and temporary orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Corbell from moving a motion in relation to outlaw motorcycle gangs.

I am somewhat surprised at the Liberal Party's approach in this matter. I had a conversation less than 10 minutes ago with Mr Hanson where he indicated that leave would be granted for me to move this motion today and I am, therefore, very surprised that the Liberal Party have changed their mind again. It just shows that, unfortunately, either we cannot take their word when they give it or they do not talk to each other about what it is they are trying to do. Either way, the Assembly should grant leave for this motion to be debated today.

We have seen significant debate in the community over the last week, since the tragic and very disturbing murder of two individuals in Tuggeranong, about the role of

outlaw motorcycle gangs in our community. We have seen debate nationally about the violence and the very obvious and disturbing violence that is occurring, unfortunately, on a regular basis in Sydney that involves outlaw motorcycle gangs and we have seen debate around the country, in different jurisdictions, about whether or not there is a need to increase police powers in relation to dealing with this element of organised crime.

What I hope to propose to the Assembly today is a very straightforward motion which simply indicates that there should be a detailed assessment provided to the Assembly on the nature and operation of existing territory laws to combat organised crime groups and any proposed review that may be required or is underway in relation to such laws, to provide information to the Assembly on issues arising—

Mrs Dunne: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: first of all, the minister is speaking to the motion but I would not—

Mr Hargreaves: Stop the clock.

MR SPEAKER: Clerk, stop the clock, please.

Mrs Dunne: Could I actually apologise to the Assembly. There was a miscommunication between Mr Hanson and me and a misunderstanding about the leave. Could I withdraw our lack of leave and can we cut to the chase?

MR SPEAKER: Probably not but we can probably cut short the suspension of standing orders debate on that basis.

MR CORBELL: I thank the Liberal Party for their apology and I welcome the change of tack. I was going to go on to outline the reasons why this motion is important and the issues that I believed needed to be addressed today. Given that the Liberal Party are now indicating that they will support a suspension of standing orders, I will leave those matters for the debate itself and I will simply thank the Liberal Party at least—I do not think the Greens are supportive of this motion—for their willingness to allow me to move this motion and then have it dealt with subsequently, I understand, later this sitting.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (10.51): On the suspension of standing orders, I do apologise to the Assembly. There were discussions about two or three courses of action on this this morning and I obviously was at the penultimate plan rather than the ultimate plan. I apologise to members for that. My understanding is that the minister will move his motion today and then it will be adjourned and debated cognately with Mr Hanson's motion tomorrow.

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

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (10.51): I thank the Assembly. I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) current community concerns regarding the activities of outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMCG) and apparent gang related violence in some Australian cities;
- (b) the relatively low level of OMCG membership and associated criminal activity in the ACT; and
- (c) the involvement of OMCG in organised crime in Australia and overseas;

(2) resolves that the Government provide advice to the Assembly on:

- (a) the nature and operation of existing Territory laws used to combat organised crime groups and any proposed review of such laws;
- (b) issues arising from the South Australian *Serious and Organised Crime (Control) Act 2008* including any available early evidence as to its operation and efficacy in reducing organised criminal activity;
- (c) any legislation introduced into the New South Wales Parliament to provide for special powers to combat OMCG;
- (d) any other legislative developments internationally that could be of relevance to combating organised crime groups in the Territory and any available evidence as to the efficacy and operation of such legislation; and
- (e) the human rights issues raised by legislation that provides for mechanisms similar to those contained in the South Australian legislation that allow for the banning of certain organisations in circumstances where a sufficient nexus can be established between the organisation and criminal activity; and

(3) resolves that this advice be provided to the Assembly by the last sitting day in June 2009.

Organised crime affects every Australian citizen. The financial cost of organised crime is estimated to be \$10 billion as of 2008. The human cost is often far more profound. Murder, assault, sexual servitude, extortion, gun dealing and drug dealing are the means by which organised crime makes its money and exerts its power.

The Australian Crime Commission has observed that criminal syndicates are formidable in terms of their capabilities, resources and resilience. By definition, they work outside of the law and they employ any unjust and inhumane means to get what they want. There is no doubt that a number of outlaw motorcycle clubs have been identified by police across the country as engaged in organised crime.

Police have noted that what sets these clubs apart from other criminal syndicates is the fact that they are hierarchical, disciplined and employ a lengthy process to test the loyalty and suitability of new members. Unlike other criminal syndicates that come

together for opportunistic reasons, criminal syndicates in the form of motorcycle clubs have strong cultural and hierarchical bonds that keep their activities secret.

All Australian jurisdictions have laws to tackle organised crime, and the ACT is no exception. Indeed, when I introduced, and the Sixth Assembly passed, the Crimes (Controlled Operations) Bill last year we did so as part of a national project to develop model laws that aid criminal investigation across state and territory borders.

The task of developing the model laws was given to a national joint working group established by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General and the Australasian Police Ministers Council, as it was then known. The joint working group was chaired by the commonwealth and included representatives of police and justice agencies from each jurisdiction.

Enacting nationally recognised law enabled the ACT to work with other police forces and justice agencies to dismantle organised crime. But that is a very different thing from a knee-jerk reaction to put in place similar laws to those in one or two other jurisdictions just because they suddenly seem like a good idea at the time.

The question in public debate now is whether the ACT needs laws specifically designed to target and disband outlaw motorcycle clubs. And it is a debate that we should have. But it is a debate that we should approach with much caution and it is a debate where we must not adopt a knee-jerk, populist or sensationalist response.

The laws put in place in jurisdictions such as South Australia and apparently proposed in New South Wales involve fundamental changes to the way a range of deeply seated legal principles, and indeed rights principles, operate. Issues such as freedom of association and the provision of evidence and whether or not it can be tested in a court are all matters that come into play in relation to laws such as South Australia's Serious and Organised Crime (Control) Act 2008.

For this reason, I believe that it is timely for the Assembly to commission a body of work that looks at the broad range of issues relevant in any decision that this place may make in relation to laws that target the activities of outlaw motorcycle gangs.

I turn to the motion itself. There are a range of issues that are worthy of some further analysis. First of all, it is important to recognise that the level of outlaw motorcycle gang activity in the ACT is small and has been for an extended period of time. There is a relatively low level of OMCG membership and there is, correspondingly, a relatively low level of associated criminal activity.

The police in the ACT have a good understanding of those individuals involved in outlaw motorcycle gangs here in the ACT and their dealings and any criminal activity that may be occurring. Obviously, with any changes in interstate law, there is the need to determine whether or not our existing laws remain contemporary and relevant and proportionate to our particular circumstances.

Therefore, I am proposing that the Assembly agrees to the commissioning of a report that looks at the following matters: firstly, the nature and operation of existing

territory laws used to combat organised crime groups and any review proposed or needed in relation to such laws. This would allow the Assembly to get advice on the effect and impact, for example, of the passage of laws in the Assembly last year, the Crimes (Controlled Operations) Act, as it is now known, and whether further work is needed in relation to those laws. It will also allow the Assembly to get an overview of issues relating to the operations of South Australia's Serious and Organised Crime (Control) Act 2008, including, and importantly, any available evidence as to its operation and efficacy in reducing organised criminal activity.

There are, no doubt, a range of views as to whether or not such legislation actually serves its purpose in effectively disrupting organised criminal activity in the form of outlaw motorcycle gangs or whether, indeed, it simply results in driving those activities further underground. These are issues that warrant further consideration by this place and further information should be provided to this place in relation to that.

We are also, of course, aware of the proposals put forward by the New South Wales government to provide for special powers to deal with their outlaw motorcycle gang activity. I think it is important to stress that Canberra is not Sydney. We are not seeing the gang-related violence that is occurring in that jurisdiction.

The disturbing and shocking murder of two individuals in Tuggeranong in the last week or so is, on the advice provided to the government by the police, not an incident that appears to be related to any broader gang-related activity, tension or violence. Indeed, the advice available to the police, and which the police have made public, is that that tragic and disturbing incident appears to be related to a domestic dispute between the parties involved. These are, of course, matters for the courts to determine.

But it is important to stress that we should not simply adopt the approach adopted by the New South Wales government without first understanding exactly what it is the New South Wales government is proposing—and we are yet to see the bill—and, secondly, whether or not such powers are actually required here in the ACT. Are they proportionate to our circumstances? Do they respond or is there a need for a response to the particular issues that we face locally? Further, is there a need—and this will be the point, I imagine, of broadest debate—to ensure that we do not provide for any potential displacement of activity from one jurisdiction to another? As I said, there are a range of views on this matter and it is important that, before making a decision as to whether or not any legislation is needed, the Assembly have the broadest possible range of information before it is to reach a considered view.

Next in my motion I propose to provide information to the Assembly on any legislative developments internationally that could be of relevance in this debate. There are a number of jurisdictions internationally that have implemented laws similar to the South Australian legislation. Their operation is of longer standing than South Australia's and the experience is better understood. It would be valuable for this place to have an assessment of that experience, any information that is available, to again inform the Assembly on this matter.

Finally, and importantly, there are a range of important human rights considerations that must be brought to bear in this debate. For example, in the South Australian legislation that outlaws certain types of organised criminal activity in relation to

outlaw motorcycle gangs, there are provisions that ban certain organisations. There are provisions that ban the association of individuals without the need to prove any criminal offence.

These are important matters, ones that go to the heart of human rights principles and which are very important in the context of the operation of our Human Rights Act, the compatibility of any potential legislation and the broader protection of those political and civil liberties that we believe to be so important in a democratic state. For all of these reasons, it is important that this evidence is brought to the table and that these issues and this information are made available for all members so that an informed and considered view can be reached.

The government is not of the view that it is appropriate to rush in legislation simply in response to the sensational media coverage of what are undoubtedly disturbing and violent incidents interstate. In fact, in many respects, the circumstances in the territory are unchanged from what they were one or two months ago or two or five years ago. We have a low level of outlaw motorcycle gang activity; we have a low level of associated crime; and on the face of it, notwithstanding the events in Tuggeranong in the last week, the situation is effectively unchanged.

But before we take a decision, let us do so with the best available evidence. Let us do so in a considered and reflective way that has regard to the broad range of complex issues at play. Let us not respond in a knee-jerk fashion, in a sensationalist way, because the matter has been hitting the headlines over the current weeks.

I say again: Canberra is not Sydney. We are not seeing drive-by shootings; we are not seeing continued assaults in public places; we are not seeing the apparent turf war that is occurring in New South Wales. Indeed, we have seen over the last few days a major influx of outlaw motorcycle gang members occurring in a peaceful manner, occurring without significant disruption to our community and occurring in a way that was well monitored and controlled by the police.

Let us progress this debate in a considered fashion. Let us have regard to the developments interstate but let us draw our opinions and ultimately our decisions about whether or not reforms are needed to ACT law on the basis of the facts rather than a response to sensationalist headlines and media coverage over the last few weeks.

That is the intent of the motion. I would propose that this report be developed by the government, by my Department of Justice and Community Safety and by ACT Policing, and be provided to the Assembly by the last sitting day in June. I have put that date of June forward because that is the legal time frame which the New South Wales government have indicated will be the period in which they will introduce their legislation into their state parliament. So even though they have made certain policy announcements in the last few weeks, they have indicated that the bills will not be before their parliament before June.

Now is the time to reflect; now is the time to gather the evidence; now is the time to provide the information and then make a considered decision on the most appropriate way forward. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Mrs Dunne**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Health—Wanniassa medical centre Paper and statement by minister

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

Health and Disability—Standing Committee (Sixth Assembly)—Report 9—
Closure of the Wanniassa Medical Centre—Government response, together with
a tabling statement

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

Leave granted.

MS GALLAGHER: It gives me great pleasure today to table the ACT government's response to the Standing Committee on Health and Disability's report No 9 on the closure of the Wanniassa medical centre. I would like to thank the standing committee for its consideration of this important community issue and acknowledge the stakeholder and community members who provided input into the inquiry process.

The ACT government welcomed the committee's report, which highlights a number of issues, including the shortage of practising GPs in the ACT, the roles of corporations in health service delivery and the impact of the Wanniassa medical centre closure on the patients and GPs in the Tuggeranong Valley.

This inquiry was prompted by community concern over the closure of the Wanniassa medical centre. The Tuggeranong Valley has suffered a number of general practice closures and amalgamations in the recent past. Patients of the Wanniassa medical centre are understandably distressed by the prospect of changing practices or travelling further for consultations. Many of them are worried about losing access to their regular general practitioner or having to wait long periods for consultations.

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the whole of the ACT is currently suffering from a shortage of general practitioners. According to the report on government services, the national average for full-time workload equivalent GPs per 100,000 population is 86.1. However, the ACT rate is lower, at 66.8 per 100,000. This is causing problems for the community, such as difficulty in finding a general practice that will take new patients, lower rates of bulk-billing and long waiting times for consultation.

Closure of the Wanniassa medical centre by Primary Health Care and the transfer of doctors to the Phillip health centre highlight some of the issues surrounding the corporatisation of medical services. The ACT community has expressed some concern over this trend. There is a role for corporate medical centres like the ones owned by Primary Health Care Ltd, and these centres have assisted in relieving some of the pressure of hospital emergency departments and raising bulk-billing levels. That said,

for many people, including many elderly or chronically ill people, these centres are neither suitable nor desirable. The ACT government supports a variety of health services that offer consumers a choice.

The ACT government agrees to five of the standing committee's six recommendations, and one recommendation is noted. The ACT primary health care strategy 2006-09 provides the strategic direction for the delivery of primary care services in the ACT. The strategy recognises that access to health care should be equitable and that all people in the ACT should have access to a range of health services and providers regardless of where they live.

The ACT government is currently implementing a number of initiatives in order to improve the availability of general practice services in the ACT. In 2008, for example, the ACT government, in partnership with the Division of General Practice, employed a general practice marketing and support officer. This is a four-year initiative to help local general practices attract and recruit GPs to the ACT. In particular, this role is helping general practice navigate the multiple and complex processes required for recruitment of overseas trained doctors.

ACT Health and the ACT Division of General Practice held a joint forum in 2008 focusing on barriers to recruiting overseas GPs to the ACT. An outcome of this forum was a commitment from stakeholders to support the removal of unnecessary barriers to the recruitment of overseas doctors through the ACT area-of-need process until the ACT reaches the national average of GPs per head of population.

Other outcomes of the forum have been that the ACT government has been running a series of advertisements promoting the ACT as a great place for GPs to work, while the ACT Division of General Practice has been promoting its website as a central resource for local practices to individually advertise their general practice vacancies. These activities, in conjunction with the close working relationship with the ACT Australian Medical Association, have reduced the area-of-need application process from around four weeks to less than a week.

Another significant ACT Health initiative has been the reconvening of the ACT GP workforce working group. In 2007 ACT Health, in partnership with the ACT AMA, agreed that there needed to be a peak body to inform discussion, help set direction and consider general practice workforce strategies across the ACT. The workforce working group includes representatives from the ACT Division of General Practice, ANU Medical School, the ACT Medical Board, the Australian government Department of Health and Ageing and other major stakeholders.

I am informed that, to date, two projects have arisen as a consequence of this group's deliberation—that is, a study of sessional or part-time GPs which aims to examine why some GPs do not practise full time and how they could be better supported to work more sessions. The Australian government, in partnership with ACT Health, the Division of General Practice and the ANU Medical School, is funding the sessional GP study.

A pilot project partnership between ACT Health, the local GP training authority and several volunteer general practices involves the rotation of a sample group of junior

doctors from ACT Health into the general practices as a way to encourage them to consider a career in general practice.

The ACT government is also currently undertaking a scoping study to investigate the establishment of nurse-led walk-in centres for the ACT, to improve access for patients who require treatment for episodic, non-ongoing minor illnesses and injuries. It is intended that the walk-in centres will be fully integrated with existing services and will support and connect with activities and service provision of GP and other health providers, and that piece of work is almost complete.

In addition, the ACT has been successful in lobbying the Australian government and a local GP training provider to increase the number of GP training places in the ACT. The ACT government, through the election campaign, have pledged \$12 million over four years to support and grow the ACT general practice workforce. The GP package will provide: annual scholarships for years 3 and 4 medical students and graduates who commit to undertaking training and returning to work in the region; \$300 per day GP teaching payments for Canberra GPs to provide teaching and training opportunities for ANU Medical School trainees; an ACT GP development fund to provide a biannual grants pool of \$1 million a year for one-off payments to practices that establish initiatives that attract staff or that foster the establishment of new services; a new in-hours locum medical service to support GPs in the care of residents of aged-care facilities; and a GP placement program for four junior doctors, building upon the current pilot project of rotating junior medical doctors through GP practices, which is extremely popular with those practices that are being involved.

