



Debates

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Tuesday, 23 June 2009

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Tuesday, 23 June 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 custodians, and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

**Notice not conforming with standing orders
Ruling by Speaker**

MR SPEAKER: Members, I wish to make a ruling on a notice on the notice paper. Last week Mr Coe lodged a notice to amend Disallowable Instrument 2009-68, which is the Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) Regular Route Services Maximum Fares Determination 2009 (No 2).

Government-sourced advice provided to me by the Chief Minister indicated that the instrument cannot be amended. As such, after discussing the matter with the Clerk, I believe the notice contravenes standing order 77(i), and I am therefore ruling the notice out of order and instructing the Clerk to remove the notice from the notice paper.

**Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee
Scrutiny report 8**

MRS DUNNE: 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 8, dated 22 June 2009, together with the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MRS DUNNE: Scrutiny report 8 contains the committee's comments on 41 pieces of subordinate legislation and two government responses. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

**Privileges—Select Committee
Membership**

Motion (by **Ms Le Couteur**) agreed to:

That Ms Bresnan be discharged from the Select Committee on Privileges and that Ms Hunter be appointed in her place.

Estimates 2009-2010—Select Committee Report—government response

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Treasurer, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Services and Minister for Women) (10.02): Mr Speaker, for the information of members, I present the following paper:

Estimates 2009-2010—Select Committee—report presented—*Appropriation Bill 2009-2010*—government response, dated June 2009.

I move:

That the Assembly takes note of the paper.

I present the government's response to the report of the Select Committee on Estimates 2009-2010. I thank the committee and its support staff for its report on the Appropriation Bill 2009-2010. The report, spanning three volumes, has been prepared in a short time frame, and the government appreciates the effort that has been made by the committee and its secretariat. I would also like to take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank Mr Tony Harris for his efforts, time and work put into providing an independent, informed and insightful analysis of the territory's 2009-10 budget.

Mr Speaker, concerning the report by the Select Committee on Estimates and its consideration of the budget, the committee has canvassed a wide range of issues, the outcome of which has been the presentation of some 130 recommendations to the government. The government has responded to each of these recommendations. Given the number of recommendations and the lack of supporting information or rationale for some recommendations at least—and I will talk about this further shortly—the government would have preferred more time to prepare their response. However, we considered it important that its response is provided to the Assembly before the budget debate commences.

I will not take the Assembly's time now by working through each of the estimates committee's 130 recommendations. The recommendations are separately discussed in the response document, which I have tabled here today. However, I would like to highlight, Mr Speaker, that although 130 recommendations is a significant number, and they certainly cover a wide spectrum of issues, there is limited focus, if at all, on the budget as a whole, on the strategic budget and fiscal issues facing the territory following the sharpest and most synchronised decline in the economies around the world.

Prospects for the ACT economy—and this is following the global financial crisis—draw three sentences from the committee. There is a recommendation to substantiate revenues and another asking the government to demonstrate appropriate responsibility and make the necessary fiscal policy decisions with respect to savings revenue and associated matters. The report does not even appear to recognise that the government has presented a strategy to return the budget to surplus. The government has

incorporated a number of policy decisions with respect to savings in this budget and clearly specified its targets for the coming seven years.

The government has articulated its approach and the processes it would adopt for its future saving decisions. The committee has not engaged on these matters. Reference to the budget plan appears only once in the entire report, as a footnote noting the government had updated it following the commonwealth budget. Does the committee have a view on the objectives of the plan that the government has adopted? Does the committee have a view on the time horizon, the return-to-surplus period? Does the committee have a view on the balance between expenditure and revenue measures that the government should pursue? Unfortunately, Mr Speaker, the committee's report appears to steer well clear of these pertinent strategic, financial and economic issues.

There is only one reference to unallocated savings, recommendation 52, where the committee recommends the government, in determining currently unallocated savings, avoid any unnecessary imposition on front-line health services and report back to the Assembly with progress by the last sitting day of the 2009 calendar year. Of course the government will avoid any unnecessary imposition on front-line health services. The government's budget plan is based on preserving and, in fact, enhancing priority services where necessary. But did the committee provide an input to the government on what is necessary and what it considers unnecessary imposition?

The committee had the benefit of analysis and advice from an expert of the background, experience and calibre of Mr Tony Harris, an expert engaged by the committee itself, I might add. Unfortunately, Mr Speaker, the committee does not appear to have engaged with its own expert advice. At least the report does not reflect his analysis and conclusions. The government appreciates Mr Harris's analysis of the territory's financial position, its ability to support borrowings to finance capital investment and its strength to absorb temporary deficits over the recovery period. I note that Mr Harris has also analysed an extreme scenario where none of the savings is realised and revenues fall by a further \$200 million. He has concluded that neither of the ensuing net debt and interest charges are particularly worrisome. These are important matters in the context of the current fiscal and economic environment and unfortunately the committee's report is silent on all of these matters.

Mr Harris has also analysed the integrity of the government's budget estimates and its record on managing expenditures to budget, and the government is pleased with his conclusions. Mr Harris has noted that the drop in revenue following the commonwealth budget update would further endanger the government's policy of fully funding superannuation by 2030. The government has indicated that a review will be undertaken during the 2009-2010 financial year to assess the magnitude and timing of further cash injections to achieve the objective of fully funding the liability.

Mr Speaker, I sincerely believe that the chair of the estimates committee, who I note has not even come down to hear this response, failed to understand its role. The committee serves the interests of this Assembly and the community. It is not there to serve his political interests. The chair missed an opportunity to provide substantial and constructive input into what has been a tough budget to bring together given the difficult economic climate.

This is disappointing for me not only as a member of this Assembly but as a resident of this territory. The committee has not seized the opportunity to provide real debate or real options on the issues affecting the budget. This estimates committee was obviously trying to score political points rather than provide considered discussion. It is here that I note that one member has dissented from this report, largely in response to the overtly partisan point-scoring character of the report, preferring instead to provide constructive policy-based input on significant elements of the budget.

Unlike the expert consultant engaged to analyse the budget, the estimates committee appears to have failed to recognise the context in which the budget has been framed. Our budget strategy stacks up, our budget is considered and our budget is responsive. Delivering such a sound budget in these extraordinarily difficult times has been possible because of the strength of our budget, and this is due to our past and continued prudent financial management.

Mr Speaker, returning to the main report of the estimates committee, generally its recommendations failed to raise any serious issues that would prevent the passing of the Appropriation Bill. I also note the absence of a recommendation on passing the Appropriation Bill. The Leader of the Opposition had threatened to block the budget and has now confirmed that the opposition intends to do that and vote against the budget.

This is incomprehensible, Mr Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition has not engaged in matters pertaining to the budget and the circumstances of the territory's finances. They have not provided an alternative plan and now they will try to block the budget. This is irresponsible, Mr Speaker. This is a budget during a very uncertain time—a point I have stressed for some time now and a point the expert adviser has stressed. This community needs confidence. The business community needs confidence and certainty. It is irresponsible to create a climate of uncertainty and it is irresponsible to undermine community and business confidence.

The Leader of the Opposition is entitled not to engage. He is entitled not to have a plan of his own, but he should not play politics with the economic and social wellbeing of this community. It is a pity that the Leader of the Opposition has not decided to join, despite my invitation, to work together. Mr Speaker, the government will be getting on with the job of prudently managing the territory's finances in these difficult times. The government will be getting on with the job with preserving and enhancing services to the community while returning the budget to surplus and the government will be getting on with the job of supporting business and investment.

I again thank the committee for its report and remind the Assembly that this budget aims to provide stability in the territory and to increase the confidence of the ACT community in these tough economic conditions. I commend the government's response to the Assembly.

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

Paper

Mr Speaker presented the following paper:

Estimates 2009-2010—Select Committee—Report—Appropriation Bill 2009-2010—Speaker's response dated June 2009.

Appropriation Bill 2009-2010

[Cognate paper: Estimates 2009-2010—Select Committee report—government response]

Debate resumed from 7 May 2009.

Detail stage

MR SPEAKER: I understand it is the wish of the Assembly to debate this bill cognately with the government's response to the report of the Select Committee on Estimates 2009-2010. That being the case, I remind members that, in debating order of the day No 1, executive business, they may also address their remarks to the government response to the estimates report.

Standing order 180 sets down the order in which this bill will be considered. That is, in the detail stage, any schedule expressing the services for which the appropriation is to be made must be considered before the clauses and, unless the Assembly otherwise orders, the schedules will be considered by proposed expenditure in the order shown.

With the concurrence of the Assembly, I am proposing that the Assembly consider schedule 1 by each part, consisting of net cost of outputs, capital injection and payments on behalf of the territory. Is this the wish of the Assembly? That being so, schedule 1 will be considered by each part, consisting of net cost of outputs, capital injection and payments on behalf of the territory; then the clauses prior to schedule 2 and the title.

Schedule 1—Appropriations.

Proposed expenditure—Part 1.1—Legislative Assembly Secretariat, \$6,163,000 (net cost of outputs), \$691,000 (capital injection) and \$5,495,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$12,349,000.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (10.13): Mr Speaker, the estimates committee report made three recommendations against the ACT Legislative Assembly Secretariat, recommendations 10, 11 and 12. I notice that in the Treasurer's response, recommendation 10 is noted, recommendation 11 is noted and recommendation 12 is not agreed. It is interesting that recommendations 10 and 11 are noted, and it says that this is a matter for the Legislative Assembly Secretariat, but recommendation 12, which is not agreed, even though it is a matter for the Legislative Assembly Secretariat, is quite curious: they do not agree to non-executive members' offices having the same sort of access to information and communications technology as do the executive members. The reason given states:

However, it is noted resources provided to Ministers reflect the substantial additional workload.

That is interesting, Mr Speaker. Our shadow ministers have a similar workload; those of the crossbench have a similar workload.

Ms Gallagher: Come on, Brendan.

MR SMYTH: We all cover and are responsible for scrutinising the same issues. We hear the mirth. I notice that the Treasurer was on the radio this morning disparaging particularly the size of email boxes. Information is important. To quote the motto of the Royal Military College: information is power. It is interesting that the government refuses to acknowledge that those not in the executive may need some additional resources to do their job properly. The government's answer to many of these questions is to say, "Let's have more members." But if all members were better resourced or equally resourced, there would be the opportunity to allow opposition members, non-government members or non-executive members to do their jobs properly.

It is interesting that the government take that stance. It was interesting that in opposition they often said that they needed more resources. I guess that is the nature of going to the government benches.

Mr Speaker, there was some discussion when you appeared before the estimates committee. We thank you for your appearance. One of the issues was the reporting, in that the activities of the Secretariat would be implementing the Greens-Labor accord. I raised some questions, and others certainly raised questions, about whether or not that is actually a priority of the Secretariat. I note what you said on the day and the discussion that we had on that matter, but it is a concern to me that that made it into the actual budget documents.

To have the ACT Greens-Labor Party agreement as something that the Secretariat sees as a priority—there needs to be a very clear division here. That which is political needs not to be in the Assembly Secretariat—indeed, it needs not to be in any of the departments' appropriations. Decisions made by the executive are; decisions to run the Assembly are. Indeed, yes, we know that currently the admin and procedure committee is looking at the Latimer House principles. What comes out of that, if it is recommended, will be rightly looked at by your vote, Mr Speaker, in the Assembly—as to how that is actually implemented. But to have it up front in these documents is a step down the politicisation of institutions that should be apolitical. We had the discussion on the day; unfortunately, I have not had a chance to read your response. I shall read it shortly and if I feel the need to say anything further I will.

It is important that the Secretariat is financed appropriately. It is important, for instance, that the committee secretariat is financed appropriately, given the burden that we have all placed on the committee secretariat in terms of extra committees, whether they are select committees or extra inquiries for the standing committees. It is important that, first, as I think we all do, we appreciate the work that is done by the committee staff but, second, we need to make sure that it is an appropriate response.

The committee system, used appropriately, is a very important part of the process. For a unicameral house, it is a very important opportunity for all members to come together, put aside their party leanings and attempt to come to a consensus position where we can move forward on those things that we agree on. It used to work a lot better before majority government. I think the system is improving. I look forward to those improvements in the coming years and under your stewardship, Mr Speaker.

I note that in paragraph 2.2 of the report there is reference to bike racks. Some promises were made in the committee that bike racks would appear, and they have magically appeared, so well done on that score.

That being said, Mr Speaker, this is largely uncontroversial, again except for the government's position that they deserve more.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (10.19): The Greens support the inclusion of the appropriation for the Legislative Assembly in the budget. We welcome the move of the very efficient ACT government library from Territory and Municipal Services to the Secretariat. This was one of the items in the Labor-Greens agreement and it also fits within the Latimer House principles in that the Assembly should control its own resources.

It is noted from estimates evidence that there are some financial details still to be determined, associated with the transfer of staffing resources—in particular, the need to upgrade the head librarian position, the future growth of the library collection and possible future expansion. We would expect that the finalisation of these issues would be accommodated within the proposed allocation or the resources presently allocated to Territory and Municipal Services and not be part of further funding requests.

There is work in relation to the upgrade of lift components and the installation of a new chiller to replace the ageing system. From our relatively short time in this place, we have seen that these upgrades would improve conditions and access for staff, visitors and members and fit in with the overall aim of last year's building audit to move the building to a more energy efficient footing.

We have no issue, and we support this line item.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (10.20): Mr Speaker, I was surprised to hear Mr Smyth criticising the government for its refusal, apparently, to provide further resources to the Assembly. First of all, that is simply not the case. The government has provided additional resources to the Assembly—and, indeed, did so in some earlier appropriations shortly after the election. I might leave the Treasurer to outline those further, should she wish.

But I want to draw members' attention to the real contradiction and hypocrisy that we hear from the Liberal Party on these matters. Here we have Mr Smyth criticising the government for refusing to support additional resources for the Assembly. But what

did the Liberals propose to do if they had been elected to government? I draw members' attention to the savings that they identified as part of their pre-election commitments. Those savings proposed an efficiency dividend for the Legislative Assembly of \$156,000 in the current financial year, \$318,000 in 2009-10, \$324,000 in 2010-11 and \$325,000 in 2011-12. Here we have the Liberal Party criticising the government for our apparent failure to provide resources and they proposed an efficiency dividend of over a quarter of a million dollars. They cannot have it both ways.

Unfortunately, what we see in this place is the typical opposition for opposition's sake from the Liberal Party. There it is in black and white—over a quarter of a million dollars in efficiency dividends that the Liberal Party said they were going to impose on the Legislative Assembly if they were elected. Mr Speaker, let us see if they can try and keep their stories straight and consistent during this budget debate, but I am afraid this is not a good start.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (10.22): Mr Speaker, just briefly on this item, the ACT Legislative Assembly Secretariat in particular does an excellent job.

Mr Stanhope: Why were you going to cut them?

MR SESELJA: This is, I suppose, the difference. We hear the interjections. Ms Gallagher says that it is good to cut from Health but we should not look for savings in other areas such as the Legislative Assembly. It is a ridiculous argument.

We do believe that the Legislative Assembly provides an excellent service to members. There are the odd complaints, but very few complaints. I personally am always impressed with the professionalism of the staff that we deal with and the professionalism of the advice. I want to particularly take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Secretariat staff who supported us during the estimates process; they are a hardworking lot.

Mr Corbell: A bit embarrassing, isn't it, Zed? It is embarrassing, yes.

MR SESELJA: The interjections demonstrate the complete lack of plan. They criticise us for looking for efficiencies. That is their criticism. They say, "You should not look for efficiencies." They are going to have unallocated efficiencies that they apparently will find somewhere down the track in areas such as health and education, but apparently any other efficiencies are not worth finding.

We believe that governments can always operate more efficiently. We believe that it is important that governments live within their means. The response from the Treasurer and others across the way highlights the complete lack of plan. We do pay tribute to their professionalism; we do believe we get an excellent service from the Legislative Assembly Secretariat. But it is important that, when we are faced with seven years of deficits under this mob—and that is seven years, if we can believe it—

Mr Smyth: Temporary.

MR SESELJA: Temporary deficit. We are faced with seven years of deficits, but we actually do look for sensible savings. We are committed to finding sensible savings. It appears that we are the only party in this place committed to finding sensible savings. The government has been exposed for not doing that work; it is important that we put that on the record.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Treasurer, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Services and Minister for Women) (10.25): Just briefly on this item, the savings that the Leader of the Opposition refers to are the savings that were proposed in order to pay for their election commitments; they were not savings to deal with the impact of the global financial crisis on the territory's budget.

Mr Seselja: Not true.

MS GALLAGHER: It is true, and they were presented in such a way. The savings were presented as a means of offsetting the expenditure commitments they made in the budget, which left them with relatively small surpluses—slightly larger than the surplus that we had forecast in the pre-election budget update. Mr Seselja, time has moved on, my friend, and we have seen dramatic reductions in our revenues—dramatic reductions in our revenues.

The savings proposal outlined by the Leader of the Opposition prior to the election, including an efficiency dividend on the Legislative Assembly in the order of \$1 million over four years, was prior to any savings measures that they would have needed to take had they been elected to government. It is an important point that Mr Seselja keeps trying to hop around behind. He knows it is the truth, but he never accepts it.

Our efficiency dividend, which we have applied across government—I am not sure if the Liberals support that efficiency dividend; they have not made it clear whether they do support that efficiency dividend—has exempted the Legislative Assembly. I have written to the Speaker, asking the Speaker to consider the application of the efficiency dividend on the Legislative Assembly, but at this point in time we have not imposed one on the Legislative Assembly.

Let us just put the shadow treasurer's comments into perspective. He wants more resources for the Assembly. The Leader of the Opposition wants to cut \$1 million to pay for election commitments. Then we have this rather larger issue of the impact of our loss of revenue on our budget. Perhaps throughout the next 25 hours of this debate, the opposition may have a view on that. And maybe—just maybe—they will come up with a plan or a response to it other than blocking it.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—Part 1.2—ACT Executive, \$6,246,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$6,246,000.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (10.28): Mr Speaker, it is obviously critically important that we see adequate funding for the ACT executive,

but it is worth looking at how some of those resources in the ACT executive are being used and what came from the estimates committee on that matter. In fact, we saw throughout the estimates committee process examples of political interference by the ACT executive in departments and agencies. We saw this pattern of political interference and politicisation from ministers' offices. This is how they used the resources of the ACT executive.

We see it time and again. We see the health minister walking away. She gave us probably the clearest example of interference, where she called up the CEO, the head of ACT Health, who obviously does not have better things to do with his time, according to Ms Gallagher, than to take her phone calls organising political advertising for her party. We saw not a scrap of documentary evidence to back up the use of Canberra Hospital for ALP advertising, yet this minister, the Minister for Health, had no qualms in politicising the head of her department. In fact, she put him in a very difficult position, in that the minister essentially asked him to arrange ALP advertising on her behalf and on behalf of the ALP.

That was a disgraceful politicisation of an agency, of a department, and of a departmental head. We saw the bar set extraordinarily low by this government. Remember when they used to actually comply with their ministerial code of conduct? That is in fact what the ACT executive is meant to be bound by—the ministerial code of conduct—yet we see this constant disregard for what is set out in that ministerial code of conduct.

We saw it also in education, although in a slightly different way. We asked whether it was appropriate for ministers to request the use of facilities for ALP ads and the minister for education stated:

It would have been improper for me as minister to have sought advantage for my political party in relation to such a request.

That is what Andrew Barr thinks of this.

Mr Hanson: Quite right.

MR SESELJA: Well, he did not actually follow through on that, but it was a good statement of principle, wasn't it? It was a great statement of principle from Minister Barr—that it would have been improper for him to have sought it. Of course, he was having a go at his factional opponent there in Katy Gallagher, who did not think it was improper for her to call the head of her department and arrange for Canberra Hospital to be used for ALP ads. But he did put down an important difference of principle—that is, he believes it was improper; it would have been improper and therefore it was improper for the health minister to do exactly what he was being asked whether he would do.

Ms Janet Davy, the Acting Chief Executive of the Department of Education and Training, said:

I can certainly answer from the Department of Education and Training's point of view that we gave permission for no filming to occur on any of our school sites

for any political advertising, as per the caretaker conventions ... It is the department's view that we would have not given permission, because we would believe it is a potential conflict of interest ...

I think Ms Davy acted honourably. She was not aware—because this had happened before her time; certainly before her time as acting chief executive—that permission actually had been granted, and she came back and corrected the record, to her credit, after the lunch break. But once again, it is a very important statement of principle from a senior public servant that it would not have been appropriate because it was a potential conflict of interest. So we have the minister for education saying it would have been improper for him to use his office. We have the Acting Chief Executive of the Department of Education and Training saying it would have been a potential conflict of interest. But we then saw that the education department actually did approve it.

It is worth noting that the education department's approval was at the request of the minister for education's chief of staff. The minister for education's chief of staff made the request. So it would have been improper for him to get on the phone but it was okay, obviously, for the chief of staff to do so. I suppose that is one step removed from what Ms Gallagher did, and I suppose that is where Mr Barr is trying to distinguish between his behaviour and the behaviour of the health minister on this matter. At least the education department put something in writing. We do have a record, and some limiting in that letter, of the use of the school site for ALP advertising. Nonetheless, we again saw a politicisation.

In fact, with respect to the first time that we were alerted to this, we asked a question on notice well before estimates and the answer we got from the education minister was actually a non-answer; it was an avoiding answer. It left it in doubt, and we can see why. We then got a misleading answer and then we finally got to the truth. So we saw an attempt by the minister to not be full and frank, but at the same time to have a real dig at the health minister regarding her use of government resources and her politicisation of the public service.

It is pretty damning when you have not just a minister saying it would have been improper, even though his chief of staff did it, but also you have the acting chief executive, to her credit, saying they would not have given permission because "we would believe it is a potential conflict of interest". It is an important statement of principle. It is a principle that I think the health minister should take note of. It is a principle that I think the education minister should take note of.

Indeed, we saw, in a slightly different way, the executive politicising our police force. I think this is particularly concerning. The ALP, in announcing the extension of hours for the Gungahlin police station, essentially put the Chief Police Officer in a very difficult position. They arranged it as an ALP event, as an election event. They invited along all the ALP candidates, they had the photo op with the ALP candidates, the police car, the chief of police and the minister.

This is no reflection on Mr Phelan because he made it clear in the hearings that he actually did not know. He did not know that his minister was going to politicise this

event in the way that he did—that he was going to use it for his party political benefit and invite his factional colleagues from the left of the Labor Party to come along to this launch. I think it may have been crashed by one on the right; I am not sure. I think one of the right candidates may have found out about it and just turned up. I am not sure that they got invited. Nonetheless, it did put Mr Phelan in a really difficult position. I think that was apparent when he was asked, “Were you advised ahead of time that you would be having photo ops with Labor candidates?” and he said, “No.”

I think this is a really poor reflection on our Attorney-General. The Attorney-General was prepared to put the chief of police in the ACT in such a position that he was in some way co-opted, against his will, it would seem, into being in this photo op and being part of this ALP launch.

There is a pattern of behaviour here, a disgraceful pattern of behaviour. They have set a new low bar. They no longer care about the ministerial code of conduct. They seem to have thrown that out of the window. And they are setting the bar so low, to the extent that the minister even endorsed the decision of the planning minister not to show up when called. That is the new Jon Stanhope standard of ministerial accountability. With regard to all the words in the ministerial code of conduct about respect for the institution of the Assembly, it is a matter of, “Well, don’t worry about that; if it’s inconvenient, don’t show up, thumb your nose at the Assembly, show contempt for the Assembly.”

We have got a pattern of politicising the public service, which has been commented on adversely by a senior public servant and, indeed, in a roundabout way, by the education minister, although his hands are far from clean on this issue. We see a consistent pattern of politicisation of the public service which does undermine confidence. I think it is particularly concerning when we see what the Attorney-General did, but also what the health minister did, in having no documentary evidence to back up such arrangements—not going through proper channels where we could have actually seen some sort of documentation to back this up. They have set a new low bar for the politicisation of the public service in the ACT.

They take our hardworking public servants and they politicise them for their own ends. This, unfortunately, is how the ACT executive operates now. They regard the ministerial code of conduct as really just words that they do not have to comply with—statements of principle that they may have once believed in but clearly they no longer believe in them now.

They believe in the politicisation of the public service for their own ends. They believe in a breakdown of process, a misuse of process. The health minister, in calling her chief executive and saying, “Could we arrange ALP advertising in the hospital,” knows that no other political party would have got that kind of treatment. They have set a new low bar for ministerial standards and ministerial accountability.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (10.38): The appropriation in this budget is reflecting the full-year impact of these additional resources and wage increases for existing staff. We would expect wage increases to be in line with the normal guidelines and the funds allocated. This, of course, is to

provide extra resources to the executive. There have been some extra resources allocated to non-executive members as well.

Following on from Mr Seselja's discussion on the use of government facilities for party political purposes, we note that in recommendation 1 of the estimates committee report the committee wanted some guidelines around the use of this and processes put in place that would be displayed on websites and that there would be a clear process that everybody could follow. I note that in the government response they have just noted this request. I would sincerely hope that that is followed through with some proper processes and procedures.

I note that they have lodged a submission to the select committee looking at government advertising, but I do not think it is onerous to put these policies or procedures up on a website and to maintain that. It then makes it very clear; it adds a level of transparency and accountability that certainly we would like to see.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—Part 1.3—Auditor-General, \$2,112,000 (net cost of outputs), totalling \$2,112,000.

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (10.40): The Auditor-General is an essential part of the accountability of the executive to the Assembly and to the community. The ACT Auditor-General was created under the Auditor-General Act 1996 to promote accountability and provide independent advice to the ACT Legislative Assembly on the efficiency and effectiveness of ACT public sector agencies.

It reports directly to us, the Assembly, rather than to the executive government, and it is funded separately, which is why we are debating it as a separate line item. These are the sort of arrangements which are normal for auditors-general in other parliaments, because it is recognised that the Auditor-General is an important part of the accountability mechanisms.

Executive accountability is the heart of our system of government and it is built on three parts: separation of powers, parliamentary scrutiny of executive actions, and ministerial responsibility. Most governments, of course, do not welcome scrutiny, although probably all opposition and crossbench members would work to promote it. For the opposition, the crossbench and the independents to effectively scrutinise the government, they must have information. Of course, there are a variety of ways that we can get information—questions on notice, questions without notice, annual reports and their associated hearings, budgets and the estimates hearings, freedom of information, and parliamentary committees.

All of these have an important role to play, but you will be glad to hear that I do not intend to bore you all by going on about them here. What I am going to go on about is the role of the Auditor-General, because it is a very important part of the accountability mechanisms.

The Auditor-General has a number of functions. Firstly, the Auditor-General is the Auditor-General of the various public sector organisations. It does the financial

statement audits for the normal government departments and agencies, and it does this in just the same way that external auditors audit companies and other entities. It does it basically for the same reason that other people get things audited. These audits provide the independent assurance to the parliament and the community that the information contained in the financial statements of the various public sector entities which are audited are fairly presented in accordance with the Australian accounting standards and the applicable legislation. This part of the Auditor-General's work is actually funded as part of the departments' budgets. It is a cost to the departments, so it is not part of the A-G's budget allocation, which is what we are discussing right now.

The Auditor-General also gives general advice to agencies with respect to new accounting standards. Recently there have been significant changes to the international financial reporting standards, which I will talk a little about later.

The Auditor-General also does performance audits. These are audits which evaluate whether or not the organisation, or the program, is achieving its objectives effectively and whether it is doing so economically, efficiently and in compliance with all of the relevant legislation. These are the things which are funded by the budget in the A-G's appropriation, and these are the things which are under threat in this budget.

As you can see, the Auditor-General has a very important role, firstly, in making sure that the books of the government are accurate—that is the financial statements audit—and, secondly, in reporting on how well departments and agencies are fulfilling their functions. That bit is the performance audit part. This is vital information for parliament and the community to scrutinise the government's performance. That is the function that we are basically talking about today in this appropriation, and this is the function that is so annoying the government that they do not want to adequately fund it.

Some overseas auditors-general, notably the British, have gone as far in their work as trying to work out how much money the auditor-general saves through performance audits. The British auditor-general decided that there was possibly a nine times payback. No figures, to my knowledge, have been done in the ACT, but I am certain that it would be a positive payback.

As people may be aware, I am the chair of the public accounts committee, and we recently went to New Zealand for a meeting of the Australasian Council of Public Accounts Committees. I can report back that every single public accounts committee, from all of the Australian states, the federal parliament and a number of associated Pacific island states, said that they found their auditors-general absolutely invaluable and they found the performance audits absolutely invaluable. There was unanimity that this is an essential part of executive accountability. If the legislature is to do its work, we have to have reliable information. The Auditor-General, through the performance audits in particular, is a key way that we get this information.

Looking, as Mr Seselja said, at the situation in the ACT, I noted in Saturday's *Canberra Times* Mr Stanhope made a number of comments in relation to the Auditor-General's report on ambulance services. I quote from the *Canberra Times*. He said:

I think perhaps it's time for the Auditor-General's office to be audited so we can have a look at the appropriateness of the level of her funding.

He went on, apparently, to say that most certainly there could be a funding cut. He said:

I wouldn't anticipate that, but when we have a situation where the ACT's Auditor-General's office, on early advice to me, receives 400 per cent more funding than the NSW Auditor-General's office, then that's an issue I want to look at.

He went on to talk about the per capita funding. In the ACT, it is apparently \$16.95 per resident, whereas in New South Wales it is the lowest, at \$4.88. Talking about that, yes, certainly our costs are more than those in New South Wales. That has to be true for quite a lot of things that the ACT government does. We are a small jurisdiction.

Mr Seselja: It's about critical mass, though, isn't it?

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes. There are some inevitable issues with being a small jurisdiction. Given some of the issues in New South Wales—and RailCorp is probably the first one that comes to mind—do we really want to say, from an auditor-general point of view, that we are comparing ourselves with New South Wales? Is this really what we are aiming to be—as good as RailCorp? I really do not think so.

Last year, the Auditor-General's Office ran a deficit, and it ran a deficit so that it could continue to keep the same number of performance audits. The estimates committee discussed this issue at some length, because it appears to be the case that the Auditor-General has two choices, neither of which I would regard as attractive, given the current budget allocation. Either they will have to run a deficit again or they will have to decrease the number of performance audits. So recommendation 14 of the estimates committee was:

The Committee recommends that the Auditor-General's funding allocation be increased to allow for the target number of performance audits to be reached without running a deficit.

I strongly support that recommendation. I am getting close to running out of time. In the government's response to the recommendations, they point out that expenditure for the Auditor-General has increased in the last few years. While I am not the Auditor-General and cannot answer in great detail, my understanding is that a significant reason for this was the challenge of implementing the international financial reporting standards in the public sector.

As some members may be aware, there have been significant changes in these standards, but most of these changes have been made on the basis of private company reporting rather than public sector reporting. There are significant changes or interpretation work that needs to be done to make this work within the public sector. It was the topic of a whole afternoon's discussion at ACPAC because it is a major issue. This is one of the reasons why the Auditor-General has required additional funding so that we can implement these properly in the ACT.

Finally, I strongly support the estimates committee recommendation regarding increased funding for the Auditor-General.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (10.50): Mr Speaker, have no doubt about it, what this government have done in real terms is cut the budget of the Auditor-General. What they have said is, “We cannot control her, so we will constrain her.” And that is not a government keeping their promise to be more honest, more open, more accountable. It is interesting that, beyond that, not only are they going to constrain the money that the Auditor-General has to spend, they are now going to seek to influence the inquiries that the auditor does.

When you go to page 11 of the government’s response, recommendation 14 states:

The Committee recommends that the Auditor-General’s funding allocation be increased to allow for the target number of performance audits to be reached without running a deficit ... Not agreed.

“Auditor-General, cut back what you are doing because we do not like the scrutiny.” I will read the last paragraph of this section on page 11, for the benefit of members of this place:

The Government intends to seek external advice on a methodology to support the Auditor-General identifying and prioritising activities for the performance audit programs. Following consideration by the Government, this advice will be provided to the Public Accounts Committee for wider discussion.

“So not only are we unhappy, not only are we going to constrain, we are now going to seek to control the Auditor-General of the ACT because we do not like it when she holds us to account.”

The government needs to go back and actually read the Auditor-General Act 1996. I go to part 3, “Functions and Powers”, paragraph 9, “Independence”:

The auditor-general is not subject to direction by the Executive or any Minister in the exercise of the functions of the auditor-general.

I wonder how we view the comments from the Chief Minister on Friday when he got a report that was critical of his government and that he did not like. Instead of addressing the issues, instead of saying, “Okay, these are things we will look at and will discuss on basis of fact,” he simply shot the messenger. Beyond that, he then threatened the independence of the auditor. That is what he has done, have no doubt about it. The Chief Minister, the man who holds up civil liberties, the man who holds up human rights, the man who believes, supposedly, in legislating about free discussion, does not want a free discussion from the Auditor-General.

The Auditor-General is independent. It is why her arrangements have her reporting to us through you, Mr Speaker, so that what the auditor does cannot be held back by a government that does not like the determinations of the auditor. I will read the section again—part 3, paragraph 9, “Independence”:

The auditor-general is not subject to direction by the Executive or any Minister in the exercise of the functions of the auditor-general.

It is interesting—and Ms Le Couteur mentioned the conference that the public accounts committee attended—that around the world people are starting to view the performance audits of their audit office as being as important as, if not more important than, the financial audits, simply because the financial audits are now, in the main, computerised; they are done in a way which makes it very hard for them to be manipulated.

But it is in delivery—what we do through the taxpayers' dollars that are spent by departments at the direction of their ministers—it is looking at the performance; it is actually looking at the output. What did the taxpayer get for the dollar that was spent on his or her behalf that this government is so worried about? And we hear it time and time again. This is an inputs-based government; it is like all Labor governments. "We spent more money, therefore we are doing a good job."

But by any objective measure, if you look across the board at the performance of this government—and just take Health, for instance—yes, the budget has gone up but the performance has not gone up commensurately. That is the problem and that is why the Auditor-General and the independence of that office are so important.

It was an extraordinary outburst from Mr Stanhope last week and it is extraordinary for the Chief Minister to behave in this way. What the Chief Minister has now questioned is funding for the Auditor-General and the efficiency of the Auditor-General's Office. It is interesting that around the world—we were told at the conference that we just attended—various jurisdictions are allowing the auditor-general to be funded through different mechanisms; that it does not go through the executive. In some cases it is negotiated directly by the auditor-general with the treasury or it is done by the parliament. Why is that happening? Because governments are squeezing auditors when they come up with decisions that the government of the day does not like.

Then Mr Stanhope proposes a rigorous audit of the Auditor-General. The Auditor-General can be audited; the Auditor-General has been audited. It can be done at the direction of PAC. And the public accounts committee, which over the last seven years has been variously controlled by different parties in this place, have the right to authorise the auditing of the Auditor-General.

If the Chief Minister is concerned, I do not recall—and I have been on PAC all the time for the last seven years—any letters from the Chief Minister asking that she be audited. I do not recall, until the Chief Minister gets a bad report card, that he suddenly thought that the Auditor-General should be the subject of a rigorous audit.

Then we get this absolutely ridiculous notion—and again it is perpetuated in the response from the Treasurer—that somehow the Auditor-General is overfunded; somehow she gets too much money. And it needs to be read, members. I will read it here now. Recommendation 14 is "Let us give the Auditor-General the funding to do the job properly." Government response:

Not agreed.

A preliminary analysis of funding of Auditor-General functions for Australian States and Territories suggests the ACT Auditor-General is comparatively well funded. The ACT Auditor-General has the highest total revenue per capita (\$16.75 per person in the ACT—the lowest is NSW at \$4.88 per person) and a mid range (fourth highest out of eight) level of direct government appropriation per person.

So what do we do? Are we going to pick and choose the standard by which we judge what our auditor does? It would be interesting to apply that same analysis, the flawed analysis, to the states. And it starts from a flawed assumption that you can actually compare these directly. If New South Wales spends less on education, will there be a rigorous audit of education to reduce education funding to the level of New South Wales? Do people want that? Is that what the Chief Minister is saying? Is he saying that the spending per capita on health in New South Wales is the target level and we do a rigorous audit of health to find out? And is he saying, for instance, in relation to arts funding and perhaps even public art funding, that we do a rigorous audit of what is spent in the ACT against what is spent in New South Wales?

If you want to pick New South Wales as the benchmark, I do not think there are too many people in the ACT who would like a New South Wales standard applied to the people of the ACT. I cannot think of any issue where the people of the ACT would like to be treated in the same way as the New South Wales government—

Mr Seselja: They cannot even pay their bills.

MR SMYTH: They may be starting to pay their bills but it is going to take them a long time to pay off their bills. It is the most appallingly run state but it is the state that the Chief Minister runs to. What he is saying is “We want a New South Wales-style of government in the ACT.” There might be some advantage in that. At least by 2012 they are going to be back in surplus; at least that was their intention. At least they have put the intention on the table, although many might have doubt about it. But the problem with this is that it is a flawed premise from the start.

You only have to look at, for instance, the editorial in this morning’s paper—and I will read it—about the Chief Minister. It states:

He said Pham’s office received the most per capita funding in the nation, at \$16.75 per ACT resident, whereas NSW was the lowest at \$4.48. But there are vast differences in the size of the population. NSW has more than six million residents and the ACT has just more than 300,000—a factor of 20.

The obvious burden for a tiny jurisdiction is having to fund establishment costs while relying on a lower overall funding and potential revenue from clients. The NSW Audit Office generates revenue in excess of \$20 million a year and has more than 400 clients. In Canberra, the Auditor-General receives about \$3 million, or two-thirds of its income, from financial audit fees from government agencies—

of which there are probably fewer than 100—

If government funding to the Audit Office is reduced, the number of performance audits will drop and the level of scrutiny on government agencies will be lowered.

And that is the intention. That is the intention of our Chief Minister. He wants the number of performance audits to drop; he wants the level of scrutiny on government to be lowered. The editorial goes on:

This would be an unfortunate outcome for ACT taxpayers. Large bureaucracies need the checks and balances of an independent watchdog. Such accountability is central to our style of democracy.

Stanhope's reaction to criticism by the Audit Office should be to defend his administration's record, not to attack the bearer of the bad news. Who else is going to ride shotgun on the internal operations of government bodies, if not the independent Audit Office?

(Second speaking period taken.) And that is at the nub of it. On the one hand, you have got a government that does not want scrutiny. But on the other hand, you have got a government that does not want to understand where it is getting things wrong. Indeed, the realisation, both in Australia and in places overseas, is that audit offices save you money. On the one hand, they can save you money. On the other hand, they can extend the value that you receive for the dollar that you spend.

It is quite interesting to note that in the United Kingdom their National Audit Office—and I quote from page 17 of their annual report for 2007-08—reported:

... we increased our target to achieve £9 for every £1 of net expenditure, up from £8:1 to £1 in 2006-07. We achieved the target with financial impacts of £656 million in 2007-08.

And what the English audit office is saying, what the English auditor-general is saying, is “We save you money. We help you spend your money more wisely. We can actually help you improve service delivery. We can help you improve the number of services that you deliver and the quantum of services that you deliver.” And what the English audit office has found, and what the English parliament accepts, is that they actually save money.

So at a time when we are desperately short of cash, when we have got those temporary deficits for seven years—temporary deficits; “temporary” used to mean short term—we have a mechanism to help make the spend more effective. But what does the government want to do? They wish to attack that. I think it is worth reading a couple of paragraphs from the National Audit Office annual report. It says, under “Financial Impact”:

We are committed to achieving beneficial change from our audit work and our financial impacts target both encourage us to focus on that objective and help us measure our success in delivering such change.

They actually measure it in the United Kingdom. They quantify it. It continues:

In 2007-08 we increased our target to achieve £9 for every £1 of net expenditure, up from £8:1 to £1 in 2006-07. We achieved the target with financial impacts of £656 million in 2007-08.

Our total financial impact is drawn from detailed estimates of the financial benefits—

there is a good phrase, “financial benefits”—

of changes in government practice which we trace to our value for money studies recommendations or financial audit findings. This total is compared against our actual net running cost for the relevant year. To ensure that our financial impacts measure is as robust an estimate as possible of the impact of our work, we agree the estimates of impact with the department or other public body concerned and they are then reviewed by our internal auditors and by our external auditors.

So there is a very clearly enunciated process, a process with relevant checks and balances, that requires the agreement of the departments so that the British National Audit Office can actually quantify what they saved the British taxpayer.

What have we got? We have got a Chief Minister who wants to attack that process. He is not interested in savings; he is not interested in greater efficiency; and he is not interested in better outcomes for the taxpayers of the ACT. What he is interested in is protecting his own ego.

It is not just the British National Audit Office that makes these findings. Committees from the federal parliament, the commonwealth parliament, have come up at some stages with a figure of \$1 to \$10. For every \$1 that the Australian Audit Office spends, they make savings or efficiencies of \$10. At a time when times are tough and times are tight, for the life of me, I cannot understand why we had this outburst from the Chief Minister on Friday.

I guess Mr Stanhope’s problem is that he just cannot handle criticism—reasonable and balanced criticism of the management of the Ambulance Service, in this case; reasonable criticism of the management of respite care facilities, which came out recently; and reasonable criticism, for instance, of the role of the Chief Minister’s Department in the data centre and gas-fired power station proposals in Tuggeranong. And the problem for the Chief Minister, and consequently for the people of the ACT, when he is embarrassed, when he is caught out, when he is brought to account by the independent auditor, is that he lashes out.

The Auditor-General is a critical component of the ACT’s democratic process. Particularly in a unicameral house, where we do not have a house of review of this place, the auditor is the independent person who looks at it. The Auditor-General should be, must be, valued and supported appropriately. If the Chief Minister has a problem, he should respond positively and, as required, defend the record of his government’s administration.

The ACT’s Auditor-General has proved to be an excellent watchdog of the ACT administration for a number of years. The reality now is simply this: we have pressure

on the Auditor-General's budget. It will be resolved, at this point, by reducing staff. And the auditor told that to the estimates committee. She will be forced to reduce staff, which in turn reduces her ability to do her job by performing fewer performance audits.

I think it is a most unsatisfactory situation for the ACT government and, indeed, for the ACT community. As the auditor told the estimates committee—and perhaps Mr Stanhope should read the transcript before he lashes out in the way that he did—they do more than just the audit; they work with the departments to improve their efficiency, to improve their management, to improve their record keeping. The auditor made the point, quite particularly for the smaller agencies that do not have large finance sections in their department, they work with them to help improve; they provide advice that they do not have in house. She has been providing a service, an extra service, a bonus service, for our small agencies.

But what we have got is a government that seek to constrain that. They do not want a more efficient public service; they do not want a more effective public service. And constraining the auditor's budget in this way, in this budget, is an indication of that. It is interesting that the standard around the world and, indeed, more and more around Australia, now seems to be that you want to have a balance in the work that the auditors-general do, of about 50 per cent financial audits—and that is clearly defined by the number of departments and agencies that you have to audit—but also aim to have 50 per cent of your work in the performance audits, because that is the rich ground, to achieve a better outcome for the taxpayer, to get better services and to get better delivery of services for taxpayers.

But what we have heard from the auditor is that she will be constrained this year. She will have to reduce from eight probably to seven performance audits, whereas she probably should be going from eight to about 16 performance audits a year so that she can work in an efficient manner and in a timely manner through all government agencies over a relatively shorter period of time. The problem is that the government do not want that; they do not want the savings; they do not want the scrutiny. And we know from the outburst on Friday exactly why they do not.

I was going to go straight to the example that Ms Le Couteur quoted, which was RailCorp in New South Wales. I saw one quote that staff were blatantly siphoning off public moneys but it was the auditor and ICAC that took that department to task and ensured that moneys that were being appropriated were being spent on taxpayers, not lining other people's pockets.

The auditor has a real benefit here. The auditor can go in and do things that ordinary scrutiny does not allow, simply because the Auditor-General Act gives the Auditor-General the power to go in and make sure they get the evidence and get to the bottom of it. I, for the life of me, cannot understand why we would be against that. I think it is unreasonable; there is certainly not a case being made for it.

Then there are these petty antics of the Chief Minister: (1) he will throttle the money; (2) he will conduct audits. You can have them audited at any time. If he is truly concerned, he needs to write to the chair of PAC and ask that we have the audit office audited.

I know that Ms Pham takes it seriously. I know that she looks every year at her expenditure. I know that there are difficulties for her in keeping staff, retaining staff in a market that is particularly tight and where the commonwealth is consuming a lot of the resources. But what she points out is that she can give us a better return.

It is interesting that last year we heard in public hearings that there was something like 75 potential performance audits. And during this year's estimates hearing, what we heard was that that list is now closer to 100. Eight 12s are 96. Twelve years worth of work is already on the books for the auditor on teams that she thinks potentially should be audited. But it will not happen. It will take twice that time. And who knows how long that list will be.

The Auditor-General's appropriation in this year's budget is inappropriate. It should be increased to at least maintain last year's level. Ideally, what should have been done is that it should have been increased to ensure that more could be done towards—
(*Time expired.*)

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (11.10): I rise simply to reflect briefly on the comments that have already been made by a number of members. I was quite concerned by the reported reaction of the Chief Minister last Friday to the Auditor-General's report on the Ambulance Service. I thought the Auditor-General provided a very comprehensive report. I think it was a valuable report in terms of highlighting some of the potential areas of concern and ways to improve the Ambulance Service. I welcome the report from the Auditor-General because I think it is comprehensive; it is considered.

I think it is important to note that the Auditor-General's process is to draft a report and then go back to the relevant agency to seek their feedback, to make sure the Auditor-General has not got it wrong, has not misunderstood something. That agency is given a chance to further comment on the Auditor-General's initial findings. So I was quite concerned by the Chief Minister's reaction to sort of conflate the issue of a critical report and the issue of funding for the Auditor-General's Office.

