



Debates

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Wednesday, 18 August 2010

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The Assembly met at 10 am.

(Quorum formed.)

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

Commonwealth public service

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (10.03): I move:

That this Assembly note the importance of a strong and stable Commonwealth Public Service to the ACT.

We heard a great deal in this place yesterday about the potential damage that would be wrought to our local economy and to our local community should the Liberals win this weekend's federal election. We talked about the impact on those whose jobs would vanish and the flow-on effect to other jobs in our economy. Mr Hanson glibly scoffed that because the job losses would be achieved by attrition, they were somehow not real jobs. Well, we all know that this is just spin. These losses will be real.

Ignoring the direct effect it will have on people's lives is perilous. We simply cannot remove 12,000 jobs from an economy of our size and expect that it will be business as usual for everyone else. It will not. Economic modelling conducted by the Australian Council of Trade Unions estimates that the removal of 12,000 commonwealth public service jobs will result in the loss of another 17,400 jobs across the broader economy. As residents of the ACT, it is likely that all of us will know one or more of those people that will lose their jobs. I know how this will affect their families. These situations are real. These job cuts will be real and they will have real effects on people.

Perhaps Mr Hanson thinks that because they are just collateral damage from his party's slash and burn of the public service they are not real jobs. Data from the ABS shows that the wages and salaries of commonwealth public servants were worth \$5.7 billion to the ACT economy in 2008-09. Are the dollars attached to the 12,000 people in those jobs somehow imaginary dollars simply because the jobs will be lost by attrition rather than by redundancy? Are the dollars that those public servants spend in our supermarkets, our grocery stores, our restaurants and our car yards somehow imaginary dollars?

The fact is that the Liberal Party has promised—not threatened, but promised—to slash \$24 billion over four years to 2013-14 from the current outlays of the commonwealth. Here in the ACT, commonwealth government expenditure is a critical contributor to our economic growth, representing almost half the territory's total economy. Over the past two years the global financial crisis has posed a significant risk to the economy, but we have come through.

The federal and territory Labor governments have worked together to shield our community from the worst effects of that global downturn and, by and large, we have succeeded. While our forward estimates have moved into deficit, the government has a plan to return to surplus by 2013-14.

Our economy has grown. It continues to grow, even through this very difficult period. Gross state product increased by 1.4 per cent in 2008-09 and it is expected to increase in 2009-10. The trend unemployment rate in 2010 declined to 3.3 per cent, compared to a national unemployment rate of 5.2 per cent. The adult average weekly ordinary time earnings in the ACT in the February 2010 quarter were \$1,443, more than 16 per cent higher than the national average.

In the year to the September quarter 2009, the ACT experienced strong population growth of 1.9 per cent. The fiscal stimulus measures of the commonwealth and local investment made by the ACT government helped sustain economic growth and minimised job losses in Canberra during the global economic downturn. We continue to enjoy a AAA credit rating. All of this the Liberals will put at risk, and Mr Seselja is more than happy to watch it happen.

Those opposite think that the 12,000 jobs that will disappear from our economy are not real jobs, that the flow-on effect to shops and other businesses are not real flow-on effects, that the money that will disappear from circulation is not real money. As the Chief Minister said yesterday, Mr Howard managed to do in 1996 what the global financial crisis could not do. He sent the ACT economy into recession with his public service job cuts.

Now Mr Seselja, Mr Smyth and Mr Hanson are sitting here on their hands and grinning like excited schoolboys in anticipation of it happening all over again. If the Liberals are elected this weekend, if 12,000 jobs are lost as promised, if commonwealth spending is cut as promised, economic growth in the ACT will be drastically slowed, local businesses will suffer, consumer confidence will plummet and a higher unemployment rate will be recorded.

What about spending cuts? What impact will there be on our town from these so-called savings? The national broadband network will be unplugged. One of the first beneficiaries was to be Gungahlin. The Liberals pontificate endlessly in this place about Gungahlin, but they will not stand up for the people of Gungahlin when it comes to the NBN rollout.