These initiatives are aimed at increasing access to general practitioners for all community members, wherever they live and whatever their health or disability status. By increasing the numbers of GPs practising in the ACT, by improving the range of primary care medical services available and by ensuring our general practice workforce are supported in the work they do, ACT residents will enjoy better access to primary health care when and where they need it.

I thank the committee for its close examination of the closure of the Wanniasa medical centre and the complex issues that surround it. The findings of this review will inform ACT government policy, including the GP task force and further initiatives, as we continue to work to provide the ACT community with an excellent primary medical system.

Lowland native grassland investigation Paper and statement by minister

Debate resumed from 26 March 2009, on motion by **Mr Corbell**:

That the Assembly takes note of the paper.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (11.15): I wanted to rise to speak briefly to this report today. I thank the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment for putting forward this report, a report that my predecessor, Dr Foskey, spoke about at some considerable length. The delivery of this report is a valuable tool for both this

Assembly and this community to take note of. The report provides a detailed assessment, analysis and series of recommendations about the state of the ACT's grasslands.

The grasslands in the ACT are a habitat of some significance. We know—and the report details with great accuracy, I think—the state of grasslands and the fact that there is a very small proportion of these grasslands left compared to the historical range of this habitat. I think the report does an excellent job both of looking at the threats to the grasslands and of making recommendations on what we should do in the future.

What I would say is that, in the context of recent public debate, it is important that we not lose sight of the broad range of threats identified by the commissioner to two grasslands here in the ACT. I think there has been a great deal of debate around and focus on the overgrazing by kangaroos and the recommendation of the commissioner to undertake an immediate cull of kangaroos. I think that is understandably so. But I think it is important that we do not lose sight of the fact that the commissioner identified a range of threats to the grasslands in the ACT.

Those threats include overgrazing by stock and rabbits as well as kangaroos, but the threat also includes weeds and inappropriate mowing. I think these are all issues that we need to take into account and look closely at. I look forward to the government's response to the commissioner's report in looking at this full range of threats. I am quite sure that the government is mindful of all of these issues and is not just caught up in the public debate around the issue of overgrazing by kangaroos. So I think it is important to stress that and to make sure that we do not get, in the context of the public debate, focused on just this one threat and that we understand all of the threats to our grasslands.

We have also got the issue of the encroachment of development, and this is going to become a very real issue as we move forward, particularly in areas of the Majura Valley and to the south of Fyshwick in the area in and around the prison, which is generally known as the Jerrabomberra Creek area. These are areas where there is a significant amount of the recognised grassland. There are some areas of particular quality. With all the proposals that are on the table for the development in those areas, including around the airport and also south of Fyshwick with this eastern broadacre study, it is important that we move to protect the grasslands.

In particular, I believe that we should move to protect the area immediately north of Canberra airport. That is an area of natural temperate grasslands that are highly valued, that are in a good state at the moment and that do require protection. So I support the commissioner's recommendation that this area be declared a nature reserve, and I think we should move to do that urgently.

I would also make a note about an area on the western side of the current Majura Road at the foothills of Mount Ainslie, an area known as west Majura. In 2004 the Labor Party gave an undertaking to create a reserve for this area, and it is my understanding that the reserve has still not been created. So, five years later, despite the election promise in 2004, the west Majura grassland is not being protected, and I

think that is something that the government needs to look at very closely and think hard about how it is going to take action. I think the commissioner has identified that as another area of importance, and something I am certainly concerned about is the possible realignment of Majura Road and the impact that it might have on grasslands in these areas, as well as the impact it might have on mountain biking facilities and other community assets in the Majura Valley. I think that these are questions that need to be addressed quickly as part of the commissioner's recommendations and as part of the government's response.

So I would like to conclude by saying that, as I noted at the start, I welcome the fact that the minister tabled in the Assembly last week the report prepared by the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. I do note that Dr Cooper was assisted in the preparation of the report by a number of scientists—namely, Dr Ken Hodgkinson, Ms Sarah Sharp and Dr Lyn Hinds. The report was also reviewed by a panel of experts prior to its release. I think that that underlines the comments I was making earlier about the quality and the depth of the report. I think it underlines the fact that the government needs to take this report seriously, and that we need to look at the considerable number of recommendations made by the commissioner.

I look forward to receiving the government's response to this report; it is something that the Greens are very focused on. We do need to protect the grasslands in the ACT, our habitat, and it is important for the government to take action soon and respond to this report in a timely manner. I look forward to receiving those recommendations and having a further debate in this place about what steps the government will take in order to ensure that protection.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (11.22): This is an important report, and I congratulate the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment on her report and for the thorough process that she has gone through to provide this report to the Assembly and, through the Assembly, to the people of the ACT. I would like to acknowledge, as Mr Rattenbury has done, the substantial scientific backing for this report. The fact that this has been peer reviewed before its publication shows that this is a report that we in this Assembly and the government must take very seriously.

This report puts a huge responsibility on anyone who is a land manager in the ACT and who has responsibility for some of our endangered grasslands. This gives us an opportunity to have a very substantial rethink on the way we manage our native grasslands in the ACT so that we manage them for the future.

The Canberra Liberals have a proud history in relation to the lowland grassland reserves in the ACT. It was the Canberra Liberals under my former boss, Gary Humphries, who was the environment minister at the time, that moved the Gungahlin town centre. We moved an entire town centre and set aside substantial areas, at substantial cost to a struggling ACT economy at the time, to ensure the Gungahlin grassland reserves were maintained and that the endangered species dependent upon those grasslands were also maintained.

Over time, there has been a range of areas that have been put into reserve to address this, but, at the same time, we have seen some extraordinarily poor land management

practices which have put substantial swathes of these grasslands at risk. I think that we cannot ignore what could be called the elephant in the room—or perhaps the kangaroo in the room. We must draw attention to the abject failure over a very long period of the Department of Defence to effectively manage their land in the ACT. We had the terrible pantomime last year over the HMAS Belconnen naval transmission station and what went on there.

We have had reports, which are substantiated by Dr Cooper's report here today, of substantial degradation in the Majura area, which is the responsibility of the Department of Defence. I am glad to see that, in the last few days, the Department of Defence, under the leadership of Dr Kelly, has seen the light. I hope that we will see an effective and humane way of dealing with the problem of overpopulation and superabundance of eastern grey kangaroos on navy and defence land generally.

But the failures of the Department of Defence are only one example; there are failures of land management across the territory, with regard to both land held by private leaseholders and land in public management. I think that we need to use the report on ACT native lowland grasslands by the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment to take stock of the situation and to improve what we do.

I encourage the government to respond effectively and quickly to this report so that we can find a way forward and also so that there are maximum opportunities for us to take advantage of any possible culling that needs to be done in the culling season. I know that people find it distasteful, but my responsibility as the shadow minister for the environment is to ensure that we have a balanced approach.

I applaud the Chief Minister for his approach to this over a number of years, and I reflect on some comments that he made last year—that it is easy for people to champion the eastern grey kangaroo; it is not so easy for people to champion more insignificant and less obvious endangered species. I think it is time that the people of the ACT were more concerned about the survival of the whole ecosystem rather than just one species which appears to be superabundant. I congratulate Dr Cooper on her report, and I look forward to the government's response.

MS BURCH (Brindabella) (11.27): In the few moments I have to speak, I would like to concentrate on the issues relating to kangaroo management on our grasslands. Kangaroos are a highly visible and major part of the grassy ecosystems and of the ACT. They are Australia's largest native herbivore and they have the capacity to dramatically change the condition and the habitat of our ecosystem. Of course, kangaroos also affect the people of Canberra, most often in a positive way. But they can also have a negative social and economic impact.

On 17 March the government released a draft ACT kangaroo management plan, and input from the community and stakeholder groups is being sought as the plan is finalised. This is a science-based plan that appraises the environmental, economic and social impacts of kangaroos in detail and makes recommendations for their sustainable management, placing particular emphasis on the need to conserve the territory's grassy ecosystem.

The ACT has a good recent history of policy making for kangaroo management but until now we have lacked a comprehensive and strategic approach to managing kangaroos across the territory as a whole. The former ACT kangaroo advisory committee produced a number of informative reports that raise important issues that are addressed in the plan as well as other contemporary issues.

Much has changed over the past decade. Most notable is the number of kangaroos that now inhabit the urban areas of Canberra. Canberra populations have grown and so has the urban footprint of Canberra. In fact, kangaroos are now so abundant in the city that mobs of roos are commonly seen grazing on ovals, golf courses, urban open space and even front and back yards.

Another major change that has occurred is our knowledge and appreciation of the native grassy ecosystems of the limestone plains. It is clearly understood that the native grasslands and the grassy box gum lands of the ACT are nationally endangered and critically endangered respectively. There are several components of species of grasslands and woodlands that are also endangered. These include the grassland earless dragon, the striped legless lizard, the golden sun moth and several species of woodland birds.

The ACT has acted responsibly and made considerable sacrifices by putting aside substantial areas of grassland and woodland for nature conservation by adding them to our protected area system. The Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment makes further recommendations to expand the reserve system. The ACT is diligently managing the valuable ecosystems under its care and, as our knowledge of these ecosystems and the threatening processes that impact upon them expands, we will adapt our management strategies in response.

The commissioner's report adds to this knowledge and identifies specific areas where extra attention is required in the short term, and in some cases in the longer term, to preserve our grasslands. Perhaps the most urgent message from the report is the need to act to relieve grazing pressure from an over-abundance of kangaroos in some areas.

A key change that has far-reaching consequences for kangaroos in the ACT has been the removal of predators such as the dingo, and more recently the cessation of kangaroo hunting by people. This has, over time, led to kangaroos building up in large numbers in the grassy ecosystems and it is likely that there are more kangaroos in the territory today than there were 100 years ago.

There is general agreement among scientists and in the community at large that there are too many kangaroos and that the scientific evidence exists to support this. Eastern grey kangaroos have a central and even vital place in the ecology of grassy ecosystems but without natural controls on kangaroo population growth eventually the kangaroos will eat themselves out. In doing so, they will decimate the ground cover of the woodlands and grasslands and potentially drive other grassland or woodland dependent species to extinction.

Any doubt that this government's assessment on the heavy grazing by kangaroos is having an important environmental impact in the lowland grasslands and woodlands is

answered by the report of the inquiry into grassland management by the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. The draft kangaroo management plan covers a broad range of policy areas. Those that are more likely to interest the broader community include appropriate kangaroo density in lowland grassy ecosystems.

Recent scientific research on a range of ACT sites indicates that a kangaroo density in the range of approximately 0.6 to 1.5 per hectare is optimal for conservation of lowland grassy ecosystems such as the endangered natural temperate grasslands and yellow box-red gum grassy woodland and associated endangered species. Some grassland and woodland reserves already have kangaroo densities exceeding or on the threshold of 1.5 kangaroos per hectare and action is required to immediately address this to ensure that the ecosystems are not damaged. Kangaroo populations can grow very rapidly.

Another item in the draft kangaroo management plan covers relocation. Relocation is not proposed for the purpose of reducing kangaroo numbers. Relocation involves moving animals from one location to another. To date, translocation has only ever been attempted for small numbers and even then its success is questionable. Licences have never been issued in the ACT for hand rearing or releasing of eastern grey kangaroos in the ACT. This plan proposes that this policy continue. The hand rearing of young kangaroos leads to many difficult problems in later life for kangaroos themselves and the public.

In the grasslands report, which was released for comment almost at the same time as the release of the draft kangaroo management plan, we have the benefit of the report from the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment from her inquiry into the management of the ACT grasslands. In conducting her inquiry, Dr Cooper had access to a wide range of scientific expertise from outside the department as well as to the departmental managers, researchers and community groups.

In summary, the commissioner identifies a number of threatening processes confronting the remaining grasslands. The kangaroos are an important one of those and Dr Cooper recommends immediate action to relieve grazing pressures and to hold kangaroos at a sustainable number and density. As highlighted, the draft kangaroo management plan proposes a grassland conservation density for eastern grey kangaroos in the range of approximately 0.6 to 1.5 per hectare in the grasslands area.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the draft kangaroo management plan also outlines the importance of research to support evidence-based management. The ACT is already investing in research needed to provide information that is scientifically sound. For example, the ACT has done the first study of the eastern grey kangaroo population ecology and from that work an interactive model has been developed that allows land managers to predict how kangaroo populations may grow and the results of a proposed culling program. Thus, it enables land managers to develop sustainable long-term solutions to population reductions.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (11.36): I would like to start today by welcoming the report that the minister tabled in the

Assembly last week. It was prepared by Dr Maxine Cooper, the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. The ACT's natural temperate grasslands are a threatened ecosystem. They are an important ecosystem, not just in the context of our natural environment here in the ACT but also nationally.

The grasslands are home to some unique species such as the grassland earless dragon and the golden sun moth. It has occurred to me that perhaps as a community we have not yet come to placing a full value on these ecosystems. I hope that this report will not only assist with their ongoing management but also raise the profile of these places in the consciousness of many Canberrans.

Too often the images that we see of the grasslands are images of degraded and dusty landscapes. Yet when they are healthy, when the threats are removed, they are beautiful places that give a hint of what this region was like in the past prior to European settlement. We are lucky as a community to live in a bush capital, but with that comes the responsibility to look after both the grasslands and the woodlands in the ACT. However, this report has identified that only 40 per cent of the territory's native grasslands are in good condition. The other 60 per cent are either approaching a critical threshold or are already in critical condition.

Urban development has left us only fragmented areas and now these are also at risk from overgrazing by rabbits and kangaroos as well as from weed infestations and inappropriate mowing regimes. Of course, there has been much made in the media of one of the most prominent issues that challenge us in relation to the management of our grassland, that of the impact of overgrazing by kangaroos on the grasslands and the species that live there.

The commissioner has made several urgent recommendations on minimising greater pressure caused by kangaroos in the Majura Valley, Jerrabomberra Valley and Belconnen. There probably is not one member in this place that is unaware of the controversy surrounding the cull of eastern grey kangaroos at the Belconnen naval transmission site last year and the ongoing debate around the role that kangaroos do or do not play in damaging our grasslands.

However, may I just say at the outset that overgrazing by kangaroos is just one of the many threats to our grasslands, albeit a significant one. Overgrazing is also happening by rabbits, cattle and sheep and we need to ensure that these threats are also managed effectively. However, the sad situation in regard to kangaroos that perhaps does not apply to the other overgrazing species is that we continue to be challenged about how to remove the threat in a way that is sensible, sensitive and part of a long-term management framework.

The Greens are pleased that the government has, at last, pulled together a comprehensive management plan for kangaroos that hopefully will avoid, or at least minimise, the requirement for large annual kangaroo culls, something that most of us find distasteful at best and highly disturbing at worst. I have had much information presented to me over the past few months from both sides of the debate about whether to cull or not to cull and still I have not managed to find a solution whereby we can prevent culling while preserving the value of our precious grasslands.

The numbers of kangaroos that we are talking about are large. Relocating hundreds of animals does not appear to be an option as kangaroos do not take kindly to being cornered or captured. Experts have indicated that kangaroos can suffer physically from the trauma of being captured and once relocated there are many other pressures that significantly impact on their chances of survival, such as being in unfamiliar territory, susceptibility to food shortages, the danger of road traffic and competition with other groups of kangaroos.

While there is research being undertaken into fertility treatment, there is some distance to go before these approaches can be applied safely across large populations. Clearly, though, we must continue to investigate these options. However, at this point I would like to make it very clear that I do not consider there is a vendetta against kangaroos here in the ACT by the commissioner, the department or, for that matter, the government. We face some terrible choices around the management of large numbers of kangaroos in order to protect our grasslands and woodlands. I suspect that all those involved would gladly wish it was not so.

As I indicated, kangaroos are only one of the threats identified in Dr Cooper's report. Overgrazing is also occurred by cattle, sheep and rabbits. At least two of these threats are surely easy for us to solve. There are recommendations to move stock off the grasslands areas and these should be implemented immediately. Sustainable stock grazing regimes should be implemented. In some cases, stock have already been removed and improvements in the grassland regeneration are already being noted.