I think it is interesting to note that, in the Auditor-General's response, the relevant department actually concurred with many of the findings. I am yet to look at absolutely all of them but there was certainly a strong sense that the department was taking the issues on board. So it is interesting to draw that distinction between the Chief Minister's reaction and the reaction of the department. I think that we actually had a confirmation on Friday of the approach of the government. It is a preference for shooting the messenger rather than looking at the substance of the matter. We saw it a couple of times last week. We saw a spectacular example here in the chamber and we saw a further example with the Auditor-General. I think that is unfortunate.

I note the government's comments in their response to the estimates committee. Mr Smyth and, I think, Ms Le Couteur have already touched on the issue of seeking external advice and basically looking at it. I do not know what the term is but there is an implicit threat to the Auditor-General, it feels, in that paragraph. While I would like to think that is not the government's intention in that comment—and I am sure

the Auditor-General is quite open to having a discussion about the right role for the Auditor-General's Office—I think if the government does not want this to be a threat, it needs to undertake any consideration of the role of the Auditor-General in a very transparent way.

I think it should primarily operate through the public accounts committee. Any review of the Auditor-General's Office should work through the public accounts committee. There should be a discussion of the terms of reference so that there is a very transparent process. Any report that is received from the executive must be provided in full to the public accounts committee, not some edited version, some highlights package or some interpretation from the executive. It must come in full.

I would seek in this chamber today a commitment from the government, from the executive, that if there is to be any review of the Auditor-General's role it be done through the public accounts committee, that it be done in consultation with the public accounts committee and that it does not turn into some sort of witch-hunt that reflects a sense of frustration that the Auditor-General is making critical findings. These are not political findings and there seems to be an assessment or an approach by this government that if there is a critical finding, it is a political finding. That is simply not the case here.

To suggest that the Auditor-General is making some kind of political finding and therefore question the Auditor-General's independence is outrageous. The government need to be very explicit; they need to stand up in this chamber and say that that is not their strategy. We need to know that there is an absolute freedom for the Auditor-General to make critical findings in the spirit in which the office does. It is important here to re-emphasise the way the Auditor-General's Office approaches these things. It conducts an inquiry, further discussion with that department, presentation of initial findings and further discussion before the Auditor-General comes out with the report.

I look forward to the Chief Minister and/or other ministers in this place clarifying their positions in relation to the Auditor-General and confirming their commitment to the absolute independence of the role of the Auditor-General's Office.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Treasurer, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Services and Minister for Women) (11.15): The government believes that the Auditor-General plays a very important role in monitoring and reporting on government activities, particularly through the performance and financial auditing process. It is important for the Assembly to acknowledge, though, that the government, again, like the Legislative Assembly, exempted the Auditor-General from an efficiency dividend when we were looking to apply that across government. It was in recognition of the important role that the Auditor-General plays and the fact that we were in a very tight budgetary situation in terms of capacity to fund new expenditure.

I have to say that as part of the budget process we would have got budget pressure, budget bids, from almost every agency across government. At least 90 to 95 per cent of them would have been returned without being addressed through this budget. Indeed, we went further: not only did we not address those budget pressures that

agencies were telling us about; we actually sought to impose savings on them. That is in recognition of the financial position that we find ourselves in because of the global financial crisis.

It is important also for the Assembly to acknowledge that in the past five budgets the Auditor-General's budget has grown on average at 17 per cent per annum. In 2004-05 there was \$1.254 million for capacity and cost funding which included two additional performance audit staff, external consultancy, and training and development.

There was also half a million dollars over four years for accommodation costs funded in the 2005-06 budget and in the 2006-07 budget, the budget where we sought enormous savings across government, the Auditor-General was provided with \$2.076 million over four years for additional compliance and performance audit capacity. These funding increases were base adjustments and continue into the 2009-10 budget and, indeed, continue into the forward estimate.

Whilst we accept that in this case the Auditor-General has put forward a case that there is budget pressure on her organisation, we believe—certainly it is the view of my department—that the bids around complying with new auditing standard APES 320 are one-off in nature and that they should have no significant ongoing impact. The Treasury view is that there were initial setup costs to comply with the new standards and some higher externally provided auditor costs, but these should not have an ongoing impact on the Auditor-General's budget.

I think also in the operating statement before the Auditor-General you will see that total revenue to the Auditor-General is expected to increase in the order of about \$100,000—it is \$90,000 from the estimated outcome. We are not seeking to impose the efficiency dividend. In terms of the view of Treasury, we would be very happy to work with the Auditor-General, not in any way of seeking to restrict or direct the Auditor-General's activities but to ensure that the Auditor-General is able to perform the role that she plays, the very important role, within the funding envelope that this territory can afford at this point in time.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (11.19): We proved last week that a week is a long time in politics. I thought it was interesting to note that on Tuesday the Minister for Multicultural Affairs stood in this place and extolled the great benefits that have accrued to the ACT from the refuge that we have given to waves of refugees over time. I was waiting for it and it came. There was the Minister for Multicultural Affairs listing amongst those people the current Auditor-General who had come here as a refugee many years ago.

I have worked with the current Auditor-General in many guises, both as a member of this place and previously as a staff adviser to the Treasurer when the current Auditor-General was the Commissioner for ACT Revenue and at times the Under Treasurer. I have nothing but the highest regard for her integrity, her professionalism and her capacity.

But it was a very short week because by last Friday the people of the ACT witnessed the most outrageous, threatening, bullying attack on the Auditor-General by the Chief

Minister. It was very interesting what happened over the weekend on occasions when I was out in the community. Two or three people whom I know fairly well and for whom ACT politics does not have very much cut-through commented on the outrageous attack by the Chief Minister on the Auditor-General. The questions were: “Has he really lost it? Where did this attack come from?” Let us just look at some of the words that the Chief Minister said the other day. This was, as Mr Rattenbury said, a case of shooting the messenger.

The Chief Minister was asked to stand up and talk about an unfavourable audit report in relation to the ACT Ambulance Service. It was an unfavourable report and there are a number of quite alarming things in that. But the really interesting thing is that the audited agency did not attack the Auditor-General. The audited agency took on board, for the most part, the comments made by the Auditor-General. This was not the case with the Chief Minister, who said:

We are currently funding the Auditor-General four times more than New South Wales fund their Auditor-General’s office and I think that there are some issues for us there, as well as for the Auditor-General and it’s probably time we had a look at that.

In the context of “I don’t like the report the Auditor-General has just brought down”, I consider that a threat. He went on to say—and this is a direct quote:

I think there’s potential for a very hard look at efficiencies within the Auditor-General’s office. I think perhaps it’s time for the Auditor-General’s office to be audited—

that sounds like a threat to me—

so we can have a look at the appropriateness of the level of her funding.

He went on to say that they would get an external auditor to do that. In response to being asked whether the Auditor-General could face funding cuts, he said:

Most certainly. I wouldn’t anticipate that but when we have a situation where the ACT’s Auditor-General’s office on early advice to me receives 400 per cent more funding than the NSW’s Auditor-General’s office, then that’s an issue I want to look at.

Madam Deputy Speaker, that was a threat. That was a threat because the Chief Minister did not like being put under pressure by an adverse report from an independent arbiter.

It is very interesting to look at the history of the Auditor-General’s Office, not just here but in other states. I remember two years ago I attended the Australian Study of Parliament Group conference about accountability. I think members of the Clerk’s office attended that conference. There was an extensive exposition on the role of the Auditor-General by the then recently retired South Australian Auditor-General and the importance of that role. There was somebody who was essentially forced out of office by a Labor Party in South Australia and who had spent a lot of time extolling

the virtues of the independence and the importance of the Auditor-General's role in Australia.

We have seen strong advocates for the role of the Auditor-General from, for example, Tony Harris, who has been our adviser on the estimates committee here, the former Auditor-General in New South Wales. He has been no shrinking violet when it comes to upholding the importance of the Auditor-General's role. But when someone is a current serving Auditor-General, they have no capacity to respond to the blatant threats that we saw last week and it is incumbent upon us in this place to come to the defence of the Auditor-General and call the Chief Minister to book.

The Chief Minister needs to come down here, while we are discussing the line in the budget about the Auditor-General, and either put up or shut up. He either needs to come down here and say in this place, yes, he does intend to take the whip to the Auditor-General's office or he needs to come down here now and—as I suspect what happened was that he had a rush of blood to the head, he was feeling trapped, he was feeling cornered and he did what he always does: he lashed out—while we are discussing this line, apologise to the Assembly, apologise to the Auditor-General and apologise to the people of the ACT for his unreasonable outburst the other day, which has not gone unnoticed. His behaviour was appalling and he needs to do the right thing and rectify his behaviour.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (11.25): The role of the Auditor-General is a critically important one and it is worth reflecting on Jon Stanhope's attitude, as has been touched on by other members, to the Auditor-General. It is reflective of a pattern of behaviour from the Chief Minister in relation to umpires. The Chief Minister, when the umpire makes a decision that he does not like, lashes out at the umpire. We see that time and time again, and we see it from this government. Mr Rattenbury referred, I think, only briefly, in passing, to the disgraceful attack we saw last week from the ALP, particularly Mr Corbell, on the Speaker and on the integrity of the Speaker in this place. And this is part of that pattern.

We happen to believe that sometimes the Speaker will get it wrong and that indeed there will be legitimate criticisms of a Speaker. But the Auditor-General is even another step removed from the role of the Speaker. The Speaker is someone who is elected. The Auditor-General is someone who I have never seen any evidence to suggest—and I challenge the Chief Minister and anyone else who wants to raise that criticism—is in any way biased, in any way biased to one side of politics or against one particular minister or against one particular government. I have never seen one shred of evidence that would in any way back up a claim like that.

But essentially what we get from the Chief Minister when he does not like the findings is an implication that she must be wrong or she must be biased or she must not be doing her job properly and, by the way, let us look at her funding and at whether or not we can cut the funding as a response to her making findings against the government. This is the disgraceful attitude of the Chief Minister towards the Auditor-General.

We saw his attitude expressed towards the coroner when the coroner found against him. When the coroner made adverse findings against the Chief Minister, he lashed out at the coroner. He questioned her integrity. He questioned her motives. In fact, the legal action that the government launched was questioning whether or not she was biased. And this is the standard operating procedure of this government: if you do not like the finding of the independent auditor in this case, the independent umpire, criticise, attack, the umpire.

I challenge the Chief Minister again to say in this place where he believes the Auditor-General is in some way not doing her job in a professional manner, in a non-partisan manner. I have never seen anything to suggest that this Auditor-General is anything other than fully professional and seeks to go about her job, which she takes very seriously, of keeping this government accountable. It is an accountability measure.

Governments of all colours do not always like scrutiny and they do not always like accountability. But this Chief Minister takes to a new level his criticisms of the independent auditor, the independent Auditor-General, when he makes the comments that he has.

It is worth going into what Tu Pham had to say, before we get into the Chief Minister's comments, in her opening statement to the estimates committee:

The government's proposed funding for the audit office of \$2.1 million in 2009-10 will not be sufficient for us to maintain the current audit capacity, nor will it be sufficient to increase our capacity to respond to the increase in government spending. In 2009-10, without any additional funding, the office will seek to reduce employee costs to return to a balanced budget, because, as you know, this year, 2008-09, we are operating at a deficit of \$199,000.

So the office have been forced into a position where, just to do their job, they ran a deficit of \$199,000—and this government is going to make that situation worse. She continued:

In a small office, we have very little capacity to cut costs elsewhere, so we had to forgo some employee costs. That is the biggest cost pressure on our office and ultimately it will lead to a reduction in our capacity to conduct our work, especially in performance audits.

It would appear from the Chief Minister's comments that that is exactly what this government want. That is exactly what they want. That is an outcome that they appear comfortable with and that is an outcome that they appear happy about. She said:

... it will lead to a reduction in our capacity to conduct our work, especially in performance audits.

The Auditor-General delivers a report into the ACT Ambulance Service and then we see the response. We see the response from the Chief Minister. He compares it to New South Wales: "We are currently funding the Auditor-General four times more than

New South Wales fund their Auditor-General's office, and I think there are some issues for us there, as well as for the Auditor-General, and it is probably time we had a look at that." I wonder what he meant by "we had a look at that".

We have got the Auditor-General running a lean operation; we only see a small number of performance audits able to be conducted every year. Only a small number of performance audits are able to be conducted currently on the budget. Jon Stanhope says: "Well, let's use New South Wales as a model. Let's go to New South Wales as the model on auditing, openness and accountability in government." The clear implication in what he said there is: "Well, look, we don't like what we're getting from the Auditor-General. The Auditor-General gets too much money as it is and in the future, once we have conducted our audit, I think we will have to look at cutting the budget of the Auditor-General." We have not heard that ruled out from this government. We have not heard it ruled out that they are going to cut funding, and in fact in real terms they are cutting funding in this budget.

Ms Gallagher: No—wrong.

MR SESELJA: Well, you are. We see the growth in all the other agencies. Ms Gallagher says, "Well, we can probably get it down to 4½ per cent in the outyears," but it is far less than that for the Auditor-General's office. So we do see a real cut in funding, and we in fact heard the Auditor-General address this point in estimates:

... since 2007, the percentage of funding allocated to our budget, to our appropriation, has declined as a percentage of total government spending. In 2006-07, the government appropriation to our office was 0.06 per cent of the total government spending. In 2009-10, it will be 0.053 per cent of total government spending. So we are not keeping pace with the government's increased spending, even though our work and the demand for our work link very closely with the government's spending and activities.

Ms Gallagher interjecting—

MR SESELJA: Apparently what the Auditor-General is saying there is wrong, according to the government; according to the interjections, that is wrong. Well, I will back the Auditor-General on numbers over this Treasurer or over this government.

But we do have this extraordinary attack. The Auditor-General goes on and makes quite a coherent case about the importance of the role. She talks about the \$9 for every \$1 and she says:

... I know that number has been used by a number of audit offices. As far as we are concerned, we regularly review the outcome of our performance audits and see how it impacts on government activities in terms of recommendations implemented by government agencies. It is not possible to quantify in terms of dollar return but we can say with certainty that a number of recommendations in our performance audits when implemented will lead to savings and efficiencies.

I do not think there would be anyone—I look forward to someone in this debate standing up and doing so—challenging that very reasonable conclusion from the

Auditor-General that, whilst there are various numbers, and the one to nine is one that is used, and there are obviously diminishing marginal returns, there is clear evidence that a well-performing audit office conducts its performance audits and makes recommendations to government. If the government takes those recommendations seriously and makes the changes, we will see savings; we will see savings and we will see efficiencies.

We have a government that actually has no ideas on how to find savings and efficiencies. It has put it all off. You would think that the Auditor-General could play a very important role going forward for a government that is so bereft of ideas on this issue; the Auditor-General could actually play the government's role. A government that believes it is doing a reasonable job and wants to do better would have no fear of a well-funded Auditor-General's office, because it would be assistance in its armoury. It would be another way for a government that was serious about finding savings and efficiencies to actually find those savings and efficiencies.

But what we have instead from the Chief Minister when the Auditor-General recommends changes, when the Auditor-General makes recommendations that do not always cast the government in a good light, is to go after the Auditor-General. It is completely the wrong approach to governance. The Chief Minister should take on board those recommendations, respond to those recommendations in a reasonable way, take on the ones that the government see will help them become more effective and more efficient, instead of attacking the credibility of the Auditor-General and making veiled threats about cutting funding. It is a disgraceful response that is part of a pattern of attacking the umpire.

We believe very much in the importance of the role of the Auditor-General, and we believe that the Auditor-General does need to be adequately funded so that the government can function more efficiently; a government that clearly is struggling to at the moment. (*Time expired.*)

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (11.35): It has been a very informative debate today, and many of the members who have spoken have made some very wise points. So it does really leave it to me to try and find more to say about such an important issue here that has been covered so extensively.

I would like to thank Ms Le Couteur for the comments that she has made about the importance of the Auditor-General—her role, the necessity that she provides to our democratic functions, to examining the performance of organisations and how accountable they are and indeed the efficiency of those organisations. The point you make about the nine times dividend I thought was very informative.

Indeed, when it comes to the delivery of services, none can probably be more important in our community than that of the Ambulance Service. It is there directly to save lives, and the recent audit report that was delivered by the Auditor-General does demonstrate to us clearly the effective role that she can provide to us in examining the delivery of services and how they can be improved.

The bulk of the debate that has been had here today has been on the independence of the Auditor-General, the actions of Mr Stanhope, the funding the auditor is receiving

in the appropriation bill and whether that is adequate. Certainly, although under the act she is independent one has to question that independence in light of the comments that have been made by Mr Stanhope. Indeed, Mr Rattenbury did highlight the effect that Mr Stanhope's words will have on that process and on the ability of the department to respond effectively, now that the Chief Minister has had his go, to the recommendations in the Auditor-General's response.

The estimates report clearly outlines, and Mr Seselja covered it in some detail, the effect that the appropriation bill will have on the Auditor-General's ability to do her job. What it means is that there is going to be a reduction in the number of audits that she can conduct, from eight to six. So, at a time when we need to be more scrupulous with our money, when we need to be looking to where we can make savings, to be making sure that all of our agencies are as efficient as they can be and are delivering the services to the community that we need, what we find is that the number of audits that will be provided is going to be cut. That is the result of this bill.

I turn now to the issue of independence and the issue that has been raised about the Chief Minister's comments. I read from the editorial in the *Canberra Times* today:

Stanhope's reaction to criticism by the Audit Office should be to defend his administration's record, not to attack the bearer of the bad news. Who else is going to ride shotgun on the internal operations of government bodies, if not the independent Audit Office?

All areas of government must deliver value for money and all agencies are under increased pressure due to the global financial crisis. This arguably makes the Auditor-General's role even more important.

It does not seem unreasonable, therefore, that the Audit Office receive more funding to carry out its crucial role of scrutinising government expenditure.

A robust democracy needs a robust auditing process. No government wants to hear the bad news—

certainly not the Stanhope government—

but rigorous analysis of spending will lead to better outcomes for all.

That is what members have been saying today in their speeches. What have we seen here? We have seen a government, true to form—in particular with the Chief Minister—whose only form of defence is attack. We are all used to it here—when we make comments in this Assembly or in the media that are negative about the government, we can expect to be attacked, and attacked ruthlessly. But I do not think any of us expected the sort of attack that has played out against the Auditor-General, someone who up until Friday apparently had the backing of everybody in this place, someone whose independence was not questioned. But now, unfortunately, because of Mr Stanhope's inference, his threat, clearly it can be.

Everybody in the community I think has read it as a threat—there are other letters in the *Canberra Times*, the crossbench, the Liberals. Just about everybody I have spoken

to—indeed, everybody I have spoken to, other than those on the benches opposite—have seen it is a threat. So I agree with Mrs Dunne: it is now for the Chief Minister to come down, apologise and correct the record.

Certainly, what message is the Chief Minister sending to the public service? We talk about the independence of the public service, and indeed there was much debate about this last week. What message is the Chief Minister sending to the public service? What he is saying is “If you criticise me, or if you criticise my government, then I’ll cut your funding.” We talk in this place about the independence of the public service, and we heard so much of it from the government last week when we were debating the issue of privilege—so much about the independence of the public service. And then, two days later, we have the Chief Minister going out and intimidating a public servant who has tried to question, tried to illuminate some problems within one of his departments. It is absolutely remarkable.

I turn now to the comments that have been made by the Greens, both in this chamber and also in the estimates report. If you follow though the estimates report, you will see a number of criticisms that have been made throughout, that the Greens have signed up to, that the crossbench have signed up to, and indeed they seem concerned about the funding that has been provided for the Auditor-General. They have also raised concerns to date—significant concerns—about Mr Stanhope’s comments.

I would contend that this is a test of the crossbench. This party have been elected on a platform of accountability and government accountability. It has been a major part of what they have talked about—we have all heard about third-party insurance, we have heard about scrutiny and accountability—and what they will do to ensure that this government is accountable. So where do they stand on this issue? I think it is time for the Greens to let us know. Will they be giving support to the government on this line item? Will they be voting for it? Will they be saying, “Yes, we’ve got some problems; the Auditor-General is being intimidated; the Auditor-General is being threatened; the Auditor-General’s funds are being cut inappropriately”? But, ultimately, when it comes to the test, when it is time for them to stand up and be counted, what will they do? It will be very informative today to see what the Greens will do in this place.

This is the point—and you get to these points, I guess, in a democratic process—where you do come to a bit of a crossroads. If you get to a crossroads and a point where the Chief Minister has threatened and intimidated the independent auditor, the judge, and the Greens decide that that is okay—if we have a position where in the estimates report they have said that they are not happy about the lack of funding for the Auditor-General and the implications that that has on the number of audits—what are they going to do about that? For them just to essentially roll over and let that go through I think would be disappointing, and we wait to see what the Greens will stand up for.

Ms Bresnan: So would you give the Auditor-General no funding?

MR HANSON: In conclusion, though, it is clear to see what has happened here.

Ms Gallagher: You’re going to vote against the budget?

MR HANSON: I am asking the question of what the Greens will do on this line item; what they are going to say about accountability. Words are easy, but sometimes you do have to stand up and you do have to be counted—and it does take risk. It is sometimes a difficult thing to do, but sometimes you do have to stand up and be counted. What is without doubt, though, what clearly has happened—

Ms Gallagher: Vote against it then. You have not voted against one line item this morning.

MR HANSON: What clearly has happened is that the Chief Minister has been criticised, and when he gets criticised he does not like it. Remember the letter that was written? “Quick, write a letter attacking the reporting in the *Canberra Times*.” Remember that one, Katy? He does not like the criticism, does he?

Ms Gallagher: The world’s greatest letter writer. Don’t talk to me about writing letters.

MR HANSON: He does not like it. The Chief Minister did that. The Auditor-General says—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, refer your comments through the chair, please.

MR HANSON: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker. Well, you could ask her to stop referring comments to me, maybe.

Ms Gallagher: Every time you get your feelings hurt, there is a letter: “Dear Mr Speaker, I had my feelings hurt. Please let the rest of the Assembly know. Help me.”

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Ms Gallagher, this is not a conversation across the chamber.

MR HANSON: What we are seeing from this government is that when they are criticised they attack the criticism. They attack; it is the only way that they know how to defend. They do not worry about the issues. They attack.

Mr Corbell: You want to exempt yourself from defamation issues, Jeremy. That is what you want.

MR HANSON: Again, this is my point: if I attack, it is defamation. This is the hostility, this is the attack, this is the sort of behaviour that we are seeing from this government, and this is what we saw on Friday when the Chief Minister attacked the Auditor-General.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (11.45): Mr Corbell has twice moved to stand up. I was going to give him the opportunity, but again he chose not to. I am not quite sure why he keeps avoiding this debate. Perhaps he wants to wait till he

can speak with no-one coming back at him. He is not very confident of his arguments. He is not prepared to get up lest they be rebutted. I was very keen to hear from another member of the executive on this attitude towards the Auditor-General. We know that the Chief Minister does not want to defend his attack. It is hard to know where the Chief Minister's head is on things like this, whether he is capable of regret and whether or not he is thinking to himself, "Maybe that unwarranted attack on the Auditor-General on Friday wasn't the right thing to do." Perhaps that is assigning a little too much grace to the Chief Minister. Indeed, we have not heard from him. Mr Corbell wanted to stand up, and maybe he will stand up at the end of the debate so that he can make a few comments that are not able to be rebutted. Mr Hanson is ready and waiting, I think, to respond, so Mr Corbell should be careful.

We repeat the point that the Auditor-General's role is to improve accountability, standards and efficiency to help the government perform better. Assigning any other motive to the Auditor-General is unwarranted and unjustified and is not backed by any evidence that has ever been presented to me. If someone has evidence of such motive they should present it; they should put it out there. But short of such evidence, we can only assume that the Auditor-General is performing her role diligently, professionally and impartially—looking at governments, whoever they may be, ministers, whoever they may be, and departments, whoever they may be, making findings and seeking to work with departments to improve accountability and performance.

Unfortunately, what we see from this government is a defensive attitude. Perhaps because they know that in many areas of government they are not performing well they take a defensive attitude. They see the Auditor-General as an enemy. They see the Auditor-General as someone coming in who is going to criticise them, expose their flaws, expose the fact that they are not getting value for taxpayers' money, expose the fact that ministers are inappropriately interfering in departments and expose the fact that this is a poor performing government which continues to perform poorly and, in fact, gets worse over time.

It is also worth mentioning another quote from the Auditor-General's evidence which I did not mention earlier. She said:

I would like to add that our performance audit works are not always aimed at saving money—

and that is true—

We aim at improved transparency, improved accountability, the protection of community safety or look at the government decision-making process. Saving money and improving efficiency is only one of many outcomes.

I think that is an important part of this debate that has not been dealt with in detail yet. Saving money—finding ways to help government save money—is a very important part of what the Auditor-General does. But by getting better outcomes in community safety, in health and in all sorts of other areas it means improved lives for Canberrans; it means the quality of the service we get from our government is better. Why would anyone be against that? Why would we have to see a government attitude that seems

to be to run down the Auditor-General's Office and attack the Auditor-General personally when it does not like the findings? Clearly, it could only be a government that is so defensive and so aware of its own flaws that it does not want to hear them ever exposed. It does not ever want any sunlight on the situation, any transparency, and the Auditor-General represents that.

The Auditor-General can actually do something that virtually no-one else can do, and that is to go into departments and find out what is going on. It is very difficult for anyone else to get an insight as to what is going on inside government. Unfortunately, with this government we cannot be there for every poor decision that they make behind the scenes—and there are many—for every contract that they sign without getting value for money and every action that they take that does not deliver quality services to the people of Canberra and does not effectively and efficiently use taxpayers' money. But the Auditor-General, to the extent that the office is resourced, has a unique ability to go in and improve those processes, to help improve some of that decision making going forward. All it takes is for the government to have an attitude of welcoming the input and not attacking the Auditor-General for her findings.

We saw, I think, an interesting exchange in relation to ACTION and some of the timeliness figures in relation to the Auditor-General. When ACTION got caught out—and Mr Coe might touch on this if he is going to speak to the Auditor-General—with their efficiency measure not being particularly effective and not being well explained, they blamed the Auditor-General. ACTION said, "The Auditor-General told us to do this." In fact, the estimates committee got correspondence from the Auditor-General which said that was not the case. In fact, I stand to be corrected. I am not aware that the actual proper clarification on this issue that the estimates committee sought has been forthcoming.

But it is indicative of the government's attitude to the Auditor-General. They do not see it as something that can improve outcomes, they do not see it as something that can help them improve efficiencies. Instead they see the Auditor-General as an enemy. They label her as an enemy and threaten to take her funding because they do not like what she says. That is a very poor reflection on this government. It is a very poor reflection, particularly, on the Chief Minister. I am not surprised that Mr Corbell in particular has been about to stand up a couple of times but he has not quite been able to bring himself to do it. He is perhaps waiting for a moment in the debate when he cannot be rebutted. We look forward to his input and his defence of the Chief Minister's comments, because I do not think Ms Gallagher addressed that.

Will anyone else in the government defend the Chief Minister's comments on this issue? Does anyone in this executive actually agree with the Chief Minister's view that we should be looking to cut the Auditor-General and cut the Auditor-General's funding because they do not like the outcome? Does anyone here want to stand up in solidarity with the Chief Minister on that point, or is he isolated within his cabinet? I see Mr Hargreaves is raring to go. I look forward to him defending the Chief Minister on this, so we can have two ministers on the record who believe that attacking the Auditor-General and veiled threats about funding is the appropriate response when an Auditor-General finds against a government.

I see Mr Hargreaves is waiting to speak. I look forward to his contribution. Mr Corbell could not quite bring himself to do it. He tried, he thought about it; he got up a couple of times and sat down. Mr Hargreaves looks keen to go. I think he could show up Mr Corbell when he speaks. I look forward to one of these ministers standing next to the Chief Minister and endorsing his comments, endorsing his veiled threats against the Auditor-General and endorsing his approach of shooting the messenger every time they get a finding which they do not like from the Auditor-General or any other umpire.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (11.53): What the government is proposing to do here is pretty typical of what we in the opposition have come to expect. I have only been in this place for six months or so and I have already worked out what this government's game is. It is pretty much to minimise anyone talking about their programs. If they do, you threaten to take legal action, you threaten to cut their funding, you threaten in any manner of ways simply to get the point across that the government is not here to be questioned. We are elected by the people of Canberra to do just that. We are elected to come into this place and to hold this government to account.

We have a budget of about \$3.7 billion and, as I said last week, when you look at the sorts of companies that have expenditure of \$3.7 billion you see the scrutiny that they go through in terms of their shareholders, their auditing and their requirements if they are a publicly listed company. You look at all those checks and balances that a company has to go through—also with the tax office—and you compare that to the scrutiny that we try and give the government. I think the government comes off pretty lightly simply because we do not have the resources to do all that we would like to do, which makes the role of the Auditor-General all the more important. The role of the Auditor-General is to do the things that the people of Canberra would like to see the government doing.

It is interesting that one of the articles in the *International journal of government auditing* from October 2008, just six months ago—in fact, the month of the election—states:

... enshrining the independence of the auditor general in law does not in itself guarantee that independence. The conference heard about a number of challenges to the independence of auditors general. The first arises from the increasing demands and expectations that auditors general are called upon to meet. Participants agreed on (1) the importance of constantly maintaining professionalism and the quality of their work and (2) dealing with Public Accounts Committees (PAC), government, and other stakeholders in an open but robust way. The second challenge—

and this is the most relevant one—

is securing the resources auditor generals need to discharge their responsibilities fully and effectively. Auditors general have explored different ways of funding their offices, including charging fees for the work they do. Overall, they—

and these are the conference participants at the 20th conference of the commonwealth auditors-general—

expressed a preference for direct funding from Parliament or the legislature, even though this arrangement may not be ideal in all circumstances. Participants stressed the need to demonstrate clearly the benefit that a well resourced, fully functioning audit office can bring to all concerned.

I think that last bit is the bit that is the most relevant: “Participants stressed the need to demonstrate clearly the benefits that a well resourced, fully functioning audit office can bring to all concerned.”

It is disappointing that this government is not embracing the Auditor-General. It is disappointing that this government is not working proactively with the Auditor-General to try and improve service delivery. If this government were fair dinkum about spending money properly and delivering services that the people of Canberra actually want they would be embracing the Auditor-General. They would not be doing what they are doing—that is, threatening them and then carrying out their threat by what is, in effect, cutting their funding. What we are seeing here is the government trying to minimise the role and the influence of the Auditor-General in the governance of the ACT. That is a pretty disappointing sign. Elsewhere we are seeing governments bolster auditors-general, but here in the ACT we are seeing the absolute opposite. We are seeing a government that is scared of the Auditor-General, scared of what the Auditor-General does, scared of what the Auditor-General will unveil and scared that the people of Canberra will realise how much wastage this government is producing.

The Leader of the Opposition touched on the issue of ACTION and the Auditor-General’s role, or lack thereof, in measuring the timeliness of their services. For members that may not be aware of what happened in the estimates committee with regard to ACTION, I will give a quick rundown. We asked why the target of 99.8 per cent timeliness for bus services was not met and why it was, in fact, only 83 per cent—a fall of about 16 per cent. After a bit of to-ing and fro-ing and people going all over the place, members of the committee and those present finally found out that the target that was set for 2008-09 and the way it was measured for 2008-09 were totally different things. The ACTION representatives present could not even explain how it was measured last year and how it was measured this year. Of course, that aroused some concern from the opposition. We asked this question on ACTION’s timeliness indicator:

Please explain the change in monitoring this indicator.

We received an answer to this question on notice and, like all the other ones, it was particularly late, but we did get it. Minister Stanhope said:

The previous measurement for this indicator was reviewed by the Auditor-General in its management comments about ACTION’s 2007/8 Statement of Performance. The Auditor-General considered that measuring timeliness of services by recording the time that buses left the depot was inappropriate.

If that was the case, why was there not a line in the budget to say, “It is inappropriate so we are going to change the way it is measured”? Instead, they just put in a figure

which was totally unrelated to the other figure, the previous figure to which it was reporting, and expected that to somehow meet their requirements for transparency and performance indication. The answer from Mr Stanhope went on to say:

As a new method for measuring timeliness was intended to be applied in 2008/09, ACTION and the Department agreed to amend the result of timeliness to 83%. In retrospect, it would have been more appropriate to leave the previous 99.8% figure and measure against that and report the result.

I repeat:

In retrospect, it would have been more appropriate to leave the previous 99.8% figure and measure against that and report the result.

It absolutely staggers me that there has to be some retrospective view. It staggers me that at the time it was not slightly odd that they were measuring something in a totally unrelated way. I find it absolutely staggering that this government would make such an error on a service that I believe takes a subsidy of around \$70 million. It is a huge line item in the territory budget, a \$70 million subsidy, and it is absolutely vital that the taxpayers get good value for money out of it.

In conclusion, the opposition are very concerned about the funding of the Auditor-General's Office. We would like to see an Auditor-General's Office that is properly funded and properly resourced so it can hold the government to account. I urge the government to reconsider this line item. I urge the government to put thought into how else they might be able to bring about the resources that the Auditor-General requires.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (12.03): We have heard many people speak on this item this morning, around the importance of the Auditor-General and the Auditor-General's Office in providing scrutiny—investigating various areas and services delivered by government to ensure that they are being delivered efficiently and that they are the services that the people of the ACT need and want. This is incredibly important. The Auditor-General's Office plays a vital role in the delivery of services—the scrutiny, the oversight of the services that are delivered.

This morning, we have been attacked by the Liberal opposition around our move that we will be supporting appropriation for the Auditor-General's Office. It was a nonsense situation not to support funding for the Auditor-General's Office. I am not sure if the suggestion there was that the Auditor-General should go with no funding in the next financial year.

Obviously, we have raised concerns about the sorts of new issues and work and the increase in workload that the Auditor-General has to deal with, particularly with implementing the international financial reporting standards, which has been quite a comprehensive body of work that has obviously impacted on the budget of the office and has not been bedded down. It will have an ongoing impact on the office and therefore there is a concern that the number of audits able to be conducted each year will have to drop in order to be able to continue that sort of work.

I want to make it quite clear that we have been out there. The Greens have been out there, quite clearly, making public statements and putting statements on the record last week about our concern about, our reaction to, the Chief Minister's public comments on the release of the ambulance services report—that that was unwarranted. We are concerned about those sorts of statements. We certainly came out on the record to say that we should not be shooting the messenger.

This office plays an incredibly important role that we support. That is why we will be making sure that that office gets an appropriation, gets its funding, for the next financial year, while taking on board the issues raised by the Auditor-General around the increased workload and the importance of being able to maintain the number of audits throughout the year.

I thought it was quite important to stand and put that on record—that we do absolutely support the Auditor-General. We do think this is an issue.

One of the other speakers this morning raised an idea that in some other jurisdictions the way that the funding is delivered to the Auditor-General is not necessarily through the executive but through some other independent type of process or mechanism that provides that sort of distance from the executive of government. We certainly are interested in having a conversation and exploring these sorts of ideas, but we need to be very clear that this would be a large change if it were to happen—that we do need to investigate it properly; ensure that we involve all those who would be impacted, and stakeholders; take on board advice; and take the time to properly study how it might work in other jurisdictions, whether it be in Australia or elsewhere.

Once again, in support for the Auditor-General's Office, we will be voting for this line item in the appropriation bill, noting that there are some major workload issues that are happening for the Auditor-General.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (12.07): Mr Speaker, I am conscious that you are about to put the question on this part. I would like to seek leave of the Assembly to permit a call of the Assembly to be undertaken on this.

Leave not granted.

Standing and temporary orders—suspension

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, I move:

That so much of the standing and temporary orders be suspended so as to require a vote of the Assembly to be taken on the question—That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Mr Speaker, what we have heard from the Liberal opposition in this place this morning is a strong and continued assertion that there is a need for improved funding

for the Auditor-General. That has been their clear and unequivocal message. I even heard Mr Coe say in his comments that he wants the government to reconsider the amount of funding that is to be provided to the Auditor-General. I think it is time that we know exactly where the Liberal Party stand on the matter of funding for the Auditor-General. Are they going to vote in favour of funding for the Auditor-General?

For the last hour we have heard their continued assertions about how important it is to properly resource the Auditor-General. It would appear that they are not keen on the idea of actually having to test the issue and say whether or not they are going to vote for the Auditor-General's appropriation. We heard Mr Seselja say on the radio this morning that they will not be voting for this budget or any part of it. Mr Speaker, the two things cannot be reconciled. Either they support additional funding for the Auditor-General or they do not.

For the last hour, we have heard a tirade from those opposite who have said, "You must properly resource the Auditor-General." When it comes to the question of whether or not they are going to vote on it, are they going to have the courage of their convictions and say, "Yes, we will support funding for the Auditor-General," or are they going to scurry away and say, "No, no; we think there should be more funding for the Auditor-General but we're not going to support the budget; we're not actually going to vote for funding for the Auditor-General"?

They should be consistent. It should be on the record. Do they vote in accordance with their convictions? Do they vote to back up the claims they have made in the debate for the last hour in this place? Or are they simply going to try and scurry away and avoid the question of a vote on the record? Let them put it on the record. Let them put their views on the record. I am simply asking that the Assembly allow this vote to be recorded with each and every member indicating whether or not they support an appropriation for the Auditor-General.

At the moment we have a contradictory position from the Liberal Party. On the one hand, they are saying: "We won't support this budget. We think it's a rotten budget; we're not going to support it." Then they say, "But it's vitally important that you fund the Auditor-General." Which one is it, Mr Seselja? Which one is it, Mr Hanson? Which one is it, Mr Coe? Which one is it, Mr Smyth? Do you support funding for the Auditor-General or do you not?

That is the question, Mr Speaker. They should have the courage of their convictions to put on the record whether they support funding for the Auditor-General or whether they are opposed to this budget. The two things cannot stand. They need to be consistent in their approach.

That is why I am moving for the suspension of standing orders to allow a call of the Assembly so that each member can indicate their view on the record.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (12.12): Again, Mr Speaker, the leader of the house shows his appalling lack of understanding of the standing orders. The position of the Liberal opposition is clearly stated here today in the debate; no vote will in any way modify or enhance that. The position of the Liberal opposition is clearly indicated in

the recommendations put forward by the estimates committee—that there should be enhanced funding for the Auditor-General’s Office.

Mr Corbell: And you are not going to vote for the funding. And you are not going to vote for it. You are not going to vote for it, are you?

MRS DUNNE: However, the leader of the house fails to understand, Mr Speaker—

Mr Corbell: You are not going to vote for it.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Corbell! Order, Mrs Dunne! Mr Corbell, you were heard in silence; let us give Mrs Dunne the same courtesy.

MRS DUNNE: The leader of the house fails to understand that it is impossible under the standing orders under the self-government act to change the appropriation one way or the other, in this line or any other line in the budget. It is pointless for the leader of the house to put forward this stunt in a way. He says he wants on the record what our views are. He was here and he heard it. What he is doing is wasting time.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (12.13): We will not be supporting the motion for the suspension of standing orders. We feel that we have a very long job ahead of us to get through this appropriation bill, and we feel that we need to get on with that job. I would like to say that I have been quite surprised that we have had a few votes this morning—probably about three or so—and I have not heard any word from the opposition about where they stand on those matters. There has been a silence; there has certainly not been a vote with the voices.

Mr Seselja: We are not backing the budget, Meredith.

MS HUNTER: They are saying that on Thursday they will not be passing the budget and therefore they do not need to get up on each line item and state where they stand on those particular items. I am surprised by that. Maybe it is because they will be changing their minds and voting a different way on Thursday, and they want to keep their options open; I am unsure. But really, at this stage, I just put forward that we do need to get on with a very large task. Therefore, we will not be supporting the suspension of standing orders.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (12.14), in reply: In response to Ms Hunter’s critique, all I would say is that the call of the Assembly will take about two minutes, so it is not a significant imposition. It has been the practice in this place on previous occasions, when a member has requested that a vote of the Assembly be taken, that the Assembly has permitted that, even though the standing orders say that it usually occurs only when there is dissent on the call.

That said, it is disappointing that we now have the Greens letting the Liberals off the hook—letting the Liberals off the hook because the Liberals do not have the courage of their convictions. The Liberals say, “We are not going to support the budget.” Then

they come in and criticise the government for not properly funding the Auditor-General, but they do not support the funding that is proposed for the Auditor-General. In fact, their vote would be to not support any funding for the Auditor-General; that would be their position. Their position would be: “We don’t support any funding for the Auditor-General.”

They do not have the courage of their convictions, Mr Speaker. They are very proud to go out publicly. Mr Seselja has probably just done a whole series of media interviews about how tough and principled he is being in opposing the budget, but when it comes to the first test in this debate—and that is why we vote on it line by line, members; there is a reason why we vote on it line by line: so that members—

Mrs Dunne: We debate it line by line.

MR CORBELL: No; the question is put line by line in this place so that members can express whether or not they support each and every single appropriation unit. That is why it is done. These guys over here, these so-called principled Liberals, are not prepared to show the fundamental principle, the courage of their conviction, and say, “We don’t think this is adequate and we’re not voting for it.” That is the gutless approach by the Liberal Party. They are not even prepared to allow a call of the Assembly on this matter.

The Greens are once again letting the Liberals off the hook. And for what reason? “This motion is going to take a bit of time.” They have not seen anything yet in the budget debate, Mr Speaker; they have not seen anything yet.

Mr Speaker, why not permit members to put their votes on the record? Why not? What is wrong with that?

Ms Gallagher: A bit of accountability, a bit of scrutiny.

MR CORBELL: What is wrong with a bit of accountability? What is wrong with a bit of putting your views on the record and voting according to your views? I know it is a radical concept. It is a radical concept for the Liberal Party to vote according to their view. They are not prepared to do that.

From this point forward, we have confirmation that this is opposition for opposition’s sake from the Liberal Party. They do not have the courage of their convictions to stand up and vote in the way that their speeches suggest they should vote, which is in favour of funding for the Auditor-General. Shame on them, Mr Speaker.

Question put:

That so much of the standing and temporary orders be suspended so as to require a vote of the Assembly to be taken on the question—That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 7

Noes 10

Mr Barr
Ms Burch
Mr Corbell
Ms Gallagher
Mr Hargreaves

Ms Porter
Mr Stanhope

Ms Bresnan
Mr Coe
Mr Doszpot
Mrs Dunne
Mr Hanson

Ms Hunter
Ms Le Couteur
Mr Rattenbury
Mr Seselja
Mr Smyth

Question so resolved in the negative.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (12.23): I will take my other 10 minutes as allocated. I am grateful that the Chief Minister is here, because I hope that he will use the opportunity of the debate on the line in relation to the Auditor-General to express his support for the independent umpire, someone who was appointed to that office by the Stanhope government. It will be most important that this debate is not concluded until the Chief Minister does so.

There was a little scurrying by the leader of the house out of the place to put out whatever press release it is. It is interesting that he has left.

I need to reiterate that the appropriation for the Auditor-General is probably one of the most important appropriations in this place. As the leader has said, we would like to see additional funding. That is what the recommendation of the estimates report is—that there be additional funding.

As I have said before, we do not have the power. The only person who has the power in this place to increase the appropriation for the Auditor-General is the Treasurer. If the Treasurer wants to move an amendment to this line to increase the appropriation for the Auditor-General, perhaps we could suspend debate on this line until a later time this week, while the Treasurer comes up with an amendment to increase the appropriation. We would welcome an increase in the appropriation to the Auditor-General; we would look forward to the possibility of voting for that. We would look forward to that; we would look forward to that possibility. But I do not think that that possibility is really on their radar. The cheap antics of the Labor Party here today show what disarray they are in and what a limited play book they have.

The position put forward by the opposition is simply that this is not our budget. This budget is going to drive the people of the ACT into debt for, by the Treasurer's admission, at least seven years. And they will stay in debt for at least seven years, because this Treasurer has no ideas about how to address the issue. She says: "I have got a plan. It is in the budget." It is a four-page plan which has no actions in it and no savings in this financial year that we are coming up to.

Probably the most important thing in the budget is the person who ensures that the money is spent well. It is not the Treasurer; she does not ensure that the money is spent well. It is the Auditor-General. The Auditor-General is the person who will help agencies to be more efficient, ensure that they deliver value-for-money services and ensure that they provide services to the people of the ACT that they deserve and expect. That is why there are recommendations in the estimates committee report to increase her funding.

If that comes forward, I am sure that the opposition will look at it. I not only challenge the Chief Minister to state here openly his support for the office of the Auditor-General; I challenge the Treasurer to fully and appropriately fund the Auditor-General's Office.

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (12.27): I thought it was very interesting that Mr Corbell chose not to defend the line item, or his Chief Minister's dreadful actions on Friday. Once again, he got up to try and make some veiled attack on both the Liberals and the Greens. His only response to this cutting of the Auditor-General's funds, to the Chief Minister's threats against the Auditor-General, was to stand up and try and force some vote here so he could then make some assertion that somehow the Liberals and the Greens are against the Auditor-General.

Ms Gallagher: Where's the cut?

MR HANSON: The cut is in the result, Treasurer. This is what you do not understand. If your funding results in a decrease in her ability to conduct audits, that is the issue. It is not just about how much money you spray at things. We see this in health as well, don't we? We see that you spend more than any jurisdiction other than the Northern Territory but you get just about the worst results. What we are seeing here is a government that can spend, spend, spend, but when it comes to the results—

Ms Gallagher: It's not true.

MR HANSON: We are concerned here because the Auditor-General's ability to conduct audits on your agencies is going to be cut from eight to six. That is the issue. Would Mr Corbell stand up and defend you or defend the Chief Minister? No. He just made another veiled attack on the Liberals and the opposition. He has now gone upstairs, probably to write a press release with some fanciful attacks on us about not having the guts or something.

Let us make it very clear: we will not be supporting this budget. Our leader has made that very clear. We are all unanimously in agreement—as is the majority of the community. We will be voting against this budget on Thursday.