Federal Labor's building the education revolution program, which has delivered new gymnasiums, new classrooms, new sporting facilities, new science labs, new libraries and new playgrounds in so many Canberra schools will be scrapped by the Liberals if they win this weekend. Zed Seselja, Brendan Smyth and Jeremy Hanson will be elated when this happens, it seems.

I cannot speak for Mr Doszpot and Mr Coe. Perhaps we can ask them when they get back from their excursion this morning to the official opening of a non-government school project delivered by the federal government under the building the education

revolution program. The computers in schools program will be shut down by the Liberals if they win government this weekend. Do we see Mr Seselja standing up for the right of students in ACT schools to have access to the latest communications technology? Perhaps, like Mr Abbott, he thinks computers are only ever used for downloading music clips or forging Facebook accounts.

Mr Speaker, the Liberals have form. When they were last in office federally, they slashed the public service by 32,400 jobs across the country. The impact to the ACT was a 2.3 per cent decline in employment, a 3.5 per cent fall in average house prices and a fall in population. Let us put the risk posed by the Liberals into proper perspective. They will do to our town what the big banks of the world could not, and the Seselja Liberals will sit by and watch it happen.

The ACT housing market proved resilient throughout the recent economic downturn, but all this could change, and quickly. Many of those who have recently entered our housing market are first homebuyers with large mortgages. A 1996-style fall in our housing market will mean that some of these Canberrans may find that they have negative equity in their homes, and those are the lucky ones—the ones who still have jobs.

What we have seen recently over the course of the GFC is that when the ACT economy suffers, those Canberrans that are already doing it tough are pushed over the edge. Before the GFC, one of our best-known community organisations was conducting its work on about \$200,000 in annual funding. When the GFC hit, the demand on its services grew to more than \$430,000 over a period of just six months. Another community organisation experienced a spike in demand of 61 per cent, and that was a crisis that did not involve the loss of anything like 12,000 jobs. That did not see the commonwealth strip billions out of our economy. All of this, and I have not even touched on health.

Listen up, Mr Hanson, and acknowledge what Mr Abbott is planning to do if your Liberal government wins government this weekend. At the very least, we need a strong commonwealth public service to deliver health services in the community. This year under the Labor government we saw the creation of a national registration and accreditation scheme. The adoption of the national scheme in the ACT has created national, consistent, rigorous registration and accreditation arrangements and will improve public protection through the regulation of health practitioners and students across the nation.

If you are struggling to think about what will happen to us, just think about our health system. You were talking about this health system yesterday ad infinitum. Yet you will stand by and let Mr Abbott neglect our health system when he strips back funding, and he will do it. The Liberal government have done it in the past and they will do it again in a flash.

On national health reform, we as a nation are at the tail end of the first stage of a historic agreement on how to better fund and manage the growing health system across the country. Our national health reform needs a chance. Through the strength of the federal Labor government and its dedicated public service, the ACT has already

made great gains in the form of a new walk-in centre, extra subacute care, new operating theatres and extra elective surgery procedures.

That is what has already been delivered through our strong commonwealth public service and our focused federal Labor government. If Tony Abbott had his way, all this would never happen and he would seek to put us in a black hole of doom. I am sure that is not where we want to go as far as our health system is concerned, Mr Hanson.

All we need to do is never forget that as health minister, Mr Abbott cut \$1 billion from public hospitals, enough to fund more than 1,000 beds. He also froze GP training numbers and we are now, of course, seeing the fruits of that. Mr Hanson bangs on about GP shortages in this place all the time. We have only got to look back on what Mr Abbott did to our hospitals and our GPs to know why we are in this situation now. He is now proposing further deep health cuts, including eliminating GP superclinics, which will hurt 400 communities and cut our after-hours GP hotline.