Of course, we can put the responsibility for one of the great threats to the grasslands firmly at our own door. I refer to the threat of weeds. Chilean needle grass, blackberries, St John's wort, serrated tussock and thistles are out there. The commissioner recommends that we embark on weed management action immediately, particularly around the suburb of Yarralumla, home to five of our grasslands, and in Belconnen at Umbagog Park north and Kaleen east paddocks. Some of these sites merely require changes to mowing practices. Grasslands do not take kindly to being overly mowed, aside from the fact that mowing often exposes them to the introduction of even more weeds.

These are the kinds of actions that the government can move quickly on. However, weed management in the ACT is not a new issue and it will be an ongoing one. We are now home to hundreds of exotic species across the territory and some of these particularly affect our native environment. It requires time and effort to implement weed management and a vigilance on the part of land managers. It may not seem to be a key priority but the threats to our native vegetation from weeds are not to be underestimated and the government's weed eradication program needs to be well funded to manage this. It also needs professionals to be part of that program. We need to ensure that the government is working closely with rural leaseholders to cooperate on weed management programs.

I note with interest one of the key areas and one of the recommendations that may well have become muted in the political process of the commissioner distilling the recommendations and the minister outlining his response here in the Assembly last

week. Dr Hodgkinson identified a number of grassland sites on which to undertake ecology burns in the autumn of 2009. Some of these sites, including at Campbell, Barton, Evatt, Yarralumla and Florey, were assessed to be approaching a critical threshold with respect to canopy closure and required a burn either to clear canopy cover or weeds. However, Dr Cooper has recommended only experimental burns, as undertaking such burns in our urban areas could be difficult. These burns should now be considered urgent purely because time is getting away from us. I look forward to hearing that the government will move ahead quickly on this.

We know that government has not always moved quickly on issues. In 2004, their election platform contained a commitment to ensure that the grassland at west Majura was made a reserve, along with Campbell Park. This would form a parcel of land that joins with both the Mt Ainslie reserve and an area of yellow box-red gum grassy woodland. Nearly five years later, there is no reserve status for west Majura. One of the commendations of the report is to resolve the heritage status of this and other reserves in a timely manner. As Dr Cooper has done, I call on the government, in collaboration with the Department of Defence, to expand the Mt Ainslie reserve to include these two areas. I would suggest it would be useful to see this protection put in place before ACT Roads signs off on plans for the Majura Parkway.

A similar lack of urgency was implied by the minister in his speech last week in regard to the culling of kangaroos. He also made urgent recommendations in relation to rabbits and weeds. Mr Corbell said the government is in the process of finalising its weed strategy, which is good news. However, the problem of rabbits appears somewhat less urgent, with the government having undertaken to commence a review. Excuse my cynicism, but I hope that the minister can somehow, from his departmental process, draw some guidance to take urgent action on these matters.

The commissioner also raises a number of policy and legislative issues that could be improved—mechanisms that exist in the ACT but also with federal law and cross-jurisdictional management. She calls for streamlining of the ACT government's planning and nature conservation legislation to ensure that the Nature Conservation Act, which is under review as we speak, covers all land management matters.

Also highlighted is the federal government's EPBC act which should be changed to allow it to be more responsive to the needs of grassland ecosystems. There is also need for coordination and cooperation across the range of land managers responsible for the management of our grasslands. Of course, we can have all the goodwill in the world and reports from experts tell us that things should be done to protect our native ecosystems, but without strong enforcement of and compliance with recommended measures, it will continue to be death by a thousand cuts for our grasslands.

There is a great deal of public discussion to be had about the culling of kangaroos and other such matters placing pressure on our grasslands. The Greens look forward to hearing not only how the government will respond to the recommendations in the report but also to seeing clearer indications that we are getting real outcomes on the ground to improve the health of our grasslands.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and

Emergency Services) (11.46), in reply: I would like to thank members for their contribution to the debate this morning in relation to this report. As members have noted, this report is an important one for the management of one of the ACT's most endangered ecosystems, lowland native grasslands.

It is worth reflecting that only one per cent of the pre-European extent of this ecosystem remains present. Of that one per cent, five per cent is present here in the ACT; so we have special responsibilities and special obligations to manage the ecosystem and to protect it to the greatest extent possible. As members have noted, Dr Cooper's report outlines the very broad range of issues and challenges confronting these ecosystems and the management of them. In particular, members have noted the issues around culling of kangaroos. I welcome the comments of members that would appear to indicate that culling on a scientific basis, and in as humane a manner as possible, is a response that needs to remain on the table to manage the future viabilities of these ecosystems.

As members have also noted, however, it is not solely an issue around culling. There are a broad range of other matters that need to be brought into consideration in the management of these areas. Those include factors such as mowing regimes. They include factors such as adequate fencing and management practices, particularly by non-public land managers and also non-ACT land managers such as the Department of Defence. Importantly, there is also the issue of the viability of smaller sections of grasslands which are now surrounded in the urban environment.

I think here Dr Cooper makes some of her most valuable recommendations in that she indicates there needs to be a program potentially for offsets. If small isolated pockets of ecosystems are not really going to be sustainable in the long term—if they have no connectivity with the broader ecosystems that would support, for example, the passage of fauna and birds between one area and another—there is potentially a need to consider offsets that effectively concede that some ecosystems, small isolated patches, are not viable into the long term. Steps can then be taken in compensation to potentially strengthen the viability of larger extant pieces of lowland native grassland. These recommendations in particular warrant serious consideration. Indeed, all of Dr Cooper's recommendations will be dealt with with close attention by the government.

As I indicated when I accepted Dr Cooper's report, the government will respond as soon as possible. I note Mrs Dunne's comments in relation to the timing around issues of culling. The government is very cognisant of those matters and will endeavour to make sure decisions are made in a timely fashion having regard to the seasonal issues associated with culling. Indeed, the Chief Minister has also indicated a framework, in draft form, through the kangaroo management plan that will allow us to have regard to those matters in a timely fashion.

Finally, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is worth commenting on the significant body of work undertaken by the commissioner. She and her office have brought together a very large effort to deliver this report. We must thank her and her staff for that. But we should also thank her for the work she has done to build a broad scientific consensus on the most appropriate way of managing these grasslands. That is really

what this report represents. It is a consensus of a broad range of scientists, biologists, people involved in grassland management, people involved in the whole range of areas that are relevant to these particular ecosystems. It was the bringing together of that extensive body of work through the reference group that the commissioner established which underpinned the real authority of this report. I thank her for that work.

In conclusion, I think it also highlights that the approach the government has adopted is one which is has sought to be a considered one, an informed one and one which is a long-term view. My predecessor as minister, Mr Stanhope, commissioned this report. He is to be congratulated for doing so because it provides us with a strong basis for future action and decision making. Equally, the work that has gone in over many months and years to develop the draft kangaroo management plan is also evidence of a long-term prospective being brought to these matters. The government is thankful for the generally supportive comments of members of the Assembly in relation to these two reports. I thank members for their contribution.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

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 11.52 am to 2 pm.

Questions without notice

Children—care and protection

MR SESELJA: My question is to the Minister for Children and Young People. Minister, on 2 July last year in this place Mr Smyth asked the then Minister for Children and Young People why qualified and experienced Australian workers had been told not to bother applying for positions in the child care and protection agency. Ms Gallagher, in answering the question, said:

... we will be able to fill the vacancies ... we have been unable to fill locally or nationally ...

Minister, why has the government recruited British workers to replace Australian workers?

MR BARR: The government has not.

Hospitals—dischargeable patients

MS HUNTER: My question is to the Minister for Health and concerns bed blockage at the Canberra Hospital. A couple of cases were highlighted in the *Canberra Times* at the weekend. Can the minister advise the Assembly of the number of dischargeable patients presently in ACT hospitals, the length of time those patients have been waiting for appropriate community-based services and the cost to the health budget of this bed blockage?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Ms Hunter for the question. I do have the details of that; I just don't have them on my person. With respect to the number that I have seen recently, if we exclude elderly nursing home type patients from this number, and if we are looking at people who are generally under the age of 60, from the briefing provided to me I think it is six. The cost of providing care packages for those individuals in the community equals about \$3.3 million a year. The length of time varies, the age varies from quite young to mid-50s and the reasons they are in hospital vary as well. I will check the actual number; it is either six or eight. But that does exclude nursing home type patients. If they are eligible for a nursing home placement and we cannot find one, they are in the hospital as well.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Hunter, a supplementary question?

MS HUNTER: Minister, why is there no whole-of-government approach to ensure people living with disability can access seamless support across ACT government services?

MS GALLAGHER: There is a whole-of-government strategy. Primarily, the lead agencies are ACT Health and Disability, Housing and Community Services. One of the challenges is in relation to the financial supports, and also appropriate accommodation and what the individual person's requirements and desires are. It is actually a very complex piece of work. I know that even up to very senior executives meet to discuss individual patients, to see whether there is the opportunity to move them into the disability support system, but it is not always black and white.

We do work very hard to free up those places in hospital. We acknowledge that hospital is not the right place in which individuals should spend long periods of time after their acute illness has been dealt with. But short of giving a blank cheque to disability, which is not the current way that we fund disability, to provide additional support over and above what they are budget funded to do—in some cases some of the care requirements are well in excess of \$150,000 a year. For the individuals that are currently awaiting appropriate placement, the cost is \$3.3 million.

This is an issue that we juggle and struggle with throughout budget cycles. Those agencies are not working in silos; they are working together. But if there is an appropriate place in the community, if the support packages are not there and being funded, it makes it impossible, unless somebody leaves the disability system or passes away in it, to free up resources.

We have injected huge amounts of money into disability services, and any government will continue to need to do that. Also, we have had some additional funding from the commonwealth—not as much as we would like, but certainly there has been some matching of that money in the CSTDA. That went a long way to meeting unmet need in the community, but it has not gone to delivering for all of the need in the community, which is something that the government continues to struggle with and consider in the context of the budgets.

Children—care and protection

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Children and Young People. Minister, in today's edition of the *Canberra Times*, you were quoted as saying that the British workers recruited to care and protection agencies were better qualified than local workers. In the same story, the former minister, Ms Gallagher, was quoted as saying that the British workers were recruited because "it was impossible to find enough child protection workers in Australia". Minister, who is right—you or Ms Gallagher?

MR BARR: I do not believe that the two statements are in any way exclusive. The government's position simply is that we hire the best available care and protection workers. We do not have a nationality preference. We do not seek to write into our approach to recruitment that someone must be of a particular nationality in order to be considered for employment. We are interested in the best care and protection workers. The 1,200 children and young people who are served by the office of children and youth are our number one priority, as they should be. Our concern, our primary concern, is to ensure that we recruit the best possible care and protection workers. It is a merit based process and people should not be excluded on the basis of their nationality.

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, a supplementary question?

MRS DUNNE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, if it is so hard to find Australian care and protection workers, why did you get rid of the ones that we already have?

MR BARR: The government has not got rid of any workers. No-one has been retrenched. Temporary contracts that were put in place while we went about a broad ranging recruitment strategy—there were temporary contracts put in place—have expired and new staff have been recruited. We are now at our full complement of care and protection workers. That is important for the 1,200 kids who rely on the quality care and protection workers in this territory.

Alexander Maconochie Centre

MS BURCH: My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Could the minister please give the Assembly an update on the Alexander Maconochie Centre?

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I invite Mr Hanson to pick up his pencil and start taking notes. He is going to love this—not a lot, but he is going to love it.

It is heartening that the first prisoners were transported to the Alexander Maconochie Centre yesterday, a facility that I note the ACT Liberal opposition never supported despite the draconian conditions of the Belconnen Remand Centre.

Mr Hanson: It is you who kept them there for a year longer than they needed to be.

MR HARGREAVES: Oh, they have started. Thirty seconds.

Mr Coe: Is it secure, John?

MR HARGREAVES: Yes. Who was it that said, “Our fundamental argument is that they should not have gone ahead with it in the first place”? It was Mr Seselja. The united Liberal Party—and there is an oxymoron, if ever I heard one, or maybe it was an ordinary moron; I am not sure—view is that no prison will be built at Hume. No prison will be built at Hume. Who said that? You are very quiet, Brendan. Mr Smyth said that. I suggest you guys just sit back and enjoy the show.

Mr Coe: Are you going to retire—

MR HARGREAVES: Ha, ha. That is clever. Go to the top of the class. Don’t take your book, sunshine. You won’t be there long enough.

Mr Speaker, while the government readily admits that it has taken longer to get to the point than we expected, it was vital that the issues which arose in the security system were rectified by the contractors before the prisoners began moving in so that the AMC was safe for the community, staff and prisoners. It was important—the crocodile tears are incredible!—for the government not to rush the process and make sure we get it right. What we have over here is Tweedledum and Tweedlestupid trying to tell me they are not going to have a jail, and then Mr Hanson says, “Get on with it quicker.” Well, get your act together if you want to be a united bunch. You are not united at all. It is a leadership challenge. It is a leadership shot.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR HARGREAVES: Maybe that was just a cheap shot. You have made your big point.

Mrs Dunne: Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Minister Hargreaves, resume your seat, please.

MR HARGREAVES: Time, gentlemen, please.

Mrs Dunne: Mr Speaker, could I ask you to draw Mr Hargreaves’s attention to the standing order that requires that the answer be directly relevant to the question.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you. The point of order is upheld. Mr Hargreaves, let us have an update on the prison, please.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Despite the scaremongering tactics of some opposite, the prison is a safe, secure and state-of-the-art facility. The security system at the AMC has been independently certified by Webb Australia Group, which assisted in the development of the specifications for the security system and throughout the project have been tasked with ensuring that the security system met the performance requirements of the specifications as it was installed, tested and commissioned. We have delivered on something that they were not going to and they

have got the hypocrisy to sit here and say that we are not doing it properly. What rank hypocrisy!

The opposition benches called for an independent assessor of the prison. That was always part of the contract. Webb Australia has been involved in the commissioning of around 30 prisons.

Mr Smyth: Do you understand the—

MR HARGREAVES: It was never going to be done in Hume, Mr Smyth. I suggest you stop embarrassing yourself.

Mr Speaker, on 20 March 2009, Bovis Lend Lease, on the instruction of Webb Australia, handed the prison over to the territory. I have to record my appreciation of the officers of Corrective Services for all the work they put in for a very long time. I would like to congratulate the technicians that worked overtime to deliver this safe, start-of-the-art facility, and I thank the people at BRC. I do not thank those opposite who said, “We will never have one in Hume. We will never have one at all.” In fact, it was Mr Smyth who said—

Mr Smyth: Will you guarantee it is secure?

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Hunter was there at the Tuggeranong college when he said it. He said, “I will take the \$100 million and put it into health.” He was going to put \$100 million worth of capital into a recurrent problem in health. What did we do? We built a prison. Mr Stanhope said, “We will build a prison,” and we built it and it now is occupied. I suggest that the only way you guys are going to get to see it is to take a brick and throw it through somebody’s window. Then you can go in there for a couple of months and have a look at it.

Mr Speaker, we have taken delivery of the facility. The contract is concluded. It is a safe and secure facility. It is a facility which exists. These guys, Mr Seselja and Mr Smyth, should sit there and hang their heads in shame. They were going to put the people in the Belconnen Remand Centre forever.

Mr Hanson: That is not true.

MR HARGREAVES: It is true, as I sit here—longer than you.

Mr Hanson: We were going to have the end of the Belconnen Remand Centre.

MR HARGREAVES: Rubbish!

MR SPEAKER: Order! Ms Burch with a supplementary question.

MS BURCH: Yes, a supplementary. Has the ACT government delivered on its promise to build the Alexander Maconochie Centre?

MR HARGREAVES: When I was preparing this—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR HARGREAVES: I thought I had better go and check out the Liberal Party policy on this, so I went to the website—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Hargreaves! The question was about your position.

MR HARGREAVES: Yes, I know, but I could not find anything anyway, Mr Speaker. Just to allay your curiosity, there was nothing to talk about.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR HARGREAVES: The government has delivered on its promise. For the first time in our history—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR HARGREAVES: Get used to it. You have been caught napping. For the first time in our history the ACT will be able to take responsibility for—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Speaker, once upon a time people would be named for this sort of display; they would be warned for this sort of display.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR HARGREAVES: I suggest that your silence merely encourages them.