Mr Seselja also offered the members of the government the ability, the opportunity, to stand up and defend the Chief Minister's actions on Friday. He said, "Would anybody like to stand up in this place?" There was a deafening silence. Then Mr Hargreaves stood up and said, "No." When given the opportunity to defend the Chief Minister, no-one did that. Mr Hargreaves stood up, thought about it, blinked and said, "No, I am not going to defend my Chief Minister, because I do not agree with him"—just as, when he was asked on Triple 6, "What do you think about the questions on notice?" he said: "Yes, they are fine. Nothing wrong with that." Again, he disagreed with the Chief Minister.

One thing I will say about Mr Hargreaves is that he is old school. He is old school, and he does not try and deflect criticism on him: he takes it on the chin. There is no doubt that, whenever I have had a go at Mr Hargreaves—and there have been many,

many opportunities—I do not get letters from his public servants; I do not get called a sexist or an ageist; I do not get attacks on me personally. What happens is that Mr Hargreaves knows, because he is old school—and I am not saying—

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

Sitting suspended from 12.30 to 2 pm.

Questions without notice Auditor-General's Office—funding

MR SESELJA: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, you said this on 19 June 2009 regarding funding for the Auditor-General:

I think there's potential for a very hard look at efficiencies within the Auditor-General's office. I think perhaps it's time for the Auditor-General's office to be audited so we can have a look at the appropriateness of the level of her funding.

Chief Minister, why did you make this veiled threat to the Auditor-General?

MR STANHOPE: I was responding to a question from a WIN Television journalist in relation to the recommendation in the estimates report that the Auditor-General's funding allocation be increased. That was a recommendation made by the estimates committee, as I think we are all aware. There was a dearth of analysis contained within the estimates report in relation to the basis on which the estimates committee came to that particular conclusion or recommendation.

As members would be aware from the response to the estimates report tabled by the Treasurer this morning, the government, in its response, has essentially echoed the comments that I made in response to a question from WIN Television on Friday in relation to the recommendation, namely, that before accepting or agreeing to that recommendation the government believes it appropriate to undertake an analysis of the appropriateness of the level of funding which the Auditor-General receives. In that regard, I drew attention to the fact—and it was a fact—that information had been provided to the government in the context of preparing a response to the estimates report.

I have to say that this was not information that I was aware of until last week, which was information which was provided in direct response to the recommendation by the estimates committee that the Auditor-General's funding be increased. I was aware, of course, that over recent years there had been a significant increase in funding for the Auditor-General, an increase in funding as a result of decisions that this government had taken. I was also aware, in the context of the current financial circumstance and the decision that the Treasurer had announced that we would be looking to all agencies to respond to the current financial crisis, a crisis impacting significantly on our budget to the tune of an over \$200 million turnaround, that all ACT government-funded agencies, except two, namely, the Auditor-General and the Legislative Assembly, would be required to find significant savings.

We do need to understand that in this context that the government has announced—and it is central to the budget that has been delivered—we will be seeking from agencies, including the Department of Health, a one per cent reduction in expenditure; we will be seeking from the Department of Education a one per cent reduction in expenditure; we will be seeking from the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services a one per cent reduction in expenditure. There are only two agencies that we have excluded from the request for a reduction in expenditure, the Auditor-General and the Legislative Assembly.

I have to say that, for myself and the government, in an environment where we are asking agencies to potentially identify reductions in services, involving perhaps mental health or disabilities or homelessness, I find it interesting that there are large sections of this Assembly that would ask us, in an environment where we are potentially asking for a reduction in expenditure on homelessness or mental health, to increase funding for the Auditor-General.

But we take the recommendation of the estimates committee seriously. So we will have a serious look at the suggestion that we increase funding to the Auditor-General. To do that seriously and objectively, we surely need to look at the adequacy of that level of funding. And what do we do in doing that? We benchmark it. We do it in relation to all of our expenditure; we look at some benchmarks. We look at the benchmarks provided to us, for instance, in the annual report on government services and we find, as we look at some of the blunt indicators that we look at, namely, interjurisdictional comparisons, we have, on a per capita and pro rata basis, the most heavily resourced auditor-general's office in Australia.

It is appropriate in that circumstance, in our assessment of this recommendation, that we actually look at some external capacity to assess the basis of the recommendation and the attitude we should take to whether or not we adopt it.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Seselja, a supplementary question?

MR SESELJA: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Chief Minister, why do you continue to attack independent individuals such as the Coroner and the Auditor-General instead of responding to the substantive issues which they raise?

MR STANHOPE: Well, the question is based on a false premise, Mr Speaker. As much as I wish to respond fully to questions from members, it is simply impossible for any minister to answer a question that is based on a false statement or premise.

Budget—property taxes

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, in an analysis of various aspects of the 2009-2010 ACT budget, the economic adviser to the estimates committee, Tony Harris, said:

There are grounds for criticising taxes on property transactions. In at least some cases they prevent economic activity.

Treasurer, what credence do you attach to these conclusions from Mr Harris?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank the member for the question. I think Mr Harris has done a fair analysis of the budget; I think I went to that on Thursday of last week. He does not necessarily agree with all of the decisions that we have taken in this budget, but he does go to outline for the members of the estimates committee the fact that the ACT budget is in a robust fiscal position and that has allowed the government to take the decisions that we have in this budget in outlining our plan to recover the budget over a seven-year period.

I note the comments that he made about property taxes; but I note that—I do not think it is in this paper that he has done it but in the analysis of the Property Council submission—he does acknowledge the narrow revenue base available to jurisdictions to raise revenue to pay for services to the community, and I would be surprised if Mr Smyth would disagree with that analysis. So I note it. I also note the fact that we have to raise revenue in order to pay for services to the community. I note the fact that the Property Council has a view on these things. I note that the Business Council has a view on these things. I have invited both of those organisations to outline to me changes they would like to see us make to our revenue measures for next year's budget. As long as they acknowledge that the amount that we have to raise has to remain the same or increase, I have said I will give fair hearing to any ideas that they have. I am sure that the Property Council and the Business Council will put forward their views; in fact the Business Council has already put forward some submissions around that.

I think I have been pretty up-front. We have seen massive dips in our revenue. We were not in a position to lower the level of charges or revenue that we raise through our various means in this year's budget, and I doubt that we will be able to do it in any budget to come. The revenue level will remain the same. The mechanism to raise that revenue is open for discussion, but taxation on property remains a legitimate way for state and territory governments to raise money to provide services, that are ever growing in demand, to the community.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, a supplementary question?

Mr Barr: You want to abolish all taxes now, do you, Brendan?

MR SMYTH: Yes, thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Barr: That's where your detailed economic analysis is going, is it?

MR SMYTH: Treasurer, are you aware of any grounds on which to criticise the imposition of property taxes?

MR SPEAKER: Sorry, Mr Smyth; can you give us that again—Mr Barr was interjecting unhelpfully.

MR SMYTH: As he does so often, Mr Speaker. Treasurer, are you aware of any grounds on which to criticise the imposition of property taxes?

MS GALLAGHER: Well, I am aware of criticism of property taxes. Those people who argue around property taxation I believe they think they have grounds to do that. I do not know that I can add anything further to this discussion, Mr Smyth. The Property Council thinks there are grounds on which to argue against the revenue that we raise through property transactions. The government believes that we have in place a fair way of raising revenue around property, and when you look at state by state comparisons we do not tax any more than any other jurisdiction, and it remains a legitimate way to pay for hospitals, to pay for schools, to pay for municipal services, to the community. I look forward to the discussions with the Property Council that we will have over how to maintain the same level of revenue but change the mechanisms to raise that revenue. If they can convince me there is a way to do it, I am very happy to implement it in budgets in years to come.

Canberra international airport—noise

MS HUNTER: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, on Tuesday, 16 June in question time you confirmed that the ACT government has made a submission to the Canberra international airport 2009 preliminary draft master plan. Chief Minister, are you aware that the process of making submissions public is that the ACT government merely needs to give permission to the Canberra international airport group to publish the submission on their website and can you tell the Assembly if and when you will be doing this?

MR STANHOPE: I thank Ms Hunter for the question. I would have to concede, Ms Hunter, I was not aware that that was the process, but I thank you for informing me of that. I will take some advice. I think when you asked this question previously I did undertake to take some further advice, which I am not sure I have received to date. I will look further at it, Ms Hunter. I have to say, in the context of the submission that was made, it is a very good submission and I have no desire to unnecessarily restrict its distribution. I have been responding in relation to that to advice in relation to just the process, but on the basis of the question that you have asked and the information that you have provided I will take some further advice and perhaps see whether or not we can respond by releasing the report, as you so obviously desire.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Hunter, a supplementary question?

MS HUNTER: Does the ACT government support a night time curfew at Canberra Airport to protect the people of Canberra from the impact of increasing numbers of night time flights predicted as a result of the 24-hour freight hub being developed?

MR STANHOPE: The attitude that the government has taken to the issue of noise in the Canberra international airport is one where we believe the decisions in relation to any decision that impacts on the capacity of the airport to reasonably, without undue impact on community citizen amenity, be the driver of our economy and the provider of services for our community to the extent that it is—we believe this particular issue, this issue of Canberra international airport, its location and the rules and regulations that would govern its operation, is one of those decisions in relation to which a genuine commitment to some triple-bottom-line decision making, policy making,

needs to apply. We believe it is a sterling example of what you urge on us regularly, rightly and appropriately in relation to all decision making—that is, that we balance the economic needs of this community with the social needs of this community and the environmental needs of this community.

That is the attitude and the approach we have taken, an approach based on evidence—in other words, what is the standard and level of noise, how do we measure it and what information do we rely on? In that regard, we have, in consultation with the airport and in consultation with Airservices Australia, engaged an independent noise assessor to assess noise readings and assess noise issues that I would expect to be at the heart. We engaged that independent noise assessor on the basis of representations from members of the north Canberra community. That report is not yet available.

I am disinclined to pre-empt a decision in relation to an attitude around noise and overnight freight and freight services in advance of a report from Airservices Australia on noise, a noise report that we have sought to be independently verified. We have sought that independent verification on the basis of representations from the community. I think it is only reasonable that our decision, when we take it, will be based on that evidence.

Even then, as you, Ms Hunter, quite rightly and appropriately, urge on all of us all the time to take a holistic triple-bottom-line approach to decision making, we make that ultimate decision not just on the basis of noise and noise levels: we balance the competing interests of our economy, other social aspects and the environmental implications. That is the approach we adopt.

We are expecting that report from the independent noise assessor, I believe, within the next four weeks or so. We, of course, will make that immediately available for the information of each of us as we grapple with this difficult issue.

But I will not walk away from the central importance of the Canberra international airport to this economy and to this community. In relation to the imposition of regulations on the activities of that major driver of this economy, we need to take those decisions mindful of the importance of the Canberra international airport to this city whilst accepting that there must be, in certain circumstances, constraints, particularly constraints that unreasonably impact on urban, community and individual amenity. We accept the balancing act, but I think that it is important for all of us, as we take decisions on this, to look at all aspects, all of the implications, of regulation of, in this instance, a major economic and social service for the people of the ACT.

Land—rent scheme

MS BURCH: My question is to the Chief Minister. Would the Chief Minister please update the Assembly on progress towards securing a major lender for the land rent scheme?

MR STANHOPE: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order, members! Let us hear from the Chief Minister.

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank Ms Burch for the question and for her interest in the welfare of Canberrans who hitherto have been denied the dream of home ownership.

Just a short while ago I had the very great pleasure of announcing that one of the most significant and most trusted financial institutions in this city and one of the biggest credit unions in the country, Community CPS Australia, is to become the first major finance provider to support the ACT government's land rent scheme.

Today is a great day for policy innovation, a great day for bold thinking, a great day for a government with a social conscience. It sends a message that it is worth striving and even worth bearing some short-term political pain if it means that one has the chance at the end of it to extend a helping hand to Canberrans who would otherwise struggle to realise the dream of home ownership.

Today is a great day for Community CPS Australia—a genuinely community minded financial institution whose vision is to help its members reach their personal goals. Community CPS Australia has been a familiar and trusted presence for good in this town since 1958. For four decades it has been the city's largest home grown financial institution, and since the merger of our local CPS with the South Australian CPS Credit Union it has grown into an institution with branches in four states and territories, managing \$2.6 billion in assets.

Currently it has \$2.1 billion in loans and \$2.2 billion in deposits. In 2008 the prestigious *Money* magazine awarded Community CPS the title of "Credit Union of the Year". Today CPS shows why it deserves such accolades. In 2009 and today Community CPS is showing the same forward thinking attitude, the same astuteness and the same degree of attachment to the community that has made so many Canberrans put their trust and their wealth in its care for the past 40 years.

The land rent scheme is a serious and purposeful bid to help Canberrans of modest means into their own homes. We are going into it without putting territory finances at risk. We are doing it without encouraging households to borrow more than they should. Indeed, that is the great beauty of land rent. It is not about providing cheaper or low-start loans, which are always vulnerable to interest rate fluctuations.

Land rent structurally reduces the barriers to home ownership. By compartmentalising the house from the land on which it sits, land rent enables families to commit to a much smaller and much more manageable loan. Land rent is giving hope to young families who have believed themselves not to belong to the ranks of those who might aspire to own their own home. The ACT government is not prepared, like the Liberal Party, to consign such families to the too-hard basket. Today Community CPS Australia has shown that it is not prepared to do so either.

Coupled with other aspects of the ACT government's ground breaking housing affordability action plan, including the mandated 15 per cent of affordable dwellings

in every new estate, land rent opens the door to home ownership for households on incomes as modest as \$50,000 a year—households that the Liberal Party actually do not believe deserve the right to home ownership. At its most base level, that underpins the stringent ideological objection which the Liberal Party and Mr Seselja have shown to this scheme from the outset. Mr Seselja does not believe that this cohort of Canberrans actually deserves to own a home. He does not support them. He does not care about them. He does not believe they have a right to dream of home ownership.

I have to say that the announcement is a matter of considerable satisfaction to me and to my Labor colleagues in the ACT government. It is a matter of satisfaction to officers in the ACT public service who have seen the value and virtue of land rent and have worked so tirelessly towards today. It is a genuine instance of extending opportunity to a group that might not ever have been in a position—we know this to be true—to even hope that they might one day own their own home.

So convinced is Community CPS of the potential social value of the land rent scheme that its chief executive officer today announced that CPS is proposing to roll this scheme out, as appropriate, throughout Australia. That is how successful CPS expects the scheme to be.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Burch, a supplementary question?

MS BURCH: Indeed. Chief Minister, are there further details that you are able to share with the Assembly?

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Yes, there are. Importantly, Community CPS is committed to lending practices for land rent that are prudent and consistent with the highest community standards. I think that is important with a new product such as this.

As I said, it is important that no territory finance is being used to support these loans. This is a genuine partnership between a government that cares about creating opportunities and a credit union whose very reason for existence is to help ordinary folk seize those opportunities when they present themselves.

Of course, land rent will not be for everyone. It is not intended to be. That is why it is part of a comprehensive suite of more than 60 initiatives that go to every aspect of housing affordability—not just for first home buyers and home buyers but for renters and those in supported accommodation such as government and community housing.

The ACT government's approach to affordability encompasses accelerated land releases, the fantastic OwnPlace partnership with a group of community minded local builders, changes to public housing and a massive boost to community housing.

Mrs Dunne: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. Ms Burch's question was: could the Chief Minister provide any further detail about this program? He is now talking about a whole range of other things, but not about the land rent scheme. I ask you to bring him back to the land rent scheme. I would be interested to hear the details of the land rent scheme.

MR SPEAKER: Chief Minister, stick to the land rent scheme, thank you.

MR STANHOPE: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I am more than happy to do that. The land rent scheme is simple in conception. That is why I have been stunned from the outset that Mr Seselja and the Liberal Party have failed to grasp just how beautifully simple the underlying proposal is. There are significant numbers of Canberrans that the Liberal Party do not care for who have trouble, difficulty and, for some, an impossibility to access home ownership because they cannot sustain a mortgage required for, say, a house and land package for \$400,000.

That is the beauty of this innovative scheme—innovative and Australian owned and Australian leading—that those groups initially most particularly targeted are those with incomes of under \$75,000, the households that the Liberal Party do not care for, the people that the Liberal Party under Mr Seselja do not believe deserve the right to dream of home ownership. It is so simple in concept that I do not know why the Liberal Party has, over this last two years, fought tooth and nail to ensure that this particular scheme is not achieved.

The proposal is quite simple. Households with an income under \$75,000 will pay two per cent of the value of land that they acquire as a land rent block. I am advised by Treasury that that will reduce mortgage payments on that first tranche, namely, the price of the land, by 75 per cent. There is the simple equation. There is the attractiveness. There is the opportunity this represents for Canberra families—a 75 per cent reduction in the mortgage amount required for the purchase of the land component of a house and land package.

Then, of course, the purchase of a house, the dream of a lifetime is then possible, is capable of being achieved by households, we believe, on household incomes of perhaps even less than \$50,000. What a stunning breakthrough in terms of housing affordability this scheme represents for the people of Canberra.

Why is it that over the last year the Leader of the Opposition has not lost an opportunity to seek to talk down, to destroy and to ensure that this scheme would not succeed? I have Mr Seselja's press releases and his commentary available to me here today—the dogmatic statements of fact that no finance institution will ever fund this product. As recently as last week there are statements on the record that no finance company will ever finance this product—ever. It is not perhaps will never; it is no finance company will ever fund this product.

What does Mr Seselja say about it now? What does Mr Seselja say now for the weekly press releases? In one of the great ironies of today, the day that CPS, one of Australia's leading credit providers announces its full support for this product, we have a notice circulated by the Leader of the Opposition for tomorrow bagging land rent once again. He circulated the motion this morning bagging the scheme again.

ACT Women's Legal Centre—funding

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Attorney-General and relates to an article in the 18 June edition of the *Canberra Times* about reduced funding for the ACT Women's

Legal Centre. Attorney, the article reported you as claiming that the commonwealth had slashed its proportion of funding to the centre from \$200,000 to \$70,000. Yet the federal Attorney-General, in a letter to the editor, published on Saturday in the *Canberra Times* refuted that claim, stating that the commonwealth had maintained its funding of the centre at \$190,000 plus indexation and, in addition, there had been one-off funding in both the 2008-09 and 2009-10 financial years. Attorney, who is right, you or Mr McClelland?

MR CORBELL: I am right.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order, members! Let us hear the answer.

MR CORBELL: The commonwealth attorney failed to mention in his letter that the commonwealth has not continued one-off grants funding for the program that has been affected at the Women's Legal Centre, whereas the territory has. We have maintained our funding of \$50,000 for that program. The commonwealth has discontinued or not renewed that grants funding because it has come to an end. That was a matter that was omitted in the commonwealth attorney's letter.

Another point I would make about this is that at no time did I use the language "slashed" in relation to that article—that was a journalist's phrase—but I did make clear to the journalist that the commonwealth had discontinued or not renewed its grants funding, and that was of the order of over \$100,000 in relation to this program. That was a matter which I felt they should be turning their attention to, rather than criticising the ACT government, because the ACT government has actually continued its funding to the Women's Legal Centre. There has been no discontinuation of any funding to the Women's Legal Centre for the next 12 months. That was the point I was seeking to make to the centre and the journalist.

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, a supplementary question?

MRS DUNNE: Minister what is the level of commonwealth funding to the Women's Legal Centre?

MR CORBELL: I do not have that information in front of me but I am happy to take the question on notice. The only other point I would make of course is that I am happy to provide it by the end of question time today, because the facts are quite clear. The commonwealth provided a grant to the Women's Legal Centre. That grant runs out at the end of this financial year. Our grant also runs out at the end of this financial year. The ACT government continued its grants money in relation to that program for another 12 months. The commonwealth has not in relation to those grants moneys.

Planning—west Macgregor

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the Minister for Planning and is in relation to the recent introduction of a technical variation to the west Macgregor precinct code to increase the number of dwellings on the site from 850 to 1,300. Minister, the original

impact statement was based on 850 dwellings. Why was a major increase of another 450 dwellings, or 53 per cent, which will, amongst other things, impact on golden sun moth habitat, only considered a minor technical change?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Le Couteur for the question. She may not be aware—and certainly did not include it in the preamble—that the additional yield in the west Macgregor development is as a result of some additional land being granted to the company that is developing that land for the territory as part of a recent extension in globo land releases in both west Macgregor and, as I understand it, in another section of the city in Gungahlin to another company who are undertaking land development. The increase in yield on that site is consistent with that extra amount of land being made available.

It will be of interest to members of the Assembly that, as is always the case when government is dealing with land developments, there is always pressure for increased yield and the government and I have determined not to support a further increase beyond that number of 1,300 dwellings. There are a number of factors that obviously have to be considered when assessing these issues, but I can advise the Assembly that housing affordability was front and centre of my thinking in relation to the technical amendment. It is provided for under the Planning and Development Act and it is entirely consistent with that legislation. The Planning and Land Authority has undertaken a formal process that has involved community consultation.

There was certainly a lot of discussion in and around the Macgregor area on this new development. I think it is important that we prioritise housing affordability. The Village Building Company have a very fine record of delivering upon shared commitments in relation to affordable housing. Having toured the west Macgregor estate in recent times, I can advise that they are achieving both the government's goals around housing affordability and also what is clearly a motto for the company of delivering a quality product at an affordable price.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Le Couteur, a supplementary question?

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you. Minister, does the removal of the housing mix as per the previous precinct code constitute a change in policy?

MR BARR: No, Mr Speaker, it does not constitute a change in policy. What it constitutes in this instance is that with the extension of the amount of land available for the west Macgregor development it was, of course, appropriate to make changes around the number of blocks that could be developed in expanding the size of the estate. I repeat that the government's priority in relation to this matter is around housing affordability. One would hope that the Greens party would agree with us that more affordable housing in this city is a priority.

Budget—consultations

MR COE: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, in an analysis of the 2009 ACT budget the economic adviser to the estimates committee, Tony Harris, notes that the Stanhope-Gallagher government had a program of consultations prior to the 2009 budget. Mr Harris then said:

There seems to be nothing to stop these consultations raising savings issues ...

Mr Harris then observes that, if the consultations had identified savings prior to the 2009 budget, “savings could have been brought forward a year”. Treasurer, why did you fail to include these savings prior to the 2009 budget?

MS GALLAGHER: Well, that presumes that savings suggestions came through the consultation process. From my recollection, if we are talking about the same consultation process, we went out to the community and sought submissions, of which there were 80-odd. From memory, we were not inundated with savings ideas. We were given views. In fact, I think that we did ask, particularly on the online version, for ideas around revenue or savings measures, and we asked people to rank areas of government that they held most highly, in their views, for delivery of services.

What the opposition fail to understand—you can agree with Tony Harris’s analysis—is, yes, we could have brought forward savings options in this budget and, yes, we did contemplate that. It was part of our discussions in budget cabinet. The decision we took, and the advice that I sought, which included advice outside of the government, including from well-known economists, was that now was not the right time to impose savings on the ACT budget; that we were in a very strong position; that our balance sheet was strong; and that we were able to ride out what was going to be essentially a pretty tough 12 months. We were in a position where we could actually increase our expenditure to invest in jobs, to deliver on high-quality public infrastructure. These were views that were put to the government and the government tossed around, and we accepted them in the end. So the government did discuss at length the idea of savings.

I note in the opposition’s response to the budget that they have not identified any savings areas. In fact, all I am hearing from Alistair Coe is “do not include increased bus fares”. We have had the debate this morning about increasing appropriations to the Auditor-General. We look forward to the opposition buying into this process and providing us with their helpful ideas around savings. But we have to say that you cannot include the savings ideas you came up with just to spend for your election promises.

Mr Seselja: Are they savings? They are not savings?

MS GALLAGHER: They were to pay for your election promises. They were not actually to deal with the situation that we deal with now. That is the problem with your argument, Zed—the man with no plan. The only plan that the man with no plan has is the plan from September.

Mr Seselja: They’re real, though.

MS GALLAGHER: Well, the world has changed since September, Mr Seselja.

Mr Seselja: It was actually October.

MS GALLAGHER: That is right; you delayed releasing all your costings. You had people working 24 hours a day in the lead-up to the last week of the campaign because you were so embarrassed about your commitments and how much they cost.

To acknowledge that we have delayed savings for a year actually acknowledges that there is a plan in place by this government to recover the budget. It is a long-term plan; it is a seven-year plan, and part of the reason it is a seven-year plan is that we took the decision not to impose arbitrary savings on the people of Canberra in the 2009-10 budget without discussing with the community those ideas first.

Those opposite have campaigned—in fact the central theme of your campaign in the last election was—that this government did not consult. You were out to lunch for about three years on the decisions we took in the functional review. Now that we have in this plan accepted the position that we need to consult with the community before cutting government services, and we are doing that, you criticise that as well. It is very easy for an opposition to sit there, opposition for opposition's sake: oppose the government, oppose cuts when you do not consult, oppose cuts when you do not implement them early enough, oppose cuts when you do consult. How easy it must be to be you every morning. You just wake up, you open the paper and you think: "Well, we'll just oppose that and—guess what—we don't even need to have an alternative. We can oppose it. We don't have to have an alternative and we'll get away with it because we're the opposition." Well, good luck to you. You will be in opposition for ever.

Budget—indicators

MR DOSZPOT: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, in the context of the 2009 ACT budget, the economic adviser to the estimates committee, Tony Harris, said:

The use of unaudited indicators allows governments to craft indicators which are inappropriate, to present fraudulent data or, as worryingly, to manipulate the program so that poor performance is a necessary result.

Treasurer, what reviews have you made of indicators used in the presentation of the annual budget to ensure that they are soundly based?

MS GALLAGHER: My recollection of Tony Harris's analysis on the forecast in the budget was that it was very good. That was the analysis. I am just looking for the quote. He actually said that the way the budget was displayed and the data that was used were very helpful in his analysis. In terms of strategic indicators, I am happy to have a look at Mr Harris's analysis and get back to the Assembly. I do not recall the criticism specifically.

Mr Smyth: It is in the third paragraph: "The use of unaudited indicators allows ..."

MS GALLAGHER: I will take the time to have a look at it. If there is one thing I have learned in this place it is that I never believe the question as it is put. I will

actually take the time. If I do not know the answer, I will have a look at it and I will get back to you. Sorry, Mr Doszpot; you are probably one of the ones who do not offend regularly. I will have a look at it and get back to you.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot, a supplementary question?

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you. Treasurer, are you aware of any indicators that are not appropriate for the program or activity for which they are used?

MS GALLAGHER: No, I am not.

Budget—mental health

MS BRESNAN: My question is to the Minister for Health and concerns mental health growth funds for the community sector via the 2009-10 budget. In response to an estimates question on notice I placed, the government indicated that \$48,000 is earmarked for a supported hospital exit program. However, there was not any mention of a specific community group. Minister, can you assure the Assembly that this \$48,000 will be allocated to and delivered by a non-government organisation in the community sector?

MS GALLAGHER: I thought we had provided the estimates committee with a list of programs that were going to the community sector in terms of answering the question on notice, but I will get back to the member with that. I do not have it on me.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Bresnan, a supplementary?

MS BRESNAN: Can you please advise the Assembly of the process and time lines that apply to the \$48,000 being allocated and which non-government organisations will be eligible to apply for that program?

MS GALLAGHER: We will pass the budget first; that will be the first step. Then what we normally do is go out to tender or, if there is a reason why it can be delivered by only one organisation, go out to a select tender. It is usually managed through an open tender process that is advertised. Again, I will check up on that for the specifics of the program you raise.

Budget—operating result

MR HANSON: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, in an analysis of the 2009 ACT budget, the economic adviser to the estimates committee, Tony Harris, identified three approaches to determining the operating result for the ACT. Mr Harris then comments:

To add to the confusion, the ACT presents its own version.

Treasurer, what response do you have to the confusion that Mr Harris has identified with the presentation of the ACT budget?

MS GALLAGHER: You must have read the analysis after you tabled the report. I believe the issue relates to the way that we treat the superannuation account. It is a difference of opinion, and it is one he has held for some time.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, a supplementary question?

MR HANSON: Treasurer, what action will you take to reduce the confusion that Mr Harris has identified?

MS GALLAGHER: We are not; we are not going to. We have a difference of opinion on how we present the long-term gains of our superannuation investment. There is a difference of opinion, and we will not be responding to that.

Land—rent scheme

MS PORTER: Mr Speaker, my question, through you, is to the Chief Minister. Could the Chief Minister tell the Assembly how land rent fits into the government's comprehensive strategy to tackle housing affordability and of the views of members of the community about land rent?

MR STANHOPE: I thank Ms Porter for her interest in extending the dream of home ownership to a broader cross-section of the Canberra population. As she observes, land rent is part of a bigger picture. Indeed, while members of the opposition, led by Mr Seselja, are obsessed by the initiative to a degree that seems at times absolutely pathological, land rent is just one of 62 actions to tackle housing affordability announced by the government and progressively implemented over the past two years. Of course, the government will shortly announce another suite of integrated measures as phase 2 of the action plan, with a focus on homelessness and housing for older Canberrans. This raft of actions constitutes by far the most comprehensive, integrated and coordinated approach to housing affordability taken by any government in Australia.

Let us, for instance, look at accelerated land release. This financial year, the government, through the Land Development Agency, has put 4,200 blocks onto the market. That comes on top of 3,400 last year. That is 7,600 blocks in the last two years. It is utterly unprecedented. Yet we remark on how the leader of the opposition characterises this. Earlier this year he described that 7,600-block unprecedented release as “a trickle”—a trickle of land at 7,600 blocks. We all need to look at the views expressed by the opposition, led by the leader of the opposition, in relation to land rent.

Mr Seselja has over the course of this year—and I will be happy to table the press releases in relation to this—described land rent as “ill-conceived”, “deeply flawed”, “pitifully inadequate” and “a dud”. We need to look at the paper trail of frenzied media releases by Mr Seselja in recent times—one a week—and we saw it again just last Friday and in a motion circulated again today. He tries desperately to talk down the initiative and to scupper it because of his ideological objection to these people in households with incomes of less than \$75,000 daring to want to own their own homes. How dare they? “How dare they?” Mr Seselja says.

Going back to June last year: “The scheme is short-sighted.” In the same release—and this is language that I know members of the estimates committee are familiar with—he says that the government is, through this scheme, “gouging first homebuyers”. That is an issue that we know the Liberal Party is very familiar with—gouging first homebuyers. You would think that “gouging” was a word that had never passed the Liberal Party’s lips, wouldn’t you? Then last year, on 25 September: “Land rent is flawed and totally discredited.” We go to 21 February this year: “The scheme has collapsed in chaos. It has become apparent there is not a single financial institution in Australia that will back this scheme. It was bound to fail.” Two days later, on 23 February: “This time land rent is a sham, a cynical grab, a scheme flawed with absolutely no backers.”

Just a day later, with symptoms of obsession which we have seen in relation to this issue becoming absolutely patently, uncomfortably and embarrassingly the opposite to those that have had to observe it, the scheme is again described as “flawed, failed, misguided”. We had a little breather between February and April. On 14 April: “The government has swindled first homebuyers.” Last month he returns to the fray, accusing me of knowing that the land rent scheme could not and would not ever be supported. As late as this month he is on the job again. Just this month he says, “It is obvious that the finance industry will never support this scheme.”

Mr Speaker, today is a very embarrassing day for Mr Seselja: “The finance industry will never ever support this scheme.” It reveals him as completely bereft of ideas, let alone a plan. We have seen it most particularly in relation to this budget and exposed for all the world to see. Mr Seselja—Mr Flim-Flam, Mr Waddle—has no plan. The only plan is a million dollars of cuts for the election. There are no plans. There is no substitute budget plan and no plan for housing affordability. There is no plan at all. It is opposition for opposition’s sake. We see it there displayed for all the world to see. He seeks to cover his embarrassment not by apologising and standing up and saying, “I was wrong. One of the biggest credit unions in Australia will back this scheme.”

MR SPEAKER: Ms Porter, a supplementary question?

MS PORTER: Yes, thank you, Mr Speaker. Chief Minister, are there any further details or information that you are able to share with the Assembly?

MR STANHOPE: There is a range of other commentary and other comments in relation to the scheme that is available, and I think, having put the Leader of the Opposition’s comments, it is relevant that we look at some of the comments and commentary of others in relation to this.

Mrs Dunne: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. Ms Porter specifically asked the Chief Minister for detail and he opened his foray into answering the question by saying, “There is lots of other commentary.” I would be really happy to hear Ms Porter’s question answered. We would like to hear the detail of the scheme.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Porter, can we have your question again, please?

MS PORTER: Yes. Chief Minister, are there any further details or information that you are able to share with the Assembly?

Mr Hargreaves: Or information.

MR SPEAKER: Chief Minister, could you focus on perhaps the details?

MS PORTER: And information.

MR STANHOPE: The question requires information. The supplementary relates to the question and the question was about commentary by others, and there is much commentary by others.

Mrs Dunne: No, it wasn't.

MR STANHOPE: Yes, it was.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Stanhope, can we just finish this point of order. Mrs Dunne, the first question was about the views of other commentators. Ms Porter's supplementary question is of sufficient breadth that I think the Chief Minister is going to be able to continue to make those comments.

MR STANHOPE: Absolutely. Thank you for your wisdom, Mr Speaker—fair, balanced and objective, as always, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, it is relevant to provide some context to this vehement, pathological opposition by the Leader of the Opposition to land rent and to those young Canberra families who would seek to access land rent. For instance, the ACT Council of Social Service, in their commentary on land rent, welcomed the scheme that would allow low income earners the option of renting land on which they would build their homes. The council's then director said that the proposal had enormous scope, and ACTCOSS went on in that same vein, actually referring to just how important and significant it was.

We have had similar commentary from the Master Builders Association of Australia, from the Property Council, from the Housing Industry Association, from the broader construction industry. We have, of course, had further comment from others that I regret that Mr Seselja has taken his advice from, most particularly mortgage brokers that the *Canberra Times* has from time to time quoted with some approval. We note in the *Canberra Times* starting on 21 February mortgage brokers quoted Mr McGetrick as saying that this was a scheme that would never work, the commentary being, "I don't know what the government think they are doing—a scheme that would never work; no lender would ever be prepared to lend against this scheme."

I would hope, in fact, that the *Canberra Times*, in reporting on the CPS initiative today, will actually go back to those of their sources within the mortgage-broking industry and ask them for their response now to the categorical comments and statements that that industry made that this scheme would fail, that not a single

financial institution would ever lend against it. The *Canberra Times* might want to ask those mortgage brokers why they held that view and the extent to which they perhaps advised clients, if they had the time, not to involve themselves with this scheme, and the implications of that.

There is significant other commentary, and I do not think I am going to have time today. I will have to take another question tomorrow on this issue to get through all the issues that have been raised, and perhaps another question the day after that.

But I will provide some information in honour of the question asked by Ms Porter, who truly cares about the attitude of the *Canberra Times* to this particular issue. This is a *Canberra Times* editorial on land rent and it is a pity that when it was issued the Leader of the Opposition and those pathologically opposed to young Canberra families and this scheme did not pay some attention. I must say that I blushed when I read it. It states:

The Stanhope Government's land rent scheme—which could give hundreds of lower income Canberra households real help to buy their homes—has an air of inspiration about it—

dear editor, it is too much—

and not only because it borrows from some of the leasehold precepts on which the city was founded. That's good by itself, but the two further attractions are even better.

This is from the *Canberra Times*:

First, it gives entree to an increasingly difficult housing market without ... the risks inevitable when people essentially cannot afford to be there in the first place. That's the more important now in a world in which financial institutions are reeling from their misjudgements in lending more and more money to people who really could not afford to pay. Even better—

says the *Canberra Times*; I will have to pay more attention to the *Canberra Times* in future—

is the way in which it allows a two-stage entry into the market for families whose needs for housing are often greatest at the time their household bills are greatest: when they are younger and with young families. A family can concentrate ...

I cannot do this justice today, Mr Speaker. I will actually take this question again tomorrow.

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

Notice not conforming with standing orders

Statement by Speaker

MR COE (Ginninderra): Mr Speaker, I seek to ask a question under standing order 115.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Mr Speaker, this morning you ruled that an amendment to a disallowable instrument was out of order. Are you able to table the advice you received from the Government Solicitor?

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Coe. I am happy to table that advice. I table the following paper:

Legislation Act—Legal advice—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-68—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Minister for Transport, dated 22 June 2009.

Papers

Mr Stanhope presented the following papers:

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

Chief Executives and Executives—Determination 4 of 2009, dated 5 June 2009.

Full-Time Holders of Public Office—Determination 5 of 2009, dated 5 June 2009.

Members of the ACT Legislative Assembly—Determination 3 of 2009, dated 5 June 2009.

Annual report directions Paper and statement by minister

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

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to subsection 9(5)—Chief Minister's 2007-2010 Annual Report Directions.

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

Leave granted.

MR STANHOPE: Mr Speaker, this instrument is issued in accordance with the Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act 2004 and continues to provide the three-year framework for the preparation of annual reports. Under the act this instrument must be tabled, although it is not disallowable. The instrument is notifiable under the Legislation Act 2001.

The annual report directions were provided to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for consultation. The chair advised on 9 June 2009 that the committee had considered the draft directions. I have written to the committee thanking them for their comments.

The annual report directions require responsible ministers to provide reports to the Speaker, who, in turn, is required under the act to provide them to the members of the Legislative Assembly before the end of September. Annual reports will also be made publicly available at this stage.

As there are no sitting days for the Legislative Assembly in the last seven days of September, reports will be presented to the Legislative Assembly on 13 October 2009. All reports will include audited financial statements and performance statements when presented. I move:

That the Assembly takes note of the paper.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Hunter**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Canberra plan Paper and statement by minister

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Minister for Transport, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts and Heritage) (2.59): For the information of members, I present the following paper:

The Canberra Plan—Towards our second century—Report on implementation, dated June 2009.

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

Leave granted.

MR STANHOPE: Mr Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to provide the members of the Assembly with an update on the government's progress with achieving the goals outlined in *The Canberra plan: towards our second century*.

The Canberra plan was originally launched by the Labor government in 2004 with the aim to guide the growth and development of Canberra for this generation and beyond. In August 2008 we released *The Canberra plan: towards our second century*, which builds on the original Canberra plan, identifying changes that have occurred over four years and updating the plan to ensure that the vision, as well as the strategic themes, key objectives and future directions remain current as we move towards Canberra's centenary.

Key issues such as climate change, water security, housing affordability and skills shortage have become a higher priority for the people of Canberra and for the ACT government in recent years. This is reflected in the 2008 update of the Canberra plan. While the future priorities listed in *The Canberra plan: towards our second century* reflect long-term plans for the future of our city, I am pleased to report that in less than a year we have already attained significant achievements in each of the priority areas.

The ACT Labor government are committed to ensuring that our decisions keep the vision of the Canberra plan in mind. In so doing, I am able to report that we have been working over the past year to ensure strong progress against the seven key themes outlined in *The Canberra plan: towards our second century*. These themes are quality health care; a fair and safe community; excellent education, quality teaching and skills development; a strong dynamic economy; a vibrant city and great neighbourhoods; a sustainable future; and high quality services.

I am pleased to report that the ACT is doing well in delivering quality health care to the people of Canberra. Community demand for health services is projected to increase rapidly over the next 15 years and beyond. By 2022 the ACT's public hospital admissions are projected to increase by 77 per cent. The ACT government therefore committed \$300 million over four years in the 2008-09 budget and a further \$148 million in the 2009-10 budget for the implementation of the capital asset development plan. This plan incorporates the total health system, including new models of care aimed at better management of chronic disease and keeping people out of hospital. It also includes better use of technology and different ways of providing care.

Achievement to date on implementing initiatives in the capital asset development plan has been good, with some notable progress. A temporary operating theatre at the Calvary hospital has been completed and an additional two theatres at the Canberra hospital are well advanced and expected to be completed in August 2009. A tender process for the new state-of-the-art neurosurgery operating theatre equipment is complete. As well, a total of 24 additional beds will be delivered to Canberra Hospital by September 2009.

While working hard to plan and build for our future healthcare needs, we have also remained focused on the immediate healthcare needs of Canberrans. *Access health* sets the overall direction for public health service in the ACT and states that the government's top priority is timely access to care based on clinical priority. The document sets out nine key performance indicators against which the progress of ACT health services will be measured. Performance against all these indicators has been strong in the last year. Importantly, we have achieved reduced waiting times in emergency departments, in the ACT government's dental health program, for elective surgery and for urgent radiotherapy services.

The objective of the fair and safe community theme is to ensure that all Canberrans enjoy the benefits of living in a community that is safe, socially inclusive and respectful of human rights, that all Canberrans are able to fully participate in community life and that the most vulnerable in our community are respected and supported. We recognised the importance of this objective back in 2004 when we released the Canberra social plan, and are about to commence a review of the Canberra social plan to bring the plan up to date for our current times and the times ahead.

The ACT's human rights legislation was the first in Australia, commencing in 2004. In accordance with the Human Rights Act, the Department of Justice and Community

Safety is currently working on a review of the first five years of operation of the Human Rights Act. The review will consider the inclusion of economic, social and cultural rights in the act and the success or otherwise of the implementation of a bill of rights in the ACT. The review process will include consultation with stakeholders and the public.

In Canberra, recognition of the needs of those in our community with a disability is in keeping with world standards. The ACT supported Australia's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in July 2008. With this support the ACT has joined with others around the world in a global effort to promote the equal and active participation of all people with a disability.

This further enhances ACT Labor's strong record in disability services. For the period 2003-04 to 2009-10, Disability ACT has delivered significant increases in the levels of support available for people with a disability and their families. Accommodation and support places have increased by 31 per cent; community support hours have increased by 55 per cent; community access hours have increased by 70 per cent; respite bed nights have increased by 11 per cent; and flexible respite hours have increased by 96 per cent.

The 2008-09 budget introduced the ACT Indigenous traineeship pilot program. Following the successful placement of 11 trainees into full-time permanent employment in the ACT public service, funding over three years in 2009-10 provides opportunities for 15 Indigenous young people to commence traineeships annually.

Access to affordable and appropriate housing is a basic right, and this government has made upholding that right one of its highest priorities. I established the Affordable Housing Steering Group to advise me on real and practical ways in which the government could help increase the supply of affordable housing. Since the release of the affordable housing plan in 2007, implemented actions have included releasing more land to ease demand; working towards a streamlined planning system; enhancing stamp duty concessions for first home buyers; introducing the land rent scheme; and supporting CHC Affordable Housing to deliver 1,000 new properties for sale or rent over the next 10 years.

There are currently 46 homelessness programs operating in the ACT, and in 2009-10 the ACT and Australian governments are funding a range of new programs to address homelessness. This includes additional properties; new service delivery models; short-term accommodation, including emergency accommodation for those escaping domestic violence; and support for those with complex needs, including mental illness and substance abuse. The Men's Accommodation and Support Service program has also been extended to provide support and managed supported accommodation for people exiting the Alexander Maconochie Centre and related criminal justice programs.

The social housing component of the nation building and jobs plan will further add to the ACT's efforts in housing and homelessness and will return 243 dwellings to the social housing stock in the ACT by funding their refurbishment. A further 57 new social housing properties are scheduled to commence construction this month. Not

only does this initiative contribute to a fair and safe community through homelessness services, but also it is contributing to the theme of a sustainable future. All housing built in the ACT under the nation building and jobs plan will be built to conform to a six-star energy efficiency rating, which includes insulation, draught proofing, solar hot water heaters, energy efficient lighting and energy efficient glazing, shading and a water tank.

Canberra's new prison is a state-of-the-art facility which focuses on rehabilitation of offenders and is Australia's first fully human rights compliant prison. In addition, the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre became fully operational at the end of 2008. Bimberi is the first youth custodial facility in Australia to be designed, built and operated under human rights legislation. The purpose-built centre is designed in the style of a secondary school campus and can accommodate up to 40 young people. Young detainees at Bimberi have access to education, vocational training, rehabilitative programs and recreational activities.

The ACT government is committed to ensuring a quality education for all in the ACT. This begins with early childhood education. Delivering on our commitment to early childhood health and vulnerable families, four early childhood schools have been established at Lyons, Isabella Plains, Narrabundah and Southern Cross at Scullin. These schools operate as early learning and development centres, providing integrated services for children from birth to age 8 and their families. The sites will eventually provide a range of family services. Discussion is taking place with Health and the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services in relation to the range of services to be provided.

In September 2008 the government announced that the commonwealth and ACT Labor governments had come to a historic agreement that will see all ACT government preschool students having access to 15 hours of free preschool. The ACT Labor government is committed to providing Canberra's children with the best start in life, and the provision of 15 hours of free preschool will greatly add to the educational opportunities of our preschool students and cement the ACT as a national leader in the provision of early childhood education.

In both the 2008-09 and the 2009-10 budgets the ACT government has invested significantly in the provision of additional teaching staff to improve teacher to student ratios in all ACT government schools, as well as investing in maintaining the ACT's strong record in literacy and numeracy. In May 2009 we announced that as part of our commitment to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for ACT students we had set the new targets to be achieved by 2013 in the national assessment program for literacy and numeracy as well as in education outcomes for Indigenous students.

The building the education revolution component of the nation building and jobs plan is assisting the ACT government to deliver on our commitment of schools for the 21st century by funding approximately \$230 million worth of projects in our public and private schools—for infrastructure projects, including libraries, halls and sporting centres. In addition, the ACT government has invested \$189 million in the 2008-09 and 2009-10 capital works budget for public schools, including construction of the new Kambah P-10 School, Harrison high school and Gungahlin college and in-school infrastructure refurbishment.

The ACT government is committed to a strong and dynamic ACT economy. Obviously the current world economic downturn is having an impact on the ACT economy. Despite what will be a temporary budget deficit, the ACT budget delivered in May of this year is one designed with carefully targeted new spending initiatives to support investment in our local economy, to support jobs and to build a better city for all Canberrans to enjoy.