In contrast, what Labor has been actively working at is catching up from when Mr Abbott left off. We are working on a plan to make the nation's health system the best it can be. We know that health costs in the ACT are growing considerably faster than the growth in the GST revenue. As the rate of growth in health costs, historically 9.5 per cent in the ACT, continues to substantially outstrip the rate of growth in GST revenues, historically a 6.8 per cent pool growth, the territory budget will come under increasing pressure, as will the health budgets for all states and territories.

The first tranche of Labor health reforms provides for the growth wedge in favour of the territory, in that the rate of growth in the ACT GST revenues to be dedicated to health spending is less than the rate of growth in health costs. The federal Labor government has already guaranteed under the agreement top-up payments to states and territories totalling \$15.6 billion from 2014-15 to 2019-20. This means that beyond the budget, between 2014 and 2015 and 2019 and 2020, the ACT will share in a guaranteed \$15.6 billion for health growth funding. This is locked into the agreement. But alas, this will all be gone under Mr Abbott. ACT Treasury modelling and projections indicate that the annual benefit would rise to about \$150 million by 2019-20. Again, this will all be gone under Mr Abbott.

In addition to the long-term reforms outlined in the agreement, the Australian government will deliver approximately \$7.3 billion in additional funding over five years aimed at delivering immediate health and hospital service improvements. This will all be gone under Mr Abbott. The health system will gain an additional \$111.7 million from these immediate investments under the agreement. This includes \$71.8 million to reduce emergency department waiting times, the provision of additional elective surgery procedures and reduced waiting times, the provision of extra subacute hospital beds under the national partnership for improving public hospital services, and making available an additional \$39.9 million to provide a range of services, including health workforce measures to support doctors, nurses and allied health professionals and funding for aged care.

If Mr Abbott has his way, there will be no more health reforms, along with 12,000 jobs that he will cut from the public service. A large chunk of these will be gone from

critical areas in support of the ACT. This will all be gone under Mr Abbott. As I said at the beginning of this speech, there are not just the actual jobs that we are talking about. We are also talking about the flow-on effect to numbers of other jobs in the ACT as people move out of the territory, as people are forced to sell their homes, as they lose their opportunity to be able to pay their mortgages.

We saw it happen before. We will see it happen again. We know that there will be a huge deficit in the ACT. We will all suffer from it. But, of course, we on this side of the chamber actually know what is going to happen. We have experienced it before. We would just like the Liberals on the other side of the house to stand up for Canberra, because all of this will be gone under Mr Abbott.

The wholesale cuts to commonwealth funding and cuts to the commonwealth public sector will damage our city, will damage our economy, damage every member of our community—not just the people who lose their jobs but everybody who lives here. I was here during the time it happened previously and I remember it distinctly. I remember the actual depression that went right throughout the community. People were really depressed at that time.

Mr Hanson: A depression?

Mr Smyth: It is a depression now.

MS PORTER: It was a recession and a depression because people were really depressed by what was happening to them. Mr Seselja and his Liberals think it is amusing. They sit there smiling and thinking it is all amusing and that I am wasting my time, but I am afraid we need to stand up for our city. (*Time expired.*)

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (10.18): Can I say that I agree with the motion but with very little of what was said by the speaker. The motion is one that we certainly agree with. As a former public servant, as the son of public servants, I agree about the importance of a stable commonwealth public service.

But we need to first address some of the lies that have been floating around, being perpetuated, particularly by the Greens and the Labor Party acting in coalition and that very credible third party organisation called the ACTU, who would never make up facts to try to get the ALP back into power, would never put forward false information. We need to address some of the facts.

The first fact is this: only one party in the federal election has promised not to sack public servants, and that is the coalition. Only the Liberal and National parties have promised that no public servants will be sacked. I give you this guarantee: if the Labor Party is returned federally there will be public servants sacked in the ACT. The question is only: how many?