A jurisdiction should take responsibility for all its citizens, and housing prisoners in another jurisdiction clearly creates difficulties in this respect. Having our prisoners at the AMC allows them to maintain their important family networks and also gives us much more influence over their rehabilitation—much more than sentencing them to New South Wales for ever, just as they did in the 1800s. The AMC provides an opportunity to address prisoners' social, emotional and educational needs so that they are less likely to commit crimes upon release.

The belief in the inherent dignity and value of each human person is reflected in both the physical design of the AMC and also in its operating philosophy. The fundamental operational philosophy of the AMC is a “healthy prison concept” which emphasises the importance of providing an environment where everyone feels safe, is treated with respect and is encouraged to improve themselves through the provision of purposeful activity. This philosophy emphasises rehabilitation and compliance with human rights principles—something that these guys opposite were going to wind back. They were going to repeal the Human Rights Act. That needs to be noted.

ACT Corrective Services will operate a “through care” model of case management for each prisoner at the AMC. Within this model each prisoner will have his or her own case manager who will work with them to develop an individual rehab plan and a pre-release plan. The plans look at addressing offending behaviour and map out education and training pathways to maximise employment opportunities upon release and to ease transition back into the community.

At the AMC the prisoner’s day will be structured around work, programs, visits, vocational education and training, and recreation.

Mr Hanson: They won’t be going to the gym, will they?

MR HARGREAVES: Therapeutic and criminogenic programs will cover such areas as sex offenders, family violence, and alcohol and other drugs.

Mr Hanson: They can gaze at the artwork.

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Speaker, would you please ask Mr Hanson to desist from trying to treat us like little soldiers in his platoon. I do not appreciate it.

Mr Hanson: You wouldn’t have quite made it.

MR HARGREAVES: There he goes again.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR HARGREAVES: How easy is it? I wish fishing was this easy.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR HARGREAVES: Okay, yes.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Let’s hear the minister.

MR HARGREAVES: Good on ya. Mr Speaker, the AMC will also see the introduction of segregated therapeutic communities for men and women prisoners with moderate to high level drug and alcohol addiction. Therapeutic communities provide prisoners who have similar offence histories, particularly relating to drug and alcohol abuse, an environment in which they can form relationships of support as well as accessing targeted rehabilitation programs. It will have a transitional release program and this will be another tool where we can assist people in their rehabilitation.

This prison is a state-of-the-art facility. It is a very good facility that we have provided to the people of the ACT despite their opposition. We have moved; we are entering into a new era in corrective services, from the rehousing model of the 19th century, through the rehabilitation model in the 20th century, into the restorative principles model in the 21st century.

The sad part is that those opposite have not realised the folly of their ways and just said: "Good on you. You've delivered the prison. Now let's get on and provide proper programs." I wish they would just do that and stop trying to make political capital out of somebody else's misery.

Planning—Deakin swimming pool

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the Minister for Planning. Given that the Deakin swimming pool has now closed and given the minister's comments in this chamber last week that the government could do nothing until this happened, what steps has the minister now taken to enforce the requirements of the territory plan and the lease that the pool be operated from that site?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Le Couteur for the question; it does provide an opportunity to update the Assembly on the process that has occurred since the pool facility closed. I can confirm that the ACT Planning and Land Authority inspected the facility last Friday and have formally now confirmed that the facility is closed. ACTPLA have now been instructed to prepare a breach notice for the owner of the site. The lessee will have six months from the date of service of that notice to rectify the breach. A failure to rectify the breach would ultimately trigger termination of the crown lease.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Le Couteur, a supplementary question?

MS LE COUTEUR: Given that, can the minister tell the Assembly what alternative arrangements have been made for all of the 1,100 children who were previously enrolled in learn-to-swim classes at Deakin?

MR BARR: Again I thank Ms Le Couteur for the opportunity to update members. The Department of Territory and Municipal Services, through Sport and Recreation Services, has established two primary sources of information for community members seeking placement in alternative learn-to-swim programs. Information is available from Canberra Connect on 132281 and on the Sport and Recreation Services website at www.sport.act.gov.au. There are a number of alternative facilities around the territory that have places available.

In many instances, the engagement of additional instructors is a demand driven exercise so we are certainly encouraging people who were previously accommodated at Deakin to make contact either through Canberra Connect or directly with other learn-to-swim providers. Additional instructors will then be able to be employed to meet that additional demand. There is no doubt that there is considerable pressure in this area. However, I am advised that, through a variety of alternative providers, most particularly through government owned facilities in Civic and Tuggeranong, there are a number of places—up to 700—available at those two facilities and that there are other places available in other learn-to-swim programs around the territory.

Alexander Maconochie Centre

MR HANSON: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, the Alexander Maconochie Centre has finally received its first batch of prisoners. Can

you confirm whether there are remaining defects in the alarm system, specifically defect 2.6?

MR HARGREAVES: As I indicated earlier, on 20 March, Bovis Lend Lease handed the prison facility to the territory on receipt of certification by the independent evaluator, the independent auditor, on the systems that all of the systems were fine. My understanding is that all of the issues on the robust nature of the security system contained in clause 2.6 have been addressed and that there is nothing outstanding in the contract as would prevent that prison operating at full pace.

This facility is a first-class facility. It has been built in accordance with the contract, part of which Mr Hanson has referred to. I have to indicate to the Assembly that it is a bit of a shame that people do not actually understand what it is that we have got out there, the state-of-the-art facility.

Some people are calling for another perimeter fence, possibly one made out of brick, but that has been delivered in accordance with the contract. There is a perimeter fence already there, believe this or not.

Mr Corbell: There are two, actually.

MR HARGREAVES: There are two perimeter fences, actually. In that sense, I table a picture of a perimeter fence. Do you know what the inside fence is? It is not the perimeter fence. This is the perimeter fence. I table the following document:

Alexander Maconochie Centre—photograph.

We have a criticism that we do not have a chapel. Yet that member opposite was sitting in the very committee and said, “Have you got a chapel?” We said, “No. We have got the money in the budget to build it. It is \$513,000 over two financial years.” This is part of the contract to which Mr Hanson refers.

Mr Smyth: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: the question was quite specific. It asked the minister to confirm that defect 2.6 had been rectified to the original specifications. He has yet to answer that question.

MR SPEAKER: I am sorry. Would you say that again?

Mr Smyth: He has yet to answer the question. The nub of the question is: has defect notice 2.6 been fixed to the original standard?

MR HARGREAVES: On the point of order—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves, before you go on—

MR HARGREAVES: On the point of order, I have indicated to Mr Hanson part of the answer to his question on 2.6, and now I am elaborating on the answer to his question on 2.6.

MR SPEAKER: The question was both a broad one of whether the prison was operating and specifically about 2.6.

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks very much, Mr Speaker. I appreciate that. You cannot take, as these people opposite would like to, any of the clauses of the contract in isolation from the others. It is a total system; it is a package. The absence of a brick wall around the outside could have a very big difference to the robustness of the security system and whether or not it is working. We saw a call for an independent evaluator of 2.6.

MR SPEAKER: Stop the clocks.

Mr Hanson: Mr Speaker, my question was not to the robustness of the security system. My question was specifically about defect 2.6. The question is: has it been rectified? It is a simple yes or no specifically about defect 2.6.

MR SPEAKER: I believe your question, Mr Hanson, was actually: is the prison operational and is 2.6 rectified?

Mr Hanson: No, it was not. I can read my question again.

MR SPEAKER: Please do.

Mr Hanson: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Corrections. The Alexander Maconochie Centre has finally received its first batch of prisoners. Can you confirm whether there are remaining defects in the alarm system, specifically defect 2.6?

MR HARGREAVES: On the point of order: I was regarding it as being in addition to the 2.6.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves, can you specifically address 2.6.

MR HARGREAVES: Indeed, he is talking about the alarm systems and 2.6 actually refers to that. We talk about the robustness. For example, are we talking about the alarm systems? Are we talking about the hierarchy of it? Both of them are contained in clause 2.6. That is what I am trying to answer for the member opposite.

My information is that the defects as outlined in clause 2.6 have been addressed and have been certified by our independent auditor, Webb Australia, that we can accept the prison. I have given the undertaking in here before. I am not going to allow anybody to go into that prison if the security system is not right.

Mr Speaker, through you: Mr Hanson, you do not get to answer the question as well. I am sorry about that. It does not work that way. If you want to answer the question, get up and give us the answer and then I will tell you the question. How is that? I do not want to debate it with him across the chamber.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, a supplementary question?

MR HANSON: Mr Speaker, my supplementary is: has there been any downgrading of the security specifications at the AMC in order to rush the commissioning?

MR HARGREAVES: No.

Budget—outcome

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, in evidence to the public accounts committee on 4 March this year, you were not able to provide an updated figure on the budget outcome for the current financial year. Indeed, you relied on the then revised outcome that you had released before Christmas, more than two months before the committee hearings. Treasurer, why are you unable to provide an update on the budget outcome for 2008-09 to the committee?

MS GALLAGHER: As Mr Smyth knows, the revised budget outcome is reported on twice a year, once in the midyear review and once in the budget, and that has always been the way of things in this place, and always will be.

Mr Smyth: No, that's not true.

MS GALLAGHER: It is true, and I will check the comments you have made, Mr Smyth. It is true. The question that Mr Smyth goes to is the monthly updates that were provided at some point in time. The only time those monthly updates included the revised operating result was the month following the publication of the midyear review and budget, and we do that in our quarterly reports.

I think Mr Smyth, as usual, is twisting the truth here. We have not changed the way in which we provide updates to the Assembly and to the community. I would also say that we have been very up-front since our re-election in reporting to the community and to the Assembly about the major impacts on our bottom line regarding revised results from the commonwealth in terms of interest rate reductions. We have been pretty up-front, Mr Smyth, on what those impacts are, and the dollar figure.

I do not see the use in providing a day-by-day running account of the territory's operating result. As you know, Mr Smyth, it is extremely complex. It is dependent on a range of factors, including decisions that the government is taking in the budget. In terms of our own revenue and reviews of our own revenue, you know that that situation changes, and we will be providing, in accordance with our legal obligations, the update of the territory's bottom line in the budget, as every government has done, including a Liberal government. That information will be provided in five weeks time, Mr Smyth, and you will just have to suck it and see. Wait and see in five weeks time.

Mr Smyth: We used to table it monthly.

MS GALLAGHER: You tabled the quarterly reports monthly, Mr Smyth. You did not table the revised operating result. That is what you are trying to peddle out there, and it is not true. It is not correct. So the quarterly reports are tabled, the midyear review is tabled, and the budget will be tabled on 5 May. And that is when we will be able to give the community a picture of the territory's revised operating result.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, a supplementary question?

MS GALLAGHER: Treasurer, what is the latest estimate of the budget outcome for 2008-09?

MS GALLAGHER: That information will be provided to the Assembly on 5 May.

Hospitals—dischargeable patients

MS BRESNAN: My question is to the Minister for Disability and Housing and is in regard to the fate of dischargeable patients in hospital or other inappropriate facilities. Given that the wellbeing of such patients is severely and unreasonably compromised due to their circumstances, can the minister advise the Assembly of the action he has taken to break down the silos between services in the ACT and the plans he has in place to ensure that these patients are provided with appropriate, cost-effective support in a timely manner?

MR HARGREAVES: Firstly, I reject the notion that these people are in hospital at their detriment. They would not be. That is a nonsensical suggestion if ever I have heard one. They are in hospital because they need to be in a medically safe facility, and that is where they are. When it comes to breaking down silos, Ms Bresnan would love to be able to run around the place and identify these silos, but she cannot because they do not exist.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Bresnan, a supplementary question?

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can the minister please table in the Assembly the February 2008 review of disability services in the ACT and provide a time line for when a whole-of-government disability strategy will be delivered.

MR HARGREAVES: I will have to get the information and see whether it is in a form which is suitable for tabling and then examine it. I do not propose, however, to go and dig up whole-of-government plans and all those sorts of things inside 15 minutes. I will have a look at the information Ms Bresnan wants and, if it is available in a form suitable for tabling, I will do so.

Unemployment

MR COE: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, according to the Chief Minister, the ACT faces a doubling in the level of unemployment over the next 18 months, to at least five per cent. Treasurer, what effect will this level of unemployment have on the ACT economy?

MS GALLAGHER: The forecast projections for unemployment are concerning. With respect to the ones that Access Economics have released, and which our Treasury support—although they do not support their going as high as Access Economics predicts—certainly there will be an increase in our unemployment rate in the territory. We are currently at 2.4 per cent unemployment, which is extremely low,

and virtually half of the national unemployment rate. But any rise in unemployment is bad for the ACT community and for the economy.

In the areas in which we can influence employment—and we have a direct role in that, in that we have relationships in terms of our own public service and organisations that we fund—we are extremely mindful of the decisions we take in this year's budget in ensuring that we do not make decisions that will impact on the unemployment rate. We also have been very strong in our representations to the commonwealth in terms of them putting their budget together, and ensuring that in the decisions they take they are mindful of the impact they have here in the ACT. We will wait and see what the commonwealth budget brings down, but we have certainly made those representations, and I think it was right to make those representations. We have very low unemployment here. It will remain low, but the projections are that it will increase. That is not good for anywhere in the country, and it is not good for here in the ACT.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Coe, a supplementary question?

MR COE: Yes, Mr Speaker. The Treasurer just said that the Treasury's forecast for unemployment is different from that of Access Economics. Would the Treasurer please tell the chamber what Treasury's forecast is and what impact that will have on the ACT budget?

MS GALLAGHER: I am just looking for the details in the midyear review, where we have published our latest economic indicators. I can't find it right at the moment. I am just trying to recall the figure. I can't recall it at the moment. I will get back to you. But there is certainly a view around a doubling of the 2.4 per cent.

Mr Coe: Get back to me today?

MS GALLAGHER: Yes. I will find it while I am sitting here.

ACT Public Service—recruitment

MR DOSZPOT: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, currently the ACT is in recession and the Chief Minister has warned of a doubling of the unemployment rate. Does the government intend to continue to recruit staff to the ACT public service from overseas? If so, what is the likely impact on unemployment in the ACT?

MS GALLAGHER: That is a strange merge of the questions of Alistair Coe and Vicki Dunne together. Recruitment to the ACT public service is based on merit, as everybody in this place would know. We are very mindful of our responsibilities in the level of employment that we sustain in this community in areas that we have direct control over in terms of our own public service and in those organisations that we fund and employ staff in.

In the context of the budget, we are looking at a whole range of issues, including decisions that we make and whether those impact or not in terms of employment. But we do ensure that employment to the ACT public service is based on merit. That is

what every public service does around the country. It is very important that we stand by the principles—

Mr Hanson: And you'll be sacked if you find someone better.

MS GALLAGHER: It is very important that we stand by those principles of merit. It is a shame that those standards of merit are not applied in jobs in the Legislative Assembly, I have to say.

Mr Hanson: It certainly is, Ms Gallagher.

MS GALLAGHER: That is right, because you would not have one, Mr Hanson.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot, a supplementary question?

Mr Hanson: Really? I've had another job—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Doszpot has the call. Mr Hanson!

Ms Gallagher: What are you worried about? You've got a very unhealthy obsession with my employment.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Ms Gallagher!

Ms Gallagher: It borders on unhealthy, Mr Speaker.

MR DOSZPOT: Treasurer, I am all ears. On average, what does it cost to move and recruit an overseas person to the ACT public service?

MS GALLAGHER: We do not do any large-scale overseas recruitment to the public service. The largest one we have done is in the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support. We provided those figures to the relevant committee. In fact, I think they are published in the *Canberra Times* today. Have a read of them.

Health—general practitioners

MS PORTER: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, can you update the Assembly on the establishment of the GP task force that was announced last week?

MS GALLAGHER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank Ms Porter for the question. Last week I announced that I had convened a GP task force to pull together all the work that has been done across ACT Health and has been ongoing for two years.

Opposition members interjecting—

MS GALLAGHER: Those opposite are interjecting again. They are upset that they are destined to spend the next four years on the opposition benches doing nothing.

The ACT is suffering from a shortage of general practitioners and this, added to the recent closures of several local—

Opposition members interjecting—

MS GALLAGHER: We always know when we hit a raw nerve. The shouts—

Members interjecting—

MS GALLAGHER: Keep going. I love it.

GPs are members of the primary healthcare team who are relied upon for their trusted advice and their ability to help people navigate the healthcare system. The GP task force will consolidate the work already being done by ACT Health and the commonwealth government and will report back to the Legislative Assembly in September.