In this climate of national economic downturn Canberra has experienced a continuing growth in our population—1.7 per cent over the last year—and growth of 2.5 per cent in our economy. The average weekly earnings for full-time employed people in the ACT in 2008 was 16 per cent higher than the national average, and the trend unemployment rate for the ACT in May 2009 was 3.3 per cent—the lowest of all Australian jurisdictions and comparing very favourably with the national unemployment rate of 5.7 per cent. All these elements combine to demonstrate that we are doing the right things to promote a strong, dynamic economy in Canberra.

The ACT continues to enjoy an AAA credit rating, lower than average unemployment rates and higher than average labour market participation rates. Standard & Poor's reaffirmed the ACT's AAA credit rating in September 2008, and following the release of the 2009-10 ACT budget in May, Standard and Poor's announced that the territory's budget remained broadly consistent with an AAA credit rating. While the territory has moved into deficit in the recent budget, this government's strong record in financial management will see us through our seven-year plan to return to surplus.

Working to address skill challenges is a priority. In May 2008 we launched *ACT skills future: key initiatives in a long term strategy to address the skills challenge*. This initiative was supported by \$51 million over four years in the 2008-09 budget. A further \$46.7 million in the 2009-10 budget continues our investment in key areas to address skills shortages, including support for new Australian school-based apprenticeships in schools each year and an expansion of CIT's scholarship program that provides assistance with fees and course materials in areas of skills shortages.

While the commonwealth has invested in ACT infrastructure through the nation building and jobs plan, the ACT government has also continued its significant investment in infrastructure for the future. In the 2008-09 budget the government committed to a \$1 billion building the future program of investment in the territory's infrastructure. The 2009-10 budget builds on and enhances the building the future program, providing an additional \$274 million in capital for new projects. In total, combined budgets commit just over \$2 billion to capital projects over the next four years. These are unprecedented commitments to the territory's infrastructure and will, in 2009-10, support more than 2,000 jobs.

I am pleased to say that Canberra is developing an increased reputation as a centre of excellent in arts. Stage 1 of the Belconnen Arts Centre is progressing well and will be ready for opening later in 2009. In February 2009 community consultation commenced on the draft of the theatre in the ACT strategic directions statement. The period for public comment closed in May and those comments are currently being considered.

This government identified the importance of maintaining the momentum to improve Canberra central and build on the success of the significant developments that have remodelled Civic over the past four years. The 2009-10 budget identifies \$12 million over four years for the Canberra CBD upgrade program, and priorities for this expenditure will be coordinated through an agreed action plan.

In December 2008 the government demonstrated its commitment to sustainability and climate change by establishing the new Department of the Environment, Climate Change, Energy and Water. In establishing the new department the government supported a substantial funding boost so that it has significant policy and planning capacity across the key areas of climate change, renewable energy, water security and environmental sustainability.

The sustainable future program is part of an ACT government commitment to building resilience to climate change through both mitigation and adaptation measures. This program focuses on reviewing planning policy and identifying strategies and measures that complement the sustainability policy and climate change strategy. Its underlying aim is to create a planning policy framework for more sustainable living.

In a major step towards securing the ACT's water future, on 25 March this year the government approved Actew building the Murrumbidgee to Googong pipeline and buying water which would be stored in and then released from Tantangara Dam. Actew has also commenced the planning approval of stages for the enlarged Cotter Dam, including the lodgement of the project's environmental impact statement with the ACT Planning and Land Authority.

On 12 May the government announced a long-term target for the ACT of zero greenhouse gas emissions. The goal is outlined in the ACT government's submission to the Assembly inquiry into ACT greenhouse gas reduction targets, together with a reaffirmation of the commitment to legislate greenhouse gas reduction targets.

On 15 May the government announced the formal calling of expressions of interest in the proposed ACT solar power facility. The EOI is the first step in a two-stage process, with the request for detailed proposals set to follow the formal evaluation of the expressions of interest.

Last year, 2008-09, saw the introduction of an additional 16 compressed natural gas buses into the ACTION bus fleet. The new buses reduce the environmental impact by producing fewer emissions than the older vehicles that they will replace. In addition, the new buses allow disability access, providing greater accessibility for customers. In 2009-10 ACTION will continue its fleet replacement program, with 100 new buses to be acquired over the next four years.

From 1 July 2009, the government has committed \$7 million over four years to introduce an additional four weeks paid maternity leave and an additional week of bonding leave for the ACT public service. Extending paid maternity leave is a significant initiative in making the ACT public service an employer of choice. It supports the economic independence of women and their access to the labour market,

provides a model and incentive for private sector employers and is supported by research pointing to the positive impacts of mother-child bonding on early childhood developmental and life outcomes.

In closing I would like to acknowledge that the achievement of objectives outlined in *The Canberra plan: towards our second century* involves a great number of individuals and organisations, both government and non-government, and I express my gratitude to all who work so hard to ensure that the vision of the Canberra plan is achieved. The ACT government is committed to working with and for the community to build on the strong foundations we have already put in place. I look forward to our future together as we approach our second century. I move:

That the Assembly takes note of the paper.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Hunter**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Development applications—call-in powers Papers and statement by minister

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Planning and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation): For the information of members, I present the following papers:

Planning and Development Act, pursuant to subsection 161(2)—Statements regarding exercise of call-in powers—Development applications Nos—

200914130—Block 1 Section 58 Garran.

200914361—Block 17 Section 1 Phillip, dated 16 June 2009.

200914387—Blocks 3 and 15 Section 1 Phillip, dated 16 June 2009.

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

Leave granted.

MR BARR: On 29 May, acting under section 158 of the Planning and Development Act 2007, I directed the ACT Planning and Land Authority to refer to me three development applications. Those were DA No 200914130, seeking approval for the construction of a nine-storey car park structure at the Canberra Hospital; and DA Nos 200914361 and 200914387, both seeking approval for temporary car parking associated with the nine-storey car park structure.

On 2 June, the Select Committee on Estimates 2009-2010 invited me to appear to “discuss the process”. In my letter to the committee of 4 June, I declined the invitation on the basis that it was not appropriate to publicly discuss the process of a decision that was before me at that time. In my view, such a discussion would have inevitably—and improperly—anticipated that decision.

On 15 June 2009, I advised the ACT Planning and Land Authority that I had decided to consider the development applications. This was notified on the legislation register. On 16 June 2009, I approved the applications using my powers under section 162 of the Planning and Development Act.

In deciding the applications, I gave careful consideration to the requirements of the territory plan, to the advice of the EPA, TAMS, ActewAGL and the Planning and Land Authority. I also gave consideration to the comments received by the Planning and Land Authority during the public notification period on each of the development applications.

I have imposed conditions on the approval of DA 200914130 requiring the provision of stormwater pollution control measures, and resolution of traffic management issues from Bateson Road to Yamba Drive to the satisfaction of TAMS.

I have imposed conditions on the approval of DA 200914361 to ensure that lighting for the temporary car park will be compliant with the relevant Australian standards for safety and reduce the potential light spill onto the adjoining residential area. I have also imposed a condition to ensure that the temporary car park area is reinstated to its original condition once it is no longer needed as a car park.

I have imposed conditions on the approval of DA 200914387 for temporary fencing to be erected along the entire length of the car park facing Yamba Drive, to direct users of the car park to the pedestrian intersection.

The Planning and Development Act provides for specific criteria in relation to the exercise of the call-in power. I have used my call-in powers in this instance because I consider that the proposal will substantially contribute to the achievement of the provision of a substantial public benefit—that being improved hospital services for the entire Canberra community.

I also consider that the proposals will provide substantial public benefit through the provision of adequate temporary car parking to meet the immediate needs of staff of and visitors to the Canberra Hospital whilst the works are carried out. The multistorey car park will also provide a suitable level of accessible and safe parking to meet the anticipated future needs of staff of and visitors to the Canberra Hospital.

Section 161(2) of the Planning and Development Act specifies that, if I decide an application, I must table a statement in the Legislative Assembly not later than three sitting days after the day of decision. As required by the Planning and Development Act, and for the benefit of members, I am pleased to have tabled a statement providing a description of each of the developments, details of the land on which the developments are proposed to take place, the name of the applicant, details of my decision for each application, and the reasons for the decision for each application.

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo), by leave: As the minister noted, this has been the subject of considerable debate in the Assembly and in the *Canberra Times*, so I will not go through all of it again.

The minister has, many times, said that politics should not be part of planning. This is a long debate which I will not go through now, but suffice it to say that politics is part of planning. It was a political process that decided that we would move from the Y plan to a more compact form of Canberra. There was a lot of community consultation because it was a significantly important political decision—how we are going to plan our town, our city—and that is why we have a planning minister.

Where I do totally agree with what I suspect the minister largely means is that politics should not be introduced in an arbitrary fashion, with a minister approving this bit and disapproving this bit. We, the Assembly, should be setting the rules and they should then be applied in a non-political fashion. I will leave more comment on that to a debate at another time.

In terms of call-in powers, the Greens have always felt that the call-in powers should be a disallowable instrument. We do recognise that there may be occasions where call-in powers are appropriate, but, if so, we think it is appropriate that the Assembly should be in a position to express its views on them.

With respect to this particular development, ideally, Canberra would have sufficient public transport so that another car park at the Canberra Hospital would not be necessary. However, in the circumstances, we agree with the government that another car park at the hospital is necessary.

I would also like to comment on the minister's comments, as reported in the *Canberra Times* and talked about in the estimates committee, that the objections were political and frivolous. I think that is particularly unfortunate. Planning is something which is very important to the citizens of Canberra. For the citizens of Canberra who choose to be involved in how our city develops to be told that their objections are political and frivolous is not at all helpful, particularly when the Minister for Health, whose staff at least had read the objections, made the comment that she thought all the objections were understandable. I find it very hard to reconcile the two views. I would like to see a more positive view expressed by the Minister for Planning towards people who make the effort to become part of the planning process.

Finally, it was reported that the objections that the minister found political and frivolous related to solar panels and water tanks. I do not think that solar panels and rainwater tanks are political and frivolous; they need to be part of a sustainable future for Canberra.

Papers

Mr Corbell presented the following papers:

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Criminal Code—Criminal Code Amendment Regulation 2009 (No 1)—
Subordinate Law SL2009-25 (LR, 1 June 2009).

Dangerous Substances Act—Dangerous Substances (Explosives) Amendment Regulation 2009 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2009-26 (LR, 2 June 2009).

Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act—Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulation 2009—Subordinate Law SL2009-23 (LR, 28 May 2009).

Gungahlin Drive Extension Authorisation Act—Gungahlin Drive Extension Authorisation Amendment Regulation 2009 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2009-22 (LR, 26 May 2009).

Magistrates Court Act—Magistrates Court Regulation 2009—Subordinate Law SL2009-24 (LR, 28 May 2009).

Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act—Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Amendment Regulation 2009 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2009-27 (LR, 5 June 2009).

Public Sector Management Act—

Public Sector Management Amendment Standards 2009 (No 4)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-90 (LR, 9 June 2009).

Public Sector Management Amendment Standards 2009 (No 5)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-89 (LR, 9 June 2009).

Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Regulation—Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Parking Authority Declaration 2009 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-91 (LR, 11 June 2009).

Road Transport (Third-Party Insurance) Act—Road Transport (Third-Party Insurance) Amendment Regulation 2009 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2009-28 (LR, 4 June 2009).

Utilities Act—Utilities (Grant of Licence Application Fee) Determination 2009 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-93 (LR, 15 June 2009).

Social housing—commonwealth stimulus package Ministerial statement

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Disability and Housing, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Corrections) (3.25), by leave: Members will be aware of the enormous investment that the Australian government is making in social housing. It is an investment reflecting that government's commitment to the provision of affordable housing for all Australians. And it is an investment timed to counteract the financial impact of the global financial crisis.

In April this year, I outlined how the stimulus package would positively impact the development of social housing in the ACT and the dollars involved. A total of \$103 million of commonwealth funding will be channelled into our social housing. Of this, \$96.5 million will enable the construction of some 320 homes over the next two years. The balance of \$6.5 million will enable the maintenance of around 243 properties.

Today I can inform the Assembly that the ACT government, through Housing ACT, has moved quickly to apply the benefits of this funding. These benefits are

considerable, not only for social housing tenants and applicants, but for jobs and our economy. I can report that all of the \$3.2 million provided in 2008-09 for repairs and maintenance has been committed. As of today, more than \$2 million has been invoiced.

Further, nearly 100 public housing properties have had comprehensive upgrades to kitchens and/or wet areas, combined with internal and external repaints and new floor coverings. Ten properties have had their windows replaced and 26 properties have had complete external repaints. Mathoura Court, in Scullin, a complex of 12 two-bedroom units, has been completely upgraded. Upgrades to a further 133 single residences and a complex of 12 units are expected to be completed by the end of this month. What this means is that, by the end of June, we will meet the target of expending all commonwealth funding allocated for the current financial year.

As welcome as these maintenances initiatives are—and they will extend the economic life of a significant number of public housing properties—they are dwarfed by the scale of the program for new construction. These works will be delivered in two stages. Stage 1 has a total value of \$11.147 million and involves 56 residential units. It has already been approved by the Australian government, allowing an early start to work.

The 56 residential units are being constructed in six building packages. Builders have been selected through the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Service's existing panel of builders, with proposals submitted. Tenders have been finalised for all packages and contracts signed for four of these developments. Development applications have been lodged for all sites and approvals are being received. The majority of these developments are on greenfields sites, with established lease and development conditions, few constraints and few existing neighbours. They are all single-storey construction and the majority are detached or semidetached.

Stage 2 of the construction package is the major focus. The work will be closely analysed by the Australian government to ensure that the federal minister's social housing reform agenda is addressed.

As I indicated to the Assembly in April, these reforms mirror in very large part work already commenced in the ACT. In addition, I made a number of undertakings as to how this work would be progressed. I committed to undertaking an expert workshop to provide input for the specifications and contracts for these housing projects. An expert panel was assembled in the areas of planning, design, construction, advisory services, equipment specification, advocacy and evaluation.

This group provided comprehensive advice to Housing and Community Services—advice that has now been incorporated into the plans, specifications and contracts for the new construction works. This advice included estate planning, site planning, orientation, architectural design, energy rating, interior layout, configuration and location of external spaces, impacts on adjoining developments, garden and landscape design, external materials and finishes, internal material, heating equipment and operation, and cooling.

Based on this advice, I am confident that the housing constructed under the stimulus package will be amongst the most energy efficient and sustainable ever built in the territory. Not only will the housing be six-star energy rated; it will include a range of features, including rainwater harvesting and use, solar hot-water units and the inclusion of robust, hard-wearing materials and construction.

In April, I further committed to convening a forum on community housing in the ACT. This forum will provide the opportunity for stakeholders to discuss the role that community and affordable housing providers play in the housing continuum that I have described on many occasions. It will also provide an opportunity for the ACT government to clearly state where it sees community and affordable housing positioned across different housing types and tenures and, importantly, different income levels. In addition, it will provide input into the work that needs to be done with the commonwealth to support additions to community housing stock in the context of the stimulus package.

On 16 April, I held an information workshop for builders, developers and community housing organisations at the MBA's new training facility in Fyshwick, to announce the stage 2 construction under the stimulus plan. The meeting was well attended and interest was very high. Housing and Community Services subsequently issued a call for proposals and the level of interest was reflected in the response.

The call for proposals closed on 22 May 2009, with 86 agencies registered for a proposal package. There were 24 responses received, covering construction of a possible 600 properties, from a range of small and large building companies and a range of local and interstate community housing providers. The proposals submitted represented an excellent range of building types, including larger and smaller houses and special accommodation types. They also included a good geographic spread, from new subdivisions in greenfields sites to development of inner suburban blocks.

An evaluation panel was convened on Monday, 1 June 2009 and the panel is currently finalising a full assessment of the proposals to determine those that meet the requirements of both the ACT and the commonwealth. Based on that assessment, I will be making recommendations to the commonwealth Minister for Housing by 30 June 2009. The commonwealth has committed to finalise their evaluation of those recommendations by 30 August 2009.

I am confident that, based on those time lines, we will see the completion of 320 new social housing dwellings by June 2011. Further, and in conclusion, I can confidently say that, in terms of the number and the quality of the properties being constructed by the government as I have described today, this initiative will be the most important addition ever to be made to social housing here in the ACT. I present the following paper:

Social Housing Commonwealth Stimulus Package—Ministerial statement,
23 June 2009.

I move:

That the Assembly takes note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Services and facilities in outer suburbs

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 Smyth be submitted to the Assembly, namely:

The provision of services and facilities in the outer suburbs.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (3.34): Madam Assistant Speaker, it is an important MPI that we discuss the nature of services, their provision and the facilities that are required in our outer suburbs. This is often a Civic-centric government, simply because there are issues in Civic as well. But we need to take into account where people live; we need to take into account how they move from where they live to where they work; and we need to account for what will happen when they are at home. So this MPI is important and I will obviously take a particular focus from the Tuggeranong point of view.

If you look at the history of Canberra, these areas developed rapidly, and in many cases, whether it be south Tuggeranong or west Belconnen, they have aged at an appropriate rate, which leaves them all at similar positions in regard to the status of the facilities that they have and the service that they have. There are complexities in matching urban development with the provision of services and facilities. There is often a mismatch that we should aim to avoid but, if we are unable to avoid, should certainly aim to ameliorate as quickly as we can.

Let us consider some of the issues that continue to exist in Tuggeranong, where people first moved into their homes in the early 1970s—1973 and 1974 in Kambah, which, of course, is nearly 40 years ago. We then need to look at some of the infrastructure that we are just completing now—for instance, Athllon Drive. I notice that the government put a press release out during the week saying how well they had done in finishing Athllon Drive. But the extension was a project first mooted in the 2000 budget as part of my five-year road program; so it is interesting to see that it finished some five years after it was meant to finish. What is important is the timely delivery of capital projects but then there is the back-up through the services and the facilities to make the capital projects worth while.

It is interesting to take the case of the Gungahlin Drive extension, which we heard about during estimates. Had both sides been duplicated at the same time, it would have saved the taxpayer of the ACT some \$20 million and would have accorded the residents, particularly of outer Gungahlin, a much easier trip to work much more

quickly. Again, we see this mismatch of delivery to critical infrastructure for those that live in the outer suburbs.

If you continue just in Tuggeranong, the duplication of Tharwa Drive has been on the books now for many years. It has been not delivered for many years. It is underway now. Some of the requests of the community have not been met in the final form that Tharwa Drive will take. If we look at the Lanyon Drive extension to link Queanbeyan and Jerrabomberra down to the Monaro Highway, that intersection has a great impact on people who live to the south of it, and we see a project that just seems to go on forever. So the timely delivery of infrastructure is important. Indeed, the Auditor-General has noted the under-delivery of infrastructure. Mr Harris also notes the under-delivery of infrastructure in the advice that he gave the estimates committee. It is about making sure that we have plans in place to deal with all areas of the territory equally.

Dealing further with roads in the Tuggeranong Valley, I note on the original plans that Isabella Drive and parts of Johnson Drive were also to be duplicated. Whether they need to be built now will be an interesting question, but one road that particularly causes great angst to a lot of drivers and that is the scene of regular car accidents, and indeed at least one death, is Ashley Drive, which connects Erindale Drive to Johnson Drive. Again, the question of when Ashley Drive might be duplicated, or at least made much more safe than it is, is something that needs to be considered. Indeed, there are still a few missing links, particularly for the people of Tuggeranong. The Monaro Highway, where it goes over Canberra Avenue, where it goes from two lanes down to one, is a continuing source of irritation to many drivers who pass that way to avoid the Woden Valley and Civic on their daily commute. This bottleneck causes a great deal of angst in the mornings in particular, but, again, also at night.

It is not just about the road infrastructure. If we look at critical social infrastructure, particularly for Tuggeranong, there has been no action on the Tuggeranong Homestead for some years now. For those that were not here, the Labor Party had intended to subdivide the majority of Tuggeranong Homestead and put residential on that area. That would have been a great shame. Tuggeranong Homestead, in fact, has buildings that come from the convict era, buildings that were built by convict labour, all the way through to a cutesy 1950s brick veneer deco front. So in one building complex you really have the architectural history of residential Canberra, yet we were going to cut that up and turn it into a residential development.

Some work has been done to stabilise the buildings that are currently there, and some small amount of work has been done, for instance, to look at whether or not we should return the creek, which is now a big stormwater drain, to being a creek. Work has also been done to restore the orchard. But in the main it has been ignored by this government. Tuggeranong Homestead is a fantastic area located in the heart of the city that is Tuggeranong with some 90,000 people. But we are not using it to its best advantage, and we are certainly not using it in a way that allows it to be maintained for the use for which it was intended. That is a great opportunity gone begging and I would hope that perhaps when the minister for heritage comes down to the chamber or when one of the members from Tuggeranong speaks to this, they might tell us what the government's intention is long term for Tuggeranong.

I, of course, have said on several occasions that it would be an ideal site for an annex to the National Museum of Australia. The museum is looking to consolidate the several repositories that it has around the ACT. There is a thought in modern museum display to display in situ, display in place, where the exhibits are actually given the background that they would have been found in in a normal sense. Many of the large agricultural artefacts that the National Museum has could be stored at Tuggeranong Homestead. They could be wheeled out at appropriate times, as could some of the vehicles that they have that come from the area and certainly traverse Australia but particularly relate to rural areas. Indeed, some of the small aviation assets that they have, some light planes, could all be stored at the Tuggeranong Homestead to make it a significant place in Canberra but also make it a significant place for the nation in that regard.

Madam Assistant Speaker Dunne, something dear to your heart of course is the Nolan Gallery. Just south of Tuggeranong is that fantastic asset that is Lanyon. Unfortunately, we seem to have a government that is dithering on Lanyon and its future and in particular what it will do with the Nolan collection. It was the express wish of Sidney Nolan that the paintings be stored and displayed in a place that gives them a context, that they be in the bush. He did not want them in a gallery in the middle of town. He did not want them in the National Gallery. He wanted them somewhere where people could relate to what he had painted in context. It is a tremendous asset that we have. We are not using it wisely and we are not displaying it. I think that is a great shame.

If we had the Nolan Gallery reopened and enlarged perhaps—certainly made safe for the preservation of the artworks and at the same time, as the 2004 report says, allowing some space to take staff that are currently housed in the homestead itself as well as provide a visitor centre and an interpretation centre—we could enhance Lanyon Homestead, which sits on the edge of the Tuggeranong Valley.

We need to come to a decision on what will happen with the Nolan Gallery. I note that the family of the artist have a say in this. I note that technically the collection may well be owned by the commonwealth. But I would hope that something is done that particularly adds to an area on the periphery of Canberra, because we are the bush capital and the ability to go there to enjoy, to relax, to visit the Lanyon Homestead itself and all its history, I think would be a tremendous asset to the people of Canberra.

If you just go beyond Lanyon a little, you get into Tharwa. We have the issues of the Tharwa bridge and we have the issues of the closure of the Tharwa school. This is a very good example of the disdain this government has had for the outer edge of Canberra—this small community. They were far away and they were seemingly out of sight and out of mind. I think the treatment that this part of Canberra's community has had from their government is a shame. There is a whole story to be told on how not to go about a historical place refurbishment in the case of the bridge and how not to go about a school closure in regard to the local school. Those small country schools are special schools. We should have cherished them and we did not.

Again, we are now faced with the situation, after years of delay, that an even more substantial project will have to be undertaken in regard to the Tharwa bridge,

something that, despite the denials of the then-minister that timber was available and that the new bridge had to be built, could have gone ahead a long time ago.

We look at things as simple as ACTION bus services and the changes to the services over the last couple of generations of the ACTION bus services. I refer particularly to the changes to the bus services in 2008. The proposal from then Minister Hargreaves for the treatment of the outer suburbs of Canberra was an absolute fiasco. I only have to say “routes 768 and 769” to indicate where the minister, who had been sitting too long in his ivory tower, had forgotten about the routes that move through the outer suburbs and the edge suburbs and then quickly move passengers to the heart of the city. It was a vindication of the public when the decision was overturned and routes 768 and 769 were kept. It is about making sure that people at the outer edges of the city have as good a service as the rest of the city has. They are in some ways disadvantaged by the length of the city and we should make sure that we put in place programs to ensure that they get the services that they not just deserve but need.

It goes to the issues of GPs. Of course, we took to the last election the issue of a bulk-billing GP clinic for Tuggeranong. It is a service they do not have. It is a service they are not going to get under this government. The whole issue of GPs—particularly when you go to the Lanyon Valley, where, for a long time, access to a doctor was incredibly hard—is an indictment of this government. It is an indictment that it took them almost seven years to wake up to the fact that we did have problems with GP numbers in the territory and that they actually should do something about it.

In terms of the provision of sporting facilities, I need refer only to the disparity between the access to a swimming pool lane on the outer edges of the city as opposed to even north versus south of the lake. We have a disproportionate lack of lanes for swimming in Tuggeranong. I am sure somebody else might have a few more words to say about that.

I refer to youth services and in particular Indigenous youth services. We heard during the estimates committee hearing about, for instance, Gugan Gulwan at Wanniasa that has tremendous programs for young Indigenous people, for Indigenous males and Indigenous families. These are critical programs that were costing very, very small amounts of money and yet were under threat because the government had not taken into account not just the effect on the Indigenous people at the loss of these programs but the actual location of these programs. The fact that Gugan Gulwan chose to set up in Wanniasa said, “We understand we need to be where these services are required.” They made that decision and they certainly should be backed up in that regard.

Access to libraries is something that I have raised in this place many times. The further you are away from a library, the less likely you are to attend. I think we have the ideal opportunity here. We talk about Canberrans being well educated, and we do have a good education system. We always have had. I hope we always will. But as a reinforcement to that system, as well as providing what would appear from studies around the world to be the new town hall, libraries are a place that people see as neutral ground where they can go, where they can be safe, where they can in some cases receive companionship.

The librarian might be the only person you speak to all week if you are elderly or if you are slightly disadvantaged or left out of the mainstream. They are certainly places around the world, whether they be in Chicago or South Africa, that are respected and are seen as neutral ground but that also are places where communities come together to discuss issues, gain access, get a book to read, whatever it might be.

There is an equation that shows that the further you are away, the more visitation drops off. For instance, again in south Lanyon, if you are reliant on the bus service or if you are a single-car family and the car is not there during the day, you are at a significant disadvantage. For somewhere like Lanyon, we do have a mobile library service, which is a good thing. But it is about having all locations covered and it is about making sure that that radius you are away from a library is made smaller. It is currently, I think, about five kilometres. It should probably be as low as three kilometres.

It is about things as simple as horse paddocks. Many people move to the edge of the outer suburbs in particular to get close to horse paddocks so that they can ride there themselves or encourage their children to learn the discipline that owning a horse is. But we seem to use horse paddocks particularly as just a holding ground. They are just in a holding pattern until the government wants to take that land and develop it. The perimeter suburbs, and particularly the outer perimeter suburbs, are the ideal location. There is a recommendation in the report about making sure that we plan for things as simple as horse paddocks.

Madam Assistant Speaker, the list goes on and on and on. It is about getting balance. It is about rejuvenation of the outer suburbs. It is about renewal. It is about making sure that, yes, we have an obligation to look after Civic and the town centres but at the same stage, where you live, in your suburb and at the edge of a suburb, is also important. (*Time expired.*)

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Planning and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation) (3.49): I thank Mr Smyth for raising this important matter today. Having lived in Flynn, Fraser, Florey, Macgregor, Kambah, Torrens, Chapman and Stirling, amongst many places, in my 32 years in this city, I can very confidently say that Canberra's outer suburbs are special places filled with fantastic people—Canberra people. That is why this government listens to suburban families, it is why we invest in suburban services and it is why we deliver suburban projects—schools and sportsgrounds, childcare centres and swimming pools.

When you look at the history of this city, you will see that the development of the outer suburbs in particular has been driven by Labor governments at both the federal and territory levels. This is because Labor is good for Canberra; there is no doubt. When contrasting our performance with that of those opposite, it is clear that Labor is good for Canberra and the Liberals are bad for Canberra and bad for Canberra suburbs.

The Leader of the opposition has said today that he will vote against the budget, which means that the Liberals will be voting against services in our outer suburbs.

They will be voting against new schools. They will be voting against refurbished sportsgrounds. They will be voting against the west Belconnen child and family centre. They will be voting against the Gungahlin pool. And why, Madam Assistant Speaker Dunne? I think you guessed it: opposition for opposition's sake; opposition politics that threatens jobs and services in the outer suburbs.

This is an opposition with no plan for jobs—no plans for jobs for the tradies who live in these suburbs. It is an opposition with no plan for services—no plan for services for the families who live in our outer suburbs. Zero plans from Zed.

Mr Smyth, in his speech, claims that he wants better services for Canberrans. If that is the case, he should take the very first step, the obvious step, and walk the walk—walk over to this side of the chamber, cross the floor, and support Labor's 2009-10 budget.

In this budget, as in every budget since 2001, ACT Labor is getting on with delivering services to Canberrans. An excellent case study is the massive investment that we are making for the benefit of the Gungahlin community, another area of new outer suburbs in this city, in my electorate of Molonglo.

For example, ACT Labor is constructing a new college in Gungahlin at a cost of more than \$70 million. The Gungahlin college will accommodate 900 year 11 and 12 students. It will provide a comprehensive program of courses and cater for students who wish to combine CIT accredited courses or training with their secondary college activities. It will include a range of facilities suitable for community use, such as a gymnasium and a performing arts complex. In addition, the project includes a CIT flexible learning centre and a joint college-community library facility.

Whilst the Liberals fail to show any support for this project, the Gungahlin Community Council have expressed their satisfaction with the design of the college and the government's consultation with the community. Earthworks have commenced on the site and building works will commence in September of this year. The college is scheduled for completion by the end of 2010, to open for the start of the 2011 school year.

We are also investing \$45 million in a new high school in Harrison, adjacent to the recently completed preschool and primary school. The high school will be capable of accommodating 800 students in permanent buildings. The high school will open in 2012 and will provide state-of-the-art school facilities for residents from the suburbs of Harrison, Franklin, Gungahlin and Forde. The new secondary school will also provide an inclusive setting for students with special needs, just as the primary school facilities already do. Construction of this new facility is due to begin in April of 2010, with the school open for the commencement of the 2012 school year.

After 12 years of the federal Liberals treating education as a political football, we are now able to work with federal Labor to invest in every student in every ACT school. Federal Labor's \$230 million building the education revolution package, combined with ACT Labor's record \$370 million investment, means that every ACT student will benefit from more than half a billion dollars of investment in education from Labor at a territory and federal level. That is a case study in delivering for the outer

suburbs. Let us look at the schools in Gungahlin that are getting funding under BER. These include Amaroo, Ngunnawal, Palmerston, Good Shepherd, Holy Spirit, Gold Creek and Harrison schools.

ACT Labor delivered more investment in our schools through the highly successful reforms of 2006. The Liberals opposed that reform. Madam Assistant Speaker Dunne, I believe that you regularly referred to it as throwing good money after bad. ACT Labor has worked to cut red tape to ensure that all schools could make the most of this package. The Liberals initially refused to back our planning reforms; it was disappointing, but they did eventually come to support us. ACT Labor continues to welcome federal Labor's massive investment in providing even better educational services for all Canberrans, particularly those in the outer suburbs. The Liberals have never supported this investment in the future of young Canberrans.

Whilst on the topic of services for younger Canberrans, let me say that it should be remembered that the first child and family centre was opened in Gungahlin in May 2006. Again, that is something only a Labor government would do.

ACT Labor is also investing heavily to provide the people of Gungahlin with excellent sporting facilities. Recently I visited the Good Shepherd Catholic primary school in Amaroo to begin the community consultation on the design of the Gungahlin pool and leisure centre. ACT Labor has committed up to \$20 million to deliver an indoor pool and leisure complex for the people of Gungahlin. Whilst we were up-front about our commitment to this project, the Liberals matched it only in the dying days of the campaign after being shamed into it by the Gungahlin Community Council. The new pool and leisure centre will be located in the Gungahlin Town Centre. The facility will include a variety of features, possibly including a lap pool, gymnasium, weights room, activity program rooms, change rooms for wet and dry areas, a cafe, child-minding facilities, dry court space and a range of complementary services such as sports medicine.

We have also committed \$6 million over the next two years to fund the construction of an enclosed Gungahlin sports complex. This project will deliver an irrigated playing surface that will accommodate all major codes to a senior level and provide covered seating for 500 people, open seating for 600 spectators, change rooms, toilets, a kiosk and storage facilities.

The people of Gungahlin will also benefit from more than \$8 million allocated to deliver on Labor's election commitment to progress the development of stage 2 of the Lyneham sports precinct, which is conveniently located not far from the Gungahlin Drive extension, Northbourne Avenue and the Barton Highway. These investments will complement ACT Labor's investment in the Harrison district playing fields and neighbourhood oval and the Throsby district playing fields.

As a result of this Labor government's drive to deliver services to the Gungahlin community, the Gungahlin police station is now operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Twenty-four additional police and two extra dedicated patrol cars are stationed at Gungahlin. This expansion has also seen the implementation of the shift of overlap to cater for busy times. This has been made possible by ACT Labor's

major investment to increase the total number of police in the ACT by an additional 122 officers since 2001-02. This initiative demonstrates the commitment of the government to providing a safer community for the people of Gungahlin and the rest of Canberra.

I found it interesting that Mr Smyth referred to bus services in outer suburban areas. Those with a longer memory of public transport provision in this city would remember that the Liberals established a zonal bus fare system that punished Canberrans who lived in outer suburban areas. It was this Labor government that abolished that zonal transport system and instituted the one fare anywhere policy that meant that people in the outer suburbs of Canberra were not disadvantaged. For Mr Smyth to suggest that public transport services have been run down by Labor is outrageous. His policy position was to penalise people in outer suburbs through the use of a zonal system.

Mr Smyth claims that he wants better services for the outer suburbs. Perhaps he should have joined the Labor Party back in his formative political years. If he had, he would have been part of the team that delivers for Canberrans. Instead, he is part of the perpetual opposition, which is interested only in opposition for opposition's sake. If he wants to deliver for Canberrans, he should back our investment in services and facilities for outer suburban areas by voting for this year's budget. But we know he will not, because Mr Smyth's entire contribution to ACT politics has been all about opposition—puerile opposition for opposition's sake. He thinks that seven years is a long time to wait; we will ask him in 2012 how it feels after 11.

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (3.59): I am pleased to speak on this matter of public importance here today. I thank Mr Smyth for bringing it to us and for his detailed outline of concerns for our community in the Tuggeranong Valley and in Canberra's outer suburbs.

The provision of services and facilities in the outer suburbs, or rather the lack thereof, can be illustrated no better than in the electorate of Brindabella. My electorate is the geographical home of some of the most outer southern suburbs of Canberra, including Tharwa. I can also say that there are many positives about this neck of the woods. We have some of the most scenic and beautiful land in the territory. What we are sadly lacking is many facilities and services. In terms of our basic needs for public transport, infrastructure, health facilities and schools, we can find a gap in all of them.

If we are to look at geographic regions, I must make mention of Tharwa. I am not sure that the Labor members for Brindabella have found a reason to visit Tharwa in recent times; in fact, I think they are fearful of the reception that might face them. But if you were to go, Ms Burch and Mr Hargreaves, you would see a community that has had the life sucked out of it. The closure of its primary school by the Stanhope-Gallagher government has torn out the social fabric of this village. Indeed, we heard during the inquiry into school closures—I wait in anticipation for Mr Barr to condemn me for apparently looking backwards and not forwards—that it is a shame that Mr Barr does not recognise that issues lingering from past decisions must be addressed correctly in order to move forward.

Submissions to the inquiry just this past month reiterated the need for a primary school at Tharwa, yet—despite valid arguments, arguments backed up by the Australian Education Union and the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, who all recognise the value to communities such as Tharwa and Hall where the schools were a vital part of the community—this is not a consideration of or of concern to this government. They will happily sit on their hands and defend their decision to close this school until the end of time.

In terms of road and transport infrastructure in the outer suburbs of Tuggeranong, we have been waiting for a long time for the duplication of Tharwa Drive and Athllon Drive. These announcements were re-announced over successive budgets, dressed up as new announcements to keep the community guessing. We can also go to Tharwa and look at the complete debacle that was the refurbishment of Tharwa bidge, a vital piece of infrastructure that was integral to the safe passage of residents of Tharwa into town—again mismanaged by this government. Whilst there are a number of buses that travel the intertown route between the city and Tuggeranong, there is still such a gap in the suburban services that we see many commuters from the outer suburbs choosing to take the car, which results in a massive traffic backlog up the Monaro Highway most mornings and evenings at peak hour.

In health we know that there is a gap in the provision of GP services in Canberra. There is still a growing gap in the availability of health services in the deep south of Tuggeranong—a gap sufficient for it to be an issue for the many young families and older Australians who make their home in these suburbs.

The community of Tuggeranong, already suffering from a chronic shortage of GPs, received a cruel blow when, in 2008, the Wanniasa medical centre was suddenly closed and the Tuggeranong Valley lost another eight much-needed doctors. The decision by the existing provider in relocating its business to Phillip and out of the valley showed no consideration for the welfare and wellbeing of the surrounding community. The Wanniasa medical centre had been there for 20 years. It had regular patients who had connections and relationships with their own GPs. The Tuggeranong region needs more doctors. The loss of the Wanniasa medical centre was devastating for our community.

What was the government response? The closure of the Wanniasa medical centre was referred to the standing committee on health for immediate inquiry with a request that it report back to the Assembly by 26 August 2008. The committee resolved to consider the circumstances of the closure, the impact on the residents of the Tuggeranong Valley, the nature of the ACT government's relationship with privately owned general practice in the ACT and possible options for the future delivery of GP services in the ACT. That committee's membership was Ms Porter, deputy chair; Ms Karin MacDonald, another government MLA, the chair; and Mrs Jacqui Burke, from the opposition.

The Standing Committee on Health and Disability duly carried out the inquiry into the closure of the Wanniasa medical centre in August 2008. That report was presented to the Stanhope government in August 2008. It took over six months into the term of the

current Stanhope-Gallagher government, after numerous requests, for the government response to the closure of the Wanniasa medical centre to be finally tabled in the Assembly.

This is yet another clear example of a government that continually ignores the Brindabella constituency—six long months of indecision and prevarication, during which time pain and suffering were inflicted on yet another community, the Wanniasa community; six long months of this Assembly missing the opportunity to look at possible legislative responses that could have been pursued in this regard. It is another example of the government's disregard of the committee system and committee recommendations, even in cases where the majority of the committee, including the chair of the committee, were government members, and a further example of the arrogant way that the Stanhope-Gallagher government continues to treat the people of Tuggeranong and southern Canberra.

The list of areas of concern goes on and on. Let me turn to policing. Tuggeranong police station has its hands full. There is no shortage of complaints to my office—not about the police themselves, but about the lack of resources for ACT police and the effect this has on the response time for some call-outs. The situation in Tuggeranong has seen a growth and resurgence of community involvement in assisting in the protection of property from growing vandalism. Neighbourhood Watch last year established a Calwell chapter, and further Neighbourhood Watch committees are being established in Theodore and Wanniasa.

Let me turn to sport. There is a distinct lack of sporting facilities in the outer suburbs of the south. I have mentioned before in this place the Tuggeranong Archery Club's well thought out proposal to build in Tuggeranong a multiuse sporting facility with the added benefit of being completely disability friendly. I hope that will come to fruition in the very near future. Many clubs are looking for a facility, including ACT Fencing, ACT trampolining, table tennis—the list goes on. The proposal put forward by the Tuggeranong Archery Club will fill this gap, with the added benefit of a locale outside the geographic centre of Canberra.

Pool lane space is particularly lacking in the outer suburbs of the south. As an indication, the total number of metres of lane space in the whole of Canberra's south in winter is approximately just 900 metres as opposed to 1,380 metres in the north. And when we see the exclusion of Erindale pool and the Deakin Oasis pool, which has since closed down, lane space is reduced to just 400 metres of lane space for south-side pool users.

In conclusion, let me say that there is much to be said about the benefits of living in the outer suburbs of Canberra, particularly in the south, but only if you are not a participant in motor sport. It also helps if you have no children of school age, so that you do not have to worry about school closures, and if you never need to access GPs, as it is almost impossible to find a GP in Tuggeranong who still takes on new clients.

The Stanhope-Gallagher government has, sadly, failed the people of Tuggeranong over the past seven years, especially when it comes to the provision of facilities and services.

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (4.07): I would like to thank Mr Smyth for raising this issue. This side of the house recognises the importance of providing quality services for all Canberrans, irrespective of their age, income status or, indeed, geographic location. I think anyone with any doubt about that had only to listen to the Chief Minister's tabling report on the implementation of *The Canberra plan: towards our second century*. There are many examples of the good work the ACT government is doing to provide services and facilities to residents of west Belconnen, one group of outer suburbs in my electorate.

As a person who was on the original steering committee and a patron of the West Belconnen Health Cooperative, I was very pleased to see the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, through the 2008-09 budget, provide \$220,000 to assist fit-out of the West Belconnen Health Cooperative, matching commonwealth funding. As we know, the cooperative model will look at preventive health measures, including nutrition, exercise, mental health as well counselling and advice services. Local residents will be invited to become members of the cooperative and have their say in the running of the centre. It will incorporate health promotion, preventive health, early intervention, social services for families in west Belconnen. It is anticipated that service will be operating in late 2009.

On our ongoing commitment to provide services for children and young people where they are needed, west Belconnen has been chosen as the site of the third child and family centre in Canberra. A national partnership with the Indigenous early childhood development program has been created, which will enable the establishment and operation, in the west Belconnen area, of an integrated child and family centre. This is an area of Canberra with a high Indigenous population and an area that would benefit from this service.

Consultations with parents and local community providers have been completed in order to determine what services are required and how they should be delivered and to identify gaps. Ongoing consultation will occur with parents and the local community providers over the course of the next six months. Specific consultation with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children and families will continue to inform and design program delivery.

The new centre will draw on the lessons learnt and the expertise gained from the well-established child and family centres in Gungahlin and Tuggeranong. It will reflect the working model of service delivery in Gungahlin and Tuggeranong to deliver services tailored to the changing needs of the community in west Belconnen. The child and family centre model is recognised as the best-practice approach in the area of early intervention, with the capacity to offer a skilled and professional workforce which is able to undertake timely interventions. The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services also funds a number of family and youth support programs which are located regionally throughout the ACT to support children and young people and their families.

As you know, I maintain a strong interest in the quality of services that this government provides the ministry of education. We on this side of the house do not

believe that spending money on education is throwing good money after bad. As we know, Kingsford Smith school opened at the beginning of term 1 in 2009. The primary-level catchment area for this school includes the suburbs of Holt, Higgins, and part of the new residential development of west Macgregor, and the secondary level includes the suburbs of Macgregor, Latham and Dunlop—suburbs, of course, all in the outer areas of Belconnen.

The February 2009 census shows total enrolment of 761 students, comprising enrolments from preschool to year 7, with 126 enrolments in year 7. The school will eventually be able to accommodate approximately 1,100 students. The school design provides flexible, modern, high-quality, environmentally sustainable education facilities that will be accessible to the Belconnen community.

Obviously aspects that affect transport to the outer suburbs are important. A traffic impact assessment for Macgregor West has identified the need to improve a number of intersections and residential streets to manage the traffic associated with the residential development in that area. Design work will be undertaken to reduce the levels of traffic to acceptable levels, manage these flows on the road network and assist public transport and pedestrian movements.

This government is also committed to achieving improved services and facilities in town centres in the outer suburbs of my electorate. The ACT government, in partnership with Westfield, is undertaking a significant improvement to the Westfield shopping centre and Belconnen bus station arrangements that will deliver improved public transport and shopping facilities for residents of the area and revitalise Belconnen shopping facilities, creating new opportunities for small business and providing locals with greater choice and variety in retail shopping. The new Belconnen bus station arrangements will provide better access to public transport and pedestrian routes and hopefully encourage more Canberrans to use public transport, a great example of government working in partnership with the private sector.

As we know, walking is great exercise and very important at any age. However, as we age, cracked footpaths can be a hazard. For this reason, I had footpath repairs carried out in eight suburbs in my electorate last term, and a number of these suburbs are in the outer areas of Canberra.

The ACT government is delivering a new state-of-the-art police facility in Belconnen, at a cost of \$17 million. This facility will provide a police precinct which will enhance interaction between the community and the police, while also addressing critical operational needs of ACT Policing across Belconnen.

I am very pleased to see underway the Belconnen Arts Centre on the shores of Lake Ginninderra, which represents a multi-million-dollar investment for the Belconnen community by the ACT government, and it will deliver great opportunities for tens of thousands of locals to engage in community events. It has extremely strong community support and includes many different aspects in stage 1. Stage 1 is nearing completion and after that, of course, it will be followed by stage 2. The ACT government is committed to delivering a facility that will be accessible to everyone in the community and will build on the many different art programs in Belconnen, especially in the community.

I would commend the investment of the ACT government in the ACT in general, but especially in the west Belconnen area, as their commitment to a diverse range of quality services and facilities.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (4.15): I thank Mr Smyth for this discussion today on the provision of services and facilities in the outer suburbs. I will be speaking with regard to the Tuggeranong area. While recognising that there is funding in the 2009-10 budget for the staged development in the Tuggeranong town centre, Tuggeranong has been relatively left out of much infrastructure planning.

We are very encouraged that the ACT government has made a commitment to a master plan for the Tuggeranong town centre. During the estimates process, it was noted that the master plan would be developed in 2011; so we will be looking forward to seeing funding for this in the 2010-11 budget. There are, however, limitations in the master plan process, and many of the key infrastructure services and needs will not come out through this process. We need to be looking at employment and education opportunities in the area, public transport and tourism, including accommodation.

As has already been noted today, the outer areas of Tuggeranong are poorly served by public transport. While it might be argued that this is because of current patronage, if we make the services better, people will be more likely to take up using public transport. There are also many tourism opportunities which could be built on in the area, including Tidbinbilla, Birrigai and the Tharwa, Lanyon and Tuggeranong homesteads. These are all aspects of an area which affect its viability and vibrancy.