The facts speak for themselves. They have already identified billions in savings. They have not said how those billions of savings are going to be effected. So there are going to be billions of dollars in savings. They are spending money hand over fist. How does one suggest that we will pay, for instance, for the rail line from Parramatta

to Epping, the \$2.1 billion for the rail line from Parramatta to Epping? How does one suggest that the \$43 billion-plus national broadband network will be paid for? Julia Gillard has promised that they will bring the budget back in surplus.

They are spending money in marginal seats—\$2 billion for one marginal seat. They are prepared to spend \$2 billion to get Maxine McKew re-elected in Bennelong. How badly must she have performed? How badly must Maxine have performed for them to feel that they need a \$2.1 billion bribe?

The ACT is not getting that kind of largesse. But you can guarantee that we will be paying for it because if they are going to spend \$2.1 billion for Maxine McKew's re-election in Bennelong, if they are going to spend more than \$43 billion—and we know it will be much more than \$43 billion—for a national broadband network, and they plan to get the budget back into surplus, they will start cutting the public service. There is no doubt about it.

Only one party has been honest and said: "We will make savings. We will make savings because Labor has racked up so much debt that we have no choice but to make savings, but we are going to do it without cutting jobs. We are going to do it through natural attrition." I will come back to the original lie that has been perpetuated, which is that the 12,000 jobs will be in Canberra. It is simply not true. And Ms Porter seemed to acknowledge it towards the end of her speech. We are talking about 12,000, through natural attrition, over two years, across the commonwealth, right around the nation. About 30 per cent of public service jobs are in Canberra. So we are talking about a far smaller number.

But the reality is that, whilst there will be savings made by a coalition government through a few thousand, through natural attrition, in the territory—they have been honest about that—we guarantee you this: when you are spending \$2.1 billion just for one marginal seat bribe, when you are spending more than \$40 billion on a broadband network, when you have got billions in other promises and you have promised to bring the budget back into surplus, the Labor Party will sack public servants. And that has been their record.

We only have to look at what they did when the budget was in surplus. In this last term they inherited a massive surplus; yet we still saw them sacking public servants. And we saw the cheerleaders from the Labor Party in the ACT. When they sacked people from the NCA, who was cheering the loudest? The chief cheerleaders. We had Senator Kate Lundy, we had Andrew Barr, we had the Chief Minister cheering the loudest. They were cheering for the job cuts. This was not natural attrition. These were sackings. These were sackings done in good fiscal times. They had inherited a \$20 billion surplus and they still felt the need to sack public servants. That is their record.

So what are they going to do if they come back in, with the massive deficit that they have racked up, with the extra election bribes to get Maxine McKew and others re-elected? It is interesting that we have not seen anything like that in the ACT. I wonder what Gai Brodtkmann would have to say about the fact that Maxine McKew gets a \$2.1 billion rail link. But of course it may never be delivered. But it is

a \$2.1 billion promise for a rail link. What do we get in the ACT? Did we get Majura funded? No, we did not. Did we get even the promise that they have for Constitution Avenue? No, we did not. We have seen them renege on the promises.

We can go through where they have made the actual sackings in good fiscal times. They inherited good fiscal times and they still felt the need to sack. How are they going to go when they come back with their—what is the deficit this year, federally?—\$40 billion deficit, which will be largely as a result of all of the promises they are making around marginal seats, best exemplified by the \$2.1 billion for one seat?

If you are going to spend \$2.1 billion to get one member re-elected in Sydney, who is going to pay? Who is going to pay for that? Who is going to pay to get the budget back into surplus? I guarantee it: under Labor, it will be the ACT. Have they shown any regard for the people of the ACT? Have they shown that they want to help us fund our infrastructure? No. I think I heard the Labor candidate on the radio today saying there have been hundreds of millions for road infrastructure in the ACT from the commonwealth. Where? Where are those hundreds of millions from the commonwealth? They have ignored Canberra.

Again, they have ignored Canberra. They take it for granted. They think they own the place and they shift the money to the marginal seats, the pork barrels in marginal seats—\$2.1 billion for one seat. We can only imagine what is going on and what the total bill will be. We can only imagine what the total bill will be.