The task force will be jointly chaired by Ross O'Donoghue, Executive Director of Policy Division, ACT Health and Dr Clare Willington, GP adviser to ACT Health. Other members of the task force are being finalised and include Dr Rashmi Sharma, Board President of the ACT Division of General Practice; Dr Paul Jones from the AMA; Professor Nicholas Glasgow, Dean of the ANU Medical School; Professor Kljakovic, Director, Academic Unit of General Practice and Community Health; Veronica Croome, ACT Chief Nurse and a healthcare consumer representative.

The terms of reference for the GP task force have also been finalised. The task force aims to review and consolidate work already undertaken by the ACT and commonwealth governments on access to primary healthcare services in the ACT; to explore and recommend on legislative options to protect the rights of patients and the health workforce; to advise on workforce demand and training issues in primary health care; to explore and make recommendations on options and innovations to improve access to primary health care in the ACT, including opportunities that may arise in the commonwealth, state and territory health reform agenda and to consider and make recommendations on provisions to improve access to primary care services for vulnerable populations, including the aged, people with mental illness and the isolated.

The task force have a very important job to do here. They will report back to me on what more we can do in order to improve access to primary healthcare services for those who need it most in the community, and I look forward to receiving that advice.

The task force will also review a lot of the work that has been undertaken in the past two years and I have to say that ACT Health, the Division of General Practice and the AMA have been working very hard on this over the last two years—not that the opposition will give them any credit for that. This task force has been arranged in order to pull together all of that work, all of that expertise that is currently being done on pieces of work, and have a look at it, I guess, from a holistic point of view.

The GP workforce working group, which was established in 2003, continues to meet and it will provide information to the task force. That has led to some significant improvements in training opportunities for junior doctors. Of course, the nurse-led walk-in centres will feed into this, and we are also developing the community-based health services plan. So there is a lot of work ongoing at the moment.

In addition, I have met with Nicola Roxon's office to talk about whether there is anything else the commonwealth can do to support the issues that we are seeing here in the territory. In a way the closest jurisdiction where these issues are being replicated is the Northern Territory, so I have had a meeting to discuss whether there is a preparedness from the commonwealth to work with us to develop some other solutions to the workforce shortage, because the simple fact of it is that we are not going to be able to wave a magic wand and have 60 GPs come and work here. So we have to work within the framework of a workforce shortage and look at how we build the workforce for the future.

The Division of General Practice, the AMA and I are singing from the same song sheet when we say this is around delivering longer-term solutions and it is around training and upskilling the next generation of doctors, because they are the ones that we need to get to and encourage them to make a choice about practising in general practice. Traditionally, it is not an area of choice for doctors. They make decisions about going into hospital-based training and on to specialise in a particular area of medicine. We need to make GPs an attractive workplace for junior doctors to consider. That will be the biggest change to the workforce that we can deliver.

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

Supplementary answers to questions without notice
Hospitals—dischargeable patients
Alexander Maconochie Centre—services

MS GALLAGHER: Ms Hunter asked me a question on the number of dischargeable patients in hospital. It was eight. I have had that confirmed.

On 12 February I was asked a question which I have not responded to. I took a question on notice during question time. That was Amanda Bresnan's question on community organisations providing services at the Alexander Maconochie Centre. The question related to agreements being changed without any further funding support. The question was:

Can the minister advise the Assembly how the incorporation of these new requirements were negotiated and if it was a process that was entered into voluntarily?

The answer is that the agreements commenced in 2007-08, and most of them are three-year agreements. The agreements were entered into voluntarily by the non-government organisations. There was no concern expressed at any time by NGOs to ACT Health about the proposed reference to the provision of services to adult

detainees in prison in the agreements. The services recognise the significant proportion of remandees and prisoners with alcohol and other drug problems and the need for continuity of care for these people before, during and after release from custody.

In relation to Winnunga providing services to the Alexander Maconochie Centre, a deed of variation was signed in December 2007 for additional funding to provide correctional outreach health services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody at the Belconnen Remand Centre and the Alexander Maconochie Centre.

Committee reports—government responses

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Minister for Transport, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts and Heritage) (2.44): For the information of members, I present the following papers:

Education, Training and Young People—Standing Committee—Report 7—*Report on Annual and Financial Reports 2006-2007* (Sixth Assembly)—Government response.

Health and Disability—Standing Committee—Report 5—*Report on Annual and Financial Reports 2006-2007* (Sixth Assembly)—Government response.

Planning and Environment—Standing Committee—Report 33—*Report on Annual and Financial Reports 2006-2007* (Sixth Assembly)—Government response.

Public Accounts—Standing Committee—Report 14—*Report on Annual and Financial Reports 2006-2007* (Sixth Assembly)—Government response.

I move:

That the Assembly takes note of the papers.

Mr Speaker, I am pleased to present the government's responses to four Sixth Assembly standing committee reports and the 2006-07 annual and financial reports of ACT government agencies. There is no government response to the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs as it advised the Assembly on 25 June that the committee had resolved not to inquire further in the 2006-07 agency annual and financial reports.

As the final reports were tabled just before the end of the last Assembly, the presentation of the responses was delayed because of the 2008 election and the subsequent need to check on and incorporate any changes to the responses that flowed from the implementation of the new administrative arrangements for the Seventh Assembly.

In keeping with past practice, I am tabling responses to all four standing committee reports together. This is because the standing committee reports generally cover more than one minister and more than one portfolio. In certain cases issues raised in the reports apply across departments and agencies.

Annual and financial reports are prepared by agencies in accordance with the Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act 2004, the Financial Management Act 1996 and the Chief Minister's Department Annual Report Directions. In this regard, the government seeks to ensure that annual and financial reports are continually updated to reflect best practice and full accountability.

The standing committees made 27 recommendations. The government has agreed in full or in principle to 22 recommendations and noted the remaining five. The government has therefore agreed in full or in principle to almost all the recommendations made by the four Sixth Assembly standing committees, and there are no recommendations to which the government has not agreed. I commend the government's responses to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Mr Barr presented the following paper:

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 13—Canberra Institute of Technology—Annual Report 2008, dated 26 March 2009.

Mr Corbell presented the following papers:

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Building Act—Building (ACT Appendix to the Building Code—2008 and 2009 editions) Determination 2009—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-26 (LR, 6 March 2009).

Children and Young People Act—Children and Young People (Transitional Provisions) Regulation 2009—Subordinate Law SL2009-4 (LR, 26 February 2009).

Civil Law (Wrongs) Act—Civil Law (Wrongs) Professional Standards Council Appointment 2009 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-29 (LR, 12 March 2009).

Drugs of Dependence Act—Drugs of Dependence Regulation 2009—Subordinate Law SL2009-5 (LR, 26 February 2009).

Electricity Feed-in (Renewable Energy Premium) Act—Electricity Feed-in (Renewable Energy Premium) Rate Determination 2009 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-22 (LR, 27 February 2009).

Public Trustee Act—Public Trustee (Investment Board) Appointment 2009—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-32 (LR, 19 March 2009).

Race and Sports Bookmaking Act—Race and Sports Bookmaking (Sports Bookmaking Venues) Determination 2009 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-31 (LR, 19 March 2009).

Road Transport (Dimensions and Mass) Act—

Road Transport (Dimensions and Mass) 6.5 Tonnes Single Steer Axle Exemption Notice 2009—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-27 (LR, 12 March 2009).

Road Transport (Dimensions and Mass) B-Double, 4.6 Metre High Vehicle and 14.5 Metre Long Bus Exemption Notice 2009 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-28 (LR, 12 March 2009).

Road Transport (Driver Licensing) Act, Road Transport (General) Act, Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Act, Road Transport (Vehicle Registration) Act—Road Transport Legislation Amendment Regulation 2009 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2009-6 (LR, 11 March 2009).

Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Act—Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Amendment Regulation 2009 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2009-7 (LR, 12 March 2009).

Utilities Act—Utilities (Grant of Licence Application Fee) Determination 2009—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-30 (LR, 12 March 2009).

Planning—subordinate legislation

Ministerial statement

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Planning and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation) (2.47), by leave: Mr Speaker, the instruments of planning can be complex but the objectives of planning are very simple: meet the challenge of climate change; support economic growth; and include the community in decision making.

Good planning brings together the communal, economic and environmental needs of our society. And, yes, bringing these goals together can be a difficult balancing act. But that balance is at the heart of Labor’s approach to planning. That balance also applies to our approach to development. At one extreme, there will always be calls to “let it rip”, and at the other there will always be calls for “not in my backyard”. And our local politics will always throw up representatives of these views. But Labor in Canberra will always hold the middle ground.

Above all else, this is why the government is determined to keep politics out of planning. This city will not go the way of Wollongong. I want to acknowledge my predecessor, Mr Corbell, for his vision of a statutory independent planning authority. Making development application assessment a statutory function handled at arm’s length from government was a major reform. Mr Corbell’s legacy to our city is that politicians do not make decisions on individual development applications.

I genuinely look forward to the day that this becomes a cross-party consensus in Canberra, but until then I am content to fight for it as Labor’s view: “no” to short-term partisan politics and “yes” to long-term, evidence-based policy.

It has now been one year since the Planning and Development Act was passed. The passage of the act was the culmination of three years of research, consultation and preparation. Today, I can report to this Assembly that our planning system is strong.

The main objectives of the planning reform project were well known. We wanted a planning system that was simpler, faster and more effective. That was our objective and it remains our objective. The 2008 reforms were practical, innovative and far-reaching. I summarise the key elements in this way: an assessment track system; a better front end; new exemptions; better and fairer notification, consultation and appeals; and the restructured territory plan.

The heart of the act is the “assessment track” system. This is based on the leading practice model agreed at a national level through the development assessment forum, which itself is part of a COAG reform process. In an assessment track system, different types of development get different amounts of attention, based on the complexity of the proposal. It provides a more exhaustive, transparent assessment process for those developments that are complex or have a high impact, and a streamlined process for those that are simple or have negligible impact.

“Code track” was introduced to provide a fast track for basic residential development in accordance with clear rules. What it means in practice is shorter time frames for a decision, no third party appeals and no public notification. A typical code track development is a residential house that meets certain criteria in a greenfield site.

“Merit track” deals with those applications that sit outside the prescribed rules and require public notification to fully assess their impact and are not subject to an environmental impact statement. In practice, merit track applications typically require short public consultation with no third party appeal. They maintain an approval time frame of 30 working days or 45 days if community concerns are received following notification. They also maintain third party appeal rights for high-impact proposals. That said, objectors must demonstrate that they are materially affected by the proposed development.

“Impact track” applies to applications that are more complex and have a high potential impact. Key features of this track are that an environmental impact assessment is obligatory, the DA is sequential to the EIS and the decision time frame on the DA remains 30 working days, or 45 days if there are representations from the community—simpler, faster and more effective; practical and innovative reform, Mr Speaker.

In addition to the assessment track system, the front end of the development assessment processes is designed to help applicants lodge their applications in the appropriate track. Extensive training, information, over-the-counter assistance and pre-application meetings at no charge to the applicant are all initiatives to make the system more efficient.

Industry has commented that the completeness check, which is a process ahead of the formal lodgement of the development application, has been taking too long. These checks are designed to ensure that all of the required plans and documents to enable a full assessment of a proposal are submitted. I know that a number of these checks have taken too long—up to two weeks in some cases. However, I can advise that a recent random sample has shown an average turnaround of less than half that.

We are getting there. Of course, where applicants make sure they have provided the required documentation up-front, they can have their application assessed in a much shorter time frame—simpler, faster and more effective; practical and innovative reform.

On top of these processes, a significant number of development proposals in residential areas have been exempted from a requirement for a development assessment application. Over the last 12 months, around 1,000 developments were newly exempt from the requirement to lodge a development application. Only a building approval was required in these cases.

The number of exemptions will continue to rise over time as the full effect of existing exemption regulations is realised. We will also look for new opportunities to remove classes of minor development from the DA system. For instance, it is now no longer necessary to lodge a development application for home businesses, sheds, roof slope changes, skylights and demolitions. And the list of building approval exemptions has continued to grow. A range of minor works are now exempt, including fences, walls, retaining walls, portable pools and pool fencing, garages and other class 10 structures, water tanks, doors, windows and the like—simpler, faster and more effective; practical and innovative reform.

Perhaps the most difficult element of any planning system is balancing the rights of the community with the rights of the individual in notification, consultation and appeals. A key feature of the new planning system is the focus of public consultation on the development of the territory plan and related codes. This is designed to make the system fairer on everyone by engaging the community in setting the planning rules, rather than on individual developments.

Third party appeal rights over development decisions are appropriate in specific circumstances. However, such appeal rights should never be abused by unscrupulous commercial rivals or by politically motivated actions. This has happened in the past in Canberra and it has slowed down the planning and development system. The new act reconfigured third party appeal rights so that they are actually stronger, but only where people can demonstrate that they would suffer material detriment if a new building were approved.

Public notification of high-impact development applications is continuing to be improved to ensure the community has reasonable notice of and access to information. Bigger signs on proposed development sites and better information in the *Canberra Times* notices as well as on ACTPLA's website are all initiatives aimed at making the process more transparent and accessible.

The broader community interest has been further protected through significantly increased penalties for offences of developing without approval or contrary to the conditions of an approval. The public interest has also been protected through a new statutory process for making and responding to complaints. And formal procedures have also been put in place in relation to the referral of complaints to other agencies for their action—simpler, faster and more effective; practical and innovative reform.

Finally, let me turn to the territory plan itself and the processes that underpin it. The size and complexity of the territory plan and related instruments have been slashed. Eighty-seven different concept plans, master plans, neighbourhood plans and registered and unregistered guidelines were collapsed into a three-volume territory plan. The territory plan codes provide a vehicle for government agencies to document their development standards in the territory plan. In turn, this will reduce the need for agency referral, and over time the DA processes will become a one-stop shop. This creates a new opportunity for reform of whole-of-government processes—an element I will return to shortly.

The new planning system has also created a technical amendment process. This enables ACTPLA to quickly rectify or refine the territory plan with minor or technical changes which do not change the policy intent—simpler, faster and more effective; practical and innovative reform.

I am pleased that the act was passed by this Assembly unanimously. And I welcome the Leader of the Opposition's recent restatement of his support for the government's legislative reforms. Continuing cross-party support for these reforms is important. We hope it will be maintained into the future. That is the best way to keep politics out of planning.

The new system is flexible and adaptable. The system has several new features which allow the government to quickly respond to changing circumstances or changing needs of the community or industry. This has been shown repeatedly over the last 12 months. Regulations exempting small-scale development from the need for a development application have been implemented in consultation with industry. These include extended exemptions and redefined rules for eligible types of development, along with more flexible rules for applying exemption criteria and DA conditions. There have been recent improvements to the land release and estate development plan processes. These improvements mean a simpler public notification process and a reduction in the number of applications that need to go to referral agencies.

Two recent major events provide good examples of this enhanced flexibility at work. These new features will allow the government the flexibility to respond to events without needing lengthy processes, and it does this while preserving the policy content and integrity of the system.

In December last year, in response to the looming financial crisis and industry concerns, the government announced ACTPLAN. This is an action plan supported by a new industry consultation group to ensure that ACTPLA and the building industry work more closely together to support thousands of building jobs in the ACT.

ACTPLAN further improved the planning system by cutting red tape and helping to deal with backlogs of development applications in the system. This allowed around 30 per cent of single dwelling DAs to be assessed more quickly without sacrificing planning standards. ACTPLAN also broadened DA exemptions through regulation, allowing more flexible assessment and approval of run-of-the mill applications, such as those for roof colours and the installation of flagpoles. The new act allowed this rapid response to an emerging challenge.

It was a surprise to learn last week that the shadow treasurer believes that I should—and I quote:

Direct [my] department to ... stop being so focused on just development applications.

I will not be doing that, and no-one else in Canberra thinks that I should.

The other example is the ACT government's response to the commonwealth government's building the education revolution stimulus package. When the federal package was announced in early February this year with strict time constraints, the ACT government needed to respond to the challenge. The package developed in response to the commonwealth funding included: the appointment by ACTPLA of a senior in-house coordinator to act as a key contact with the ACT Coordinator-General; development application assessors to ensure school applications are processed without delay; more flexible arrangements to ensure staff and resources can be moved within ACTPLA to areas of demand; and a renewed focus by ACTPLA on reducing the number of development applications that require assessment and decision.