The Greens have called for more holistic planning through a neighbourhood planning process. We need to make areas, particularly those outer suburbs such as Tuggeranong, places that people want to live and socialise in and feel like they are a part of their community. Tuggeranong is an area that has really grown but planning has not kept pace with this growth.

An area such as Erindale has grown significantly and has become an area with increased services and facilities and has very much become a major centre in its own right. A feasibility study for a park-and-ride facility in Erindale has been announced by the government; so we will watch the outcomes of this study with great interest. Lanyon is another area that has grown and continues to grow and, I have no doubt, would benefit from a neighbourhood planning process.

The need for sporting facilities in the Tuggeranong area has also been mentioned today. I have already spoken previously about a multiuse, multipurpose community facility being invaluable in the region. A scoping study is needed to facilitate this development, and I note that the government has stated this would occur. A multipurpose facility would provide a safe space for sporting, elderly and disabled groups as well as encourage active participation by and for families.

Business Tuggeranong has been pushing for a Tuggeranong master plan since 2001 to have a more thoughtful approach to development in the area. I look forward to the outcomes from the Tuggeranong master plan and to a more thoughtful planning approach for the area.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (4.18): Last week I, like other Nicholls residents, received a letter from the Director of Roads ACT regarding the Nicholls shops car park. I was very pleased to read in the letter that the ACT government is not proceeding with converting the car park to one-way traffic. As the Assembly is well aware from previous debates on this issue, the completion of this plan would have created more problems than it solved. It would not have addressed the problem of capacity or loading zones. It would have created traffic problems at the Paisley Street and Kelleway Avenue intersection and would not have widened the car park.

A public meeting on 29 April 2009 was held to discuss the Nicholls shops car park. The government's design was unanimously rejected by the meeting. Not one of the 50 residents present expressed support for the government's proposal, although, I must say, it was not clear where Ms Porter stood on the issue when she spoke. Before this meeting, the community had not been consulted properly and it definitely showed. The community only knew about the meeting because I took the initiative to distribute notices of the meeting by letterbox. Roads ACT only managed to letterbox about 80 homes, whereas I was able to letterbox over 2,000 homes in Nicholls in preparation for the meeting. Most people who attended only heard about the meeting through my letterboxing and I am glad they were able to come to ensure the government got the message. It was clear from the meeting that the government must widen the car park, continue two-way traffic at the Kelleway Avenue roundabout, provide more parking bays and not divert traffic down Paisley Street.

In last week's letter to residents, Tony Gill stated that Roads ACT will not be progressing with the one-way traffic and will liaise with the ACT Planning and Land Authority regarding "current and future parking demands". He stated that a new option will not be presented to the Nicholls community until "later in the year". I am worried that a simple infrastructure program is taking so long and that there are no time frames in the letter. It took more than six weeks to get this letter out and it is remarkably short in detail. In fact, the lack of professionalism the government is showing on the issue is demonstrated by the fact that the government cannot even spell the name of the suburb correctly in the letter—not once but twice. Twice the letter from Roads ACT talks about the suburb of "Nicholl". This is indicative of the government's bungled approach to the ongoing issue of the Nicholls shops car park. That is Nicholls with an "s".

This has been an ongoing issue for the government. On 23 August 2004, the then Minister for Urban Services, Bill Wood, wrote to a former member for Ginninderra, Bill Stefaniak, stating:

I am advised by officers of roads ACT that the traffic and parking arrangements at the Nicholls shopping centre were recently assessed. This assessment identified the need to modify the access road to the shopping centre and to widen the car park to facilitate the movements of vehicles within the car park. The design work for these improvements is in progress and the implementation of the works is expected to commence in October 2004.

So what has happened in the meantime? John Hargreaves was the minister between late 2004 and late 2008. I wonder if that is why it has taken until now to get some

progress on this issue. If Bill Wood could give a time frame of two months for progressing from decision to design work to implementation, why can't Roads ACT do that now?

I ask the government to consider all options for expediting this work. I ask the government whether any of the \$8 million from the shopping centre upgrade program or the "additional funding or repairs" listed on page 73 of budget paper 3 could be used. I would urge the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services to show some leadership on this issue, make a decision, have some clear time lines and fix the car park. Nicholls residents have endured enough of this government's incompetence and inability to get even the most basic local infrastructure right. It is clear what the residents of Nicholls want and deserve, and it is about time the government fixed this mess.

MS BURCH (Brindabella) (4.22): I welcome the opportunity to speak today. As Tuggeranong was the place of choice for me and my family when I moved to the ACT, I would like to cover some of the improvements and the activities by the government in regard to facilities and services for the residents of Tuggeranong. Firstly, I would like to talk around the Aged Care and Rehabilitation Service which is establishing a community precinct in the old Village Creek school at Kambah. This precinct will include services such as the equipment loan scheme, the ACT equipment subsidy scheme, the ACT domiciliary oxygen and respiratory support service, the specialised wheelchair and posture seating service, prosthetics and orthotics services and vocational assessment and rehabilitation services. The Village Creek centre is expected to be operational in October 2009 with all services, apart from the independent living centre, relocating at that time. The independent living centre is scheduled to relocate in December 2009.

Madam Deputy Speaker, on road improvements, the need to duplicate Lanyon Drive has been identified for some time. Lanyon Drive is part of an arterial road network, carrying approximately 23,000 vehicles per day, including a large proportion of heavy vehicles. Stage 2 works continue the duplication, and the construction of these road networks will be undertaken in one contract jointly managed by Roads ACT and the RTA of New South Wales. The Drakeford Drive duplication is complete and the Tharwa Drive duplication is well on track and will provide improved access for local residents. The feasibility work to establish the viability of a third south-bound lane on the Monaro Highway through Hume will be undertaken. The third lane will manage the forecast traffic projections, given the current traffic conditions in this area are often congested during peak hours. Given that is my road to and from home, I welcome that study.

A recent grant announcement provided support for a new artificial hockey pitch in Tuggeranong and an extended gymnastics facility at Erindale. These are just two examples of local projects that will have major benefits for our local community.

Child and family centres service families with children across our community. Building on the success of the Gungahlin centre, the Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre opened in July 2007 and continues to provide a wide range of universal and targeted services to the Tuggeranong community. Child and family centres aim to

improve the health and wellbeing of children and their families. Services provided in the Tuggeranong area include parenting information and support services, specialist clinical services, community development and community education programs. These services are delivered in partnership with other agencies and local community organisations and service providers. The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services also funds a number of family support programs and youth support programs which are located regionally throughout the ACT to support children, young people and their families.

The government announced \$5 million to construct a new performing arts centre at Calwell high school in the 2008-09 budget. This facility will also benefit nearby schools and the community because it will be available for use after hours. The project is set to be completed in time for the start of the 2011 school year. Also on schools, in the 2007-08 budget, \$54 million was allocated for the new P-10 school in Kambah. The new school will be a major education centre for Kambah, providing quality education and support services for students and their families. It will provide an expanded and enhanced range of services to supplement those currently provided by other schools in the suburb. The new school will also have capacity to accommodate an intensive language learning unit and specialist learning facilities, such as a flexible learning centre, autism and early intervention units. The construction of the new P-10 school will commence in October 2009 and the school will be ready to accommodate students from the start of the 2011 school year.

Other recent activity concerns the ACT Public Cemeteries Authority. The ACT government has commenced a consultation process on a proposed southern cemetery. That work began early this year with a proposed location in the area to the south of Mugga Lane. The cemetery would be developed in stages and cater for Canberra's needs for up to 80 years. It would recognise that a crematorium is an important option for most Canberrans, given that increasingly, can I say, that is our preferred choice for our final resting process.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I also noted a report that was tabled in the chamber just this afternoon—a report on the implementation of *The Canberra plan: towards our second century*. I will quickly read an extract:

Throughout 2008 and continuing in 2009 the Department of Education worked with the ACT Youth Coalition, Creative Safety Initiatives and the Construction Industry Training Council to develop an innovative program designed to provide an avenue for disengaged youth in the Tuggeranong Valley to reconnect with school. The program is being delivered through the Lanyon Youth Centre and is designed to give at risk students practical hands on experience in the trades along with exposure to occupational health and safety principles.

That is a local initiative. I know the Lanyon Youth Centre do fantastic work in the area.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have just a quick response to some of the earlier comments by Mr Doszpot. I can let him know that I regularly visit Tharwa. In fact, I thoroughly enjoy being out and about across Brindabella. It is a beautiful area and most weekends you will find me enjoying it. On the matter of GPs, I came here with a long

background in the health sector and I remain committed to improving GP services. I am working with local groups, a local Calwell group, looking at local solutions. Finally, Madam Deputy Speaker, I have enjoyed, and will continue to enjoy, living in the outer suburbs in my electorate of Brindabella.

MS LE COUTEUR (4.30): I have only a few minutes—three, so I will try and talk very quickly—so my speech might be slightly disorganised. We are talking about services and facilities in outer suburbs. One of the most important facilities for people living in suburbs anywhere is employment, somewhere to work. One of the questions on notice that I asked as part of the recent estimates process was in relation to the new government building. I asked:

Has there been any consideration of building a new Government department building in Gungahlin?

The Chief Minister answered:

As there are over 17,000 public servants and the proposed building will house over 3,000 it therefore does not preclude opportunities in other locations.

In other words, no. I think that we need to look at where we have employment in this city. It is one of the most important services for people. It is important that we deliver good services to everyone in Canberra, no matter where they live. Over the past couple of decades Canberra has become more and more of a sprawling city, which has made delivery of services more and more of a challenge. Canberra was originally designed just to have what we now know as an inner south and an inner north. As we have grown into the city, we have had to adjust our service provision policies accordingly. We have not always managed to do that. The reality is that there are always going to be more services in the centre of town and the town centres generally.

This leaves us with the question of how to provide good services for people in the outer suburbs. We have two choices. We can provide as many facilities as possible in the suburbs or we can provide a top-class, affordable public transport system to ensure that people can get to existing services. Unfortunately, I am not confident that this city is doing either of these. We do not have a top-class public transport system and we do not have good services in our outer suburbs. This is a particular problem because, increasingly, our outer suburbs are where the more vulnerable Canberrans live.

The government talks a lot about the provision of affordable housing in new developments, and that is important, but the problem is that a lot of this is going right on the outskirts of Canberra, in places like the fringes of Gungahlin, the fringes of west Belconnen, and there just are not the services there. People often live there with no cars and no public transport and they are basically stuck. An increasing amount of aged-care accommodation is going in locations like that. When schools, shops, medical facilities and community services are not there, it makes it increasingly hard for people who do not have the wherewithal to hop into their car and get somewhere else.

Going back to some further Gungahlin issues, public transport, as I mentioned, is a real issue. Why do we not have a bus interchange in Gungahlin? It would seem to me

that that is the next step needed in getting a public transport system that works for Gungahlin. I wish to put it on the record that I very much regret that we did not put light rail into Gungahlin when it was originally built. It has been a tragedy for the ACT that that opportunity was lost. Outer suburbs in general have very poor public transport in Canberra. I am fortunate that I live in the inner north and it is quite reasonable, but for the people who have to go from their suburb to one interchange and then to another interchange and then possibly out to another suburb you are talking about hours and hours.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: The time for the matter of public importance has expired.

Climate Change, Environment and Water—Standing Committee Reference

Motion (by **Ms Hunter**), by leave, agreed to:

That the resolution of the Assembly of 11 December 2008, which referred the issue of ACT greenhouse gas reduction targets to the Committee for inquiry and report, be amended by omitting “30 July 2009” and substituting “17 September 2009”.

Appropriation Bill 2009-2010

[Cognate paper:

Estimates 2009-2010—Select Committee report—government response]

Detail stage

Schedule 1—Appropriations.

Proposed expenditure—Part 1.3—Auditor-General, \$2,112,000 (net cost of outputs), totalling \$2,112,000.

Debate resumed.

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (4.35): Resuming, as I am, after lunch, I remind you that we were talking about the Auditor-General and we had the response from Mr Corbell, who had been given the opportunity to talk in his Chief Minister’s defence about the extraordinary attack on the Auditor-General. He had the opportunity to defend the reduction in funding in real terms that means that the Auditor-General will only be able to, in future, conduct six audits rather than eight. Rather than defend that issue and explain it, no, he went on a line of attack. He tried to attack the Greens and the Liberals on what their position on the budget was and demanded that we put that on the record. I think that we are on the record and I think that the record quite clearly says that we will not be voting for the budget and the Greens will be. We have made that issue quite clear.

It was a pretty extraordinary attack but, to be honest, it is the way the government, if they are criticised about anything, and we see this with the Auditor-General, will

attack. We have seen that with the budget in its entirety. When we have the audacity to criticise this budget, we do not actually hear a defence of the budget. What we hear is “Where’s your plan? You can’t criticise us because you don’t have a plan.”

Let us just remind ourselves of what the process is here. We are the opposition and you are the government. You deliver the budget and then we, through a process of estimates and in the Assembly, respond to that and criticise it. I will just quote here from Mr Stanhope when he was the Leader of the Opposition: “In contemporary politics, particularly for an opposition, the focus is on the negatives. It almost has to be and almost always is. Governments must be scrutinised. They must be accountable. That is the role of oppositions and it is a role that is particularly necessary as governments become lazy, arrogant, aloof and accident prone.” That is what we hear about today and that is what we will be continuing on with on Thursday—holding you to account.

This defence that you have, which is a form of attack, is “Well, you can’t criticise us because you haven’t got a plan.” If you would like us to present a plan to you, give us the keys to the Treasury, let us get in control of those benches over there, and we will show you our plan. But, until then, you need to articulate better to the community, to the opposition and to the crossbench the rationale for this budget. So it is a false premise, an absolutely false premise.

Mr Seselja graciously offered the opportunity to government members to defend the Chief Minister for his attack on the Auditor-General, and we certainly heard all that Mr Corbell had to say. As I was saying before lunch, Mr Hargreaves certainly took the opportunity, didn’t he? He stood up, and we all waited for his eloquent defence of the Chief Minister’s actions. And what did he say? “No”. If ever we needed confirmation that the members of the Labor Party are not quite unified behind the Chief Minister that was probably the final bit of evidence that we needed—the same minister who on Triple 6, when asked about the questions on notice and his support of the Chief Minister there, was quite categorical.

It is good to see him come into the chamber because I can get, once again, to praising Mr Hargreaves for his actions. Although I often am critical of Mr Hargreaves—there is no doubt about that, and I think rightly so—what I have never seen from Mr Hargreaves is him trying to blame others for his own mistakes. He certainly has been quite courageous in the rather unpleasant hospital pass he was given on the Alexander Maconochie Centre. He has actually taken that on the chin and has not blamed Mr Corbell for somewhat of a fiasco that he then had to inherit.

We have a government that attacks. It attacked on the land, using the LDA to attack the report in the *Canberra Times*. It has attacked us, it has attacked the Greens and now it is attacking the Auditor-General. But let us put it on the record here, and certainly I speak for the opposition—I hope I speak for the crossbench—that we see the Auditor-General as a beacon of independence, and we support her. We commend her. We admire her and we will not allow her to be disheartened. We support her and we say to her: “Don’t give up. Keep holding the government to account. Keep performing your audits, and don’t be intimidated by the Chief Minister.”

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Burch): I call Mr Hargreaves.

Opposition members: Hooray!

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Disability and Housing, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Corrections) (4.41): I might just remark that I had not said anything before the rabble got going.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Yes, I had noticed the noise.

MR HARGREAVES: So I congratulate you on your speed.

One of the things that those opposite have not worked out is that this budget is a budget for the time. It is a responsible budget, but it also indicates within it the imperative to be responsible and it says how we will work together to get over the global financial crisis as it applies to services that we deliver.

It is interesting that those guys over there leap to the defence of the Auditor-General when, in fact, the Auditor-General has not received a cut in the budget at all, as indeed the Legislative Assembly has not. You have got to ask yourself from time to time how many times you can do a double backflip with pike. These guys are gold medallists at this. They are gold medallists at the double backflip with pike. I tell you what: I wish you guys would come down to Batemans Bay when we go fishing because you guys are brilliant bait, absolutely superb bait.

The thing that they have not acknowledged is that there is a bit of a contradiction here. They are saying to the government, “Dear government, don’t attack your senior officers.” But those very same senior officers are fair game for the opposition to have a go at. There is a little bit of a contradiction. I notice that Mr Seselja is sitting there with all his friends. I will count them for you—no, no, no, no, no. He has got twice as many friends this week as he did last week. Also, I did notice, when the Chief Minister got up and started talking about land rent, how in fact the colour drained from the Leader of the Opposition’s face at the time: he had been sprung and had been snapped at it. It seems like this is the week for the colour to drain from the faces of leaders of oppositions. Of course there was some rumour at one point that the Leader of the Opposition here had designs on the federal house. Well, heavens, he does walk in the footsteps, in fact, of Mr Turnbull—for getting it wrong.

Mrs Dunne: I raise a point of order on relevance, Madam Assistant Speaker. This is a debate about the line, in relation to the budget, of the Auditor-General. We have had land rent and what is happening up on the hill. I am sure we can get land rent a little later in the day, but at the moment we are talking about the Auditor-General’s line.

Mr Corbell: On the point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker: the Leader of the Opposition, in his comments on this line item, managed to draw in the coroner’s inquiry into the 2003 bushfires and a range of other matters. I think it has been a very broad-ranging debate and, as is the case with debates on appropriation bills, the debate is necessarily wide ranging, and there is no point of order.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: No. I agree with you, Mr Corbell.

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks very much, Madam Assistant Speaker. When we talk about the Auditor-General, which is what Mrs Dunne wanted me to do, I thought it was a pretty low act actually on Mrs Dunne's part to draw the distinction about the personality of the Auditor-General into the debate in this chamber. I had thought better of her. I did not really think that was necessary, because the inference was quite offensive—very much so.

The fact of the matter with regard to the amounts of money that we would hope will be appropriated to the Auditor-General is that the amounts of money will enable effective scrutiny of the systems of government. The Chief Minister and the cabinet have not asked the Auditor-General to examine a one per cent efficiency dividend. Rather, the Auditor-General has been asked how, in fact, those same resources can be used more effectively. There is nothing wrong with asking the chief executives of all government departments to examine the way they do things to see if they can be done more effectively within the resources envelope that they are given.

I think, quite seriously, Madam Assistant Speaker, that those opposite ought to be a little bit quiet about their contradiction in terms of attacking senior officers. I do not think it is doing them any favours at all. In fact, it is exposing them a tad, and I would not like to see them upset or hurt in the public arena. As you know, I do not like to see people on that side of the house reduced to tears from their own folly. So I would say to them over there: you have gone public and said you are not going to support the budget; fine, you can vote against it when it comes to the total if you wish, but I might in fact—

Mr Hanson: Thank you, John. That is very generous of you.

MR HARGREAVES: I know; I am the most generous of souls. But I also would point to the history of it. They say, "Well, you blokes did not vote for it when you were in opposition."

Mr Hanson: Six times.

MR HARGREAVES: Indeed, I draw Mr Hanson's attention to those pages of history and invite him to go and have a look at the voting on the line items of those budgets, because, in fact, the Labor opposition did not vote against all of the line items. They did vote against them in total, because of one inalienable fact: it was a budget being produced by the Liberal government and therefore we viewed it with some suspicion. And so much suspicion was actually warranted, because when we came to government in 2001 we found some horror stories in the back rooms, the back dungeons, of their paperwork. We found that they had reduced public housing stock by 1,000 units, for example—we did not know that before that—and so we quite rightly viewed their budgets and their operations with suspicion. But we did not do it on every single budget line item.

Mr Seselja: Nor have we, John.

MR HARGREAVES: Well, you have been tested today already and we will see. We will see. The challenge is whether you are going to be just a bunch of glove puppets

and pop up and say, “No, sir,” or whether you will consider the line items appropriately and vote for them accordingly. We will see whether you have got courage to support something which is going to benefit the people of Canberra, after having expressed your reservations about it. We will see whether you have the fortitude to do that.

I suspect I am going to sit here for what will be an interminable period between now and the end of the week. I know that, because last year I grew noticeably older in the time that it took the debate to be concluded. I had in fact incredibly dark hair at the beginning of the debate—and ended up with the silver locks that I now possess. The challenge is out for those opposite: let us see whether you have got guts or not.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—Part 1.4—Chief Minister’s Department, \$45,218,000 (net cost of outputs) and \$13,444,000 (capital injection), totalling \$58,662,000.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (4.50): There are a number of important issues that came through in the estimates committee in relation to the Chief Minister’s Department and we want to touch on some of those. I touched earlier, in relation to the ACT executive, on how the Chief Minister has allowed ministerial standards to sink so low. In fact, we saw, during the Chief Minister’s appearance before the estimates committee, how he is leading from the front on that score. We saw how in fact he uses the agencies of the government as his personal plaything.

We note that the Chief Minister walks away when the Chief Minister’s Department is being debated. We note that the Chief Minister will not even stay to defend himself, to defend his record and to defend his behaviour. And there were a number of—

Mr Corbell: He has a pair, and you know it.

MR SESELJA: I did not know that, but you would think that he would stay for some of the Chief Minister’s debate. He walked the second I got up. I suppose, when you have behaved as he has and you have had to be condemned by the committee for your behaviour, it is no surprise that you would run away.

Indeed, we saw in relation to OwnPlace one of the most extraordinary things. The committee had to conclude that the Chief Minister misrepresented the committee in writing to builders. He wrote to builders, he wrote to industry bodies, and he misrepresented what had been said, for his own ends. In fact, we had to conclude:

... the Chief Minister misrepresented the Committee, claiming the Committee had made accusations rather than seeking clarification. The Committee also noted that the Chief Minister misrepresented the committee during hearings, claiming that “defamatory allegations” had been made.

The Committee noted that at no time did committee members claim that the building companies involved in the scheme were ‘price gouging’, and that this term was first used by Deputy Chief Executive of the Chief Minister’s Department, Mr David Dawes.

The committee goes on to recommend:

... the Chief Minister ... write again to the builders involved in the OwnPlace Scheme—those with whom he had previously corresponded and misrepresented the committee—and that the Chief Minister correct the record.

What an extraordinary reflection on the Chief Minister's integrity when we have to, as a committee, conclude and recommend that he actually write to builders and tell the truth! We actually asked the Chief Minister to write to them. In fact, in the end we had to write to the builders themselves and correct the misrepresentation of the Chief Minister. What a reflection!

Ministerial standards are set from the top, from the Chief Minister. The example that he is giving to his ministerial colleagues is that you can misrepresent all you like; you can make it up as you go along in order to score a cheap political point; do not bother about the truth; do not bother about being accurate in your correspondence with builders and with industry.

It was a shameful episode that the committee would come to the conclusion that we had to write to these builders to actually correct the misleading statements that had been made by the Chief Minister. What a disgrace! What an outrage! What a poor reflection on this Chief Minister that we would be forced to actually do that because he was not honest, because he misrepresented, because he thought he could get some sort of cheap political hit out of it!

We also saw how things operate under this government, and, indeed, under this Chief Minister in terms of the public service and the way that government resources are used to fight political battles on behalf of the Chief Minister. What we had was a headline in the *Canberra Times* that the Chief Minister did not like. The Chief Minister did not like the headline in the *Canberra Times*. He actually had to conclude that there was absolutely nothing in the article that was incorrect, that there was not one word in the article that he could actually reasonably refute. All that he could refute was the headline which, at best, was ambiguous.

As a result of the Chief Minister not liking the headline, as a result of him being annoyed, we saw a situation where, before 9 o'clock I think, an email had been sent out essentially ordering the LDA to take out an ad in the *Canberra Times* to respond. He also had a letter prepared, attacking the reporting, attacking the Liberal Party. This is how the Chief Minister spends his time and this is how the Chief Minister uses the public service and public resources. He uses it to fight his political battles.

He believes that he does not get enough opportunities through press releases, through the Assembly, through daily doorstops, to actually make his case; so he has to go and spend thousands of dollars of taxpayers' money to make the case that he clearly feels he is incapable of making in these fora. He is incapable of responding to this in a reasonable way. Perhaps the fact that he was not able to refute anything in the article suggests to us why he had to take out an ad. The ad did not actually refute anything that was in the article; it simply promoted the schemes. So we see taxpayers' dollars spent because the Chief Minister is annoyed.

Indeed, it was put to him:

Do you think it is reasonable, Chief Minister, that you spend taxpayers' money on an advertisement because you were annoyed about an article?

The Chief Minister said.

Well, that would be unreasonable, Mr Seselja.

Then he goes on:

That would be completely unreasonable for anybody to do that.

But then of course we saw the email which showed that that is exactly what happened, that the Chief Minister, in his own words, did act unreasonably. This is the bar that he is setting; he is setting the standard so low; and indeed his ministers are following. We saw the email from the chief of staff to the Chief Minister:

The Chief Minister is very annoyed about today's P2 article in the Canberra Times.

It seeks a number of actions, including:

- A detailed brief explaining ... OwnPlace ...
- A letter to the editor attacking the reporting and the Canberra Times willingness to work together with the Lib leader in trying to talk down our housing affordability schemes;
- A media release ...
- A half page ad for Saturday's paper ...

And this was at 8.40 on the morning of the article. We see that, by 8.40 on the morning of the article, the Chief Minister, because he is annoyed and, by his own admission, has acted unreasonably because he was annoyed—that is what the email says—he spends thousands of dollars of taxpayers' money responding, because he does not feel capable of making the arguments himself, because he actually cannot attack anything in the article. All he can indeed do is attack the headline.

But I am particularly interested in this reference to “a letter to the editor attacking the reporting and the Canberra Times willingness to work together with the Lib leader in trying to talk down our housing affordability schemes”. So we have got another conspiracy theory here, a conspiracy that somehow the *Canberra Times* and the Liberal Party in the ACT are working together to get Jon Stanhope; we are all out to get him. This is becoming the talk around town—whether the Chief Minister is quite with us these days. Everything is a conspiracy. If he gets a bad day's coverage, it must be a conspiracy. It could not be that he got it wrong; it could not be that someone just took the opportunity to write an article that was critical of him. Jon Stanhope is fast gaining a reputation.

He used to have the reputation of being arrogant and out of touch—and that indeed has not changed, and we have seen that with the attack on the Auditor-General—but there is increasingly a losing grip on reality about it, this idea of a conspiracy between the Liberal Party and the *Canberra Times* to bring him down, this conspiracy to talk the Chief Minister's programs down. It has nothing to do with the quality of what the Chief Minister is doing; it has nothing to do with the quality of his work. We have the conspiracy theory.

We saw throughout estimates the lowering of the bar of ministerial standards and the politicisation of the public service. In fact, Mr Hargreaves looks at me. I have got to say we did not have anything on Mr Hargreaves; well done to Mr Hargreaves; he is the one minister out of five who did not get sprung in totally politicising the public service during this estimates. We cannot say it did not happen. I am not going to vouch for him and say it did not happen; all I will say is there was no evidence. But we saw it for Mr Stanhope, we saw it for Ms Gallagher, we saw it for Mr Corbell and we saw it for Mr Barr. Well done, Mr Hargreaves; you are the only one who did not get caught; you are the only one who did not get caught on the record as politicising the public service.

The Chief Minister has lowered the bar. He now comes in. I will reserve my second 10 minutes.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (5.00): The ACT Greens and the estimates committee have been advised that responsibility for triple-bottom-line assessment reporting has transferred to the Chief Minister's Department. When I talk about triple-bottom-line assessment reporting, I am referring not just to the economic issues but of course also to the social and environmental issues.

There appears to be some indecision, from the answers supplied at estimates, as to how best to incorporate this into a budget framework, along with strategic and accountability reporting indicators. Indeed, the committee expressed concern that it was not clear whether this process would be sufficiently established and robust enough to frame the next budget.

We note that the estimates committee has recommended that the Financial Management Act 1996 be amended to require, in future budgets, a statement about how the budget has taken into account the object of ecologically sustainable development, including greenhouse gas emission reduction. I note this recommendation has not been agreed to, and the reason given was that there is already a chapter in the budget on sustainability. But I do raise some issues and concerns about whether that is enough and, really, that is what we are talking about.

We understand that there are complexities in sustainability assessment and reporting. Other jurisdictions are taking up this challenge. For too many years now we have heard filibuster on this matter. Movement on this needs to happen as a priority and in time for incorporation in the 2010-11 budget papers.

The sustainability measures we want to see in the budget are necessary to give us an indication of how well we are going to be meeting our strategic vision for a sustainable Canberra. Are the budget measures taking us in the right direction? Are they fulfilling our combined economic, social and environmental objectives?

The ACT Greens look forward to seeing sustainability measures in the next budget as well as the long-awaited triple-bottom-line assessment tools. I am very pleased to have heard the Chief Minister get up in question time and embrace this approach on triple-bottom-line assessment and reporting.

In agreeing to support this appropriation for the Chief Minister's Department, we are mindful of the responsibilities of the department in relation to major projects, in particular the priority project of coordinating the ACT's nation building and jobs plan projects in the current economic climate. The funding associated with the nation building and jobs plan and the last two appropriation bills represents a great opportunity for the ACT to rejuvenate our education and social housing infrastructure.

There is a need, however, to keep the Assembly and the public informed through regular, detailed reports of progress. I note that the government has agreed to recommendation 26 of the estimates report, which states:

The Committee recommends that the Coordinator General provides a quarterly report to the Assembly on progress of the Federal Nation Building stimulus package projects.

So I look forward to seeing those quarterly reports when they are tabled in the Assembly.

Another issue that I would like to raise is the Community Inclusion Board and the moving of resources from the community inclusion fund. Community inclusion fund resources were moved to the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. We have heard, last week particularly, that the fund is ending as of 30 June. A number of these projects have been picked up by departments in their recurrent funding. There are still a few outstanding and we are certainly pushing that these few projects also have that continued funding. The Gugan Gulwan literacy and numeracy project and the multicultural youth services are a couple of examples.

But I want to spend a little bit of time on the Community Inclusion Board. This was, I believe, a very important board that played an important role in the ACT and I am a little concerned that the board will be closing. I note that, in the tabling statement from the Chief Minister today on the implementation of the *Canberra Plan: towards our second century*, if you actually go to page 15, it talks about action 29 of the ACT climate change strategy and how the ACT government and the Community Inclusion Board worked together in a partnership to undertake a social impact analysis of the effects of climate change on low income, disadvantaged and vulnerable ACT residents. And there was some good research that was undertaken. The findings of this research were discussed and then advice was put forward.

What came of all of this was a number of policy measures that could support low income, disadvantaged and vulnerable households to improve sustainability and maintain access to energy, water, food, housing and transport. This went on to frame policy and programs that will be rolled out and carried out, such as the ACT Energy Wise home energy advice teams and home energy kits. I use this as an example of why I think it is quite unfortunate that the Community Inclusion Board will be closing. This was a board that really was a leader in pushing for research to be done on vulnerable families in the ACT, to look at how we might be able to put in place the policies and programs that were needed to ensure that these vulnerable families did not fall through the cracks.

Now, with the closing of the Community Inclusion Board and the community inclusion fund, in a way we have created a bit of a gap in that system and I guess that we will be watching closely to see how government does propose to be able to look at important research projects that can be undertaken, to then look at how government departments might be able to partner with community organisations to deliver programs and then, in many instances where those programs have been evaluated and shown their worth, for them to be picked up and recurrently funded, because they are obviously filling a need. So I did want to highlight that.

I also want to pick up on the fact that the Chief Minister's Department is a department that has a lot of cross-government responsibilities and is taking responsibility for a lot of the COAG agenda. I do note that we had a bit of a kicking this morning from the opposition on support for the budget. They were talking about their savings plan. I went to have a look for their savings plan on the Treasury website and I found it. It is quite interesting reading what they would have actually cut.

I am really concerned that a number of the savings that they would have made were on community strengthening type projects. It was on energy efficient housing which, of course, we know is so important in this stimulus rollout and on communication and events. This is another important area. It has a community engagement unit. The Greens pushed for it to be put back in Chief Minister's and for us to have a far more robust community engagement strategy with the people of the ACT. But it seems as though they did want to make savings in this area, which I find quite alarming.

It also seems as though they wanted to make cuts to things like the centenary of Canberra. This marks 100 years of Canberra. I think it is a very significant occasion. I have noted that I am very disappointed the federal government has not provided any money to the ACT; so the ACT is very much going it alone at the moment. With this savings plan, it would have meant that the centenary of Canberra would not have been so much of a celebration. I am wondering whether Mr Seselja was planning to host a sausage sizzle in his backyard but ask everyone to bring their own sausages, because there certainly was not going to be enough money to hold any events to celebrate our 100 years.

I just want to say that I do hope that we have a look at this issue of the Community Inclusion Board and what can be put in place. Also I do hope that we are going to be pushing harder the federal government on providing some funds to assist the ACT to

be able to properly celebrate a hundred years of this wonderful city that we are so privileged to live in.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (5.10): I would like to respond briefly to Ms Hunter, because I think there is a real contradiction in the message the Greens have given on this budget. It is interesting to hear the odd little cheap shot, but what we had on day one from Ms Hunter was her holding up the budget and saying what a wonderful win it was for the Greens. Then we had a process that we went through with two Greens members, one Labor member and two Liberals where there were a lot of damning findings about the budget. But, of course, the Greens had already signed off on it. Ms Hunter had already signed off on it in the agreement.

We actually heard a bit of the debate today about the agreement on the radio—whether or not it is fluid. It seems to me that the agreement is fluid in terms of what Labor will deliver on policy because we heard Mr Hargreaves this week. He is not delivering on the public housing promise. We saw the press release. He pointed out how much it would cost. That is in the agreement. That is actually in the agreement.

Mr Hargreaves: Have another read of it.

MR SESELJA: We have read it, don't worry. What we are actually seeing is that none of the major policies are being delivered on but Ms Hunter is signing off on the budget nonetheless. So the question they will have to answer at some point to their constituents is: why are they signing off on a budget that does not deliver on the half-hour buses, that does not deliver on the public housing promise?

Ms Hunter: Redex trial.

MR SESELJA: The Redex trial was not mentioned. I did not see the Redex trial mentioned in the agreement. I saw half-hour buses mentioned. We do have this contradiction. Indeed, it is a contradiction between what was said on the day and then subsequently, once we have had actually had a look at the budget through the estimates process, the genuine and real concerns about the lack of a plan. The problem I think with ticking off on it sight unseen is seen in the attitude this government has to answering questions about the budget.

Mr Hargreaves: You have not given us any questions about the budget because you did not read it.

MR SESELJA: Apparently, Minister Hargreaves does not believe that this question is about the budget: how much has been budgeted in 2009-10 for advertising and marketing? That to me sounds like a budget question. There are a number of questions like this. Of course, the Chief Minister complained about questions. He said there were trivial questions. He asked why he should have to answer questions about roads, rates and rubbish. Why should that be his role? Why should public servants' time be wasted answering questions about how their money is spent in the Department of Territory and Municipal Services? But this is the problem with ticking off on the budget without seeing the detail, because they still will not give us the detail. They want us to vote on a budget but they tell us they cannot provide the detail. So I have asked a series of questions.

I asked the Chief Minister:

How much has been budgeted for 2009-10 for advertising and marketing?

The answer provided is:

As the Legislative Assembly has not passed the 2009-10 Budget the budget allocations have not been finalised.

Hang on, are you not asking us to approve the expenditure of money? Is it not the role of government to say what that money will be spent on? Is that not what we have been doing in this process? Instead of actually having a process where departments said, "We will need some money to pay teachers, we will need some money for classrooms, we will need some money for consumables, we will need some money for advertising," apparently, based on this answer from the Chief Minister, that they said, "Well, we need a bucket of money. We need roughly X million dollars and we will work out later how we are actually going to spend it." That is a ridiculous way to do budgeting and it actually demonstrates the guesswork approach from the Treasurer to this budget.

The Chief Minister will not answer about advertising and marketing. It goes on. We see this in relation to a number of other areas. This is another example relating to expenditure in the Chief Minister's Department:

How much has been budgeted for 2009-10 for hospitality?

Why should we not be able to ask that? Why should we not be able to get an answer? The response was:

As the Legislative Assembly has not passed the 2009-10 Budget, no allocations have been made.

We need to know what you are planning on spending in various areas. Yet we get these non-answers. Another question:

How much has been budgeted for 2009-10 for staff training?

That is a question about the budget. We get the same answer.

As the Legislative Assembly has not passed the 2009-10 Budget the Department's budget allocations have not been finalised.

It goes on. We see it in other departments represented by the Chief Minister as well:

How much has been budgeted for 2009-10 for:

- a. Interstate travel
- b. Overseas travel

The response:

As the Legislative Assembly has not passed the 2009-10 Budget, departmental budget allocations have not been finalised ...

It goes on: in relation to web design and web hosting, again they will not give us the answer. This goes to the heart of what we are being asked to do here, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are being asked to support a budget. It is legitimate that in scrutinising that budget we ask a lot of questions because we do not get the breakdown in the budget papers. The budget papers do not give us a breakdown of where this money is going to be spent.

Mr Smyth: 530 questions.

MR SESELJA: Indeed; we did ask a lot of questions and it is legitimate that we do. I was thinking, "Well, what is it? Is it actually that he does not want to answer or that he cannot answer?" I thought, "If he cannot answer, that means the budget process is totalling flawed, that they are not actually working out what they need, and then asking for money, putting in bogus submissions."

Mr Smyth: It is just a guess.

MR SESELJA: Apparently, it is just a guess. But then I see a question for the Attorney-General in relation to the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission:

How much will the Commission spend on travel including domestic and international travel?

The response states:

Estimated Commission domestic travel expenditure for 2009-10 is \$6,000 to \$7,000.

Mr Smyth: Hang on!

MR SESELJA: So hang on; why can the Attorney-General answer this question? Why is it a reasonable question for the Attorney-General to answer? Indeed, the LDA have actually answered similar questions, to their credit. We will go into the detail of some of those. Why is it unreasonable?

We have a Chief Minister who is actually asking us to pass a budget but he is refusing to tell us what he is going to spend the money on. This goes to the heart of the budget process. This goes to the heart of the estimates process. No wonder he did not want us to ask questions. It is because he is not prepared to give reasonable answers to reasonable questions.

At some stage no doubt the Chief Minister will engage in this budget debate. He has been clearly so sidelined internally that he does not bother to come to some of these debates anymore. But I put this to all members: is it reasonable that government departments and ministers say to the Assembly, "Pass our budget and we will tell you later on how we are going to spend that money"? That is unacceptable.

It is quite reasonable that we know how much you are going to spend. We can conclude a couple of things as a result of these non-answers. One is that the budget process is guesswork. It is guesswork, just as Katy Gallagher told us it was some time ago. It is guesswork. They ask for a bucket of money and then they figure it out later.

The other conclusion is that they have got something to hide. They are embarrassed about how much they are going to be spending on travel. They are embarrassed about how much they are going to be spending on hospitality. What is so embarrassing about these answers? There is only one of two conclusions that can be reached. Either they have not done the work, which they should have done. They should be prepared to come to the Assembly prior to us voting on this budget. They should be able to tell us what they are going to spend our money on. But they will not.

So we can assume either that they did not bother to do the work—they just guessed and they made wild estimates as to how much money they would need. But I give our public servants far more credit than that. They would not allow a process like that, even if a minister wanted it. Therefore, we can only conclude that the minister has something to hide. Come out and answer these questions. The Chief Minister should come back during the budget debate and answer these questions. They are legitimate questions about expenditure in this year's budget.

We have had a lot of whining. We had it from the planning minister from time to time. We had it from the Chief Minister. We had it from Katy Gallagher on various issues: "How does this relate to the budget?" Firstly, every area of government activity relates to the budget because it needs to be funded. Secondly, when we ask specific questions about this year's budget and about how much they will be spending, they refuse to answer them. They refuse to answer them either because they are inept or because they have something to hide.

I commend the Attorney-General on answering this question, although I have not looked at all the questions to the Attorney-General. I commend the Attorney-General for actually bothering to answer the question. Now maybe the Attorney-General can get up and tell us why he is able to answer this question and the Chief Minister cannot or will not. This goes to the heart of this budget process. We should be able to expect these answers. The Assembly deserves these answers and the Chief Minister should come back prior to this budget being voted on and give us some of these details.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Disability and Housing, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Corrections) (5.20): I wanted to address a couple of things and to discuss some of the things that Mr Seselja just said. I also want to talk a little about the industrial relations component within the Chief Minister's Department's appropriation.

I noticed Mr Seselja swaggering out and doing his Paul Osborne imitation. In fact, he was accusing the government of either being inept or having conspiracies. Having such a fixation on conspiracy theories is decidedly unhealthy, Madam Deputy Speaker. It can really eat you away inside and can sometimes explain why there is that depth of hatred that resides within that body. However, Mr Seselja, as chair of the committee,

is in no position to talk about ineptitude. Indeed, I received a letter under his hand as the chair of that committee asking me how much money I had spent on overseas trips et cetera in my role as Speaker.

I have been a Temporary Deputy Speaker, actually. I have been here for 11 years but I have not been the Speaker. I am never going to be the Speaker. All he had to do is look up the Assembly directory. And guess what? You know what he could have done? He could have asked Peter Litchfield for my title. He could have asked Dick or Ray Blundell over here. But no, he decided to go out, stride onwards and upwards and make a complete fool of himself. Needless to say, I have nothing to report.

Furthermore, talking about ineptitude, he then goes on to ask me the questions relating to a position that does not exist. A check of the AAAs might have revealed that. That is ineptitude—absolute, screaming ineptitude. I also remember listening, as I am wont to do as I weave my way through the traffic, to the dulcet tones of Ross Solly—

Mr Hanson: That was a great pun, weaving your way through the traffic, John. It was good.

MR HARGREAVES: It was good, yes. But the point is that I was listening to Mr Seselja as Leader of the Opposition going for it. Ross Solly is saying, “Okay then, what are those lists of savings, Mr Seselja? Can you tell us what they are?” He says, “There are out there, they are out there, they are out there,” and he could not tell us any. He has been asked repeatedly what they are and he could not tell us any. Indeed, then he said, “Well, it is not in front of me at the moment.” I am not surprised about that, Madam Deputy Speaker, because where was he? He was at home fronting a bowl of cornflakes. That is what he was doing. Instead of being here and doing his job, he was enjoying the school holidays. That is what he was doing.

Mr Hanson: Is that right?

MR HARGREAVES: Yes, it was, because he said so. The thing is that if you cannot say what your savings are going to be and you are the Leader of the Opposition, you are in no position at all to attack the government and accuse it of these sorts of ineptitudes. This guy is the absolute champion of ineptitude. Anyway, I think I have made my point.

On the issue of the industrial relations component of the Chief Minister’s Department—how many minutes does that say I have—another 15? Good. The 2009-10 year will be a busy year for the Industrial Relations Portfolio and, of course, for the Office of Industrial Relations. The major achievement by the commonwealth, states and territories in establishing Safe Work Australia and on agreeing on a model for the new national harmonised OH&S laws will keep the OIR very busy, in fact.

Safe Work Australia is the replacement body for the Australian Safety and Compensation Council. It is responsible for driving national policy development on OH&S and workers compensation matters in cooperation with the states and territories. The ACT has a representative on the Safe Work Australia Council. The government is continuing its commitment to national OH&S reform, with an

investment of \$569,000 over four years to support the establishment of Safe Work Australia. Our investment represents the ACT's share, based on the ACT's population.

Over the next year, Safe Work Australia will be responsible for drafting national OH&S legislation and its supporting regulations and providing them to the Workplace Relations Ministerial Council for agreement. OIR will be heavily involved in this process, both from a position on the Safe Work Australia Council and through representation on a number of interjurisdictional working parties that will assist in reviewing and commenting on the draft legislation.

While the ACT government is committed to national OH&S harmonisation, we are not forgetting our own OH&S legislative requirements. It is likely to be another two years before nationally harmonised OH&S laws are introduced. In the meantime, the government is continuing with its plans to implement modern OH&S laws in the ACT. The Work Safety Act 2008 is currently the most modern piece of OH&S legislation in Australia and is the main reason why it is such a short step for the ACT to move to the nationally harmonised legislation.

Following requests from employer and employee representatives on the ACT OH&S Council, I agreed to delay the commencement of the Work Safety Act to 1 October 2009. This will allow for a full consultation period with employers, regulators and employee representatives on the package of regulations that has been developed to support the act. The regulations were released for consultation in June this year, with consultation continuing until the second half of July. Together, the Work Safety Act and its supporting regulations will provide an excellent bridge to the nationally harmonised OH&S legislation.

In 2007, when family and community day was introduced, the government gave a commitment to review the future of the holiday after the repeal of the Work Choices legislation. To honour that commitment, I sought the views of the public as to whether the day should be abolished, left where it is or moved to another day with more significance to the ACT. The consultation period has finished and drew more than 1,000 responses from across the ACT community. Detailed comments submitted by the community are still being consolidated. However, in terms of overall numbers, close to 90 per cent of respondents want to keep family and community day, with a substantial majority of those preferring the day to be moved to a day that has more significance to the ACT.

I am intending to consider the responses to the consultation and then to make a recommendation to the government about the future of family and community day. I am delighted that so many people in our community took the trouble to respond and I look forward to introducing legislation in the spring session of the Assembly to make a place in our holiday calendar for a day that will give our community great pleasure for many years to come.

The ACT government has committed to the introduction of a security of payments scheme for the building and construction industry in the ACT. Contractors in the building and construction industry in the ACT are entitled to be paid for the work they complete, and they are entitled to be paid quickly. A security of payments scheme will

give the same support to contractors in the building and construction industry under the act that they have if they operate in New South Wales, Queensland or other jurisdictions. Following consultation with other jurisdictions and with representatives of the building and construction industry in the ACT, planning for the introduction of the scheme is now well advanced and I plan to bring a bill to introduce the scheme to the Assembly in the spring.