We go back a couple of years to a time when federal Labor came in, with an inherited \$20 billion surplus; yet they were still looking to make cuts. Their first instinct was to come in and make cuts. And who cheered them on the loudest here? Jon Stanhope. He said, “The reason it has done so is the inflation bogy.” Before the first federal Labor budget in the last term, Jon Stanhope said, “Yes, you should be cutting these institutions. You should be cutting the public service because of the inflation bogy,” the non-existent inflation bogy. It was not there.

They manufactured a reason. They had a \$20 billion surplus that they had inherited and they still felt the need to make cuts. That is the record of Labor federally. And the record of ACT Labor is to cheer them on. No matter what, they will cheer them on. They will pretend that they care about Canberra but if it is a Labor government they will simply accept whatever rubbish is put up. And the inflation bogy was one of the most embarrassing economic arguments ever put forward by a federal government. It simply did not exist.

There is no doubt that we had a well-managed economy under the coalition. And if we look at what they inherited, they inherited, I think, an unemployment rate in the ACT of about 2½ per cent. That is where it was when the coalition left office. It underlines the point: if you manage the economy well, in the end the whole nation prospers, including the ACT. And that is what we saw. I defy anyone—I defy any of the Labor members or the Green members—to get up and say that, for the vast majority of the Howard government, the ACT did not do well.

How was the ACT doing in the years 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005? How was the unemployment rate tracking? How was growth in the ACT? It was booming under a commonwealth government that was investing. But it was investing on the back of sustainable economic management. The reality is that that has been blown out of the water. The reality is that three years of Labor have turned a \$20 billion surplus into a \$57 billion deficit.

How are you going to do that, when you splash money around marginal seats, on marginal seat bribes, in an election and you say you are going to get the budget back into surplus? I have not heard Kate Lundy rule out sacking public servants. I have not heard Julia Gillard rule out sacking public servants. They will sack public servants. There will not be any other way.

When you spend so much money in other places and you say you are going to get the budget back into surplus, there are two ways you can go. You can find the savings elsewhere, that is, in Canberra, or you can raise taxes. And no doubt there will be a good mix of both. There will be a good mix of both under the Labor Party.

But we need to address the lies. And it does go to this claim of the Greens that they can somehow be a third force and a voice of reason. They have aligned themselves with the Labor Party on this. They have been silent on the billions in savings that the Labor Party has said they will find. The Labor Party has not actually said where they are going to find those savings in Canberra.

The IT industry will be decimated through their policies. They are going to pull money out of that fund. What is that going to mean for both public and private sector operators in the IT industry? They are already losing their jobs. But we have heard silence on that, absolute silence.

It goes to integrity. Only one party has said the deficit is so large that we will make savings but what we will do is: we will guarantee that no-one is forced out of their job. And I guarantee you this: if the coalition comes in and makes the savings and stimulates the economy, as it always does, and gets the budget back into surplus, the ACT will see growth in the public service, as we did last time. We will see growth in our economy. We will see the unemployment rate in the ACT going down. That was the legacy last time. That was the legacy in 2006 and 2007.

The Chief Minister, who joined us at a time when the ACT was doing so well, not only cheered on Kevin Rudd for coming in with his meataxe but said that he had to do it; he had to start swinging the meataxe. He was encouraging him to do more. He was encouraging him to cut more because of the apparent inflation bogy, the manufactured inflation bogy. But people will remember this.

What the Labor Party will not be able to escape is that Julia Gillard is not guaranteeing that she will not cut jobs in the public service. And I would ask members of the press gallery to put that question to Ms Gillard, to put that question to Senator Kate Lundy, to put that question to the Labor candidates for the seats of Canberra and Fraser. Put that question. How are they going to pay for the \$2.1 billion bribe to get

Maxine McKew re-elected? Who is going to pay for that? I expect that Canberrans will pay for that. Canberrans will pay for that through higher taxes. Canberrans will pay for that through the loss of jobs, as they desperately seek savings. And we have seen it.