But we also changed planning regulations to ensure all ACT schools could start building quickly with the commonwealth provided funds. This funding was a case of "use it or lose it", or, to describe the government's response using planning terminology, the government created an education code; that is, we extended the principles that apply in other codes, such as the residential code or the water sensitive urban design code. These principles were extended to education buildings consistent with certain criteria.

ACTPLA and the government's response to the commonwealth funding package are great examples of the new act providing the flexibility to respond to unforeseeable circumstances whilst protecting planning standards. Whereas under the old system new legislation would have been needed, the new act allows us to change regulations. It is a much more time effective and straightforward process which is equally transparent—simpler, faster and more effective; practical and innovative reform.

As with any major reform, change can be difficult. People need to adjust to new ways of doing things. Teething problems occur. Working with the new act means doing things differently. But let me state plainly: the planning system is working and we will continue to make it stronger. A planning system will never be perfect. There will always be room for improvement and we will always remain open to suggestions. But the system we have in place is responding to the needs of the community, the environment and the economy. It is working to get the balance right between these competing needs, as it is intended to do. It is on track.

The task before us now is to build on the 2008 legislative reforms. The key way we are doing this is developing codes which will guide future development and streamlining whole-of-government processes.

The government's attention has now shifted to the policies that make up the territory plan. This is a long-term project which will be worked through incrementally over a period of years. The government will review the structure and content of the development tables, the development codes, the precinct codes and the general codes.

The government will also develop a priority program to review the following codes: the commercial zones precinct codes; the subdivision development code; the multi-unit housing development code; the single dwelling housing development code; the bushfire risk mitigation general code; the access and mobility general code; the community and recreation facilities location general code; and the non-urban zones development code.

Consultation workshops with industry on all of these codes will commence soon. This is where the real gains from the 2008 reforms can be locked in. Developing the codes—getting them right—is the most important way of giving the industry certainty in planning decision making for the long term.

A recent important industry paper acknowledged many of the gains already made and put forward a range of practical suggestions on further planning reform, especially whole-of-government processes. The government will respond to this agenda over the coming year. High on the priority list will be working to develop a better whole-of-government approach to deliver development approval in a timely manner. Industry concerns about robust data on the number and time of DAs in the system are another important issue that will be addressed. The government also acknowledges that a unit within ACTPLA focused on major projects is worthy of serious consideration. We welcome industry's input and we look forward to working closely with them over the coming year.

I said earlier that the objects of planning are simple: include the community, support growth and beat climate change. Climate change changes everything, and the implications for planning are enormous. The debate about whether there is a problem is now over. The debate about how to create the solutions is now open. Climate change means Canberra changes, and our ideas for planning must respond. That is why the ACT government began the sustainable future program. Sustainable future will ensure that our planning policies support our sustainability policies and our climate change action plan, weathering the change. Sustainable future will drive changes to regulation and design standards in the territory plan. It will lead to reviewing public transport, housing choice and infrastructure provisions in the territory plan. And it will outline strategies for a more compact city to reduce carbon use in transport for the long term.

These are long-term measures with enormous implications for the city that we live in and we all love. But the climate is changing around us and we must change with it. Madam Assistant Speaker, keep politics out of planning. Build on a simpler, faster, more effective planning system. Reform codes and government processes. Include the community in decision making. Support economic growth. Meet the challenge of climate change. That is our vision for planning in Canberra's second century. I present the following paper:

Planning—Ministerial statement, 31 March 2009.

I move:

That the Assembly takes note of the paper.

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

Economy—revenue base

Discussion of matter of public importance

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

The ACT government's revenue base.

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (3.06): Madam Assistant Speaker, I feel very privileged to have the opportunity to raise another matter of public importance in this chamber. The issue we are discussing today, the ACT government's revenue base, is indeed a matter of public importance, and one that goes to the heart of the economic past, present and future of the ACT.

Last week we debated a motion brought to us by Mr Smyth, which addressed the poor handling of our economy by the Stanhope-Gallagher government. We, the opposition, lamented the fact that we have been led to the point of being in a recession, technical or otherwise. The purpose of that particular motion was to analyse the actions of our current government and to advise the community of the outcome of that analysis.

In this instance we, as an opposition, raised our concerns 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. A critical factor in this debate was this government's response to what has now become a significant global economic downturn. Today we have the opportunity to analyse another component of our economic status. That is the way in which we make our money—our revenue base.

The matter of the ACT government's revenue base is a particularly important issue at the moment. Governments around the world are facing significant pressures because of the global economic downturn. Australia and the ACT are no exception. Let us consider the current situation in the ACT.

The private sector is under pressure. For example, the latest Sensis survey showed that business confidence has continued to decline. According to the Sensis Business Index released on 5 March, on the back of continued weak trading conditions business confidence in the ACT has slipped further over the last three months. The business

confidence indicator for the ACT sits at seven per cent, down from 16 per cent last quarter.

The economic downturn, including the general economic outlook, weak economy and vulnerability to global US economic conditions, is the main reason ACT businesses are worried about their business prospects. This can also be evidenced by such economic indicators as conveyancing revenue, which, as at December 2008, is down by \$23 million in this financial year alone.

The public sector is also coming under pressure, as we have seen from the continual revisions to the budgetary outlook for this financial year and the outyears. The midyear review that was released on 23 September 2008 showed an aggregate net operating balance of around \$300 million between now and 2011-12. This briefly sets out where we are now. However, the critical issue is: why are we where we are now?

We know that revenue for the ACT is generated from three broad sources: firstly, the commonwealth government; secondly, the general level of economic activity and, lastly, taxation revenue. Revenue from the commonwealth is now out of the control of the ACT and is predominately represented by revenue from GST. Revenue from the general level of economic activity is partly out of the control of the government as the private sector makes its own decisions about investment, employment, the purchase of goods and services and other factors. Of course, the private sector also is influenced by the policy environment set by the government.

This brings us to the third source of revenue—taxation. Taxation revenue is the outcome of decisions made by the ACT government, and it is this area of policy that has exemplified the failings of the Stanhope-Gallagher government. Again, we are in a position where we must expose the weakness of our current Treasurer as she blindly stumbles her way after those who have gone before her.

The tenure of the Stanhope government is littered with failed and very poor taxation proposals as this government has sought to rip more and more funds out of the Canberra community and out of the business sector. The philosophy of the Stanhope-Gallagher government towards taxation is best exemplified by former Treasurer Quinlan when he told the ACT's business community in March 2005 that his government would squeeze investors until they bled, not until they died.

This statement from the then Treasurer led to outrage from the business community which was entirely justified. The *Canberra Times* on Saturday, 19 March 2005 reported on this affair:

ACT Treasurer Ted Quinlan's remark to real estate agents ... that the Government would squeeze the investors until they bled, not until they died, has provoked outrage from the industry and Opposition.

Mr Quinlan apologised yesterday if anyone was traumatised by his remark, which he said was meant as a joke.

The Opposition wants more of an apology, the Property Owners Association wants his resignation and the real estate agent who triggered Mr Quinlan's comment wonders if he knows the extent of opposition to land tax in the ACT.

Agent Phillip Kouvelis said Mr Quinlan did not seem briefed on the purpose of a breakfast meeting with real estate agents on Thursday morning. The topic was about the increasing impact that taxes had on ACT real estate. When Mr Kouvelis raised land tax a second time at the meeting, Mr Quinlan called for a common sense approach and added the squeeze-till-you-bleed comment.

Yesterday Mr Quinlan said he had been joking.

He should have read his briefing notes more closely because he was unaware the meeting was confined to land tax.

“If anyone was traumatised by the remark, they have my apology. I didn’t get the impression that anyone took particular offence at all.”

He said land tax had increased significantly because values had increased significantly, with the ACT tax higher than Queensland’s and Victoria’s but better than NSW’s tax regime.

Opposition ... said the joke was callous. Property Owners and Ratepayers Association president Peter Jensen said Mr Quinlan should resign and leave the Assembly.

ACT Real Estate Institute president Stan Platis said if the remark was a throwaway line, it showed the Government was not listening to the ACT’s peak real estate body. In the ACT, land tax could represent an annual impost on landlords of 40 percent of annual net rentals return.

Property Council of Australia president Greg Lyons said he was surprised by the remark. The council had a strong view that stamp duty on commercial conveyancing should be removed to fulfil the state government’s promise on the eve of the GST’s introduction. Land tax needed reforming as well.

Mr Kouvelis said, “If that is the attitude of the Government, it will definitely be a turn-off. People do ask what the costs are in owning a property in Canberra.

“The land tax component is three times higher than any other payment and it is factored in. The rent has to be attractive enough to make it all worthwhile.”

We may well ask whether anything has changed since 2005. I think the answer is no; we are still in that same situation.

In more recent times this attitude has been repeated. Sadly, the approach of the Stanhope-Gallagher government to the business community is quite simple: tax it, tax it and tax it again. The most recent example of this attitude is the Stanhope-Gallagher government’s infrastructure tax. This is an extremely complex tax which raises a relatively small amount of funds and has annoyed everyone that it has touched, including people not even residing in the ACT.

This tax adds to the list of poor and failed taxes from this government, which has a record of almost complete failure, as the following analysis shows:

- Rating policy: the government proposed a complete change to the way in which general rates are determined in the ACT. This proposed policy, for which little analysis had been done—Ted Quinlan said it sounded like a good idea at the time—was defeated in the Assembly.
- Corporate reconstruction concession: this policy involved changing an existing exemption to a concession based on 95 per cent of the duty payable, raising an additional \$1.1 million.
- Transfer of business assets: this policy imposes a duty on the acquisition of business assets at the same rate as conveyance duty, raising \$1.7 million.
- Bushfire tax: the government proposed to impose a fixed levy on all rateable properties for two years, raising \$10 million over two years. This knee-jerk proposal was abandoned as unnecessary.
- Loan security duty: this policy would have imposed a duty of secured loans with a value of more than \$1 million, raising half a million dollars. This proposal was abandoned after the government realised belatedly that the states were abolishing this duty.
- Pay parking in Barton: this proposal had to be abandoned when it was established that the ACT government could not introduce this taxing measure.
- Parking space tax: this measure was proposed in the 2003-04 budget to apply in four city centres in Canberra, raising \$2.5 million. Again, this policy was very poorly developed and the government failed to undertake proper consultations. The government finally abandoned this proposal.
- City heart tax: in the 2005-06 budget the government proposed to replace the ill-fated parking space tax with this tax. It is actually called a levy, but it is still a tax. This tax is anticipated to raise only \$2.5 million each year when it is introduced. Once again, the key feature of this proposal has been a lack of proper planning and development. Finally in December 2006, the Stanhope government managed to have a city heart tax introduced. Legislation was passed in March 2007.
- Home buyer concession scheme: after considerable pressure from the opposition and other interests the government finally agreed to make the parameters of this policy more appropriate to the market for residential properties. Unfortunately, the government announced the policy change some weeks before the implementation date, resulting in an unnecessary hiatus in parts of the property market.
- Motor vehicle tax: in May 2006 the Stanhope government sought to impose stamp duty on motor vehicles based on the list price of a vehicle. In the face of fierce opposition from the opposition and the industry, when the government became aware of the stupidity of this proposition the proposal was withdrawn.

- Utility land use permit of June 2006: ultimately this was called the infrastructure tax. The Stanhope government sought to impose a utility land use permit as a charge on utilities where they occupy unleased territory land. It was estimated to raise \$16.5 million in a full year. As the latest in a long line of taxing proposals that either had to be abandoned or had to be modified before being imposed, this permit proposal became the network facilities tax after consulting with the utilities companies such that it would impose a lower administration burden for the utilities. The tax became more in December 2006.
- Fire services tax: I will stop at this one because the list just keeps going on. This tax was imposed as a fixed amount on residential properties—it was imposed as a proportion of the UCV on commercial properties; hence it becomes a major impost on business—and is only expected to raise \$20 million.

The sad reality of this history of poor taxation proposals is that many of them were raised by the Stanhope-Gallagher government at a time when the ACT government was booming. The tragedy that will be left out of all debate by the government today, and any day, is that the Stanhope-Gallagher government have squandered significant windfall gain that could have helped prepare the ACT to withstand economic shocks. It was frittered away. They have squandered the good times and failed to diversify our economic base to a point where we now have to rely solely on taxes.

The period between 2001 and 2008 was a time of economic boom, largely on the back of sound economic policies emanating from the Howard government that delivered a sustained run of economic prosperity to Australia. This prosperity provided enormous gain to the ACT in the form of additional revenue totalling \$1.6 billion. What did the community see from that windfall? What did the community see from that windfall? They saw schools closed, libraries closed, swimming pools closed and higher and higher taxes. This is, indeed, a sad legacy.

It is also instructive here to point out the reforms to taxation that were agreed to by the commonwealth and the states when GST was introduced. We are all aware of the so-called nuisance taxes, which were to be abolished after July 2000. We also recall that the BAD tax was abolished by all states quite quickly, but all states had to be dragged kicking and screaming to the point of agreeing to abolish all but one of the other taxes that were listed on the GST agreement. Fortunately, all states have now put in place a schedule to remove all those remaining taxes, except for the duty on commercial property conveyancing.

It is sad to report that South Australia has now reneged on this agreement. On 19 December 2008 the Premier of South Australia announced that the proposals on two measures would be deferred for two years. While it is possible to understand this decision, it is not a good decision. Tax reform is too important. Let us hope that no other state, including our own, makes the same decision as South Australia.

Not only have we not seen any diversity of the ACT's economic base, but employment shares have started to move back in favour of the public sector. This is evident from the Access Economics report into the economics of the ACT. Evidence

also suggests that this government are doing nothing to reverse this trend. The Stanhope-Gallagher government have not pursued reform of the ACT economy as they should have done and, as a consequence, the ACT is now in the position of being reliant upon a narrow revenue base when, in reality, we should have been in a much stronger position. (*Time expired.*)

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Treasurer, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Services and Minister for Women) (3.21): I thank the member for raising the important issue of the ACT's revenue base. I am not entirely clear on what the central argument was. I am not sure whether it was pro tax cut, changes to service delivery, any suggestions for diversifying the economy; rather, it was just 15 minutes criticising a whole range of unfounded allegations, in my view. It was. It was the opposition's take. I guess Mr Smyth's office have written it because it was the same thing that Mr Smyth has been going on about, certainly for the last few months that I have been Treasurer.

Revenue is an important issue but, unfortunately, it often gets discussed in simplistic ways, as we have just heard from Mr Doszpot. It is quite simplistic to suggest that taxes are high. Of course everyone would like to pay lower taxes or, indeed, no taxes at all. It is also quite simplistic to suggest that the ACT has a narrow revenue base. Of course that is due to the fact that we do not have mining and agricultural sectors. Such simplistic suggestions hardly provide a framework for any meaningful discussion in this place.

When we look at our own-source revenues, they can be broken up into two parts: taxation that funds general services, and fees, fines and user charges. There are well-accepted principles for the latter category, such as the efficiency of services for which cost recovery is being made and the effectiveness of regulation. Own-source taxation comprises around 31 per cent of the budget revenue in the general government sector, that is, less than one third.

Nevertheless, taxation is the main focus of discussion. In general, taxes do not have a justification in themselves. Governments raise taxes to fund universal services, redistribute income or wealth or change behaviour. Taxation serves social policy objectives of government and the primary reference in discussing taxes needs to be the expenditure on services and infrastructure.

There are number of other contexts in which the level and mix of taxation need to be viewed. The financial arrangements under Federation provide for an equal capacity to deliver services, although individual jurisdictions may make policy choices to deliver higher or lower than average levels of service. Comparison with other states, therefore, is a useful reference for assessing reasonableness of taxation levels.

Taxes invariably impact on the economic activity. The level of taxation relative to the size of the economy is a useful and widely utilised measure of taxation. Notwithstanding the generally accepted principle for taxation to be broad based, all jurisdictions tax different sectors of the economy differently. Further, states and territories are not able, under the constitution, to tax income, production or consumption, which leads to fewer taxation bases such as property, labour and transactions.