A review of workers compensation arrangements in the ACT was completed in late 2007. Among other things, the review recommended the conduct of an actuarial report on the ACT scheme. With the completion of this review imminent, I look forward to consulting with workers compensation stakeholders in 2009-10. Without pre-empting that consultation, I anticipate the implementation of a number of recommendations from the review over 2009-10, along with other measures all designed to ensure the most efficient scheme possible and a scheme which balances fair and equitable premiums, while protecting the interests of injured workers.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I note the comments by members in the report. I thank the committee members for their comments. I note that since there were no recommendations in there, quite clearly the committee is thrilled to the back teeth about the activities of the Stanhope Labor government.

Debate interrupted.

Visitors

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Burch): Before we move on, I draw members' attention to the Weston Creek scout group that we have present. Welcome to the debate on the 2009-2010 budget.

Members: Hear, hear!

Appropriation Bill 2009-2010

[Cognate paper:

Estimates 2009-2010—Select Committee report—government response]

Detail stage

Schedule 1—Appropriations.

Proposed expenditure—Part 1.4—Chief Minister's Department, \$45,218,000 (net cost of outputs) and \$13,444,000 (capital injection), totalling \$58,662,000.

Debate resumed.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: The question is that the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (5.30): My colleague Ms Hunter has already spoken at some length about indicators and the role of the Chief Minister's Department in

whole-of-government coordination of budget indicators and sustainability reporting and assessment. This issue is very important to the Greens. It is part of the Labor-Greens agreement, and I am particularly pleased that three recommendations in the estimates committee report go to this. Recommendation 3 states:

The Committee recommends that the indicators in the ACT Budget papers reflect how progress will be measured in relation to the implementation of ACT Government strategies and plans.

Recommendation 4 states:

The Committee recommends that strategic indicators contained in the ACT Budget papers for ACT Government agencies be meaningful and measurable.

Recommendation 5 states:

The Committee recommends that a measure be introduced as a strategic indicator for each agency requiring that agency to report on its work towards achieving zero net carbon emissions.

That is a recent and welcome government commitment. I understand from the Chief Executive of the Chief Minister's Department, Mr Cappie-Wood, that the budget reporting and assessment framework will be ready in about four months. This should be enough time to help Treasury and all the other government departments develop meaningful and strategic accountability indicators for next year's budget to help us evaluate which spending priorities should be funded.

Mr Cappie-Wood also told us that they were finding it difficult to figure out how to relate spending to social and environmental benefits. Bringing the relevant indicators from key strategies directly into the budget will help each agency clarify how budget spending is prioritised against government priorities generally and whether this funding is to the most strategic areas.

We do have key government plans, including weathering the change; people, place, prosperity; and the Canberra plan, which the Chief Minister reported on today. But reporting on them is not actually linked to the budget so it is hard to see when you look at the budget how the government is actually funding its strategies and how the things that the government is funding are actually the most important things for the government to do. The Treasurer and the government have pointed out the limited funding available to the government, and I am sure we all acknowledge that it is important to focus on what is most important.

The budget is the only annual whole-of-government report. I know that annual reports do, in fact, have more information in them, but the data in the annual reports is not consolidated and it is not in a consistent format so it makes it very hard for people to put it all together.

I understand that integrating these indicators into our future budgets and therefore into our annual reporting could lead to thicker papers and reports, hence recommendation 9 of the estimates committee report, which recommends producing

information electronically. I would love to see a much more extensive budget report produced electronically. The fact that the budget report is missing so much information is another reason to put more in—so that we do not have to spend so much time asking questions on notice, which I appreciate do take up the time of the public service. They also take up the time of MLAs and their staff in asking them.

Continuing on indicators, I am disappointed that it still is not clear how climate change analysis reporting will be integrated into the budget framework. I am not sure if this is because it is too hard or because it is more than the government actually wants to aim at. I do not think it is a difficult ask, particularly given the government's commitment now to zero net greenhouse gas emissions and given that they need to report on greenhouse gases. We need to link our greenhouse gas emissions to our spending. We want to be able to see how much each tonne of greenhouse gas mitigation costs the ACT budget. I would have thought that that sort of approach would suit everybody in the Assembly.

Related to this I support recommendation 24, which requires an annual statement on ESD, including how greenhouse gas reductions have been taken into account in preparation of the budget. Unfortunately, the government does not agree with this recommendation. I would have to say that the estimates committee clearly did not find the current information adequate. We do need more. The problem is particularly relevant to greenhouse programs. We cannot see greenhouse gas emissions. We need measurement processes to work out the effect of our actions.

As I said in the tabling of the estimates committee report, I am particularly concerned that the lion's share—\$60 million out of \$100 million—of the climate change package announced in last year's budget seems to be devoted to tree planting programs for the arboretum and street trees. It is not clear that either of them is going to lead to a net reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

On this, I particularly want to note the government's response regarding the arboretum, which is wonderful. It is said that it is soon going to table the carbon sequestration audit and also that the arboretum will reach a maximum carbon stock of around 70,000 tonnes, with 90 per cent of this sequestered within 200 years. I applaud the government for its forward thinking. I would like to see all government programs being evaluated on a 200-year basis because I totally believe that if this was the case we would all be green and sustainable. However, with respect to climate change, I think we are going to need to take some action a little bit quicker than 200 years. My other comment as far as tree planting is concerned is that a lot of it seems to be normal government expenditure repackaged as greenhouse spending.

Moving along, my colleague Ms Hunter also discussed the nation building projects. The only thing I would add is that I would like to note my hope that these projects outdo their minimum environmental requirements so that there are projects that the government and the community can be proud of, not just in one or two years because of the employment contribution they have made, but in five years, 10 years and 50 years because they are actually the things that the community wants and that they are well-built and sustainable projects.

I would like to say a lot more about business and industry development, but unfortunately there was not an awful lot of information given about this in the budget papers. In recommendation 18 the estimates committee recommends that the government immediately commence the development of a policy framework that will encourage the growth of the private sector in the ACT. The government's response is, "Not agreed." I find that unbelievable. Maybe slow progress, but "not agreed"! Also, there is very little in the way of indicators as far as business projects are concerned.

Mr Smyth It is okay. The ABS does it.

MS LE COUTEUR: I know. We should all be reading the ABS.

Mr Smyth: It is okay.

MS LE COUTEUR: I appreciate that, Brendan. It is difficult to see what is, in fact, the net return of the government's business projects to ACT citizens. I am, however, pleased that the government has at least agreed to recommendation 28, which was a request to give more information in the budget papers on programs run by the Business Development Unit. As I have said before, this is mainly to reduce the workload of the public servants who have to answer our questions.

I would also like to talk a little bit about the Strategic Project Facilitation Unit. It is a unit which unfortunately got very little attention during the estimates process, but it does seem to be a very important gateway for projects and people that require some sort of special consideration from the government. This has made it a very difficult unit to scrutinise because everything it deals with is commercial-in-confidence and, as we know from the Auditor-General's report on the data centre, there does not seem to be a lot in the way of clear processes. We saw the fiasco caused by the data centre and we remember the Auditor-General's report on the issues with the handling of the direct sale of land for the project. Maybe this is one of the reasons why Mr Stanhope is not pleased with the Auditor-General.

A more recent fiasco, which seems to have cost the government at least \$7 million, but possibly more, was the recent sale or non-sale of the press club block of land in Barton. These are the sorts of actions that we feel should be under a greater level of scrutiny and which are not now because of the minimal level of information about them in the budget papers. We would like to see this unit work more transparently. (*Second speaking period taken.*) I only need another minute, minister, you will be pleased to know.

I was pleased to find through the estimates process that the Land Development Agency has established a new Sustainability and Innovations Unit. This unit will be working on a sustainability framework and the work plan will cover environmental, economic, social and functional aspects of sustainability. It is also very pleasing to note that the LDA will be incorporating vegetation types into land release planning, but disappointing that it will not be incorporating vegetation maps into its land release maps.

I am afraid there is a bit of a hole in terms of land planning generally across the ACT government. I have had responses like this now from a number of relevant government agencies. I think we need a whole-of-government solution to ensure that we protect the few remaining high conservation value lands in the ACT. At present what we are doing is slowly but surely chipping away at them for development.

On a more positive note, the estimates committee has recommended, and the government agreed, that the LDA should maximise solar orientation of new estates consistent with topographical orientation and yield requirements. I am also looking forward to the LDA's long awaited paper on triple-bottom-line land release.

The centenary of Canberra program is the celebration of 100 years. We should be doing something that will be a legacy for a hundred years, something which is sustainable, and obviously it is a celebration so it should be fun and involve us all. Given that the next 100 years is going to have to have a focus on climate change and sustainability, I would really like to see that as a major theme, not just, as the government said, blended in in some way.

It should be a celebration by Canberra. It should be a celebration which will engage the local arts community, local publishers, local event organisers and theatre companies. The annual Canberra events run by the community could become part of the centenary year and funded additionally and specifically to support additional centenary themes. The National Folk Festival, for instance, could have a special Canberra or 100 years ago theme.

Also in the area of arts, I am pleased to note that this year's budget provided funds for the bronze foundry at Strathnairn Arts Association, which will allow artists who work with bronze casting to keep their work local. This is an example of reuse because I believe the foundry has been sitting there in bits for 10 or 15 years, something like that.

I also welcome the \$7.6 million funding for the Performing Arts Theatre in Woden. However, I would like to see artsACT more specifically involved with the project to ensure that there is community engagement and community access to the new facility. In the future, when it comes to choosing sites for arts facilities that will be in schools or colleges, the education department should not develop these policies in isolation. It should do it in conjunction with artsACT, which is the agency which can identify the community need for facilities.

It is disappointing to see that the per cent for arts program has been slashed and it is, of course, important to continue funding artworks in our city even when economic times become difficult. Art and culture bring benefits to the community and give our city vibrancy and character. I can understand why the Chief Minister wants to reconsider the commissioning and consultation process around the scheme. Public art naturally attracts a wide diversity of opinions, but I would like to see funding for public art be a commitment for the government going forward, not just for the two years of the current funding.

Currently there is a focus on large, permanent, static displays and, as the Greens have been saying for years, we would like to see more focus on ephemeral art, impermanent things, light displays—the sorts of things that can be seen occasionally in Sydney’s CBD. These are cheaper, they are interesting, they are local and they can be changed after a period of time so that if you do not like one you will like the next one. This is one way that the government could react to the difficulties placed on public art by the economic downturn. I was very pleased to find, through the estimates process, that the Belconnen Arts Centre is actually on budget and on time, and I look forward to it opening—I believe in late August.

I would also like to mention the estimates committee recommendation that the government rethink its funding policy regarding the structure of boards in arts bodies. Currently, the criterion that needs to be met in relation to conflict of interest is very strict, and I am aware of one Canberra arts organisation which lost its entire board in a couple of months, mainly because most of the board members had also done a small amount of paid work for the organisation.

I come from a listed company background. Some listed companies do not have any directors who are also employees, but many do, and I was one for my time as a director. They are called executive directors. Listed companies have strict governance and conflict of interest provisions, and I cannot see any reasons why our arts NGOs should not be able to solve the problems as well as listed companies. I am not sure how the current approach by artsACT will solve the issue in the long run, but I do hope that they will make some efforts in this direction. I am very pleased that this is one of the recommendations which the government has agreed to look at. I believe it will report by the end of the year.

Moving along to Indigenous affairs, one of the interesting and, I think, positive things about the estimates committee process was that we looked at the initial decision to discontinue funding for Gugan Gulwan’s numeracy and literacy program. We spoke to three different ministers about this. They all said: “Yes, well, obviously, it is not us. It is a good program, but it is not us.” This shows one of the advantages of being able to go through and find someone who eventually says; “Yes, well.” I understand now that the government has, in fact, agreed to continue funding, at least for this financial year. I would be more pleased if it made a commitment to ongoing funding because all the departments that were asked about it agreed that it is a very valuable program.

I am concerned that the \$50,000 allocated to the Women’s Legal Service is not a sufficient amount of funding, and the same goes for the Aboriginal Legal Service. Considering the lip-service which is paid to Indigenous education by all levels of government, I would like to see the government look to closing the gap. I think we need to look seriously at the amount of funding for this. Also along those lines I would like to see the government consider a more transparent method of reporting Indigenous funding by issuing an aggregate statement for all Indigenous funding. They did that previously with a women’s statement. That is probably something the Chief Minister should be responsible for, and I understand that the government may support this in the future.

Finally, in relation to heritage, I welcome the government's allocation of funds to restoration work at Albert Hall, Lanyon, Mugga Mugga and Calthorpes House.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (5.49): On behalf of the Chief Minister, who has another engagement at this time, I am happy to try and respond to the range of issues that members have raised in the debate today.

I will start by taking the opportunity to provide that information in relation to the Women's Legal Centre which was asked for during question time today but was raised by Ms Le Couteur in her comments around support for Indigenous people, in this particular regard for Indigenous women and legal services. Mrs Dunne asked me during question time today how much commonwealth funding is received by the Women's Legal Centre. My advice is that the total commonwealth recurrent funding for the Women's Legal Centre is currently \$190,000 with indexation, and my preliminary advice is that it may reach a level of around \$192,000 this coming financial year due to indexation. The Women's Legal Centre, I understand, is awaiting final confirmation of this figure from the commonwealth.

I would like to provide the following information in relation to the other matters raised by Mrs Dunne. In 2008-09, the commonwealth provided \$200,000 in one-off funding for the Women's Legal Centre. This is additional to their ongoing recurrent funding that I have just detailed. Sixty thousand dollars of that money was specifically tied for the Indigenous program. Over a three-year period, the Women's Legal Centre received \$140,000 from the ACT government's community inclusion fund for the Indigenous program, of which the Indigenous liaison position is a part. This amounted to approximately \$46,000 a year from the ACT government community inclusion program, and that grant was due to expire in January this year. An additional \$19,000 was subsequently found to allow that funding to continue until the end of this financial year.

The position of the Indigenous liaison person costs approximately \$70,000 a year if it is full time. It has been full time over the 2008-09 financial year, and a part-time solicitor was employed to assist with the additional work undertaken by that liaison officer. The program in 2008-09 was funded partially through the community inclusion program from the ACT government and partially through the commonwealth's one-off grants.

The commonwealth have indicated that in 2009-10 they will provide \$70,000 in one-off funding for the Women's Legal Centre. This represents effectively a reduction of \$130,000 in the level of the one-off funding from the commonwealth. As a result, the Women's Legal Centre approached the ACT and the commonwealth for continued funding for the position and indeed for additional funding for the program. The ACT government has provided \$50,000 for support of the position in 2009-10 and this would be sufficient to fund the Indigenous liaison position at a part-time level. In doing so, the government has secured effectively a similar level of funding per annum to that which was provided from the community inclusion fund.

The commonwealth, however, did not continue their one-off funding to the Women's Legal Centre to the same amount. In fact, their one-off funding was reduced by \$130,000. However, as I previously mentioned, \$70,000 of the one-off funding from the commonwealth was then provided by them, and I am advised that the Women's Legal Centre has been told that this funding is not tied to any particular usage. The money from the ACT is, however, tied for the Indigenous liaison position.

It is now a matter for the Women's Legal Centre to decide how the position is funded and how they deploy the available resources. However, I reiterate that it remains the case that the one-off funding from the commonwealth to the Women's Legal Centre has been reduced to the effect of \$130,000 less and that they have only been prepared to commit \$70,000 instead of the previous \$200,000. I hope that clarifies the matter raised by Ms Le Couteur.

I would now like to turn to some of the criticisms made by Mr Seselja in relation to the OwnPlace scheme; I also note the notable absence of land rent from Mr Seselja's speech. It is particularly interesting that the committee which he chaired devoted, goodness me, nearly four pages of commentary on the land rent scheme and a number of recommendations. But did Mr Seselja mention it at all when he stood up to speak? He took his full 20 minutes, I think, but did he mention it when he stood up to speak? Not a word, Mr Speaker—not a word. I wonder why Mr Seselja has all of a sudden gone dead silent on the issue of land rent. Could it be the case that today Mr Seselja had that proverbial gun backfire in his face when it came to land rent?

What happened today is that the Chief Minister was very pleased to announce the fact that CPS credit union, one of the leading credit unions in the country, has become the first major financier of the land rent scheme here in the ACT—a very important development. The Liberal Party should apologise for the tack they have taken in this matter. At every instance they have tried to talk down the scheme. Indeed, Mr Seselja has been so unequivocal as to say that no financier would ever back the scheme. That was the position taken by Mr Seselja. It was not just, "I doubt that a financier will ever back the scheme" or "It appears unlikely that a financier will ever back the scheme". In fact, Mr Seselja said unequivocally, "No financier will ever back this scheme—ever".

Where is Mr Seselja's apology? Where is Mr Seselja's acceptance that he got it wrong and the Liberal Party got it wrong? You have got to give it to the Liberal Party, though: when they are proven wrong, do they apologise? Do they own up to it? No, they quickly change tack, and now of course the tack is not that a financier has been secured, despite the fact that that has been their point of attack for the last few months. It is now, "Well, where is the detail in relation to the financier?"

Mr Smyth: Yes, where is the detail?

MR CORBELL: Just ring up Community CPS. I am sure Community CPS will be delighted to give you all the details about the product that they are offering and how it links in with the land rent scheme.

The Liberal Party deserve to be absolutely ashen-faced about their position on this matter because month after month after month they have criticised, carped, complained and moaned on this issue. They have relentlessly—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order, members!

MR CORBELL: They do not like it, Mr Speaker. They do not like it, which is quite obvious. It is quite obvious from the level of interjections, Mr Speaker, that they just do not like the fact that they have been proven wrong. They simply do not like the fact that they have been proven wrong, and it is evident from the objections. It is evident from the ongoing objections that we hear from them that it is a very sore point indeed.

The bottom line is that this is an innovative scheme and the government has been vindicated in its approach in relation to this policy with the securing of a major finance provider—a major finance provider.

I would like now to turn also to the issue of OwnPlace and I note that there has been considerable to and fro about OwnPlace. The first point to be made, of course, about this is that it is entirely legitimate for the government to seek to correct misinformation that has been put out by the Liberal Party. If media reports are inaccurate, it is entirely appropriate for the government to seek to correct the record, and that is indeed what the government did.

It is an absurd and bizarre position from the Liberal Party, yet again, that when there is a report that is inaccurate and which serves to cause confusion in the community the government in some way should simply remain mute; the government should simply not reply to matters that are inaccurate. We have seen what happens when members of the Liberal Party get their noses out of joint; they get matters referred off to the privileges committee when they are unhappy about matters. But apparently it is not acceptable for the government to simply seek to correct the record.

Let us turn to the issue at play here. (*Second speaking period taken.*) It was interesting to look at the recommendations and also to look at the committee's response. Mr Coe, in the estimates committee, basically alleged that there was profiteering. In fact, he implied quite explicitly that it would appear that builders were adding up to \$60,000 onto the price of a house as a result of entering into the OwnPlace scheme. What an outrageous assertion for the Liberal Party and Mr Coe to make—without any evidence of course; they just made it blatantly under parliamentary privilege.

At 6 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly having been put and negatived, the debate was resumed.

Sitting suspended from 6 to 7.30 pm.

MR CORBELL: Before the dinner break I was commenting on the fact that the Liberal Party had engaged in a shameful campaign to besmirch the name of reputable

builders in this town who were making an effort to improve housing affordability in Canberra. Isn't it interesting, Madam Assistant Speaker, what some of those builders have said? For example, Mr Andrew Kerec, the managing director of Renaissance Building and Design, a very well known local Canberra based building company, said:

I was dismayed to learn that the Liberal Party had made what can only be described as an unwarranted and insulting attack on the integrity of the program.

Mr Hanson: Is that in response to Mr Stanhope's letter, in response to false allegations made by—

MR CORBELL: Wait, Mr Hanson, he goes on to say:

I can only assume that they have completely failed to properly inform and educate themselves on the program and the package being offered.

They do not like it, Madam Assistant Speaker, but it is the truth. They were caught out with a nasty, grubby little claim and it is a good lesson to Mr Coe that just because you are in the estimates committee it does not mean that no-one is paying attention. You have been caught out badly. Mr Kerec went on to say:

I stand with the other panel members—and 100 per cent by the LDA and their excellent administration of this program.

Indeed, Michael O'Brien from RAM Constructions, which was also involved in the OwnPlace scheme, said in part in this letter:

We fail to understand why such serious allegations can be made without any apparent evidence to support it or, if there is evidence to support it, why the allegation is not made in full detail, including the name of the builder alleged to be involved.

The coward's castle indeed, Madam Assistant Speaker.

Let us go on to Mr Valdi Luks who wrote on behalf of GE Shaw. GE Shaw said:

G.E. Shaw & Associates is keen to preserve the high reputation of the OwnPlace program and shares your disappointment in regard to the allegations of price gouging.

AV Jennings, that radical left-wing organisation, said:

In response to the specific allegations that a builder is profiteering and charging at least \$60,000 more for the house component than they would expect to pay—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR CORBELL: They do not like it, but they were caught out. And they were caught out badly on this matter. It is interesting that when the Liberal Party do not like an

argument they just seem to drown you out, Madam Assistant Speaker. That might work in Young Liberal meetings and in Liberal Party branch meetings, but it should not be permitted in the Assembly.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR CORBELL: They are still doing it. They just cannot help themselves when they come under a bit of critique for their own actions. AV Jennings said:

In response to the specific allegations that a builder is profiteering and charging at least \$60,000 more for the house component than they would expect to pay if an identical house was purchased outside the scheme, I can assure you that this is not the case for the AV Jennings houses proposed for this scheme.

So there you have it. Four very reputable builders have, outright, completely rejected the scurrilous assertions and allegations made by the Liberal Party on this matter. I thought the Liberal Party were interested in housing affordability in this town. I thought they were interested in good solutions to addressing the issue of housing affordability in this town. This government has very progressive policies on housing affordability, whether it be the 15 per cent mandated minimum requirement of housing affordability in every new residential estate—a proposal that I was very pleased to help introduce when I was the responsible minister—or the land rent scheme. Of course, the Liberal Party do not want to talk about the land rent scheme any more—they do not want to talk about land rent any more because they are a bit embarrassed on that one—or, indeed, the innovative OwnPlace scheme.

This is a government with innovative and progressive policies which are delivering on the ground for ordinary working Canberrans to help them get into their own home. Why do the Liberal Party see fit to continually criticise and demonstrate opposition for the sake of it when it comes to these housing policies? What is the reason? The reason is that they do not have any ideas of their own. They have no ideas of their own on this matter. Their only proposal is a proposal which would dramatically increase house prices in the ACT.

I thought it was particularly telling that in all the time the Leader of the Opposition had to debate the Chief Minister's appropriation and after the extensive commentary that he led on the land rent proposal in the estimates committee report he never commented on the issue of land rent. Did he mention it once in his speech in the Assembly when speaking to the Chief Minister's appropriation? No, he did not, Madam Assistant Speaker. He is embarrassed and so he should be. He should now have the courage to come into this place and apologise. He should apologise for making a claim which has been proven to be manifestly false. He claimed that no lender ever would back the scheme. That was his clear and unequivocal statement. He has been proven absolutely wrong. He should come into this place and apologise for making such a blatant and terrible misleading statement in this place.

Debate interrupted.

Supplementary answer to question without notice Planning—west Macgregor

MR BARR: Madam Assistant Speaker Le Couteur, I seek leave of the Assembly to add to an answer I gave in question time today. It is in relation to a question you asked me.

Leave granted.

MR BARR: Madam Assistant Speaker, today you asked me a question in relation to a technical variation for west Macgregor. I indicated in my answer that the additional yield was as a result of some additional land being granted. That additional land has been granted and it will result in additional yield. I am advised that the technical variation relates to the original amount of land and that the increased yield from that original amount of land has been achieved. I am advised that through a number of innovative design measures and through more efficient use of the original grant of land there will be even more with the second englobo land grant.

Appropriation Bill 2009-2010

[Cognate paper:

Estimates 2009-2010—Select Committee report—government response]

Detail stage

Schedule 1—Appropriations.

Proposed expenditure—Part 1.4—Chief Minister's Department, \$45,218,000 (net cost of outputs) and \$13,444,000 (capital injection), totalling \$ 58 662 000.

Debate resumed.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (7.39): I am going to comment on industrial relations. I notice the Minister for Industrial Relations intends to introduce a number of bills on Thursday, one of which is titled the portable long service legislation. I presume it brings us closer to the long promised portable long service scheme for the community sector, the progress of which—less than four weeks ago—there seemed to be little detail known about.

My office sought a briefing on a number of related IR matters. We raised the issue of bringing the proposed community sector scheme in under the same umbrella as one of the others and there was a fair bit of uncertainty and resistance in the response. It would seem from comments made in estimates hearings that this obvious proposition is now going to be taken up and some kind of consolidated scheme has been or is going to be developed.

I think this issue is pertinent to the whole question of industrial relations in a time of hardship and recession. One analysis would be that all jobs are at a premium and less is needed to make them attractive. On the other hand, given there is not so much money likely to be available in terms of wage rises, issues of working conditions

emerge as a way of looking after and retaining employees in place of the extra money that, until recently, has been par for the course.

When it comes to keeping people in what looks likely to be a highly pressured community sector, the availability of a portable long service scheme, while not attractive to all employers, is likely to further encourage community sector workers to stay. There are contradictions between what is needed to build a viable and valuable community sector with a skilled and committed workforce and the bottom line of so many of the organisations within it that aim to satisfy, on tight budgets, the ever expanding needs of their growing client base.

A portable long service scheme is one aspect of reasonable, equitable employment conditions of this important and growing workforce. While that may not keep all employers happy in the short term, it is a benefit for a life and we can attract and keep and develop a high-quality workforce committed to the social service sector. I would like to see this government invest a bit more thinking and organisation over the next few years into workforce development because that will be the growth area in terms of need and opportunity. Employment conditions, even for ACT public servants, are going to need to be addressed outside the usual cycle of scheduled wage increases.

It is worth noting that the APS still pays its employees 15 or 16 per cent employer superannuation. The ACT stepped away from that in 2006. So in that context it is worth looking at other benefits and conditions. The increase in parental leave for ACT public servants initiated by this government is one such example. The re-inclusion of journey cover to and from work, in workers compensation, could be another. While Comcare no longer includes journey cover, the ACT's private workers compensation scheme does. The cost of the ACT's private workers compensation scheme is often raised as evidence that the territory is not supportive of small business, yet the review conducted a couple of years ago suggested a course of action has not been fully implemented or responded to. On the one hand the ACT system is disadvantaged by its size. The number of claims is not high but the apparent cost-effectiveness of the ACT scheme can be affected by relatively few expensive events.

If the ACT government left Comcare and brought it into this ACT scheme, as is proposed in the review, there would be some benefits that would accrue in terms of economies of scale. It would also mean that ACT public servants would enjoy, among other benefits, cover for their journey to and from work. At the very least, that would make EBA negotiations with the CPSU and ACT employees rather easier to conduct, I would imagine.

I was disappointed to hear the minister admit to the committee that the government has not come to a policy position on this element of the workers compensation review. I am not sure what is yet to be properly considered and acted upon, but it seems clear to me that in the context of a financial crisis issues around the care and protection of workers take on particular significance.

UnionsACT have raised a number of matters with us, including controls over workforce surveillance and the need for an industrial magistrate or tribunal to deal with matters such as unfair dismissal under the national fair work regime. I would

hope that the government has plans to take these issues on board in the next couple of years as, in the eyes of most employees, they do act as a balance on contests over pay rates. If, as seems clear, there will be less money available for wage increases, the government needs to be working more industriously on other employment-related issues.

The three bills being introduced on Thursday will give us a better idea of what direction the government is providing in this area. But it is also a matter of how government relates to the workforce. If there is going to be a good result in terms of EBA negotiations, whether that be with teachers or ACTION bus drivers, we will need to see issues addressed with goodwill at the start of the process. Given workforce wages are going to be an issue this year, positive engagement might well be the line that ought to be followed. You need to not have barriers with your workforce. You need to work in a positive way to get good outcomes.

I want to comment briefly on Mr Corbell's comments on Indigenous services. I think Ms Le Couteur was actually referring to the Gugan Gulwan literacy program for young Indigenous people.

Mr Corbell: No, she also mentioned the Women's Legal Centre.

MS BRESNAN: That was one of the programs. The estimates committee asked a number of departments about this program, which saw the ending of its funding after the winding up of the community inclusion funding, and it took some questioning before a minister took responsibility for this program. We now know, obviously, that the Department of Education and Training has funded this program at its current rate for 2009-10, but we would hope to see ongoing funding for this very important and successful program.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (7.46): The government challenged us to stand and talk about land rent. I am happy to stand and talk about land rent. What Mr Corbell has forgotten is that it starts on page 50, volume 1 of the select committee's report on estimates. It talks about the land rent scheme and the things that we discovered. And it goes on to make two recommendations.

But before I go to the two recommendations, the fundamental question was: were you told that people would back the land rent scheme and what reasons did they give for backing it or not backing it? The interesting thing is that we had the disgraceful article in the *Canberra Times* where a spokesperson on behalf of the Chief Minister—something the Chief Minister has never denied—came out and said that the reason the insurance companies, the mortgage insurance companies, would not back land rent was that they were afraid because of their exposure under the GFC. That was the reason.

The reality is that the letter back from the major mortgage insurer to the government—something the Chief Minister denies ever knowing about—says that they did not want to lend against it. And it is interesting because, when you go to the last paragraph of the letter to the public servant, the senior manager of strategic project facilitation, the one in charge, they actually say they will back OwnPlace.

They make a decision based on the information to hand and they say, “We will back OwnPlace.” I will read the third-last paragraph:

Genworth is able to provide lenders mortgage insurance on loans under the Own Place Program, designed to allow lower income households to purchase house and land packages under \$300,000. Applications will be assessed according to Genworth’s current Underwriting Policy across our full range of products.

It goes on to say:

The only exclusion relates to any land that is under the Land Rent Scheme.

When you read the letter, it is quite clear that the global financial crisis had nothing to do with Genworth’s decision not to back land rent back on 14 October 2008. In fact, it was before the election. Since 14 October 2008, the government has known about this. The Chief Minister should have known about this. The Chief Minister did know about this. But he denies it. I read you the letter:

Dear—

public servant—

Thank you for submitting the ACT Government’s affordable housing initiatives to Genworth Financial ... to review.

We have thoroughly analysed both the Land Rent Scheme and Own Place Program and would like to advise the following:

Land Rent Scheme

Unfortunately, Genworth is unable to provide lenders mortgage insurance on construction under the Land Rent Scheme.

Whilst initially reducing some entry costs into the housing market, this scheme presents a number of risks to us which does not commercially suit our current risk appetite.

Whilst this is not an extensive list, we have listed some of our main concerns in the following areas.

And there are seven areas. Not one of them is “exposure as a result of the global financial crisis”, as maintained by the Chief Minister and his office. The reasons are:

It is likely that loan to value ratios will be required at the higher end in view of your target market. Our risk appetite with construction loans factors in the land acquisition. As you may appreciate land plays a significant part in diminishing risk by effectively reducing the loan to value ratio as house price appreciation takes effect over the term of the loan. Excluding this factor would significantly inflate any pricing model and severely inhibit mortgage insurance affordability.

Not the global financial crisis. The second arrow point is:

It appears that there is a direct relationship to property values by the reliance on the rates notice. Caps are in place to control rent issues which may arise in a “go-go” market where house price appreciation quickens. However, there is a direct link to affordability should a new owner acquire the property.

No mention of the global financial crisis. The third arrow point is:

Timing of revaluation would possibly detract from purchase or sale.

No mention of the global financial crisis. The fourth arrow point is:

Concentration risk may impair values within the subdivision. There may eventually be a propensity for a valuation firm to eventually base its valuation on the rates notice within the subdivision rather than fair value. This could ultimately distort fair value-normal market forces.

Not the global financial crisis. The fifth arrow point is:

Whilst we have not sought legal counsel there may be some issues concerning the ability for a funder to exercise their right should mortgagee in possession occur. It appears at first glance that initial recourse to mitigate losses may in fact lie with the land owner. This may then impact the funder’s severity. Furthermore subrogation may be effected in the right of recourse.

Not global financial crisis. The sixth arrow point is:

Saleability is untested.

Not global financial crisis. And the last arrow point is:

The cost of construction may not equal the value of the dwelling. Without the land component balancing out any negative equity issues realised in the value of the dwelling it is possible from the outset that the borrower may, in fact, have negative equity.

Not global financial crisis, as maintained by the Chief Minister and his office. So there we have the reasons why the country’s largest mortgage insurer would not back the land rent scheme. They said they would do it for OwnPlace but they would not do it for the land rent scheme.

It is interesting that, after almost four pages of text, there are two recommendations from the estimates committee, recommendation 39 and recommendation 40. When one goes to the government’s response, one should remember that at lunchtime, after the Treasurer had come down and tabled this report, the Chief Minister went out and did his own thing anyway. Let me read recommendation 39 and the response:

The Committee recommends that the Chief Minister prepare and table a full briefing for the Assembly, in the next sitting, on the progress of the Land Rent scheme, a timeline of what advice his office and department received, and a cross reference to information provided to the public, and to reveal the identity of lending institutions, if any, who have officially offered support for the scheme.

Government Response

Noted.

The Chief Minister tabled on 18 June 2009 an updated report on the Land Rent as per an earlier Assembly recommendation.

If you read it, I do not see the timetabling and I do not see the cross-referencing. I do not see what was actually asked for and I certainly do not see the proposed funding listed here. But it is so typical of the Chief Minister to insult the committee by judging when he will do things rather than complying with the requests of the Assembly.

Let me go to recommendation 40 and the response:

The Committee recommends that the Chief Minister provide an update to the community, informing those currently waiting for this scheme, about progress on the status of financial support and the likelihood of any potential purchase being completed prior to the expiration of the first home owners' grant.

Government Response

Noted.

The Chief Minister's Department has recently provided an update to people with land blocks on hold, and will continue to provide updates to concerned parties as appropriate.

Far from being afraid to talk about land rent, let us get back to the issues which the committee had concerns about, which the Chief Minister has never answered and will never answer. And yes, they are a little bit cock-a-hoop today about having a funder. The Chief Minister had a couple of dorothy dixers on this today—two questions on this, 20 minutes worth of answers. Throughout that entire speech, he could not mention one single detail in the course of the afternoon about the terms and the conditions. And it will be interesting to see what the terms and the conditions are. What is the size of the loan that you can borrow? How much deposit do you have to have? What interest rate will you pay? Will you be able to get mortgage insurance? So it will go on.

We actually need those details. We need to find those couples or those households under \$75,000—and what did he describe them as, “disabled” because they cannot buy into the market—and those people under \$50,000 income per household that he claims to defend. We need to find out whether or not those people are burdened with what the UDIA pointed out were the two factors that stood in the way of most people owning a home.

The first is cost of land, which is regulated by this government. Remember the comment “squeeze them until they bleed but not until they die”. That is our land policy. That is our taxation policy in this jurisdiction under this Chief Minister. “Squeeze them until they bleed but not until they die.”

UDIA says the second factor was, of course, the planning process—land and planning. Both are under the control of this Chief Minister; both are under the control of this government; both are failing low and middle-income earners in this city in their quest to purchase a home. Until those two are properly addressed, housing affordability will remain beyond the reach of many people in this city, no matter how many schemes the Chief Minister comes up with.

It is interesting that, when the Chief Minister and others were talking about OwnPlace, what they forget—and Mr Corbell can read as many transcripts as he wants and can apportion blame wherever he seeks to apportion it but the truth will out—is that the reality is that the behaviour of the Chief Minister in this estimates process has been appalling. It has been noted by the committee and it has been recorded by the committee. I refer members to page 46 of the report and the two recommendations there, recommendation 34 and recommendation 35, and then paragraph 4.57 which follows. Recommendation 34 states:

The Committee recommends that the Chief Minister, Mr Jon Stanhope MLA, correct the record concerning his misrepresentation of the letter that the Committee wrote to the Deputy Chief Executive of Business and Projects, Mr Dawes, on 27 May 2009.

(*Second speaking period taken.*) Recommendation 35 states:

The Committee recommends that the Chief Minister, Mr Jon Stanhope MLA, write again to the builders involved in the OwnPlace scheme—those whom he had previously corresponded and misrepresented the Committee—and that the Chief Minister correct the record.

The committee has said that the Chief Minister has misrepresented them and he needs to correct the record. It is interesting to read the next paragraph, paragraph 4.57, on page 47:

The Committee resolved as a result of Mr Stanhope's misrepresentations of Committee proceedings to write to the companies and industry associations to correct the record.

I am not aware of that ever happening in the history of the Assembly. In the last 20 years I have never heard of a committee writing to people to correct the mistruths that they have been told by the Chief Minister. It is an extraordinary paragraph and it is an extraordinary indictment of the behaviour of the Chief Minister.

We can get up here and we can misquote *Hansard*; we can twist and say that we wrote letters based on false premises and that we elicited a response that had no relation whatsoever to the truth of what occurred in the Assembly and somehow feel vindicated. But I think the shallowness of that approach brings this place into disrepute and it is why people in this community still have a dilemma with self-government in the ACT, when they have a Chief Minister who is willing to write misleading letters to leading businesses and business associations and then, when caught, refuses to correct the record.

That is a slight on him and it is something that I think he should be quite ashamed of. I hope he takes the opportunity to stand up and speak in this debate because we are still waiting for his correction as outlined in recommendations 34 and 35. It is interesting, when you go to 34 and 35, oddly enough, they are not agreed by the Chief Minister. Goodness me, the Chief Minister did not misrepresent the letter. It is the committee's letter and they felt that it was misrepresented. The response states:

The Chief Minister did not misrepresent the Committee in his letter dated 20 May to the Own Place builders.

Indeed he did. It is the recommendation, the determination of the committee, that he did. He should have the courage to apologise; he should have the courage to correct the record; and he should have the courage to write to those groups that he wrote to and correct the mistruth.

The other thing he should do is stand in this place before we go home tonight and tell people the terms and conditions of the loans that will be available. It is well and good to have a funder but, as we always know when dealing with financial institutions, the devil is in the detail. If we do not know what the thresholds are, if we do not know what the conditions are, if we do not know what the prerequisites are, if we do not know what compliance is required, it may well be good to have a funder but it may well be that most people will not be able to access the funds provided. Unless you know how much you have to have in the bank to get the loan, unless you know what the interest rate is, unless you know what the repayment details are, unless you know what the charge for mortgage insurance will be, unless you know the full picture, then no-one can make a judgement on this.

None of the ministers have been able to stand and tell us—indeed two dorothy dixers during question time did not give anyone in this place any more knowledge—about the terms and conditions of a loan that one would get.

Mr Coe: There were two dorothy dixers and two supps.

MR SMYTH: There were two dorothy dixers and two supps, four questions, potentially 20 minutes. We all know that the Chief Minister is not shy at taking his time and we all know that the Chief Minister can fill his 20 minutes should he so wish.

He was even asked, in one of the dorothy dixers, for more detail: “Give us the details to the question.” He wrote his own question. It was a good question. “I want the details,” said the member. But the Chief Minister could not oblige. As Mr Seselja has pointed out, there are only two reasons for this. Either you do not know the details or you do not want to tell people the details. If this is a scheme you were proud of and if this was something that people would be interested in and avail themselves of and see themselves into a new home, then you would be crowing here long and hard telling everybody the details.

The Chief Minister can have up to 20 minutes. Indeed, as the minister responsible for the line item, he can have unlimited time to respond. So go and get the contract; go

and get the brochure; go and get the letter; go and get the brief; go and get the information; and come and tell us, chapter and verse, the detail. My bet is that he will not, because that is the nature of our Chief Minister. And it is a shame.

In the time remaining to me I will address some of the other issues that were raised in the estimates report in relation to this portfolio. As always, there will not be enough time. It is interesting that the Chief Minister continues to misrepresent a number of questions. Just in case you have not read it, Chief Minister, because I know you have a propensity not to read reports, page 9 of volume 1, paragraph 1.39, refers to the number of questions lodged with the committee: 530.

I know we spin and we like to twist and change things, but the truth of the situation here is that there were 530 questions. I will say it again, just in case you missed it. There were 530 questions. It is interesting that, as we were making decisions, only 16 per cent of those questions had been answered; by the following Monday, about 35 per cent had been answered.

But if you were trying to make an informed decision on this budget, on the information provided by this government, you would not be able to because they took so many questions on notice and they were either unable to or unwilling to answer questions. And many of the questions are still not answered today. If you were trying to make an informed decision or if you were trying to come to a position based on knowledge, rather than just "Trust me, I'm Jon Stanhope, I'm the Chief Minister," then you would be struggling to make an informed decision.

But there it is: 35 per cent of the questions, when this report was finished, were unanswered. So the Chief Minister's claims of swamping the ACT public service are rubbish. We know they can answer those questions; they are a very professional public service.

We talked about many things in the section relating to the Chief Minister. I would now like to speak particularly about business and economic development. The Chief Minister is responsible, or at least he should be responsible, for the decisions of his government. We know that this Chief Minister eschews responsibility wherever it is not convenient. Nevertheless, it is this Chief Minister, as it is with the premiers of all the states, that should acknowledge his overall responsibility for the ACT.

In this context, I note the proposal for the budgets for the next seven years. It is interesting what a change moving into government can make. We have got a Chief Minister who is now quite happy to have seven years of budgets but, of course, when he was the opposition leader he said:

We keenly appreciate that deficit budgets and high debts are serious impediments to dealing with social priorities.

So, members, for the next seven years, his high debts, his seven years of deficits, will be an impediment to delivering social priorities in this city, by the Chief Minister's own words. They are the words of the economic guru, the master of fiscal policy, and it is quite clear that when he made that comment on 14 March 2001 it was indeed very hollow.

There are some recommendations about openness and accountability in the budget and I notice the smug response in the response. We said, "Please give us some lines that are easy to understand and that tell us the true position of the funding for business." Of course, because of the way it is presented and is obfuscated, the smirky response comes back, "Just because you can't read properly, we'll make it clearer in the future."

But this is a standard feature of the budgets of this government, and has been for some time. A number of recommendations of a number of committee reports said, "Can we have a simple one-line for the environment, for women, for Indigenous, for multicultural, for business, for tourism, for sport and rec?" Some of them are there now. We are getting there very slowly but, again, it is this government and their inability to be up-front, to be honest and open, that really puts any understanding of the budget at risk.

There is some commentary about sustainability assessment and triple-bottom-line reporting. It is interesting that, in relation to recommendation 24 and recommendation 25, which I think you mentioned, Madam Assistant Speaker Le Couteur, the government does not agree to either of them. It is a shame really, because people genuinely were trying to put forward recommendations that we thought the government could live with and that we thought would assist people in trying to understand the budget of their government.

But when you ask for the government to put forward statements about how they take into account the object of ecological sustainability, including greenhouse gas emissions, and the government just says, "Not agreed; budget paper 3 already has a chapter," clearly, it is not clear enough. And this is symptomatic of so much that we see in this budget. It is unfortunate that the government wants to act in this way but, again, it is a government that I do not think has learned the fact that they are not a majority and that they will be held even more accountable than they have been in the past.

There are still a couple of issues outstanding between the territory and the commonwealth, in particular the torch relay and the cost of the land that we sold to the federal government at the defence precincts and that still has not been paid for. *(Time expired.)*

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (8.06): I would like to speak specifically about recommendation 31 of the estimates committee. I will just read it out for the purposes of everyone in the chamber:

The Committee recommends that funding for the Canberra International Arboretum and Gardens not be counted as a climate change initiative until there is a cost benefit analysis on climate change outcomes from the Arboretum, including the carbon emissions generated and offset.

The government's response is simply to note this recommendation.

The arboretum is one of these projects that the Greens have always had some concerns about. Firstly, we were concerned about the location, the water usage, the cost and the diversion of resources away from other horticultural assets in the ACT. Once the project started, it seemed sensible to get behind it at least. While it is hard to imagine that we will ever see the arboretum as a significant part of the government's climate policy, if all goes to plan it may well be a significant tourist attraction and probably a very beautiful spot.

I would like to read from the arboretum's website, which states:

The goal is to create a place of outstanding beauty, of international standard and interest, that is a destination and recreational resource in its own right, and which is welcoming to locals and visitors alike.

But many of the concerns that we raised at the beginning are ongoing, and the cost of the arboretum, particularly at a time when the territory is going to need to tighten its belt, is going to continue to seem excessive, I imagine. Indeed, the Chief Minister's passion for spending money on this project is probably going to appear more and more incongruous as the years pass, especially as the government finds itself cutting other programs when the GFC rubber hits the road.

But, of course, the issue that the Greens were keen to note at budget time this time around was one that we had already raised with the government in last year's budget: that the government should not be able to get away with calling the arboretum a climate change project. Yet that is exactly what they have done again this year. They did it last year, and this year they have done the very same thing despite the evidence being put under their noses.

Perhaps it is even worse this year, as the Chief Minister, in estimates, appeared unaware that this was the case. I refer to the estimates hearing when this was raised with the Chief Minister and he had to take the question on notice. It seems strange to me that he had to take it on notice given that he was the minister responsible for climate change in the previous administration when the \$100 million funding bucket was announced. Here is a question the Chief Minister was unable to answer in the hearings that points to why so many questions had to go on notice.

Out of that \$100 million bucket, about \$60 million of the climate change spending has gone towards some kind of tree planting, whether it be the arboretum, the urban forest renewal or, perhaps less controversially, the tree planting in the Murrumbidgee corridor.

Why is this point important? Why do we care so much that the government should not get away with funding what is essentially an urban monument out of a bucket of money that the same government has identified as climate change? The reason is this: it is time that voters—taxpayers, citizens—are clear about what they are getting when governments tell them that they are getting action on climate change.

For a decade or so people have been told by government that there is money being spent on climate change. The Howard government was supreme at lauding its

spending announcement on climate in any number of ways, shapes or forms. Inevitably, programs that had little to do with climate were rebadged as climate spending, and climate spending that was promised, say, over four years was simply extended out over a decade or more.