They were going to reduce the efficiency dividend. They are going to keep it. We have been told time and time again—we used to get told by Kate Lundy—that that efficiency dividend meant job cuts. We have not seen any evidence that they are able to actually manage efficiently. Presumably it will mean job cuts. Presumably it will. But only one party has guaranteed that public servants in the ACT will not be sacked. Only one party has guaranteed that.

The Labor Party's record, even in good fiscal times, was that they sacked public servants. Imagine what it will be like, having put the budget into serious deficit, having promised to bring it out in a couple of years, having splashed election bribes right around the country. We are not getting \$2.1 billion for a rail line in the ACT. Only marginal Labor seats get the \$2.1 billion.

But someone is going to pay. I guarantee it will be the people of the ACT who will pay for that if we see a re-elected Gillard-Rudd-Swan-Shorten government. Who knows who will be the Prime Minister? But we know that the people of the ACT will pay.

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Minister for Transport, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Land and Property Services, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and Minister for the Arts and Heritage) (10.34): I thank Ms Porter for the motion. It is a very important motion, particularly, of course, as we focus on the potential outcomes of the election on Saturday with the leader of the Liberal Party, Tony Abbott, unblinking in his promise to cut \$24 billion of general outlays from the commonwealth government. Although we believe there is quite a detailed analysis, not even the Liberal Party know how many jobs will be cut, but I think Mr Abbott himself has conceded that it will result in 12,000 in cuts over two years. He goes on to say, almost shamelessly: "Don't worry about it. It will be a 12,000 reduction through natural attrition."

We have just seen some mighty attempts—feeble, certainly, in content but loud in message—around the Liberal Party's role in the 1996 slashing of the public sector. I think there may already have been some attention drawn to Mr Smyth's significant role as a member of the Howard party room in 1996—

Mr Smyth: What did your boss say in 1996?

Mr Seselja: Why did you get sacked in 1996? I mean, normally it's just departmental heads that are sacked for political reasons.

MR STANHOPE: Actually, I wear it as a badge of honour that I was singled out by John Howard as somebody that would actually be deemed excess to requirements. There is probably an interesting story there, that those of us that were invited not to return to work—I think there were nine of us—

Mr Hanson: Incompetence, political thuggery, bias.

MR STANHOPE: There were nine of us, I understand, that actually were overlooked in the then claim—the sorts of claims similar to those being made now—“It will just be natural attrition. There will be no forced redundancies.” In fact, there were a few.

Mr Hanson: Maybe they saw special characteristics. You’re unique.

MR STANHOPE: I think it was just that I was far too successful in my role as chief of staff to a very successful Labor minister and—

Mr Hanson: Why did you get dumped then? If you were so successful, why did you get kicked out?

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Hanson!

Mr Seselja: Why was that?

MR STANHOPE: Well, I think the question for today is: why was Brendan Smyth, the then member for Canberra, the only sitting member of the Liberal Party of Australia to lose his seat in the 1996 election? It was because he was the sitting member, the person that the people of Canberra looked to to stand up for them in the face of a very deliberate promise by his then leader to do precisely what Tony Abbott has now promised to repeat—to slash and burn the commonwealth public service, to affect jobs in Canberra, to affect the economy, to send the ACT into recession, to reduce the price of houses, and to force people to leave the territory in search of work and another life.

Brendan Smyth was a part of that decision in 1996, and the people of Canberra looked at his role and his complicity and his weakness and his refusal to stand up for them. The people of Canberra today need to have exactly the same view of and regard for the current member of the Liberal Party in the party room. As Mr Smyth was in 1996, Gary Humphries, in 2010, was the member of the Liberal Party in the party room at the time when Tony Abbott decided to put the cleaners through 12,000 jobs. Who was there as part of that decision that will create a \$24 million reduction in expenditure, enormous damage to our economy and a massive impact on jobs? Senator Gary Humphries, senator for the ACT. Gary Humphries is a part of a decision in relation to a fundamental promise being made by Tony Abbott and the Liberal Party to slash ACT levels of employment with, of course, the resultant effect and impact that it will have on this economy—on jobs, on families, on the standard and quality of living and life here in the ACT.