Individual taxes should also be assessed against some key principles such as economic efficiency, vertical and horizontal equity, administrative simplicity, financial adequacy and sustainability. The overall taxation system needs to be assessed against these principles, recognising that not all taxes need to satisfy all of these principles for the overall system to provide an appropriate balance. It should also be acknowledged that it is impossible to identify a perfect mix of taxes, given the fact that taxes themselves are imperfect. However, the need to assess the appropriateness of the taxation mix remains, given the question of fairness of taxation burden for various sections of the community.

The Commonwealth Grants Commission assesses states' and territories' revenue and expenditure efforts relative to their capacities and provides a benchmark for the national average. According to the latest assessment from the Commonwealth Grants Commission, published in the 2009 update of relative fiscal capacities of states, the level of government service provided in the ACT is assessed at 121 per cent. That is well above the national average.

The taxation effort of the ACT in 2007-08 was 107.5 per cent. That is also above the national average, which by definition sits at 100 per cent, but should be put in the context of the level of service delivery. The ACT's total own-source revenue effort is also assessed at 121 per cent. The ACT's above average level of service delivery is assessed as being in balance with its total own-source revenue efforts.

The difference between the taxation effort of 107.5 per cent and the total own-source revenue of 121 per cent reflects other non-taxation fees and user charges. The consistency between our own-source revenue-raising effort and the level of service provision ensures that the high quality of government services currently provided in the ACT are sustainable. And the 2009 update shows that, over the past three years, the ACT has progressively aligned its total own-source revenue-raising effort with its high level of service delivery.

The mix of taxation in the ACT is broadly consistent with the mix in other jurisdictions. The ACT's payroll tax, land tax and general rates, and share of total revenue, are all within one percentage point difference from the national average. The most significant differences are for conveyances and gambling taxation.

In 2006-07, the conveyancing share in the ACT, at 26 per cent, was 3.6 percentage points higher than the national average of 22.4. While the ACT conveyance share was above the national average in 2006-07, it is important to note that there is a relatively large variation in the conveyance share across the jurisdictions. The 3.6 per cent deviation from the national average was within the statistical measure of spread across jurisdictions, which is 5.1 percentage points. In other words, this is within the norm.

For gambling taxation, the share was 3.0 percentage points below the national average. As with the conveyance share, there is a relatively large variation in the gambling share across jurisdictions and, again, the deviation from the national average is within one standard deviation.

Following on—in terms of whether we have a narrow revenue base—all states and territories have a narrow revenue base because, under the constitution, as I have outlined, states cannot tax income or consumption. This leaves transactions and property as the areas that states and territories can tax. Around 82 per cent of taxation in the federation is by the federal government; that is, around 18 per cent is left for the states and territories to raise. However, around 45 per cent of the expenditure is at the state level. The issue of a narrow revenue base for states and territories has been well recognised by the federal government in establishing the Henry tax review.

In terms of diversifying the ACT economy—and this is something that the opposition have argued at some length—I do not think you would find anyone who would disagree with having a diverse economy. But to say that would mean the ACT economy does not have a diverse economy, we would say, is not the case.

It is important to recognise that there are some industries that the ACT economy can simply not support. For example, mining and agriculture are highly unlikely to ever be sources of economic activity in the ACT. On the other hand, the ACT will have a large government sector for a long time to come, and hopefully forever, as Canberra is the seat of the national government. This could be viewed as a positive, as it provides a strong and generally stable source of economic activity. Government administration and defence count for about 30 per cent of the ACT economy and, abstracting from these sectors, however, the ACT economy is not that different to the rest of the country.

The main differences are that the ACT has relatively greater shares of property in business, services, education and construction and relatively lower shares in manufacturing, finance and insurance and wholesale trade. The calls for a more diverse economy are really calls, I think—and maybe Mr Smyth will go to this—for greater manufacturing and wholesaling sectors for the ACT and perhaps less emphasis on business services and education.

But the ACT government's business policy is not to pick winners. Our policy is to create an environment where all businesses can operate efficiently. It is not that clear that artificially generating manufacturing or wholesaling, for example, is the best direction to take the ACT. The value added per worker in these sectors is lower than in the service sector. It could also be argued that the strength of the ACT's education and business services is something that should be supported as adding significant value to the economy.

The government would rather focus on ensuring that the private sector can grow strongly, and this is already happening. The December 2008 ABS quarterly business indicator survey showed that both sales and wages and salaries in the ACT private sector are growing more strongly than in almost every state or territory. The 2008-09 budget supports an unprecedented investment of \$1.4 billion in the territory's infrastructure to increase the productive capacity of the economy, support the growth of the city and improve its amenities to provide a competitive edge to attract people in business. And we will continue along the path that we have already established.

Going briefly to Mr Doszpot's point on the property sector and the argument that the property sector is taxed too highly—I think that was the argument that Mr Doszpot was putting—this is an argument that the property sector has put for some time. However, when you actually go to the details, it is not supported by the facts. The Property Council claims that 52 per cent of taxation revenue in the ACT is from property taxes, fees and charges.

A comparison with other state governments in this case is wrong. The council has included in those figures local government taxes such as general rates. And so it needs to be recognised that in the ACT both state and local levels are combined and a significant proportion of the ACT's taxation is from general rates, which contribute to the cost of essential services across the community. Taxes make up only 30 per cent of the total ACT government revenue. Land tax, conveyance duty and the change-of-use charge comprise only nine per cent of the total ACT government revenue.

The Property Council's own study shows that, in comparison with other states, ACT taxes and charges on property development are low. Of the 13 residential growth markets considered in the Property Council's report, Canberra had the third lowest level of state and local government taxes, behind only Adelaide and Mandurah, 74 kilometres south of Perth. ABS data shows that the proportion of taxes on property in the ACT is in line with other states.

The Property Council also argued that property taxes increased significantly as a result of the 2006-07 budget. Rather, the tax rates for conveyance duty, land tax and change-of-use charges were all left unchanged, while the fire and emergency services levy was introduced. Its purpose was to contribute to the costs of protecting property.

The Property Council also failed to mention that property investment activity in the ACT is strong. The value of finance commitments to individuals for the purchase of investment properties in the ACT is averaging around \$96 million per month for the year ending February 2008, 37 per cent higher than the average value of investor commitments for the year ending February 2007 of \$70 million.

Are taxes too high in the ACT? The data available from the Commonwealth Grants Commission and the ABS indicate that the ACT is not a high-taxing jurisdiction. According to their work, our taxation effort is around the same level as it is in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia and is lower than in South Australia. The ABS data indicate that the total state and local government taxation in the ACT is lower than the national average. The ACT's per capita share of state and local government taxation is lower than in New South Wales and Western Australia.

The increases in taxes in the 2006-07 budget served to put the ACT's public finances back on a sustainable footing while ensuring that the government could continue to provide high-quality public services. Brendan shakes his head and just does not believe this. But the issues—and we had it in question time today—raised are about service delivery and more money for disability services.

At the end of the day, the money has to come from somewhere and, while you try to keep taxes at a reasonable level and while you look at all your areas of expenditure and you look for savings and you look to make sure your expenditure is efficient, our community demands high-quality public services. They demand it in health; they demand it in education; they demand it in child protection; they demand it in disability services; they demand it in the look of the city; they demand it in the amenity that they want in their own suburb. These are things that the Canberra community have said they want to see and, in order to deliver that to the community, the government has to raise the money.

The piece that is missing from the opposition's analysis is that the revenue base is too narrow and taxes are too high. Then they come in this place and argue for greater expenditure on a whole range of areas that they are interested in, and you just cannot have that debate without having the other. You cannot have the debate of how you increase services, address needs in the community, and not have the discussion on revenue raising and how you look at that.

From memory, although they argued a lot about all of the revenue measures in our 2006-07 budget, at the end of the day I do not think they voted to oppose any.

Mr Smyth: We voted against all of them.

MS GALLAGHER: You voted against all of them?

Mr Smyth: Yes, voted against the utilities levy, voted against the fire and emergency services levy.

MS GALLAGHER: You vote against the money that is being well spent now in health, education, child protection, disability. That is where it goes. Take a look at the budget. Take a look at where the increases in appropriations have gone to. They have gone to key areas of service delivery. The government will keep taking those decisions, mindful of the fact that we do not want to tax the community to a level that is unreasonable. But at the moment the level is not unreasonable. The expectations are very high. I think the challenge is to keep that balance together, and that is what we are seeking to do. (*Time expired.*)

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (3.37): I was a little surprised by the content of this MPI. I was hoping to hear more around how we might diversify the income and also broaden our revenue base, but that is not what I heard here this afternoon. There was a considerable amount of time spent talking about the statements of a Treasurer from more than four years ago. Then there was a focus on three areas that we do get our income from—taxation and money from the commonwealth through things such as GST and conveyancing. There was a lot of analysing in a very negative way, but there were not the sorts of things that I would have liked to have seen put on the table this afternoon—ways forward, solutions, new ideas. That is what I am very much interested in—those new ideas and those new approaches that we can take.

The ACT Greens have spoken in this place before about the fact that economic times are tough. We acknowledge that. We know it is not possible to conduct business as usual. The global financial crisis is with us, climate change is with us and the future of oil production is uncertain. It is fairly easy to point to some obvious sources of revenue which the government should explore. Unfortunately, I did not hear that from Mr Doszpot.

We will take the courage—and we need to take the courage—to put steps in place to move to a new, green economy. The Greens will be providing solutions to build an ACT economy in the future that is sustainable both economically and environmentally. President Obama has recently promised a green job package to create five million jobs in green sectors, believing that it makes sense to use a global economic crisis to start the long, hard process of making economies more sustainable. Ban Ki-moon indicated at the Davos World Economic Forum in February that the economic crisis presents us with the opportunity to solve many of our current troubles, including the threat of global recession.

The green economy is happening elsewhere overseas, with regional governments taking a proactive role to planning in their cities which centres around not only preserving the environment but saving money. In my speech on a matter of public importance on the green economy which I delivered in the Assembly on 9 December 2008, I used the example of the Masdar City project in the United Arab Emirates. Masdar will rely entirely on solar and other renewable energy sources. It aims to create a sustainable zero-carbon, zero-waste ecology. The city will be home to 50,000 people, which is similar in size to the Molonglo development. It seems that long-term strategies like this for new developments are one way of improving the ACT government's revenue base.

In Razhao, a city of nearly three million on the Shandong Peninsula in northern China, 99 per cent of households in the central districts use solar water heaters, and most traffic signals and street and park lights are powered by photovoltaic solar cells. In the suburbs and villages, more than 30 per cent of households use solar water heaters and over 6,000 households have solar cooking facilities. In addition, the city requires all new buildings to incorporate solar panels.

We support the ACT government building on the strengths of the region. A major strength in the ACT is that we have a considerable research capacity which is built on the foundation of institutions such as the ANU and CSIRO. In this context, as I said before, we support the government's recent investment in the ANU's new Climate Change Institute. Professor Will Steffen, the institute head, said:

We can devise a way of using our own city, and the Canberra region as a big laboratory to test new ideas.

More concretely, we have included initiatives to move to a greener economy in the Labor-Greens parliamentary agreement. A key feature of the agreement is an energy efficiency makeover of Canberra homes rated lower than three stars. This program is a winner for the environment, the occupants of the houses and the ACT economy,

because once the houses have been made over they will need less energy to heat and cool so less energy will be used and less greenhouse gases produced. It will cost occupants less for heating and cooling and, as many of these houses are owned by ACT Housing, it is a winner for the ACT economy. For instance, the jobs of insulating houses are inherently local jobs which can be done by local businesses.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts report on appropriation bill No 3 of 2008-09 called for tax incentives or other forms of incentives and related education programs to encourage the private rental sector—that is, the private landlords—to make energy efficient modifications to their rental properties. In our response to the PAC report, I mentioned the recent Australian Council of Trade Unions and Australian Conservation Foundation report *Green gold rush*, which identified that green industries could grow an additional 500,000 jobs and take on a significant global market share.

Leaders around the world have taken to the green economy as a key part of the economic recovery. I have already mentioned President Obama. The Prime Minister of Great Britain, Gordon Brown, chaired a meeting of business leaders in early March at which he called for a new industrial strategy to promote a green economy which he said would employ 1.3 million Britons by 2017, 400,000 more than now.

Estimates are that the world has already committed close to \$200 billion to the green economy under economic stimulus plans—especially the United States and the European Union. The recent CSIRO report *Growing the green collar economy: skills and labour challenges in reducing our greenhouse emissions and national environmental footprint* calls for concerted action by government, business and educational institutions to develop and implement new approaches to green education, training and jobs, the aim being to produce cost savings and greater competitiveness, greater wellbeing and reduced environmental impact.

We note that the Chief Minister has reopened the issue of pay parking in the parliamentary zone. This represents a great opportunity to broaden the ACT's revenue base. This was examined in 1994 and 2003, and we support the ACT government going down this track once more. We hope that there are better results. This is certainly an area where we can be looking at increasing revenue across the city. Another area to pursue to improve the financial base is putting in measures to collect the existing outstanding revenue—running to millions of dollars—from traffic fines. These measures need to take into account mechanisms to prevent such a backlog building up again.

In conclusion, the Greens see that the ACT's economic future can be green. The government has a range of options to help get there. We call upon government, business and the community to support investment in our future to make it so.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (3.44): It is interesting to hear what the Treasurer has to say. She gave Mr Doszpot a quick slap and said it was quite simplistic to suggest that the tax base here was narrow. But it is interesting that, on page 26 of the government's own economic white paper, there is actually a subchapter devoted to a narrow economic structure and revenue base. When you compare the old economic

white paper, which the government claims to have implemented and moved on from—I would move on from it, too, if I was them—and we move to *Capital development: towards our second century*, which was released in August last year without much fanfare at all, it is interesting to note on page 14 that there is this fabulous paragraph:

Today, the ACT economy is stronger than ever. In no small part this is due to the ACT Government's sound fiscal and economic policies of the last five years.

Well, perhaps we should discuss what those sound fiscal and economic policies of the last five years have left us with and where they have taken us—they have taken us into recession. You can argue whether it is a technical recession or a real recession, whether it has no effect or it has some effect; but the reality is, according to the standard measure adopted by most Western nations, we are in recession. It is not something that has just happened. If you look at four of the last six quarters, 12 out of the last 18 months, you see that we have had negative growth in this economy. When you have negative growth, it means long term you have got problems with your revenue and your revenue base, because if there is negative growth you are not going to have the taxes you need to deliver the services that the minister speaks of.

So it is interesting; it is okay to slap Mr Doszpot, but then there is a whole chapter devoted to it in the economic white paper that the government has abandoned. It is interesting for those who were not here when it was released to go to the economic white paper. If you look for these sorts of words in the capital development document, you do not find them, but on page 6 of the economic white paper there is an interesting quote from the former Treasurer, Mr Quinlan:

With this in mind, there is a need to diversify the ACT economy to build a strong private sector. We need to do this to lessen the economic dependence we have on Commonwealth activity, and because a stronger and more diverse private sector represents the bridge to the new economy that will help the ACT create a more dynamic and attractive society.

So there is the clear acknowledgement from the government that it needed to do this. All you can say when you look at attempts to diversify the ACT economy in the last seven years is that the government has failed on any measure.

But let us look at employment in that sector, because when the last Liberal government came to office 60 per cent of the ACT was employed in government employment. When they left office, that figure was 40 per cent. The private sector had overtaken the public sector, and that heralded the seven years of economic growth and revenue that this government inherited and abandoned quite dramatically. That is the problem.

In the white paper there were four principles. In the new document we have three themes. In the white paper there were nine priority industries to be developed. In the new document we have three themes. In the white paper we had 47 outcomes that the government sought to achieve—at least they gave themselves some questions to answer. In the new document we have three themes. We have abandoned the fundamental principle that underwrote the economic white paper, where the then Treasurer, Mr Quinlan, said:

We will do this at the policy level by being unashamedly pro-business and committed to actions that will make the ACT the premier business friendly location ...

Indeed, so strong was that commitment I think they actually adopted it as one of their principles. Yes, principle 2 is that the government aims to make the ACT the most business-friendly location in Australia. I looked for a reiteration of that commitment in the capital development document, and it is not there. It has been abandoned—four principles, nine key industry, 47 actions versus three themes. You can see quite clearly the government's attempt to diversify the ACT economy have failed, and that is why we give it a fail mark on this.