I fear that we are heading down the same path here in the ACT. When the government announced their \$100 million of climate spending—just in time for the election, mind you, when their polling was probably telling them that environment issues and the Greens were polling well—it was an interesting coincidence of timing. Sixty per cent of that funding has gone to tree planting programs that in the main would probably have occurred anyway.

The urban tree program, for example, was always going to need to happen for reasons other than climate change if we wanted to manage and preserve our urban environment. We are as yet unclear about how carbon neutral it will even be. The arboretum website does not even mention climate change, yet surely, judging by the funding, that is its *raison d'être*.

It was reassuring to hear that there has been at least some assessment of the carbon sequestration capacity in the ACT. I look forward to seeing the report when the minister for climate change and water tables it in the Assembly.

This brings me to the very interesting part of the government's response to the estimates committee. Ms Le Couteur has touched on this already, but there is an extraordinary paragraph here in the report. It says:

A carbon sequestration audit ... estimates that the Arboretum will reach a maximum carbon stock of around 70,000 tonnes with 90 per cent of this amount sequestered within 200 years.

Fantastic! Within 200 years. If we look at 70,000 tonnes and if we take 90 per cent within 200 years, that brings us out at 63,000 tonnes, so already the numbers are a little less impressive. If the issue were not so serious, this would be quality comedy. It begs the question of whether anybody in government has actually read the climate science. Folks, we face a climate emergency, not a picnic.

That 63,000 tonnes is accumulated over 200 years. It is a bit rough-and-ready science, and it has probably had a few scientists spinning in their graves, but, if you take an average, that is 315 tonnes a year over 200 years. The ACT's emissions in 2005 were 4,448,000 tonnes. That 315 tonnes each year is 0.00007 per cent of the ACT's emissions.

Mrs Dunne: How many zeros?

MR RATTENBURY: That is four zeros—0.00007 per cent. Yet around one-sixth of the government's \$100 million climate change budget is being spent on this project.

Mrs Dunne: That is \$700,000.

MR RATTENBURY: Yes. Thank you, Mrs Dunne, for that clarification. You obviously did well at maths. One-sixth of the \$100 million “we’re going to tackle climate change” expenditure is going on a project that barely even rates when it comes to carbon sequestration.

Let us stop making a joke of the arboretum. Let us get serious about climate change. I hope that by next time, when we come around to next year’s budget, we will not see this same sort of spin doctoring going on and the people down at Chief Minister’s will have found some better projects to spend climate change money on. Maybe they will have given up on climate change and at least given it to the department where there might be some people with some expertise, because clearly Chief Minister’s is about spinning this, not about taking real action.

I find it singularly bizarre that the government could only note this. That they could not simply agree that next year they were not going to try and put this same spin across the table is really unfortunate. I hope that over the next couple of years—certainly the Greens are pushing hard for this—we can see a more real account of what the government is doing on climate change.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (8.13): There are a number of elements in the Chief Minister’s portfolio that I need to address tonight. We have to go back to the important issues in the Chief Minister’s portfolio as the principal agency, in the sense of being the *primus inter pares*, the most important agency—about the example that we see in Chief Minister’s. We have seen, and Mr Seselja and Mr Smyth have touched on this already, the Chief Minister’s spac attack over unfortunate headlines in the *Canberra Times* that resulted in an 8.30 in the morning email off to the Land Development Agency to put in an ad and write a letter to the editor attacking the opposition and the *Canberra Times*.

Having been a staffer for quite a number of years, I know how these protocols work. I worked in the government and I worked on the other side as a public servant in the commonwealth for a number of years. As a public servant, I was often asked to draft a speech or to draft a letter to the editor. It was quite clear whether I was being asked to do it or I was asking to do it as a staffer. You actually ask the agency for the facts. It was often said, “Don’t you worry about the spin; we will do the spin. We will put the political slant on it. That’s our job; it is not the job of the public service.” It is entirely inappropriate for public servants to be asked to draft a letter to the editor that attacks the opposition or that attacks the principal journal in this town for something that the Chief Minister does not like.

The Chief Minister does not understand that he is the chief politiciser of public servants in this town. His performance is appalling. He shows no remorse and no regret and gives no indication that he will not do it again in the future when he sees the *Canberra Times* over the breakfast table, he does not like it and he chokes on his weeties. The next thing we will find is another splenetic missive off to some poor unfortunate public servant who will be told, “Do a job on the opposition and the *Canberra Times*.” It is perfectly reasonable for the Chief Minister to do a job on the opposition in the *Canberra Times* if he wants to, but it is not reasonable to ask the

public servants to do it for him. There are many things that we see in relation to the Chief Minister.

Mr Stanhope: It's so easy to do. There's no fun in it any more. The fun's gone out of it, Vicki.

MRS DUNNE: If the fun's gone out of it, get out of it, Jon. The day it ceases to be fun, you should give it up, Jon. We have seen a range of things where this Chief Minister—

Mr Stanhope: The fun's gone out of doing a job on you. It's all just so easy.

MRS DUNNE: If he does not enjoy it, nobody else enjoys his spac attacks. I am sure the Auditor-General did not enjoy the spac attack we saw the other day. I am sure that the officers in the Land Development Agency did not enjoy the spac attack when it was relayed to them: "The Chief Minister is very annoyed; he wants this, this and this before morning tea." It certainly did not happen under previous governments. It did not work like that. There is a lot more to be said about the politicisation of the public service under other departments as they come on.

I need to spend some time talking about the arts in the Chief Minister's Department. I am particularly interested in the issue which you yourself touched on, Madam Assistant Speaker Le Couteur, in relation to the question of conflicts of interest on arts boards. artsACT has developed a policy for the key organisation that precludes members of arts organisations from serving on boards of those organisations if they receive any remuneration from that organisation.

When I asked questions in the estimates committee, the reason given for this policy was that artsACT was concerned about conflicts of interest arising on boards where the board decided the remuneration of staff of the organisation and if that staff member was involved on the board. You yourself raised issues at the time, Madam Assistant Speaker, and you have dealt with this issue today.

It is the case that there are clear conflicts of interest here. But they are not insurmountable. There are many cases and many examples of how we could get around this without taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut. There has been no consultation on this with arts organisations—no real consultation. It has just been presented to them as a *fait accompli*. A *fait accompli* is not consultation.

I am pleased to see that recommendation 33 of the estimates committee report has been agreed to. It is one of the minority of recommendations that have been agreed to. This is a significant—

Ms Gallagher: Fifty-three in total; 53 out of 130.

MRS DUNNE: Fifty-three out of 130 is a minority, yes. This is a great win for key arts organisations, in that artsACT is now going to review this policy. I hope that, when the Chief Minister goes to the end of the high board and prepares for the dive, we see a very elegant backflip and pike, not a belly flop.

There are many other issues in relation to the arts. Some of them we will touch on. The ACT previously had a peak arts body, which has been abolished by this government. That was Canberra Arts Marketing, which was de-funded at the end of 2008. There is a mixed view in the arts community about that, but there is also a view that there needs to be some replacement for that. It is interesting to note that the ALP's 2008 election platform said, amongst other things, that it would continue the funding for Canberra Arts Marketing and that this would be part of its strategy for 2009-10 to expand cultural tourism. It also said—

Mr Hargreaves: Madam Assistant Speaker, point of order.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Le Couteur): Stop the clock, please. Mr Hargreaves.

Mr Hargreaves: Madam Assistant Speaker, I wish to rise on a point of order, and I apologise for my tardiness. I am a bit affected by this. On four occasions this evening, Mrs Dunne has used the term “spac attack” in relation to behaviour that she perceives the Chief Minister to have undertaken. As the minister for disability, I was offended by this, but I just wanted to check my facts and make sure that I was not overreacting. I understand that that terminology was used in the federal Senate and that a senator was asked to retract and to apologise for the use of that phrase. I would ask that you seek for Mrs Dunne to stand, retract that term and apologise for it.

MRS DUNNE: If Mr Hargreaves is offended by that, I have no problem at all in withdrawing.

Mr Hargreaves: Thank you, Vicki.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Restart the clock, please.

MRS DUNNE: In addition to its election commitment to continuing funding for Canberra Arts Marketing, the Labor platform states that in pursuing a strategy around cultural development Labor will:

Encourage and support the establishment of a peak Arts advocacy body to complement at a public level the work of the Cultural Council.

So I was surprised that when I asked the question, on notice, “Does the ACT Labor platform for 2008 commit to the establishment of a peak arts body in the ACT?” the answer came back, simply, “No.” So I am not quite sure whether there has been some misunderstanding, and I would ask the Chief Minister to review the answer to the question, to review his own policy and, if necessary, to correct those matters.

One other arts matter which came up in this budget was the decision to do away with the centenary art project. The decision to do away with the centenary art project was curious, because a lot of effort had gone into it. I am very unhappy about the way that the affected artists, the artists involved, were informed about this. It seemed that each of them found out about it by reading about it in the paper or by being approached by a journalist.

Those artists spent a great deal of time, effort and their money developing concepts for a centenary art work, acting in good faith that the government was firmly of a mind to proceed with the major project. But the government suddenly decided, and with no real justification, that we did not want one any more, and they just pulled the rug out from under all these artists. There was no consultation, there was no warning—there was nothing. One day we were going to have a \$1 million piece of art to celebrate Canberra’s centenary and the next day it had gone—again, no consultation, no warning, nothing, especially when it came to those artists.

Indeed, it was a case of “the judge’s decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into”. And there was correspondence. Certainly not until after at least one of the artists was contacted by the media, seeking comment on the government’s decision, did they find out about it; he found out about it from the media, not from the government. When artists have approached the Chief Minister on this matter, they have been given very short shrift in the replies. (*Second speaking period taken.*)

This is an outrageous, dishonest, cynical, hypocritical and uncaring act from a government that has callously said that it could withdraw the project at any time. It is just too bad about the artists; too bad about the work they have done to develop a major piece of artwork; too bad about the time and the money that they had spent; too bad about the opportunity they had to immortalise their creativity in a major and iconic work—it is just too bad. But the thing is that the losers were the artists themselves and possibly the people of the ACT.

In relation to a couple of other issues, I notice that in the indicative land release it is proposed, and you also touched on this in your questions on notice, Madam Assistant Speaker, that there should be a sale and redevelopment of the car park at the Hawker Group Centre. I think it is necessary to just recap on the history. This was a case of the government claiming that there was consultation on the project and that it had been sufficient. That consultation amounted to simply planting a sign. Indeed, that block of land was scheduled to be sold at auction on 18 March 2009. It did cause quite a furore and eventually there was a unanimous change of heart in this Assembly when the Assembly supported my motion to postpone the sale while consultation was taking place. But, since then, there has been a breathtaking silence.

I, from time to time, have contact with the Hawker residents and the people who work around the group centre and they are waiting for the consultation. So it was interesting to see the answers to questions on notice that both you and I asked about this, Madam Assistant Speaker. They seem to provide quite a reasonable bit of information, but really what it boils down to is that there is still not going to be what I would consider satisfactory consultation. It seems that what the government is doing is getting together its arsenal, developing its final decision, before going to the community. The Chief Minister says, in answer to the questions on notice:

Consultation will be undertaken upon completion of the studies on how the development of the site might impact on existing tenants, operators and others in the precinct. The studies and consultation will assist in determining the nature and level of development, if any that may be appropriate on the site. Following completion of that work, there will be consultation with the local community on the results of the studies and their feedback will be sought.

It goes on to say that there will be meetings. But really what it boils down to is that that is going to be information: “We’ve decided what is going to happen and we are going to tell you about it. We will listen to what you say.” But I think the outcome is pretty much firmly determined, and this is unfortunate. I hope that we do not have to recommit the issue of consultation in Hawker in this Assembly and I hope that the Chief Minister will become more attuned to talking to people in his electorate about what they might and might not want in that area and try to come to some real consensus in relation to the Hawker shops and the redevelopment, or the possible redevelopment, on that site.

In relation to industrial relations, the minister himself spoke at length about the way forward in this coming financial year in relation to occupational health and safety, but—before my voice completely gives out on me—the one thing that the minister was silent on was where he was going to in relation to the sale of shopgood fireworks. Mr Hargreaves has, on a number of occasions, told standing committees and select committees what he thought the policy should be. In fact, in February 2009 Mr Hargreaves told the Standing Committee on Public Accounts that he was preparing a cabinet submission in relation to the banning of fireworks and he also stated his personal opinion when he said:

So please, committee, do not ask me if I am going to recommend this ban; just ask me when I am going to recommend this ban.

Also he told the Select Committee on Estimates that he had had an enormous amount of contact with the general community and that he would be taking a cabinet submission forward and “I will be recommending that they be banned and I will be doing this on the basis of my position on animal welfare and also on illegal use.” It was interesting to see, after this, that the minister then played this matter out in the public, I think in a misguided attempt to bring his colleagues with him. And what we have seen is the annual unholy and unedifying fight, with a minister expressing his views on a subject but not actually able or willing to implement a regime where we have a coherent approach to the sale.

Actually, we have a coherent approach to the sale; it is quite well regulated. But we do not have a coherent approach to the hard bit, which is the discharge of crackers. There is no policing of this. Perhaps the police and regulatory services do not have the right weapons in their arsenal and perhaps this might be a place where on-the-spot fines might be of more use to police and regulatory services than the process that they have to go through at the moment. But what we see is that, for the umpteenth year, we have this on again, off again public discourse on the issue of shopgood fireworks, simply because members of the Stanhope government cannot get their act together.

I suppose it boils down to that it seems to be a microcosm of the paralysis that we see in the Stanhope government at the moment. We have people trying to force their hands, we have obvious disunity and a government that cannot make decisions. It cannot make a decision on bungers, so how can they possibly run the budget, run the economy and bring the economy into some sort of control.

Ms Gallagher: Well, we are. The reality is that we are.

MRS DUNNE: We have the Treasurer saying, “I’ve got a plan. I’ve got this plan; it’s in the budget papers.” But there really is not anything to the plan. There are four pages devoted to the plan, but there is nothing in it. It is a whole lot of rhetoric but there is no way forward—the same as there is no way forward with Mr Hargreaves and his policy on his approach to fireworks; there is no way forward with Mr Stanhope and his consultation on the Hawker shops; there is no way forward in relation to the centenary artwork because that has been shelved completely. But I do hope that we see a way forward for the major arts organisations and that they do not have their boards stymied by thoughtless carelessness on the part of the Stanhope government.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (8.32): I stand to correct the record on what a couple of members have said and what Mr Stanhope has done over the last few weeks with regard to OwnPlace. When it comes to an authority about what actually did happen, I can see no better resource than the Select Committee on Estimates report, volume 1, on Appropriation Bill 2009-2010. Page 45 starts to talk about what actually happened. Paragraph 4.48 states:

4.48 Questions were asked about allegations that house prices offered under the *OwnPlace* scheme had been marked-up by one of the builders. The Chief Minister advised that the claim was without foundation and had been dealt with appropriately by the Land Development Agency (LDA).

4.49 The Chief Minister undertook to write to the builders involved in the *OwnPlace* scheme, raising with them the concerns raised by the Committee. The Committee noted that in doing so, the Chief Minister misrepresented the Committee, claiming the Committee had made accusations rather than seeking clarification. The Committee also noted that the Chief Minister misrepresented the Committee during hearings, claiming that ‘defamatory allegations’ ... had been made.

Let us go over a couple of those points again: the Chief Minister misrepresented the committee and the committee also noted that the Chief Minister misrepresented the committee during hearings, claiming that defamatory allegations had been made.

Paragraph 4.50 states:

The Committee noted that at no time did Committee members claim that the building companies involved in the scheme were ‘price gouging’, and that this term was first used by Deputy Chief Executive of the Chief Minister’s Department, Mr David Dawes.

Recommendation 34 at paragraph 4.55 states:

The Committee recommends that the Chief Minister, Mr Jon Stanhope MLA, correct the record concerning his misrepresentation of the letter that the Committee wrote to the Deputy Chief Executive of Business and Projects, Mr Dawes, on 27 May 2009.

Recommendation 35 at paragraph 4.56 states:

The Committee recommends that the Chief Minister, Mr Jon Stanhope MLA, write again to the builders involved in the *OwnPlace* scheme—those with whom he had previously corresponded and misrepresented the Committee—and that the Chief Minister correct the record.

The committee found that the Chief Minister had, in effect, deliberately misrepresented what I had said for his own political gain. This is a person and from a party that like to accuse the opposition of having a go at public servants. We have the utmost respect for public servants, because dealing with this ministry I think would be pretty hard and I think public servants do a pretty good job. I think some of the directions that come from the Chief Minister's office with regard to advertising or letters to the editor, or whatever it may, be would be pretty hard to comply with, so I have got the utmost respect for the professionalism of the public service.

The Chief Minister's accusing us of doing things was, in effect, nothing more than the Chief Minister trying to score political points on the back of situations that simply do not exist. The committee found, very clearly—a committee that involved the Greens and the Liberal Party and, of course, the Labor Party—that the allegations that the Chief Minister made were false. It is very important that this place do note what actually happened, as opposed to the spin that Mr Stanhope is trying to put out there.

I am sure this is all part of some plot by the government to try and rattle us, either individually or collectively; to try and make us think twice before we criticise the government—the same way as the Chief Minister is having a go at the Auditor-General; the exact same way he is having a go at the Auditor-General—because we are bringing the government to account. The Auditor-General brings the government to account from a different angle, but both have a go at the government when there is something to actually be raised. Yet, as soon as we do that, as soon as we do the job that we were elected to do or the Auditor-General was appointed to do, the government cries foul. It is just not acceptable in this system of government.

So, in conclusion, I draw recommendations 34 and 35 to the attention of those interested in this matter so that the correct representation of what actually happened in the estimates committee is understood.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Disability and Housing, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Corrections) (8.38): I may take the second 10 minutes, but I will not take that long. I just want to address a couple of little things that Mr Coe said. He has got this conspiracy theory running rampant through his veins around the plot by the government against the Liberals. It is unfortunate, and I have to let Mr Coe know that there is no plot afoot.

The reason why there is no plot against the Liberals by the government is that the government considers them irrelevant and does not want to waste any time on plotting. We do not need to plot against the Liberal Party. They do that well enough all by themselves. They are just so good at it. I just wanted to let Mr Coe know, so that he can sleep easily, that there is no gunpowder plot on this side of the house trying to

explode them. He can just settle down and talk about policies, but do not get paranoid about people plotting against you. Quite frankly, we are not plotting against you because we are not going to waste that amount of time.

Mr Coe: What are you doing now?

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Coe wants to know what I am doing now. Well, plotting is not one of them. It is very difficult to plot when you are talking directly to people.

On the issue of substance, these people across the chamber have missed what housing affordability is all about, what the strategy is all about. It is something that these guys seem to have missed all this time.

Mr Coe: What is it about? What have you achieved?

MR HARGREAVES: Rabbiting on like a very thin Joe Hockey is not going to cut it with me, I am afraid. I am just going to ignore you. Madam Deputy Speaker, if only Mr Coe would just be quiet for a couple of seconds and be a good little boy, he might actually learn one or two things. It would be nice. I have listened to him in silence and I ask that he do the same.

The issue the Chief Minister has championed around housing affordability for a very long time is to increase and enhance the opportunities for people to achieve homeownership—the ultimate goal, the ultimate success for people. What we are talking about is opportunity, the provision of opportunity, not obligation. These folks over here confuse opportunity with obligation.

Let me just run through a few things that this Chief Minister has championed over the years that I have been associated with him. There is the increased land release—the negotiations with the developers to make sure that we can deliver properties for under \$300,000 per property. We know that at west Macgregor some of those properties sold at \$290,000. That is a success story. Nobody is obliged to go and buy them, but it is an opportunity for them.

There is the actual increase in land supply itself, considerably greater numbers of blocks out there in the marketplace to reduce the cost of land, which, in turn, will flow on to an opportunity for people to buy properties and realise their dream. We have our sale to tenants program within public and community housing that we are enhancing and trying to get on with.

We have the shared equity scheme, which is almost with us at the moment, which gives people an opportunity. If this opportunity actually presents itself the way we believe it will, it will go right through the private marketplace and then give people a greater opportunity to own their own home.

Then we have got land rent. The CPS credit union is on board. Hello! These people have been naysayers for so long, yet here we have a significant financial institution saying that this is a visionary approach to homeownership.

Members interjecting—

MR HARGREAVES: The Stanhope Labor government is providing people with an opportunity, not an obligation; nobody has their arm ripped up their back to go along and do these things. People are offered the opportunity to take advantage of these particular processes.

Members interjecting—

MR HARGREAVES: These people across here have missed the point entirely.

Members interjecting—

MR HARGREAVES: They have missed the point entirely. Madam Deputy Speaker, conversations across the chamber do not actually cut it. Treasurer—

Members interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Clerk, stop the clock.

MR HARGREAVES: Katy, please. The thing that these people across the chamber have missed—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves, resume your seat for a moment, please.

MR HARGREAVES: I certainly can if you stop the clock, Madam Chair.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, I have. I thought that members wanted to hear what Mr Hargreaves had to say. I thought you wanted to listen to him in silence the way he listened to you. Obviously you do not. I will not call you to order again. I will start warning you. You have been warned that I am going to start warning you if you continue to behave the way you are. We are not having any more conversations across the chamber. We are just going to listen.

Mr Coe: Madam Deputy Speaker, does that apply to both sides of the chamber?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes.

Mr Coe: Okay. I am just clarifying.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Of course. Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. The issue for me is that these guys just across the road here do not understand that what we are trying to do and what we have been doing since Jon Stanhope led us to government over that rabble across there is provide people who are disadvantaged in our town with the opportunity to be successful in their lives, to build the concrete and bricks of the foundations of a positive life. Most people—maybe not most—many people in this town have been sentenced to a life of tenancy. That is just not on. Just because

people are on an income of \$35,000 a year, it does not mean that they should not be able to buy their own home at some point.

We have been struggling—and, I have to say, with successful outcome—over the last six or seven years now to provide those opportunities. The land rent scheme is the most recent one to come off the assembly line. I have to say this, and say this as strongly as I can. This is the provision of an opportunity, not an obligation. Nobody is forcing people to go to the CPS credit union and do it. It is there if they want to do it. Nobody is forcing people to go to west Macgregor and buy a property for \$290,000, but it is there if they want to. Nobody is going to force public housing tenants to pick up the shared equity scheme, but it is there if they want it. Nobody is going to force people to buy the property they live in, but we would hope they would look at it. What we are seeing here is the provision of an opportunity. These guys should learn a lesson from the provision of that opportunity instead of bagging it.

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) (8.46): I would like to take this opportunity to commend the appropriation bill and the 2009-10 budget to the Assembly and to the ACT community.

The budget is a careful and considered one. It takes a very measured approach to these extraordinary times. It is proven and targeted. It makes no significant cuts to services or imposes any increases in taxes. It is a budget that puts our community first and delivers the service the community needs. It invests in infrastructure, and so ensures that we are ready for the future. It is a budget that quite deliberately provides stability and confidence. It supports jobs. It meets the challenges of today and invests for tomorrow.

As the Treasurer indicated in her budget speech on 5 May, this is a budget that provides modest but strategically targeted additional expenditure for key election commitments, as well as the commitments contained in the parliamentary agreement with the ACT Greens. In addition, the government has included additional expenditure to meet agency pressures in key areas of government service delivery, the areas Canberrans most depend on: the health system; our teachers; the bus system; and our municipal services.

Although the global financial crisis that is afflicting the world presents the ACT with challenges, it has not meant that we are unable to pursue and progress the commitments we have made to this community. It has meant that we have had to prioritise, to be creative and to maximise and leverage every dollar. In this we have been rightly assisted by the commonwealth stimulus package.

We do need to put this budget into context. The World Bank, in its latest global development finance report released on 22 June this year, states that the world economy is forecast to contract by 2.9 per cent in 2009 compared with a prior estimate of a 1.7 per cent decline made just three months earlier.

The global economy is not forecast to begin expanding until the second half of 2009, with the global GDP rate expected to rebound to two per cent in 2010 and 3.2 per cent

by 2011. However, the recovery is expected to be much more subdued than might normally be the case. The World Bank underlines that the financial markets remain unsettled, investor confidence remains fragile and credit remains tight. The World Bank warns that the world is entering an era of slower growth that will require tighter and more effective oversight of the financial system.

The largest drop in the ACT's revenue base in the past year has come from the fall in GST receipts. Between last year's budget and now, the fall in GST receipts in the ACT has totalled \$487 million over five years. These GST receipts are linked to the level of consumption in the national economy and, despite the forecast recovery in the ACT economy in 2009-10, GST receipts are likely to remain weak until the national economy recovers. This is likely to take much longer than the forecast recovery in the ACT this budget year.

Other factors impacting on the ACT's budget which are outside this government's control are the reductions in interest revenue. Between last year's budget and this year's, the reduction from interest revenue totals \$322 million over five years. Furthermore, the reduction in superannuation earnings as a result of lower interest rates totals \$193 million. Both of these revenue lines are directly affected by interest rates in global financial markets.

These are simply quite unprecedented numbers. It is how our government responds that reveals its true colours. In the budget handed down by my colleague the Treasurer, we have responded without panic and without the infliction of needless pain. Those opposite may believe that the grab-bag of odds and sods that they took to the October election and the careless and random cuts they promised to inflict on the men and women of the ACT public service still represent a valid plan for this community in June 2009. But, thankfully and obviously, no-one else believes them.

The government's plan has been broadly applauded by economists and ratings agencies—by those accustomed to discerning a real plan from flim-flam. But any Canberran picking up a copy of the estimates report relating to this year's ACT budget could be excused for wondering if they were reading a report relating to another world. It is an estimates report from a committee that is in denial, a committee oblivious—it is clear from reading the report—to the fact that we are in a recession. You would not know or believe from reading this report of this estimates committee that the world is suffering its worst financial crisis for almost a century. It is in that context and that environment that we have crafted a budget for these times.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—Part 1.5—Department of Territory and Municipal Services, \$312,574,000 (net cost of outputs), \$273,752,000 (capital injection) and \$385,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$586,711,000.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (8.52): The TAMS budget is a failure of the government to learn the lessons of the past and their inability to properly plan for the future. The budget has some big ticket headline failures and a litany of shortcomings throughout the portfolio. There are, as we all well know, plenty of questions surrounding this

portfolio. I was appalled last week when the minister belittled the portfolio and the accountability processes of the estimates committee and this place.

As I said last week, the ACT government is unique for Australia, in that it combines the role of state and local government. Some in this place seem to forget that these issues are most important and must be addressed. The Chief Minister's attitude to my question and his portfolio are telling of a minister who thinks himself above the task. In an extraordinary performance during question time last week, in response to a supplementary question from me, the Chief Minister said:

Mr Speaker, I reserve my contempt not for the questions but for the questioner.

Mr Stanhope: You should put that on Twitter. You should Twitter that.

MR COE: You are obviously not a Twitter user. You may well have even seen that last week.

I find it pretty special that we have a Chief Minister who thinks he is the lord mayor of Canberra, but does not actually want to do the mayoral work. He does not actually want to do the roads, does not actually want to do the rates, does not actually want to do the rubbish, does not want to do the footpaths and does not want to do the green paint on the side of the road.

Mr Stanhope: When are you going to apologise for that?

Mr Hanson: For what?

Mr Stanhope: Your sexist attack.

Mr Hanson: What sexist attack?

Mr Stanhope: The Facebook one.

Mr Hanson: What are you alleging, Mr Stanhope?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Coe, please sit down. Stop the clock, please. Mr Hanson and Mr Stanhope, please stop having a conversation across the chamber. Mr Coe has the floor. Start the clock. Mr Coe.

MR COE: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. This year we are going to see increases in fees, in fares, in rates, even in charges for going to the tip. It is all very well for the government to say that it is not increasing taxes. That may be technically true by the definition of a tax. However, when the average punter pays more for the same service and the money is going to the government, guess what it is in effect? In effect it is a tax. You can go and tell the average punter: no, that is a fare; no, that is a fee; that is a charge. The average punter on the street sees more money going to the government where there is no correlation between the service and the charge. It is a tax. It is simply a tax.

From 1 July we will see a rise in parking machine fees by 20 per cent. From 1 July we will see rises in parking meter fees of 50 per cent. When you visit the tip to get rid of your rubbish you will see a 25 per cent increase in fees. We will see rates increase by 3.7 per cent—well above and beyond the inflation rate. It is very hard to justify all these expenses to the average person when, really, the services are getting worse, not better.

I want to go now to ACTION. ACTION is a pretty special operation for most Canberrans. It runs with a \$70-odd million subsidy and, as the Minister for Planning said in the estimates committee, it is probably the most subsidised bus system in the country. It probably is; I wish I knew. I put the question on notice, but that was commercial-in-confidence so they could not actually give me the answer. It would be nice to actually know. I will have to assume that that cabinet member over there has seen the commercial-in-confidence information and that what he is saying is based on that information. Therefore, I will take you to the gospel that it is the most subsidised bus system in the country. The \$70 million that the ACT government is pumping into it is, in fact, the highest on a per capita basis. With that in mind, if we are pumping so much money into ACTION, I think it is pretty important that we are making sure we are getting good bang for our buck from that \$70 million.

Going to some of the specifics of ACTION, let us look at the timeliness indicators. ACTION's timeliness is of real concern to many people, and I think my office would probably get the most complaints about the government when it comes to ACTION timeliness. As I said earlier today, when they were setting the budget they set as a target a timeliness measure of 99.8 per cent. However, when they actually measured the timeliness, they used a different measuring tool, a different indicator. Only when I put in a question on notice to the Chief Minister, the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, did he actually say, "In retrospect, we made a mistake."

Well, it is pretty disappointing that an operation of around \$100 million makes a mistake as obvious as using a different performance indicator from the one set out in the budget. Whatever way you look at this matter, ACTION bus services are not running on time. The very best figure that ACTION can actually publish is 83 per cent, but even that figure is very much a stab in the dark. What it actually means for the average person on the street waiting at the bus stop is that only four out of five buses are going to be on time. One in every five buses is going to be late. To increase fares by an average of 11 per cent when 20 per cent of buses are running late is a disgrace.

The headline figure of 11 per cent for bus fares is not a true indication of the situation. Since 2006 inflation has been of the order of seven per cent, yet for students, when it comes to bus fares, the inflation rate for this year is going to be 49 per cent. The faresaver 10 will go from \$8.20 to \$12.25. Those opposite laughed when I raised this the other day. They laughed and said, "It is \$4. What does it matter? It is only \$4." Well, when you add it up over the course of a year for someone who is getting a bus to and from university, to and from CIT or to or from another tertiary institution, it does, in fact, add up quite significantly. Again, is this increase actually commensurate with an increase in services? No, it definitely is not.

The challenge is to the Greens when it comes to this issue. I have a motion on the table for tomorrow about ACTION. It calls on the government to revert to the level of classification for tertiary students until 30 June this year. The pressure is very much on the Greens to make sure they bring about the outcome that their constituency would actually want. How they vote tomorrow when we debate the motion will be telling.

Those paying cash fares to ACTION are going to see a pretty big fare increase. In fact, there is going to be an increase of 26 per cent. A single trip is going from \$3 to \$3.80 and a concession single trip is going from \$1.50 to \$1.90. I think it is a bit much to claim that this fare increase of 26 per cent is because there has not been a fare increase in the last three years.

Despite the priorities laid out in the budget, including the claim that the ACTION network meets its passengers' travel needs, there have been a number of issues that have come to my attention that ACTION has not resolved. They are:

- reinstatement of bus services on Ainsworth Street in Phillip, north of Hindmarsh Drive;
- reinstatement of services via Clianthus, Dryandra, and Scrivener Streets in O'Connor, as the old route 35 did and new route 8 does not;
- ensuring all services on routes 76 and 77 are covered by wheelchair accessible buses;
- bus services in Gungahlin, namely, 51, 52, and 59 only travel to the city in peak hour;
- commuters from Macquarie are particularly frustrated by route 10 and were better serviced by route 40 and route 41;
- connections at Belconnen through the new arrangements;
- connections between bus routes are not working as well as they should; and
- feedback that suggests that the bus stations are not maintained to the same standard as the interchange, the bus stops are often dirty and the bus stops are uncomfortable.

I am concerned about the lack of detail surrounding the proposed trial of REDEX bus services. I have already asked a number of questions in relation to the benchmarking of ACTION services against other services around the country. (*Second speaking period taken.*) I am concerned by statements in the estimates committee that ACTION is not operating as efficiently as it could. For example, on page 102 of budget paper No 4, the cost per kilometre has increased from \$3.86 to \$4.33. We have to be very careful that this trend does not continue.

I want to move on to other areas within the TAMS portfolio. The GDE, of course, is a saga which has gone on and on and on when, in actual fact, we should have been on the dual carriageway a couple of years ago. If the opposition had been elected in 2004, we would have been on that road a couple of years ago. What Roads ACT revealed in estimates was that it cost an extra \$20 million do it the way the government did. The government can try to spin it and say, "What roads wouldn't you have, Mr Coe?" I am afraid that just does not stack up.

The fact is that it cost \$20 million and ran years late. We have to take into account the \$20 million of taxpayers' money and we also have to take into account the depreciation on that money because, had it been invested in other infrastructure two or three years ago, we would actually be two or three years better off. In addition to that, we would have had efficiencies as a result of having a dual carriageway for the last couple of years. People would not be spending as much on petrol, there would be fewer emissions and more time at home or more time at work. The entire system, the entire community would have been better off financially, indeed, socially and, indeed, environmentally had the government actually built the GDE on time and on budget as we were calling for the whole time.

The Kingston library is another issue. It is almost too big and too complex to go into here. We are still trying to get across the information that we got from the estimates committee and answers to questions on notice. In a nutshell, I will really be very surprised if the government is capable of delivering a full library service in an area the size of a coffee shop. They are saying it is 195 square metres or thereabouts. That is a pretty small area. It is 10 metres by 20 metres. It is a very small area.

Mr Seselja: Does that include all the areas out the back as well?

MR COE: Yes, it may well include sorting areas. It may well include a kitchenette. It may include bathrooms. I am not completely across that. Perhaps some of the answers to questions on notice, when they come in, might tell me that information. But I will be very surprised if the government can deliver a comparable service to what was delivered at the Griffith library and the Kingston library shopfront. But the challenge is for the government to deliver it and prove us wrong. In many respects, I hope they do. I hope they do deliver a good service there, but I am very sceptical because this government do not have a good track record when it comes to delivering services or infrastructure.

In addition to that, a question on notice that I put in came back with a confirmation that no parking study was undertaken. Those who frequent Kingston or who live there would be aware of the difficulty in getting a park there, and also the fact that it is pay parking. The ability to drop in and out of a shopfront-style library is going to be eroded by the fact that people are going to be driving around trying to get a spot and perhaps even driving around trying to get a disabled spot. When they do find a spot and put money into the meter, they may go in, spend too much time in the library and get a fine—of course, fines are going up as well in this budget—or they may pop out or just not use the library as they usually do. When you have a library, it should be used properly. It should be available to the public to make the most of, and I am

concerned that the proposed library at the Kingston shops will not be all that the people of the inner south do expect.

While we are on Kingston we might talk about the Green Square debacle. This is an absolute blunder by the person who wants to be the mayor of Canberra. He wants to be the mayor of Canberra but does not want to do any of the mayoral work. He does not actually want to do any of the council work. He does not actually want to do the roads, does not want to do the footpaths and does not want to do the grass. He does not want to do the basic things that people in Canberra expect the government to be able to deliver with ease.

The government's attitude on Green Square is really quite indefensible. Their position has changed day after day, hour after hour almost. Quite simply, what happens is that businesses in the area pay rates, as do the residents, and they expect to get services in return. However, under this government, because you live or work or run a business in Kingston, your rates do not get spent on you; the rates go somewhere else and you have got to pay additional money. There is a user-pays system for the grass.

A user-pays system is a policy position that the government might consider. But if you do that, you have got to cut rates substantially. You have got to cut rates so that the money that people are saving from their rates can actually be used in the user-pays system. We are not advocating that for one minute, but if the government is going to charge rates it has got to actually deliver services in return.

Each shopping centre in the ACT is unique. We are not denying that. We are not trying to say that they should all be treated exactly the same because there are different requirements. But for the government to be saying that every single shopping centre must be treated exactly the same way, I think, is really quite absurd. Not all shopping centres have grass. Not all shopping centres have the same sort of lighting as other areas. Not all shopping centres have the same levels of parking. Not all shopping centres have the same amenity of public toilets.

There are all sorts of things which make shopping centres unique. It is for that reason that we have a Department of Territory and Municipal Services to actually manage this sort of thing. If they are not actually doing their job, if they are not actually treating the individual communities as communities, if they are just treating them as separate blocks, then I think there has to be a rethink of how it is managed. I support the estimates committee in their recommendation that the government should maintain the grass in Green Square.

The budget papers were pretty misleading on the subject of the Red Hill and Lyons shops upgrades. It really was not about Red Hill and Lyons shops; it was about all shopping centres. Yet the budget papers clearly stated Red Hill and Lyons. If someone that did not have the benefit of sitting in on the estimates committee read the transcript and go through the budget and see the amount of money they are apparently spending on the Red Hill and Lyons shops, they might be a bit alarmed. In actual fact, it was an error and a TAMS official admitted to that. Hopefully, that sort of error will not be made in next year's budget paper.

Another concern that I have with the budget papers is listed on page 73 of budget paper No 3. It lists appropriations that are incredibly broad: additional funding for municipal services and additional repairs and maintenance. It is \$7 million—quite a large amount of money. To simply say that there is \$7 million for additional work I think is really treating the taxpayers with contempt. This is the taxpayers' money. The taxpayers are working hard to give money to this government, and for them simply to leave it unaccounted for in this budget as they have in budget paper No 3 is quite inappropriate.

In conclusion, the TAMS budget is a failure of this government to learn the lessons of the past. The TAMS budget is not a trophy of local government. It is not a trophy of things that the community can point to as local infrastructure. Instead it is a litany of errors, a litany of disasters and a litany of waste. We hope that the government will improve on this budget next year. We hope that the money will be better spent in future years.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (9.11): My comments are about transport generally and ACTION. One of the measures of progress in terms of an integrated and less car dependent transport plan is the level of investment in transport-related infrastructure, particularly looking at how much is going into public transport, cycling and pedestrian infrastructure as against general road funding.

After a couple of years of lower proportional investment in non-car infrastructure, the next two years return more or less to the 25 per cent proportion of previous years. The Greens would like to see a plan put in place to increase the proportion of investment in bus priority lanes, cycleways, park-and-ride facilities and bus interchanges. Holding level with our investment strategy of the past is not good enough.

One of the recommendations of the joint house committee inquiry into the NCA was that the national capital plan be amended to incorporate an overarching sustainable transport plan. The Greens would like to see the ACT government agitate for progress on that amendment, as it could provide a framework for regional transport linking Queanbeyan, the airport and Yass, Goulburn and Sydney with transport plans in Canberra.

The budget does not provide a clearly articulated vision for transport at a regional level or a strong commitment to transport infrastructure planning. In some ways this may be an inheritance of the past few years of neglect. We note and welcome the feasibility studies for two park-and-ride facilities. However, we want to be confident that two or three park-and-ride facilities will be under construction in the next year or so. And while there is some money going into bus priority lanes, the process appears to be driven by pressure on the roads, without a particular commitment to a regular level of investment or an overarching plan for where that investment should go.

We take the view that public awareness and current economic circumstances have coincided to create the opportunity to take a big leap on transport, but the time to act is now. This budget takes some important steps but it does so in a fairly disjointed way. The only way we can make this shift is to present it in the form of a big picture.

So, yes, there is more money going back into bike paths, footpaths, bus stops and bus lanes, but the people of Canberra would appreciate a clearer sense of what it will all add up to.

Services on the ground also warrant a closer look. Wheelchair accessible taxis are a case in point. I note that the budget papers have only one accountability indicator relating to WATs. It is about waiting times, and the goal is for waiting times to meet the required standard. The estimated outcome for this year against that standard is 95 per cent. Given the number of stories that have come to my office about WAT users left waiting for hours, unable to get around as they would like, being left when other bookings turn up, and being loaded in and out of the vehicles by people without the skills or the interest, I do not know what that 95 per cent really means.

Last week, the minister tabled a response to a petition that I presented in March, calling for an improvement to the WAT service. It was pleasing to read the comment that he has written to both taxi networks and industry representatives in the hope of significantly improving services provided for WAT users. But if that does not work, there does not appear to be any back-up plan. A truly inclusive accessible transport plan will have the goal of ensuring adequate transport choices for all members of our community, including those who are unable to drive, for whatever reason, or for whom mobility is a challenge. That goal needs to be explicit, with related targets and time lines. The hope that players will work better together falls well short of that.

In terms of accessibility, I note the interesting discussion at estimates hearings on the attempts to link the provision of accessible ACTION services with the needs of patrons and the attempts to link those services with community bus services run by the regional community service organisations. Clearly, once we have 100 per cent accessible buses in service, we will have a more complete service. Until then, it is quite a challenge. I would hope that there might be a more flexible approach taken to the regulation of community buses and that there will be some attempt made to get the WATs interacting more easily with these services and with ACTION in order to improve the service for people living with limited mobility.

Cabs will also need to play a more general role if we are to develop a seamless transport system that will work effectively for people without a car. We have seen innovations over the past few years in providing an affordable way home for young people out late on Friday and Saturday nights. There are still real problems when it comes to peak periods. One obvious bottleneck is at the Canberra airport. The Greens take the view that the ACT government needs to be prepared to take action in order to remove this unnecessary bottleneck.

Finally, I would like to make some comments on ACTION. We have already publicly welcomed the trial of the REDEX rapid transit scheme. I have been talking about the community service end of public transport, but this proposed bus rapid transit system is about increasing our commuter public transport capacity, getting more people out of cars, improving public health and reducing our overall emissions. It may well be that the government has a bigger bus plan in store in terms of the overall budget allocation to bus transport. We would be pleased to discover that this is the case.

However, I am particularly concerned that the REDEX trial will only operate for a few months. I note that the government, in responding to the estimates committee report, supported in principle recommendation 83—that the trial be structured in a way that, if shown to be successful, could simply continue, and that ongoing funding would need to be factored in to the outyears, which has not happened to date.

I note that the government seems to take the view that the benchmarking management used to criticise the cost and efficiency of its own service has been labelled “commercial-in-confidence”. If you want to make the argument to the Canberra population that a better bus service could be provided if things were organised differently then you need to be up-front about the basis on which that claim is being made. I think it would be a useful tool even with the commercial-in-confidence elements removed.

It seems obvious to me that we want ACTION to grow. And if we want to make it a part of a system which links with other buses and other transport providers then we need to put all the information on the table. We need to have a plan for transport that links the services together. We need to have a city that is engineered with public transport in mind. We need to have the costs associated with the service up front. We need to make sure that all the contributors, including passengers, drivers, owners and operators, are invited to be part of the solution. And we need to see that shaped up over the next year or so.

I recognise that some important progress is being made with the REDEX trial and the new ticketing system, but the Greens are looking for a more visionary, more forward looking, approach.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (9.19): There are a number of areas to cover in such a large portfolio, but I will just touch on a few of them. I think Mr Coe has covered a number of them very well. One of the issues that was certainly of concern was the issue around accountability measures in ACTION. I refer to the contradiction between what we had in the evidence given to the committee and what was actually given to us by the Auditor-General later on.

It is worth reading from part of the committee’s report on this. For members’ benefit, this went to the difference in the timeliness measure, which had dropped from 99-point-something per cent to around 83 per cent. Mr Coe asked questions about it. Obviously, it seemed like a very massive drop. We were informed that the timeliness measure had changed, that the way of assessing this timeliness measure had changed from whether a bus left the depot on time—the 99 per cent—and the 83 per cent, which was something different. I think it was taking into account the different stops. When we asked questions on this, we were told that this was an Auditor-General’s figure. We were told that very clearly. In fact, Mr Elliott said:

... you cannot guarantee a figure anything other than 83 per cent. In fact, this is an Auditor-General’s figure, not ours. This is what they think the timeliness measure should be.

Ms Burch asked the question:

Based on the methodology ... provided by the Auditor-General.

Mr Elliott said, "Correct." The Auditor-General felt strongly enough to write to the committee on this and, indeed, to cc Tom Elliott, the Acting Executive Director, Territory and Municipal Services. The most important part of the letter states:

The Audit Office did not provide the target figure of 83 percent for ACTION timeliness measure nor did it provide a methodology for its assessment. The Office has no role in the setting of ACTION performance targets or its measurement methodology. Indeed, the Audit Office is not involved in any agency's budget process or the setting of performance indicators and targets.

The Audit Office understands the Department's official intends to correct the record.

That was written to the committee on 3 June by Tu Pham. She was seeking to correct the record. The committee noted this and it sought clarification from the parties about the source of the figure and the reasoning behind its adoption by ACTION. Questions on notice were also asked about other indicators that ACTION used. As at the close of business on 12 June 2009 when the report was essentially ticked off, clarification had not been received.

It is of some concern, I think, that we did not receive clarification in that time. I think that this would have been a relatively simple one to clear up. It is not really clear what led to the confusion that led to the incorrect evidence given to the committee. But I think it was an important point. The important point to make, too, is that misleads, whether inadvertent or otherwise—and I am prepared to accept that this was an inadvertent mislead—often do cut off lines of questioning. When you are given the incorrect information, you are then unable to pursue further lines of questioning, because they often flow from the first question and the answer to that question. So misleads are important. Whether they are deliberate or whether they are inadvertent, they do throw inquiries off, and it is of concern.

It is also of concern to me, and no doubt to other members of the committee, that we did not, in the time that the committee had to consider this for the estimates report, receive a response from Mr Elliott, which would have been no doubt very helpful in our consideration. I draw that to the Assembly's attention.

I raised earlier the issue of refusing to answer questions and not being able to answer questions. We have a number of other examples here in TAMS in the questions on notice. I provide just one example, but I think there are a number of others in TAMS along this line. This one was to the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services. Question on notice No 349 asks:

How much has been budgeted for 2009-10 for hospitality?