We cannot overstate just how important the commonwealth public service sector is to the ACT economy, but we often do. The commonwealth public service accounts for just around half of all employment in the ACT. That is how significant it is, and that is just how damaging this decision by the Liberal Party will be. Importantly, it is not just half of employment levels in the ACT; it is also half of our state final demand.

That is how important the commonwealth public sector is to this economy. Half of our state final demand is generated by the commonwealth public service. Of course, that reflects the fact that we are the seat of the federal government, the national capital.

This motion, appropriately moved by Ms Porter today, provides this opportunity in the lead-up to Saturday to highlight the territory's strong economic performance over the years, which is, of course, as we acknowledge, a consequence of the role which the commonwealth plays. We saw just now almost hysterical efforts and attempts—and I heard them yesterday from Mr Smyth—by the Liberal Party to actually categorise the current Labor government as a government that has reduced or slashed jobs. There has been an evening out of jobs across departments.

Mr Smyth: Oh, it's an evening out!

MR STANHOPE: Absolutely. There has been an evening out across agencies, but there has been an overall significant increase in federal government jobs within the commonwealth public service. Indeed—

Mr Smyth: So you've forgotten your own words?

MR STANHOPE: No, I have not. I have not forgotten at all.

Mr Smyth: "It wasn't as bad as we thought it would be."

MR STANHOPE: Well, it is far better than we expected. It is massively different from the false picture that both you and the Leader of the Opposition have painted over the last day or so. Total employment, average staffing levels, for all federal government sector agencies in 2007-08 when Labor came into government was 248,217. The budgeted ASL for this financial year for the federal government—in other words, its public service, its workforce—is 258,704, an increase of 10,487 during the period of Labor government. Is that consistent with what Mr Seselja and Mr Smyth have been saying? No, it is not. They have been gilding the lily. They have not been telling the truth. The fact is that, over the last three years, there has been an increase of 10,487 commonwealth public servants. But, of course, that increase is set to be completely removed by the Liberal Party.

So there you have it. The Labor Party over the last three years has increased commonwealth employment by 10,487, contrary to everything that Mr Seselja and Mr Smyth have been saying. They have been hysterically seeking to justify the cut, but every single one of the jobs that has been created under Labor over the last three year in the commonwealth public service is about to be wiped out by the Liberal Party, plus an extra couple of thousand. Those are the raw figures, so do not listen to this nonsense. Do not listen to the fibs and the gilding and the hysteria around—

Mr Seselja: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the Chief Minister does tend to verbal and mislead often, but he cannot go around saying that we have fibbed. We had this debate in the chamber yesterday, and I ask you to get him to withdraw those words.

MR STANHOPE: I withdraw those words, but I draw the attention of anybody with any interest to the statements made yesterday and today by the Leader of the

Opposition and Mr Smyth. I refer them to the commonwealth budget papers and the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and they can draw their own conclusion around which set of numbers they choose to believe. We have one particular version of facts and numbers being put by Mr Smyth and Mr Seselja, and then we actually have the facts and the truth.

Mr Smyth took great pleasure yesterday in a question, I think it was, in detailing cuts, but this is my point about evening out across agencies—he did not, as he would not, mention any of the increases that were included in exactly the same budget. He actually listed a whole range of cuts, but he did not then go on to say: “But, by the way, there was an increase in staff in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. There was an increase in the Attorney-General’s Department. There was an increase in the Australian Crime Commission. There was an increase in the Australian Customs Service—all in the ACT. There was an increase in the Australian Federal Police. There was an increase in the environment department. There was an increase in the climate change department.” He did not bother—

Mr Smyth: All in the ACT?