It is interesting that Ms Hunter asked what we would do. Well, we have put numerous ideas on the table. We actually said we wanted to talk to you at an economic roundtable, but you did not like the way the invitation arrived. So forget principle: "No, we're not going into that conversation because the invitation arrived in a means unacceptable." We offered to discuss our ideas at a roundtable, and I am not aware of any opposition doing that anywhere before, and all points to Mr Seselja for offering that. But we were turned down fairly and squarely by the ALP and by the Greens. We were turned down. So to stand here and say, "Tell us your ideas," is nonsense. We wanted to sit down with you and tell us our ideas, but you did not want to come to the table. That is the problem.

What have we done? We have said for years that there are so many opportunities that the ACT could follow if the government had the wherewithal. Let us go back to no waste by 2010. That is an opportunity that should be dear to the Greens' hearts. Fundamental to that was the development of business opportunities to make sure that we achieved that target. No waste by 2010 became no action by 2010, because it was abandoned by this government.

We said the government should help firms like Revolve. On the one hand the government wanted to be socially responsible and help people through the job creation that they wanted to do, which was a great thing, but on the other hand they wanted Revolve to help them achieve this no waste target, and it was locked out of the tip by John Hargreaves. It was locked out of the tip and given no assistance to help achieve that objective. That was a very simple, very practical thing this government could do that we had asked for.

Through the late eighties we said, "Let's develop an ICT sector," and we did. That culminated in the winning bid for NICTA. That is a Liberal Party initiative. We said, "Biotech is the way of the future," and we put together the winning bid that saw the establishment of Epicorp. That is a Liberal Party initiative. In the greenhouse gas strategy that I put out, we said there was opportunity to develop sustainability industries because we needed solutions that did not currently exist. Seven years of Labor government, particularly of the Chief Minister, has seen our target and the objective abandoned. It has put forward the most wishy-washy greenhouse strategy in the country.

In 2002 I suggested film. In 2003 we said, "Creative Canberra"; go for the sunrise industries. In 2006 we put down our plan for a convention centre, a convention centre

that still languishes because of the inability of this government to understand the importance of tourism to this city. I go to recommendation 30 in the economic white paper:

The government has commenced the procurement process for the development or redevelopment and operation of convention exhibition facilities in the ACT.

That was December 2003. The commitment to a new convention centre was made in December 2001 at the tourism awards, and Mr Quinlan said they would announce what they would do in December 2002. We are now just past December 2008 and we are still none the wiser about what the government would like to do.

So we have put ideas forward. We have more ideas to put forward. We will put ideas forward, but we offered you that opportunity and you turned us down. So do not sit here and say we have not spoken and we have not said what we would do, because we understand the importance of diversifying the ACT economic base to reduce the impact of the downturns that do come, and in this case the downturn that has come will be exacerbated by the policies of the Stanhope-Gallagher government.

We know from the ABS statistics that the amount of private sector employment in the ACT under Jon Stanhope and Katy Gallagher has declined. It was 60 per cent in the private sector when they came to office; it is less than 55 per cent now. It has declined, and with that opportunities have declined, opportunities like commercialising some of the initiatives out of the ANU that went to South Australia and then overseas. It is about assisting start-up firms that want to be in the ACT, like Spark Solar, that get no assistance from this government. The government said, "We will have to develop a policy program to assist you," because in 2006 they abandoned all industry assistance in the ACT, and we are going to reap a dreadful outcome from that.

What we have is a government that has failed to diversify the ACT economy and, as quite well enunciated by Mr Doszpot, a government that has failed on tax reform. The only statement that exists on its tax policy is from Ted Quinlan, which is squeeze them till they bleed, but not until they die.

So they have failed on diversifying the economy; they have failed on tax reform. All their taxes are property based; they simply squeeze that sector further and further. They have failed with budgetary policy, because they had an economic boom which they did not take the opportunity to use. They budgeted for deficits in the best of years, and we are now failing at the worst of times because of the inadequacies of this government. (*Time expired.*)

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (3.54): I thank Mr Doszpot for bringing this matter forward. I think the dismissive way in which the Treasurer deals with this is perhaps indicative of her approach to the seriousness of this issue and to her approach to the job of Treasury itself. We have seen, in fact, her early comments on what actually goes on in the framing of the budget. Of course, that caused many of us in the community concern; it certainly caused many in the business community concern—the apparent guesswork, according to Ms Gallagher, that goes into framing budgets in the ACT.

But what we saw enunciated by the Treasurer was, I think, a restatement of what has been this government's position in relation to revenue, and that is: once you have got revenue, you never, ever let it go; every tax is a good tax. The Chief Minister, I believe, has never seen a tax he did not like. I think the Treasurer is following in his footsteps.

We heard again put forward by the Treasurer earlier—it is always one or the other—that if you cut taxes by X, you must cut services by the same amount. That is essentially the argument we hear time and time again. We heard it from the Chief Minister when he clearly did not understand the concepts behind giving first homebuyers a tax cut, which involved, yes, the sacrificing of some revenue.

But there are two things in relation to the sacrificing of some revenue. There are things called savings, which I will come to in detail. Not every piece of government spending is good government spending. Not every piece of government spending results in services being delivered directly to the community. Not every piece of government spending is delivered in an efficient manner and cannot be done more efficiently and more effectively.

We know—and we have seen it in relation to the idea behind some of the cash handouts from the federal government—that there are also stimulus issues in relation to giving tax cuts. When you give tax cuts and you generate activity, you actually see revenue sometimes also coming in, which offsets the revenue that has been forgone. For instance, if you do give first homebuyers a tax cut and they choose to settle in the ACT instead of Queanbeyan as a result, we know that they will be spending money in the ACT. We know that they will pay GST here, which will come back to the ACT government to provide for services. We know that they will pay things like rego here and other rates and charges.

There are a number of ways of looking at this. It is not as simple as the Treasurer would have us believe: if you ever cut a tax, you have got to cut a service to match. It does not work like that. We see, I think, why they are so committed to keeping every tax. No doubt we will see increases in taxes in this coming budget. But they are committed to keeping these taxes because they are committed, it seems, to every dollar of spending.

We know this from their response to our announcement in relation to savings: the Labor Party in the ACT claimed of course, and always claims, that any savings always result in job losses, which is not true once again, but also that any savings result in service delivery cuts. You need to look at some of the money that Katy Gallagher is so committed to continuing to spend to see the extent to which we will never see any relief anywhere under this government. By the same token, by committing to spend this money, it is either tax cuts that cannot be given or it is money that cannot be spent on more important things. They are the fundamental choices that need to be made by government.

When they choose to criticise cutting just \$100,000 in the first year and \$200,000 in the second, third and fourth years out of the marketing and communications corporate

affairs budget of Actew Corporation, that is money they cannot spend elsewhere. When they see the massive growth in the major projects and facilitation unit in the outyears they say, “No, we have to have every piece of that spending. We need to hold onto that”. That is the \$938,000 extra in 2008-09, the \$1.9 million in 2009-10, the \$1.97 million in 2010-11 and the \$2.019 million in 2011-12. This is over and above the original amount.

This is part of the growth to which we said no, we would not see the growth in that part of the bureaucracy and we would therefore be able to spend the money in other areas. This is the fundamental reason why Katy Gallagher, as Treasurer, says, “We need to hold onto this.” We know they need to hold onto it because they have said that all of these cuts they do not agree with. All of the cuts that were put forward by the opposition, according to them, are going to result in job losses. The Treasury figures do not have any space for redundancies; so we know they did not agree with that conclusion.

But we see what else Ms Gallagher, as Treasurer, has committed to keeping so that she cannot spend it in other areas and she cannot give it in tax relief. There is to be reduced marketing in the Chief Minister’s Department, \$600,000 over three years; a reduction in consultancies across government by five percent, which would save \$4.5 million in 2009-10, \$4.6 million in 2010-11 and \$4.7 million in 2011-12.

These are significant dollars, and these are significant dollars in savings that were found through looking at some of the low-hanging fruit and looking at some of the areas where this government does not wisely spend money. We said there are areas where we cannot spend this money and we can devote it partially to some tax relief and we can devote it to other areas of spending which we see as more important—putting it into smaller class sizes, for instance, as one as the important priorities of government; putting it into infrastructure and the building of roads, as another example.

We see this Treasurer and this government addicted to this spending, to the extent that they will criticise any attempt to find savings. Mr Smyth and Mr Doszpot have laid out part of the alternatives that have been put in terms of ideas to stimulate the economy.

We have also put forward things such as Infrastructure Canberra, which would assist the government with actually getting the job done. It is difficult to measure, but we do know that delays in infrastructure and the inability of this government to deliver on its infrastructure program cost jobs, cost economic activity and eventually eat into revenue for the ACT government. Infrastructure Canberra was a way of dealing with that. It was widely welcomed by industry because, for a small amount of money, for a small expenditure over a few years, we were making the structural changes that are needed in order to see this infrastructure delivered.

Likewise with the changes to the planning system that we proposed, many of which, it seems, the planning minister likes so much now that he is starting to adopt them—and it is flattering him having adopted our lower-class sizes policy as well—he sees the merit in our planning policy. But fundamentally this is about seeing the resources shifted to where they are needed. This is about structural and cultural change within ACTPLA, which everyone in the industry acknowledges is needed.

When we passed that piece of legislation last year in the Assembly in relation to planning reform, we said it counts for nothing unless you make the cultural changes within ACTPLA. They have not happened. In fact, the minister is now acknowledging that they have not happened, so much so that he has to either bypass them or indeed he has to pick up more of the ideas that we put forward such as shifting the resources to where the development applications are.

These are some simple but very important changes that can be made to stimulate the ACT economy, therefore improving the prospects for revenue going forward and giving the opportunities there.

The other side of the equation is to make savings where there is government waste. And we see example after example. We get criticised for going through the litany, but it is quite a litany in terms of the millions of dollars that this government has spent for so little gain. I have listed tens of millions there. Of course, we have heard things before such as the busway that they have wasted \$5 million on. We saw the money they were spending at Fairbairn for an empty building—\$5 million for filing. The list does go on.

They have not made the savings, which is why they need to hold onto the revenue. They refuse to see that tax cuts can be a good thing and, if you make the savings and if you make tax cuts the target, you can have the money to spend in the critical areas. That is something this government has failed to do. They have had \$1.6 billion in windfall gains and we, the taxpayers, have very little to show for it. It seems that under this Treasurer, this record will continue as they continue with this tax-and-spend philosophy. (*Time expired.*)

MS BURCH (Brindabella) (4.04): Revenue raising is important for governments, to ensure that they are able to deliver services to the community. That is the purpose of revenue raising and it should not be forgotten in any discussion on revenues. The government's record on improving efficiencies and administration is unquestionable and the budget incorporates more than \$1 million in efficiencies year after year. But the opposition has focused on taxation and, indeed, has not really yet shared with us what it can do.

Turning to taxation, ACT government taxes account for only 31 per cent of the total revenue required to deliver services to the community that the community expects and deserves. Taxation, nevertheless, is the main, though myopic, focus of the opposition when it comes to resource-allocation decisions in the annual budget process.

It is important to understand where the ACT sits with other jurisdictions and why, so I will go to some point of comparisons. "Taxation is too high" is, of course, the most common comment from those opposite, and it usually comes out as a conclusion. But there is an obvious question to us, and that is: compared to what?

According to the latest assessment from the Commonwealth Grants Commission, published in the 2009 updated relative fiscal capacities of states, the level of government services provided in the ACT is assessed at 121 per cent. This is the

highest level of service provision across all jurisdictions. The taxation effort of the ACT in 2007-08 was 107.5 per cent. That is the equation: 21 per cent above the average services and only 7.5 per cent above average taxation. The ACT total own-source revenue effort is also assessed at 121 per cent. The ACT's above average level of government service delivery is assessed as being in balance with its total own-service revenue efforts.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mrs Dunne): Order! The time for the matter of public importance has expired.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Ms Gallagher**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Relay for life

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (4.07): I will speak briefly about the relay for life, which I had the opportunity to participate in over the weekend. It is a fantastic event put on by the Cancer Council and it gets bigger and better every year. This was the 10th year of the relay for life and I understand that, on the Friday before the relay, \$135,000 had been raised at that point and they were hoping to—and this was also reported in the *Canberra Times*—raise over \$200,000, which is a big improvement on previous years. They had 2,000 participants in the relay for life.

For those who are not familiar with it, it is a 24-hour relay at the AIS, around the track, and teams make sure they have someone on the track throughout those 24 hours. I was able to participate for only about an hour and a half, unfortunately. It was enjoyable, nonetheless. The team that we had was there for the entire 24 hours. It is a fantastic event; it is really good fun. I am hoping next year that I can do the overnight session and get a bit of the extra Christmas pounds off and just enjoy it and raise money for cancer research.

I would like to congratulate all of those participants, the over 2,000 Canberrans who participated, the Cancer Council volunteers and the employed staff who put it together. It is a sensational event. It is genuinely a lot of fun and it will continue to grow. In fact, they actually had to turn people away this year because there was a shortage of space and they are looking at ways they can get around that for future years. Perhaps there is a challenge there for government to assist.

But it is a great event. I would like to give it a great plug. We look forward to it going on for many years and raising more and more money for cancer research. I congratulate volunteers and all those who participated in the event.

Harvest festival Narrabundah community festival

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (4.09): I would like to rise briefly to speak about two events that I attended over the weekend, on Saturday. Coincidentally, they were

two festivals that took place for the first time. I want to acknowledge both groups of organisers because they were tremendously successful events. I think they were helped by the weather on the weekend. Both are community initiatives that I think really added value to the life of this city over the weekend.

The first that I went to was the harvest festival, conducted by the environment centre at their facilities on the ANU campus near Lennox Crossing. I think this was a festival designed to celebrate the harvest season and promote local produce from the Canberra region, in particular. There was a great crowd there on Saturday, a range of providers of local natural produce, workshops on how to grow your own garden, how to compost—these kinds of things.

There was a great spirit there and, I think, a really valuable contribution to raising awareness about the enzymes of food and the values of growing produce locally. Sometimes I think just how much better things taste when they are grown locally. I think there was a good crowd there and I really hope this is the first of many years to come for the harvest festival.

The other event that I then attended was the Narrabundah community festival put on by the Old Narrabundah Community Council and Harmonie German Club. It was held at the Harmonie Club premises on Jerrabomberra Avenue. Again, I think it reflected a great community spirit in Canberra. Those two organisations, the Harmonie German Club and the Old Narrabundah Community Council, got together and worked to put on a festival for their own community, to promote a sense of community spirit and give a space for community organisations to show their wares, to raise awareness of their own programs and engage with the local community.

There was, again, a good turnout on Saturday, I think aided by the terrific weather. I think the organisers were pleased but were hopeful that it would be the first year of many years to come. Based on the success of Saturday, the feedback that I had from the people that I saw there at the festival, the good time that people seemed to be having and the range of activities on offer, I think it will be a festival that will continue on into future years as well.

I would like to finish by congratulating all of those community groups that made that effort to initiate both those festivals this weekend, for the first year. I think they were great initiatives and I look forward, hopefully, to going to both of them next year and having similarly good weather for their occurrence next year.

**Death of Ms Margaret Spalding OAM
Death of Mr Theo Moulis**

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (4.12): I was not able to be in the chamber this morning for the motion of condolence for Ms Margaret Spalding OAM. I did attend the very emotional memorial service for Ms Spalding yesterday at the Southern Cross Club and would simply like to add my own recognition and understanding of and tribute to her enormous commitment and incredible service to the Canberra community and to Koomarri in particular.

The reason I was not able to be here this morning was the funeral of another great contributor to Canberra, a long-time friend of mine and contributor to both the Canberra sporting and business communities, Mr Theo Moulis, who passed away suddenly last Wednesday. Theo came to Australia back in 1948, a long time ago, and contributed greatly to the development of the hospitality industry in Canberra in particular where he ran a number of the most-recognised establishments in Canberra— restaurants such Bacchus Tavern, Neptune’s Haven, Charlie’s restaurant and the Tower Restaurant.

Mr Moulis was also a great contributor to the sporting community of Canberra, with a number of clubs that he was involved with—a number of junior clubs as well as senior clubs. He was the foundation director of Downer Olympic, foundation director of Canberra City Soccer Club, which was the very first entry into a national competition by a local sporting team.

Mr Moulis is survived by his wife, Nicki, and children, Danny, Antony, Nicholas, Madelaine and Natasha. On behalf of our community, I would simply like to pay my respects to another great contributor and a very quiet achiever who did a lot to make Canberra the place it is today.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 4.14 pm.