Once again, the answer is:

This question cannot be answered until after the 2009-10 Budget has been passed by the Legislative Assembly.

I just put on record again that it is unacceptable that the government come in here asking us to pass their budget and fail to answer the most basic questions about how they will be spending this money. It is simply a government that have shown themselves either unable or unwilling to cooperate with the Assembly in the process of scrutinising this budget. It is a bit rich for them to call upon us to support all aspects of the budget when they cannot tell us what they will be spending the money on.

This is not a question about what they may have spent money on five years ago, or what they make plans to spend money on in five years time. This is about this year's appropriation, the 2009-10 appropriation, and how they intend to spend that. We see a pattern and it seems most evident from the Chief Minister in some of his answers both as Chief Minister and, indeed, as Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, in simply seeking to avoid giving us the answer to this question.

I put it again to the minister: is it because they are not up to answering such basic questions or is it that they have something to hide and they do not want us to know the basics of how this money will be spent? It is fundamentally once again this minister and government thumbing their noses at the Assembly and saying, "I do not have to tell you how we are going to spend the money." Well, you do. You have to tell us how you are going to spend the money, and that is why we go through this process.

The crocodile tears we see from the Chief Minister about being asked questions are made to look even more ridiculous when we see some of the most basic questions, questions you would think would be able to be answered without any effort by departments, not being answered. I think this is simply stubbornness and a complete refusal to actually tell us. We will continue to ask these questions and I suppose he will then have to justify, once the budget is passed, why he cannot tell us.

We should know this before we are asked to pass a budget. We do not know how much they are planning on spending in a number of these areas. We have seen a history from this government of overspending and wasteful spending. Our job as an Assembly is to ensure that every bit of taxpayer dollar is spent appropriately. We are well within our rights to be asking for this information and it should be provided to us.

We see in TAMS also that there was discussion about the Ernst & Young review. The Chief Minister said:

The department commissioned Ernst & Young for advice in relation to financial management and strategic planning, but the report was not commissioned on the basis of making suggestions or finding savings and it does not provide that.

I do find this a little bit strange. Certainly, it was reported at the time—and it was our understanding at the time—that this was about finding savings. It is a \$400,000 report. It is quite a substantial consultancy. I would have thought that finding savings and efficiencies would have been part of that. We asked about this. Indeed, there is a committee recommendation that the Ernst & Young review of the Department of Territory and Municipal Services' financial and asset management be tabled during the June sitting.

I believe the government has rejected that particular recommendation, although I do not have it in front of me. We heard from the Chief Minister claiming that the report is cabinet-in-confidence. We are starting to hear this a lot. There did not really appear to be a reason why a report of this nature, a report about one particular department and some of its management, would need to be cabinet-in-confidence.

This, on the face of it, appears to be an example of where a government has created a report and then later on stamped it "cabinet-in-confidence". It does not appear to me to be a report of the nature that would have been created specifically for consideration by cabinet or in any way reflect cabinet deliberations. I think that the Assembly will have to look at this again if the government continues to refuse to provide documents such as these when we know that they are overusing the cabinet-in-confidence defence. They are stamping everything cabinet-in-confidence that they do not want in the public domain, that may be somewhat embarrassing or may in some way show flaws in some part of the department.

I think it goes again to the debate we had this morning about the Auditor-General's funding and the attitude of the Chief Minister to the Auditor-General. He treats scrutiny as the enemy. He treats the Auditor-General as the enemy. He treats bringing light onto a report such as the Ernst & Young review as somehow a danger for his government rather than an opportunity to actually be open and accountable, to try and do things better and to learn, and try to explain to the community why certain changes might be being made. *(Second speaking period taken.)*

I think the Chief Minister does need to justify why this is cabinet-in-confidence. What is it about this report that makes it cabinet-in-confidence? Was it specially created for consideration by cabinet? I doubt it. What have we actually got for our \$400,000-odd worth of taxpayers' money spent on this report? These are important issues and I think that we need further information.

There is also a recommendation that the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety consider as part of their inquiry into freedom of information legislation discussion on the issue of cabinet in-confidence designation for documents. I have no doubt that the committee will consider that and I think that will be a very important review.

We also had the issue of Kingston library, which has been covered I think fairly well by Mr Coe. This is still an issue of concern. We do want to see it work. Some library service in the inner south is better than none. We believe that a full library service, which was in operation, would have been a better way to go. Indeed, it is a pretty inefficient way of doing things when you get it wrong because you do not consult and then you are forced to reopen a library service, having closed one that was in existence.

I think there is concern. Committee members were concerned that the proposed Kingston space is around one-fifth of the size of Dickson library and half the size of Gungahlin library. Of course, that probably goes to library services in Gungahlin as well. I am referring to the fact that Dickson library is far larger than Gungahlin library

when we see a growing population in Gungahlin. At some stage that will have to be revisited.

I understand there has been a favourable response to the committee recommendation for formal assessment of parking availability at Kingston local centre to be undertaken with specific reference to the potential increase in parking demand for library users. I think this is important. It may well be, as the committee were told, that there is plenty of parking but it did not appear to committee members that there had been any rigorous analysis to actually figure out whether this was indeed the case. There was no proper study. There was a little viewing of the car parks at certain times that was fairly rudimentary in nature. So we are pleased that there actually will be that parking study.

I want to turn also to the issue of an asset management plan. Mr Smyth and I certainly asked questions about an asset management plan in TAMS. I think this is critically important. This is one of the areas of structural reform which we need to see from this government in order to get better outcomes for the community. I have spoken at length about the issue of better delivery of infrastructure in the territory. There are a number of aspects to that. Getting your procurement and tendering processes right is one aspect of that. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am just struggling a little to hear myself.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Burch): Assistant Speaker.

Ms Gallagher: Sorry.

MR SESELJA: There is just a little bit of chatter. I am pleased that Ms Gallagher and Mr Barr are finally on talking terms again but—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: So you acknowledge, Mr Seselja, the need for quiet when someone is talking?

MR SESELJA: I am happy with interjections but just chatting sometimes makes it difficult. Interjections are easier; you can respond to them. But seeing Katy and Andrew chatting, I do not know what to make of that because it is the first time I have seen it.

Ms Gallagher: Do you feel left out? We will include you in it a bit more.

MR SESELJA: I would love to come and chat. I might come and chat after I have finished my speech. I would love to hear what is going on over there—some sort of factional peace deal going on across the chamber. Who knows? Bill Redpath's future might be being discussed as we speak.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I am sure the member is getting to the point he wants to make.

MR SESELJA: Indeed, I am, Madam Assistant Speaker. I thank you but the volume is very high; so I feel the need to speak over the top. The importance of asset management planning, I think—

Mr Barr: The importance of asset management planning, clearly.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: We will listen to Mr Seselja on asset planning.

MR SESELJA: Mr Barr is now interested in asset management planning. I am fascinated. I have a captive audience.

Mr Barr: I am interested in your views on asset management planning. That is what is crucial.

MR SESELJA: My concern, and the concerns we raised that I think were legitimate, relates to the lack of asset management planning. In TAMS in particular we asked these questions. We were told, in fact, that there was not an asset management plan for the whole department. We were told that individual business units had some asset management plans. But we have not seen a comprehensive approach to this issue. I have had this issue raised with me by industry. In order to deliver infrastructure well and to ensure that we maintain infrastructure well, there are a number of aspects to that.

The procurement process is very important and we have not seen the kind of changes that we need and the structural changes that we need. Having an overall infrastructure plan is part of that. Getting top-level advice, as we advised, through an infrastructure commissioner is all part of that. An asset management plan is critically important to ensure that we do have assets that hold their value and that we get the best value for money out of those assets over a period of time. I would put on record the concern of the opposition that there is no comprehensive approach at the moment in the ACT government to this issue.

Mr Barr can scoff at the importance of this issue. Whilst it might not be sexy, it is a very important issue. We must ensure that in an ongoing way we have sustainable infrastructure in the territory. We must ensure that Canberrans have the kind of infrastructure that they need going forward and that we do not spend more than we otherwise would need to spend on maintenance because we do not get it right in the first place or because we do not have ongoing maintenance plans. Indeed, looking forward on the broader issue of the delivery of infrastructure, we must ensure that we do not plan ahead as we have seen so obviously with the Gungahlin Drive extension and the failure to do that properly the first time. It is worth reflecting on that for a moment. Mr Coe raised this issue.

Mr Stanhope, I think, is so used to wasting our money that he barely raised a sweat when Mr Gill told us that not duplicating Gungahlin Drive immediately cost us, I think, at least \$20 million. That was the tenor of the answer: at least \$20 million. That was the cost just by not making the decision which, on the reasonable person test, any ordinary person would have made.

We have seen all the traffic studies which said it should have been done. But the ordinary person on the street, whether in Gungahlin, west Belconnen or other parts of Canberra, could have told you that you need to build a two-lane each way road

straightaway. I do not think there is any doubt about that. The fact that they had to duplicate it almost as soon as they finished it demonstrates just what a reckless abuse of taxpayers' money this was.

Jon Stanhope shrugged his shoulders at the \$20 million plus that it cost us in making this very poor decision not to duplicate it immediately. We see that time and time again. We see it throughout the budget process. We see it in the attitude of the Chief Minister down. Losing \$20 million, wasting \$20 million, seems to be par for the course for this government as part of their ongoing approach to budgetary management.

Getting these things right is important. The people of Gungahlin, the people of west Belconnen, the people who use Gungahlin Drive, will now be waiting and will now be subject to a lot further disruption than they otherwise would have been and the taxpayer is forced to pay at least an extra \$20 million simply because Jon Stanhope got it wrong. That is what this comes down to. Poor decision making has cost the taxpayer \$20 million. Of course, we can speculate on what wonderful things could have been done in an infrastructure sense with that \$20 million, whether it be in Gungahlin or in other parts of Canberra that sorely need it such as south Tuggeranong and west Belconnen.

This is just a snapshot of some of the issues in TAMS. If we had more time we could spend more time going into them. The fact that the government shrugs at wasting \$20 million of taxpayers' money is of serious concern to us.

Asset management planning is an important issue which is not being properly addressed by this government. It is an area of structural reform and structural change that needs to be addressed very urgently. If the government is not hearing this very clearly from industry then they need to listen. The delivery of our infrastructure and the maintenance of that infrastructure are critical to the wellbeing of Canberrans. The issue is critical to the growth of our city into the future. It is critical to the sustainability of our population base and also to our taxation and revenue base going forward.

These are critical issues. They are not the most exciting issues but we will continue to argue for the sensible reforms that we need. Hopefully in future we will see sensible decision making as opposed to the reckless decision making we have seen as epitomised, I think, by the absolute debacle that has been the Gungahlin Drive extension. (*Time expired.*)

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (9.39): I would like to speak to a number of specific areas that sit within the TAMS budget, primarily relating to the environmental part of TAMS. Firstly, on the kangaroo management plan, the Greens welcome the government releasing the kangaroo management plan and the funding that is being put towards its implementation. I note that there has been considerable interest in the management plan, the government having received 61 submissions. We look forward to seeing the final version, due at the end of this year. Ultimately, we must get to a stage where the ecological balance on a number of sites is restored, the grasslands are protected and the absolute minimum number of kangaroos are being

culled each year, as it is a distasteful notion that we are killing some of our wildlife to protect other valued native areas and creatures.

The Greens also welcome the small increase in the number of rangers dedicated to look after our parks—one extra for the rural parks, one extra for Tidbinbilla and one extra for all the parks and reserves across Canberra. It seems timely given that the workloads for rangers are almost certainly increasing and there has been no increase in the number of rangers over the past five years. However, with the government's commitment to expand the nature reserve system in the ACT, which we hope they will be delivering on, staffing in Parks, Conservation and Lands will need to be reviewed again next year in order to ensure that land management regimes are able to be fully implemented.

We note that the 19 rangers that are employed to look after the north and south districts of parks and reserves are spread across a very wide area and undertake a diverse range of tasks as they not only service the Canberra nature park, our grassland reserves, Mulligans Flat sanctuary and Jerrabomberra wetlands, but also manage all of our town and district parks, playgrounds and skate parks right across Canberra. This is quite a load for this number of people to manage, especially when events in our parks and gardens can draw rangers away from reserve management throughout the year.

The management of our urban parks requires very different skills from the management of grasslands and native reserves—identification of particular weeds, native and non-native, ensuring appropriate mowing regimes are undertaken, and the like. I note that most of the rangers that are employed in Parks, Conservation and Lands have environmental science and resource management qualifications. It may be appropriate, particularly in light of the environment commissioner's report this year into grasslands, that the government consider, as part of the PCL team, a specialised team of grassland managers that can focus on implementing the findings of the commissioner's report as well as managing the ACT's woodland areas.

It is clear that some of the grassland areas that were surveyed by the commissioner have been inappropriately managed until now. And while not all areas are the responsibility of Parks, Conservation and Lands, the Greens believe there may well be merit in ensuring that there are specialised rangers who are trained in the management of the highly valued grasslands and woodlands that the ACT is lucky to have within its urban and rural areas.

I would like to note and acknowledge the department's comprehensive program on weed and feral animal management—programs for the management of wild dogs, pigs, feral horses and rabbits, including extra funding for rabbit management and funding for the predator-free sanctuary at Mulligans Flat. It is clear that the ACT will never be able to rest on its laurels in regard to feral animal and weed management.

One of the challenges of this budget was the way in which the information was presented and the lack of detail about program spending that was in the budget papers. This is an opportune time to point out the difficulties that that creates for those of us who are charged in this place with keeping the government accountable on how the public's money is spent. I note that the estimates committee report comments:

The Committee enquired about the breakdown of funding for land management purposes and was advised that programs were still being prioritised within TAMS. The Committee questioned why such detail was not available.

Other members have spoken about these sorts of problems. The funding for weed and pest control is a classic case in point of only being given half the story about what is being spent and on what. While specific and new funding was allocated for rabbit control programs for Mount Majura and Mount Ainslie and articulated in the budget papers, it is clear from some comprehensive answers to questions on notice that were provided by the department that the management of weeds and pests is broad based and ongoing. Yet despite information being provided on the nature of the programs, no breakdown of the proposed funding for the year ahead was given. I appreciate that the minister gave a commitment to provide this breakdown. I look forward to him keeping the Assembly informed.

Before I move on, I would like briefly to reflect on comments I made earlier about the arboretum and its effectiveness as a climate change program, and also mention that the same concerns apply to the urban forests renewal program. So I am pleased that recommendation 69 from the estimates committee addresses this issue and make the same points as I made earlier about the pitfalls of a government that seeks to dress programs up as a climate program and sell them to the community as a climate solution when, in fact, (a) they are not and (b) they were going to happen anyway. Once again, I look forward to the cost-benefit analysis from the government on the effectiveness of this as a mitigation measure and to seeing the carbon sequestration report which hopefully will be tabled very soon.

I would like now to comment on one specific sport and recreation element from the TAMS budget, and it relates to the Brumbies funding. This has been a matter of some considerable public discussion. During estimates, I asked about the loss of sponsorship by the Brumbies and the minister took on notice at the time to provide the information on how much was cash and how much was in-kind support. I think that was one of those that it was fair enough to take on notice, and I appreciate the response we got from the minister; it was very clear. With respect to the ISC sponsorship arrangement with the Brumbies, the answer from the minister was as follows:

The original ISC contract for 2009 included cash of \$347,750 and \$245,000 of 'in kind' support. The revised deal negotiated with the new ISC company for 2009 is \$150,000 in cash and \$170,000 of 'in kind' support.

I have done the maths on this and what this shows is that the funding in both forms coming from ISC to the Brumbies has gone from \$592,750 down to \$320,000—that is, a loss of \$272,750 in sponsorship.

What I would like to put on the table, and I would invite the minister to give a clarification to the Assembly on, is that the ACT government provided \$720,000 to the Brumbies. I am willing to accept that I might have missed the point here, but there is a significant gap between \$272,000, as indicated in the answer to the question on notice, and the \$720,000 that the minister spoke about in estimates and in the various

press statements that are around. I would hope that the minister can provide a clarification to the Assembly during the course of this debate as to where the rest of the money went.

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (9.47): It is my pleasure to speak to this line item, 1.5, Territory and Municipal Services, and specifically to the area of my shadow portfolio responsibility of sport and recreation. There has not been a dramatic change to the funding levels of sport and recreation. In fact, there has been no real change to this area for a number of years, since the horror slash-and-burn budget of 2006 when the secretive Costello review saw the loss of 13 per cent of the entire budget for sport and recreation.

The predominant line of questioning during the estimates inquiry focused on the stadium upgrades. Funnily enough, the stadium upgrades and preliminary consultation round were announced on the very day that the estimates committee was due to scrutinise this section of the budget. This is the minister in his best form—a minister who is very good at attracting the attention of the media for his own purposes, with a lot of spin and very little substance. It must be said that, regardless of the outcome of the consultation and the discussion that will be ongoing about the proposed plans for our stadia, the question will still remain: how will this government, with its track record, be able to deliver such a large-scale project on time and on budget? We need not look too far to see some epic failures in this regard. The Gungahlin Drive extension still stands as a monument to inefficiency, lack of planning and fiscal mismanagement.

The question of the state of our sporting facilities was also raised during the estimates hearing. Only an 87 per cent satisfaction level with our sports grounds and ovals was achieved when the target was 92 per cent. I would encourage the government to take heed of recommendation No 85 in the estimates report and to conduct a more detailed survey when it comes to dissatisfaction with facilities. It is important to know whether community users are dissatisfied—why they are and what they want to see done about it. I note that the government, in their response to the estimates report, have agreed in principle and that the department will explore options for seeking more specific data on user dissatisfaction.

I also look forward to the government's compliance when it comes to recommendation 86 of the estimates report—the initiation of a facilities audit of all ACT sports venues, to be reported on by February 2010. There are a number of issues under this, and I go straight to one of them. Access to pool facilities remains an issue for many constituents who have made representations to my office. The minister claims that the Molonglo development will resolve issues, but this remains to be seen, as forward design for this facility will not even commence until 2011 or 2012.

It is my belief that currently there is a huge discrepancy regarding access to pool facilities in the winter months between those residents in the north and south of Canberra. Indeed, something like 400 metres of lane space is available in winter to south-side residents compared to 1,380 metres on the north side. These figures are based on the exclusion of the Deakin pool, which has now closed, and Erindale, which is closed for at least six months. This is just another example of a lack of planning that has had very significant effects on the residents of south Canberra and Tuggeranong.

While we are on the subject of lack of planning and fiscal responsibility, the expenditure on the world mountain bike championship to date is, or will be, around \$2.986 million. Originally it was supposed to be around \$900,000. The minister has assured the committee that the \$2.986 million that will ultimately have been spent over three consecutive budgets on the world mountain bike championship will be money well spent and a good investment for Canberra. However, he did make a point of not speculating on the expected return from the event. I will also be very interested to see the report providing a reconciled budget for the event and the ultimate benefits. I note that the minister was quick to say that he was happy that due diligence was followed during his time as minister, but qualified what happened before by saying that it was before his time. I present the following quotes from *Hansard* of 27 May 2009:

THE CHAIR: You said that it was done properly since you became minister. What about before? Was due diligence done?

Mr Barr: I am just not in a position to comment prior—

THE CHAIR: But you must be aware of what was done?

Mr Barr: Certainly the background papers I have read, I can say, yes, I am comfortable with the cabinet decision, but I was not permanently part of that cabinet that took the decision. But the background material, that I have seen, yes, I am comfortable. Had I been sitting in the cabinet at that time, I would have supported the submission at the time.

Mr Barr: You couldn't get anything more unequivocal than that, could you?

MR DOSZPOT: The minister would not speculate on the expected return on the event. This is an incredible and very rare stance for this minister—the minister for spin and media opportunities. However, he has stated—and I quote once again from *Hansard*:

... yes, I am comfortable with the cabinet decision ...

Well, minister, businesses in Canberra are doing it tough. You are comfortable with a cabinet decision that has seen total funding for this event blow out to almost \$3 million.

Mr Barr: I will take it as a huge compliment that you've noticed how much media I get.

MR DOSZPOT: Madam Assistant Speaker, I am sure the minister does not want to hear this, but can I get a little bit of attention here?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Burch): Do you have a point of order, Mr Doszpot?

MR DOSZPOT: I have. I would appreciate a little bit of—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: You want silence?

MR DOSZPOT: Yes.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: If you are referring to the minister, refer to him by his name or title, not the “minister of spin”. Thank you; continue.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you. Minister, while businesses in Canberra are doing it tough, you are comfortable with a cabinet decision that has seen total funding for this event blow out to almost \$3 million, from an original budget of \$900,000 approximately. Recommendation 87 of the Select Committee on Estimates 2009-2010 is as follows:

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Sport and Recreation, Mr Andrew Barr MLA, provide to the Assembly a report providing a reconciled budget for the Mountain Bike World Championship, and which outline the benefits of that event.

The government response, which we received today, was:

Agreed.

This will be provided after the Championship event has occurred.

Minister, I am sure that the rest of the Assembly will be as keen as I am to hear from you after the conclusion of that event.

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (9.55): Territory and Municipal Services receives one of the largest appropriations from the budget and this expenditure is spread over a number of business units. This is a good example of where the budget papers could usefully provide better clarity and break the figures down. The estimates committee recommended that TAMS start providing a breakdown of operating expenses for each business unit within the output classes. Unfortunately, this recommendation, 66, was not agreed to by the government. I strongly supported it and I would like to point out that this would have led to fewer questions on notice for the government.

More than in other areas of the budget, TAMS issues often relate to the areas and the environment where people live. It is one of those areas members of the public want to understand when they look at the budget. It is clear to most of us, I think, on all sides of politics, that more could be done in the TAMS area: we could always fix more potholes; we could always have more bike paths; we could always fix the cracks in the footpaths; we could always extend roads. The public feel strongly about the priorities, especially when they are near their houses. The clearer the budget is, the better we can all understand it and scrutinise it—which would only be a good thing.

This has been another bumper roads budget. There has been massive spending on roads. There has been \$83 million for Gungahlin Drive extension, \$10 million on extending Mulligans Flat, and a number of other projects. I think that this is the biggest budget for roads on record.

However, this comes at a time when our priorities really need to focus on transforming Canberra into a sustainable city. I asked the government if they had any targets for shifting capital works expenditure so that higher priority was given to buses, bicycles and pedestrians. The government did give me an extensive reply, in which it said no.

I would have at least expected that newly funded roads would be built with transit lanes incorporated. But the government does not plan to have a transit lane on the due to be duplicated Gungahlin Drive extension. It also has no plans to add a transit lane to Canberra Avenue on the way to Queanbeyan, which is already at well beyond capacity at peak hours.

I must admit to having a degree of surprise at these answers, although maybe I should not. The government has said that it has a goal to make Canberra a sustainable city, but it is still the same old sorts of development, the same road-centred sorts of development. There have been some very good green aspects in the budget, but, looking forward to the next budget, we are going to need to do more. The environmental imperatives demand it. We are going to need a budget that looks more at climate change, and one of the areas where we need to start this is sustainable transport, as my colleague Ms Bresnan also spoke about. I look forward to the recommendations of the soon to be completed greenhouse gas target inquiry.

Unfortunately, the government at this stage is focused on cars. Its attitude towards the refurbishment of Bunda Street is a good example. Some \$4 million has been provided for its refurbishment. There has been public consultation, and that public consultation reveals a preference for pedestrian and bike-friendly solutions. However, the government's view appears to be that motorised traffic is the major priority, so it looks as though the refurbishment of Bunda Street is going to be an opportunity that will be lost; instead, part of Canberra will be locked into a car-dominant configuration for longer than necessary.

This is also happening at Gungahlin. Gungahlin businesses and residents have urged the government to make Gungahlin's town centre safer and more pedestrian friendly, in line with the vision zero concept. I remember that all the time during the last election campaign the Labor candidate there had a petition for people to sign to close Hibberson Street. She did not get elected and we have not closed Hibberson Street. The government really needs to look at the safety aspects on Hibberson Street: Saturday mornings, particularly nice Saturday mornings, are quite frightening there. This would be a good area where the Chief Minister could translate his enthusiasm for vision zero into real action in Gungahlin. A true vision zero would prioritise safety for vulnerable pedestrians and cyclists through proactive planning.

The budget and the government have also failed to deliver a government shopfront to Gungahlin. We all know that Gungahlin is a fast-growing area. This growth is influencing a number of other planning decisions, such as the new Majura parkway. A shopfront in the area would assist the growing population of Gungahlin to be more self-contained and reduce the need for some of the travel.

There is also a separate \$12 million over the next four years for city upgrades. Again, it does not appear that sustainability is a major priority for this. If the government wanted to champion sustainability, there are many things it could do as well as the issues I have been talking about in terms of pedestrian and bike friendliness. Well-maintained drinking fountains for people in the city who are not fortunate enough to have glasses of water provided for them would be very useful. People would buy less bottled water; and less bottled water means means less plastic, which means less waste. There are only five drinking fountains in the city, and there is no additional funding for any new ones.

Similarly, the city would be a great place to install bins for street-level recycling. This is an initiative that the government promised to implement, in its agreement with the Greens. The millions of dollars for refurbishment of the city, as far as we know, does not include the installation of recycling bins. If it did, it could capture the recyclable waste of city-goers, such as plastic bottles and paper. Other cities and towns in Australia have urban recycling schemes in their town centres, but Canberrans still do not have any easy opportunity to dispose of this waste responsibly.

Once more, I would like to mention bike paths and footpaths. We are very pleased that the government has honoured its agreement with the Greens and provided an additional \$6.4 million of funding over four years for cycle paths and half a million per year for footpaths. Fifteen years ago, Canberra boasted a fantastic bicycle and pedestrian network. But since then it has been in decline. While this may not have been clear to everybody, particularly the major car users, it has been clear to the users of footpaths and the cycle paths, which have just been falling to pieces. The funding boost is well and truly overdue, and it will need to continue into the future to keep the network working well.

I would like to emphasise again the value of urban infrastructure that is friendly to non-motorised transport. Each person walking or riding is a person who is not riding in a car. Each car less is less pollution and less demand on roads. Each car less means a person who is walking or riding and having hopefully pleasant but definitely exercise in a way which will lead to a healthier population, which will lead to less call on our strained health budget. And a bike path or footpath also costs less to build and to maintain than a road. This is the way we need to go. We need to look at this instead of providing endlessly for cars or getting too concerned about the cost of the green paint for bike lanes.

Moving out of the city for a little while, I would like to move to Kingston. The first item I would like to talk to here is the Fitters Workshop. I understand that \$200,000 has been allocated in the budget to redesign this and take away what I understand is one of Canberra's premier music recital locations, a prime venue in the recent international music festival. I have been told that the internationally renowned Australian composer Peter Sculthorpe said that the Fitters Workshop had the best acoustics of any recital hall in Australia. I asked questions on notice about this workshop and I am afraid I still do not really know what the answer is. I think, though, that maybe we have not actually worked out the answer. The Chief Minister—

Mrs Dunne: Yes, that was the impression I got.

MS LE COUTEUR: Mrs Dunne also did. We think that possibly it might become a visual arts precinct. I would like to suggest, in the circumstances, that some of the money be spent on comprehensive consultation and discussion to work out what the best outcome for this valuable resource is.

Also in Kingston, the future of Green Square has been causing a lot of concern to the government and to the community. (*Second speaking period taken.*) Clearly, the grass in Green Square is a very loved piece of grass. It is loved not only by the people who drink their coffee and go to the cafes there but, judging by the feedback, by people from all over Canberra. It is clearly the backyard to Kingston. Clearly, from talking to the government in some depth, one of the issues is that, because it is the backyard and there are so many medium-density developments around Kingston, it is being basically loved to death.

There is an issue with compaction. I think that the government should look at this. It is being loved to death. The solution is not to say, "No, you can't have it." The solution is to say, "Let's redesign it so we can have high-quality grass and high use." It can be done. I was in Melbourne over the Christmas break; outside the library in the centre of Melbourne, which I can assure you is an even busier area than Kingston, there is some absolutely gorgeous grass next to it with a coffee shop next door. You buy your coffee; the kids go and play on the grass. This is what the people want to do in Kingston. Why should we have to go to Melbourne to do it?

I asked the Chief Minister how much water was being used on Green Square, because I suspect that the number he gave was not accurate. Unfortunately, he has not yet been able to respond to my question. I suspect that possibly this is because the government does not actually know.

I would also point out that the government is currently asking the traders to pay for the capital costs of any change. I do not know if the government is aware, but many of the traders in the Cusack centre are being asked to go onto one-year leases. It is really unreasonable to expect traders who are on a one-year non-renewable lease to pay for capital improvements in an area which should be maintained by the government.

The final item to talk about in Kingston is the library. Of course, we are very glad to see that there will be a return of the library to the inner south. The new site at Kingston is going to be quite different from the old Griffith library, and there may be some issues with parking. We are very hopeful that these can be resolved with things like some dedicated parking spots for library users and some sort of system where you go to the library and get a ticket for your library parking spot. I have heard quite a few positive comments about the library, and I am very much looking forward to its new location and to its opening.

Let me go to trees. My colleague Mr Rattenbury has spoken about trees, and I have done so earlier. There was very little information provided to the estimates committee about the government's proposed urban forest renewal program, which had \$4.5 million assigned to it. Again, I have asked questions on notice and I have not yet received any answers to them.

Mrs Dunne: I got mine.

MS LE COUTEUR: Congratulations.

Mrs Dunne: It was a non-answer.

MS LE COUTEUR: Congratulations, Mrs Dunne; you are luckier than I. I also asked a question about the number of trees on the tree protection register. As I already know that last year no trees were put on the register, I really thought that it would not take a lot of time to count the remaining trees, but I live in hope.

The proposed urban forest renewal program is a very significant program. Canberra is regarded as the bush capital. One of the early things that was done in Canberra was to establish a nursery, an early arboretum, in Weston Park, which I used to walk through as a child. Trees are an integral part of Canberra's development, especially the older areas of Canberra. We are very pleased that the government is looking at the urban tree renewal program, but we are very concerned that this program be done well.

The program needs to work in the context of the whole environment and the amenity. The type and location of trees influence the ability of homes to receive solar exposure, and trees affect people's lives. Some trees have significance to some communities, to some people. Even trees which the government may call pest trees can be important to people. Rebalancing and maintaining the urban forest is a critical undertaking. We want to make sure that it is done well, not just looking at the cheapest option and the government's liabilities.

The next item I would like to look at is waste. In the time since the budget was announced, I am very pleased to say that the government has responded to the Greens' request and released the independent report on the NOWaste strategy which was completed in 2008. This report is quite revealing when it comes to the budget funding for waste-related activities. The report warns that, faced with growing total quantities of waste, it is an unacceptable expectation that the ACT government considered reducing, or even containing at current levels, the current budget. The review also pointed out that the budget data reviewed had considerably under-forecast the demand for forward capital expenditure in waste management despite the warning in the report.

The funding in this year's budget has not broken this cycle. With the ACT's recycling rates static and the waste to landfill proportion increasing, we desperately need to do something to reinvigorate the NOWaste strategy. The Greens have argued for new initiatives such as an organic waste recycling trial, street-level recycling and commercial waste recycling.

We are very pleased that in this budget the government has dedicated some funding to a commercial waste initiative. We think that commercial waste is one of the true low-hanging fruit as far as waste is concerned. But we are a bit concerned, because the budget paper describes it as a future waste strategy that will investigate why businesses are not recycling more and clarify the obstacles to increasing the recovery of the commercial waste stream.

The government has said that this is going to result in the release of a business waste reduction strategy in 2011. I understand that the business waste challenge program from 2006 produced a business guide to businesses and commissioned a strategy for a new approach to business waste. I do not want to see this new funding frittered away repeating work or reassessing things that we already know. We need to use it to actually take some hard decisions and get out of the business-as-usual rut.

Another important part of the TAMS portfolio is the Property Group. One of the committee's recommendations was:

... that the ACT Property Group prioritise energy and water savings as a contribution to achieving the efficiency dividend across ACT Government.

A better approach is needed, highlighted by the fact that the energy efficiency of government buildings is often quite poor. For example, I am informed that TAMS buildings such as the Dickson motor vehicle registry and Macarthur House do not measure up to the benchmarks for energy efficiency set by the government. I am pleased to see that the government has accepted this recommendation and I look forward to it being robustly implemented.

One last thing I would like to mention from the TAMS portfolio is the RSPCA. I have been disappointed that the government has not increased funding for the RSPCA so that it can continue animal services around Canberra. With the funding it is receiving, the RSPCA has said that it is actually going to have to cut services managing straying cats and dogs and cut its education program. Domestic Animal Services' response was that it will accommodate increased dog referrals within its current business practices, that it does not care for stray cats and that the department of animal services education program will have to fill the void. I am not sure that in the long run this is going to work out to be an adequate solution. I think it might be a false economy, especially as far as the cats are concerned.

In conclusion, this is an important department and I would like to see it broaden its horizons to be less car-focused.

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (10.14): Firstly, I would like to commend Alistair Coe for not only the speech he gave tonight in the Assembly but also the work that he has done in his role as shadow minister for territory and municipal—

Mr Barr: You're looking for his vote for the leadership challenge, are you, Jeremy? Is that why you are buttering him up now?

MR HANSON: Actually, no. This is the error that the Labor Party often make. They are such factional warlords; they sit themselves on the left and the right. Mr Barr is to the right of the Liberal Party on economic matters, I believe. I know that these are the mistakes that the Labor Party make. When they look at us, they look at a mirror of themselves and they know their mistakes. I feel free and unencumbered to praise my colleague for the work he is doing both in the speech that he made tonight and the hard work that he does in the community with his constituents. He is an example to us

in terms of all the constituent work he does and the interest and the enthusiasm that he shows for this portfolio. That is in a stark contrast to the supposed mayor of Canberra, the Chief Minister, who shows a stark disregard for this.

Mr Barr: So 90 seconds in and you haven't spoken a word about the budget yet.

Mr Stanhope: No, he hasn't read it.

MR HANSON: Really?

Mr Stanhope: He hasn't read the estimates report yet.

MR HANSON: Indeed I have. They are here before me, Chief Minister. I have read them in some detail. I enjoyed reading the estimates report. I thought it was a most illuminating document. I read all of the recommendations. I note that when you were asked on Triple 6 this morning, minister, you were unable to even mention one of them. You forgot them, did you? They were at home? The dog ate them? You could not quite recall them. You definitely opposed them. You just could not remember any of them. That was interesting. I have read the report and I enjoyed it immensely—a far better document, I would say, than the government response. What a sad affair that is. Anyway, back to the issue at hand. Mr Barr is giggling away over there. We talked a little bit about your photo opportunities, Mr Barr.

Mr Barr: You're all so fixated on it. It's quite remarkable, really. Surely there is enough going on in your own lives, but no, apparently not.

MR HANSON: I enjoy the pictures of you that I see all the time. It has been quite a pleasure for me to see it in the *Canberra Times*. I will just go back to what Mr Stanhope said in the lead-up to the last election. He said he wanted more attention to be given to process rather than photo opportunity; what more could have been achieved? I think those are just words. Back in 2001 Mr Stanhope seemed to say some stuff that appeared quite reasonable. It is a shame that since that time he seems to have completely ignored his own advice. Both in the approp bill and in their normal course of delivering services there has been a complete failure by the government to address the provision of basic services.

During the election campaign the comment that was probably made to me most out in the suburbs was that the Chief Minister and the government were focused on their pet projects, their ideologically driven schemes, at the expense of the delivery of basic services. This is particularly of note in the outer suburbs and obviously in my electorate of Molonglo. Numerous comments were made to me about the lack of provision of services and amenities in Gungahlin. I have heard tonight quite a bit about the library in the inner south—the once Griffith library that was then relocated to Kingston, the size of that facility and the ad hoc nature of the location. That is clearly going to be inadequate. It will not provide anywhere near the service that was previously provided at the location in Griffith and is provided elsewhere in our community.

I certainly share Ms Le Couteur's concerns about Green Square. Indeed, my children used to play on the grass at Green Square—certainly my older son did; my younger

son has been unable to because it is a dust bowl. But my older son used to and I used to sit at the same cafe. In fact, I met my wife at that cafe. We had our first breakfast there. So I have a great affection for that location also. I have recently had coffee with a number of the proprietors of the establishments there and share with them their concern about how the government has allowed that location to be degraded in the last number of years.

Turning to roads and the maintenance of roads, we have heard about the Gungahlin Drive extension and the failure there in fiscal terms—the \$20 million that it is now going to cost us to duplicate a road that should have been duplicated in the first place. We have wasted \$20 million. This is not just about money that is going to go on a budget bottom line; it is also about the inconvenience. Every morning when I drive, thankfully from Weston Creek, I hear about the appalling state of that road in the traffic report. I hear about people who are backed up for kilometres travelling on the GDE to get to work. This is just unnecessary. Had the government been able to plan it right in the first place they would have saved money and created a far better service for the community.

I turn to the issue of buses and the amount of money that we spend in this territory on our buses and the amount to which they are subsidised. We certainly are not getting the service that we should be getting. I believe about eight per cent of people use them. People are voting with their seats or, should I say, their bottoms, because that is what you sit on in a bus. If the service was good and was providing what should be provided and if we were getting value for money then I do not think we would have such a lowly number in terms of percentage of use in the territory.

I notice that there are efficiencies that can be found. In the estimates report, which I have read—and I refer you to recommendation 79, minister—you will find that there are a number of efficiencies that can be made. I hope they can be so that we can provide a more efficient service. I share Mr Coe's concern about the disproportionate increase in fares for students. People who are studying at university or CIT should rightly pay for their buses, but I think that the increase in fares is disproportionate and indeed unfair. No doubt Mr Coe will have more to say about that. I look forward to supporting him in those endeavours.

What we see here is a minister, a supposed mayor, who really I do not think has put the effort into this portfolio that it deserves. We can look to the efforts that Mr Coe has made in this area as the shadow minister. I encourage the Chief Minister to catch some of that enthusiasm—the enthusiasm of youth maybe that Mr Coe has for this portfolio and the splendid job he is doing—and take on board the recommendations in the estimates report.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (10.22): The provisions of services under the Territory and Municipal Services line in the budget are, in many ways, the bread and butter of what we are about in the ACT Assembly. One of the interesting things is that many people, when they get into politics in the ACT, are suddenly shocked and appalled to discover that what people in the ACT are most interested in in terms of this Assembly is the delivery of services. A lot of those services are about the quality of their roads and footpaths, their sportsgrounds and the like. Under the tutelage of the Stanhope government I think that we have seen a considerable decline in those areas.

Just looking around my electorate at some of the changes that have occurred I can see examples of the failure of the provision of basic services. A range of new traffic lights has been put up through the Belconnen town centre, which is done in the name of modernising our bus interchange, but it means we now have many more places where cars must sit idle in a very inefficient and wasteful way. I have noticed that there are places where lights have been installed, especially at the intersection of Josephson Street and Cohen Street, and there seems to be no sensor to indicate that there is a car there. There is this long, elaborate cycle that the lights go through and if you miss the light cycle you can sit there for quite a long time, with no other traffic around, waiting for the lights to change in your favour. I would have thought in this day and age that sensor technology would be part and parcel of installing traffic lights.

We have seen a whole range of choke points brought to us courtesy of the Stanhope government. If people driving to work from Belconnen and Gungahlin want to go south along the Tuggeranong Parkway there are three major choke points along the way that slow the traffic down for inordinate periods of time between half past seven and about a quarter past nine every morning. There is a huge amount of traffic backed up on Gungahlin Drive, and if people want to turn off Gungahlin Drive and go onto Parkes Way, again, there are three major choke points. Two lanes become one, before they merge with another two lanes which become one, and then they merge again and those two lanes become one. Three times you do that, irrespective of whether you go straight ahead or turn left. The traffic coming down William Hovell Drive adds to that and augments the back-up.

It has been government policy for some time that when they resurface roads, where appropriate, they will put in extra bicycle lanes. That has happened along Ginninderra Drive. But in the process of doing so we now have another choke point at the intersection of Ginninderra Drive and Coulter Drive, courtesy of the Stanhope government. Every morning east-bound traffic is now backed up all the way back to Copland Drive for a good period of time because the Stanhope government has created a choke point by causing two lanes to merge into one at a really inappropriate place. If you had just thought about it a little bit more you could have merged those two lanes about another 100 yards further down and the traffic would have flowed much more smoothly. But, no, we have really badly thought out merge points.

There is a piece of road which has been resurfaced only in the last three or four weeks and the surface is falling apart already. I do not know whether it has been done at the wrong time and it is too cold to put down the hot mix, but that is a problem. There are a number of potholes that your car gets lost in in the public car parks, the government-owned car parks, at the Belconnen Mall. This is becoming a complete disgrace and is a failure of maintenance across my electorate.

During the estimates process I put a number of questions on notice on a range of issues relating to land management. The one I want to dwell on is a seven-part question—and I know this is a bit of a challenge for the Chief Minister—in relation to the urban forest policy. The minister's answer was pretty succinct to this seven-part question. It states:

Insufficient time was available to answer these questions in detail. The opposition has agreed to a full briefing on the Urban Forest Renewal Program by the Expert Reference Group in coming months.

I have been waiting for that briefing for some time, which is why I put the questions on the notice paper. I have just basically been told to wait. It is not as though these were extraordinarily difficult questions. They relate to the current policy and the policy which has been put out there. I will give you a couple of examples. I asked if the 12-member expert panel appointed in December 2008 would be issuing a report on the tree management program. I presumed that this would be part of the terms of reference and it would be difficult for the government to pass on this information to the public. I got no answer.

I asked why the government was proposing to engage in wholesale tree felling in our suburbs. Given this activity has already started, there must have been some consideration given to the matter and it should have been recorded somewhere. But I got no answer. I asked why this option of wholesale felling of trees was chosen over others. I would think, Mr Speaker, that any policy worth its salt would look at the alternatives and have some idea of what they were, but I got no answer. I can only assume that this government has not considered any of the seven elements of my question or indeed any other aspects of the urban tree renewal program. I can only assume that the government is making up policy. This is more policy on the run. It is not as though this was an inordinately difficult issue.

On many of the other questions I asked in relation to land management I got really quite fulsome and helpful answers. I compliment the minister and the officials for the level of detail, for instance, in relation to the wild dogs program, the feral pigs program and the pest plants program. Most of it was very comprehensive. I think that if the minister can do it—

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mrs Dunne! Stop the clock, please, clerks. Members, I understand it is the wish of the Assembly to finish at 10.30 this evening. I invite Mr Corbell to take the floor.

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

Adjournment

Motion by **Mr Corbell** proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Australian Historical Railway Society

MR COE (Ginninderra) (10.31): A few weeks ago I had the pleasure of visiting the Australian Railway Historical Society at Kingston. I was privileged to be given a tour of the ARHS museum and workshop by tour guide, Dr Howard Quinlan. The ARHS is a working museum and contains a variety of exhibits, including carriages, freight

cars and track maintenance vehicles. Dr Quinlan has a great depth of knowledge of experience of the ACT's railway heritage and is a great asset to the community for the knowledge he holds.

The museum is home to the society's restoration work. Significant volunteer effort goes into restoring and maintaining the society's locomotives, carriages and rail motors. The society uses some purely as exhibits, whilst others are used for the society's many rail tours. The steam locomotive that led the first train into Canberra in 1914 is housed at the museum. Locomotive 1210 was originally built in 1878 and entered service on the New South Wales Railways. On 24 May 1914, when the Queanbeyan to Canberra railway line was constructed, that locomotive pulled the first train to what was then the national capital construction site. The locomotive continued to serve on the New South Wales Railways and, when it was eventually withdrawn from service, it was purchased by the National Capital Development Commission on behalf of the people of Canberra. It was displayed outside the railway station on Wentworth Avenue from 1962 until 1984.

In 1988 the locomotive was recommissioned to celebrate the Australian bicentenary. It has since been used to operate heritage trips. Indeed, the Australian Railway Historical Society operates a number of heritage train services throughout the capital region. Unfortunately, trains can no longer be operated to Michelago, due to storm damage of the tracks. Services do continue to operate to Bungendore, the Southern Highlands, Sydney and sometimes further afield to the North Coast, central west and south to Victoria. These services are operated by a combination of steam locomotives and historic wooden carriages, trains with the more modern stainless steel carriages of the old Sydney-Melbourne *Southern Aurora* train, or the smaller "tin hare" rail motors that were a feature of New South Wales branch lines in the second half of the 20th century.

There can be no doubt there is something special about rail travel. I have many fond memories of the Michelago tourist railway with my late grandfather, Alan Salisbury ISO, who was also involved with the society as a foundation member. I would also like to pay tribute to Graham Stanley and Stephen Buck for their services to the organisation over many years.

What makes these rail tours possible and keeps the museum operating is the selfless dedication and tireless support of the association's members and volunteers. The association can only afford to employ staff for specialist maintenance duties on their locomotives. Other than that, all the work is done by the association's more than 100 active volunteers—whether it is carriage conductors, catering, manning the onboard bar, performing the guard's duty, track work, opening the museum, secretarial work or driving the trains. It is the spirit of volunteerism within the society that ensures Canberra's rail heritage is preserved for the current and future generations. The society also operates a CountryLink travel agency at Queanbeyan to ensure that Queanbeyan travellers continue to have access to ticketing services at their local station.

The organisation faces significant challenges, including attracting volunteers, increasing costs and keeping the skill set necessary for its maintenance and restoration

work. I wish them well for the future and their successful continuation of their operations. If their history is any guide to their future I am sure they will rise to these challenges, overcome them, and become an even stronger society in the future. I hope the government recognises the value of this organisation and helps to ensure a smooth transition to their new home as a result of the redevelopments of the Kingston and Causeway area. The Australian Railways Historical Society is a true credit to the volunteers who support it. They do an invaluable job in protecting some of our national capital's heritage.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 10.36 pm.