MR STANHOPE: Yes. He did not bother to mention, as he listed with great hilarity departments that had lost numbers, all those that actually had an increase in public servants—the departments that I have just mentioned. Yes, Mr Smyth, the numbers evened out and, at the end of the day, in each of those years there was a net increase in public servants in the ACT. There was more than an evening out; there was an increase. In the commonwealth public service across Australia, an increase of over 10,000—

Mr Smyth: I will read your words back to you.

MR STANHOPE: Well, you do that, and we will read back your list of cuts without you actually balancing it up, evening it out, by mentioning all of those agencies that increased the number of public servants, as I have just done to correct the mistakes that you made yesterday.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (10.44): The Greens will be supporting this motion today because there can be no doubt that a strong and stable public service is in the best interests of the ACT.

During yesterday’s debate on the matter of public importance, I outlined the particular impacts that a significant reduction in the number of public servant jobs will have on the ACT economy. A quality public service is important to every Australian, but, as I outlined yesterday, it is of particular importance to the ACT because our economy depends on it. We in the ACT depend on the public service for our livelihood. It is our biggest industry sector. I find it astounding that a party hoping to form the government of Australia on Saturday can actively promote a policy that it knows will have such a devastating impact on our economy. It really does highlight what a perilous position we are in.

The public service is an easy target. It is a shame that the service that the APS provides is not really recognised and that it is treated like this when it is seen as

politically expedient. It is the perennial scapegoat, tasked with a difficult job where the best outcomes largely go unnoticed by the general community, and is the subject of media attention only when things go wrong.

I spoke yesterday about how, unfortunately, the public service is used as a political football. The Greens recognise the value of the contribution made by many of the thousands of public servants across the ACT who work for the commonwealth or our own territory public service. Our community simply would not function if it was not for the executive that not only delivers the front-line services, but also contributes to policy development and provides the information that facilitates the governance of the country.

This is not to say that public servants must not be required to do their job efficiently and effectively. And public moneys must be spent in a manner that ensures the greatest return for taxpayers, which is, of course, the case. But the Greens would like to make sure that the community understands that we value the public service and the role that it plays in our community.

I would like to reiterate what I said yesterday about the economic impacts of large-scale public service job losses. Last time this occurred, we had a recession here in the ACT. Ms Porter pointed out how many people felt quite depressed: it had a great impact on their mental health and wellbeing. Mr Hanson thought that was very amusing; that is probably because Mr Hanson was not here in the ACT at the time to witness that particular impact on so many Canberra families. House prices fell by around 30 per cent, and that was a terrible time for families who had purchased a home, only to see the value of that home drop by 30 per cent while they were still struggling to pay their mortgage.

And let us not forget small business. When we cut 12,000 public sector jobs, it has a ripple effect. It ripples out into the economy, affecting thousands of small businesses. Most of these businesses are family-owned businesses. Here we have a Liberal Party that says it stands up for small business. Here we have a Liberal Party that says that it stands up for families. If there is one policy that is totally anti-family, it has to be this massive slashing of the commonwealth public service.

I think it is fair to say that everyone acknowledges that large public service job cuts are bad for the ACT. We know that Mr Humphries can do absolutely nothing, and the shadow treasurer, Joe Hockey, has told us this in no uncertain terms. At the Liberal Party local campaign launch on Sunday, he said:

... Gary—

Mr Humphries—

let me know his views in no uncertain terms about that, but we're being upfront with the Australian people and we're being upfront with Canberrans about what has to be done ...

And let us not forget Tony Abbott, speaking at the National Press Club yesterday. He said that he could not rule out further cuts. That is, job losses could be even greater

here in the ACT.

The Liberal Party—it might have been Mr Seselja—just said that I had not made any reference to the ALP and their position. I did. I did so yesterday in my speech, but I will say it again. I said that Ms Gillard has made reference to unpopular cutbacks, as well as some specific cutbacks for particular agencies, which also gives rise to a concern that neither the Labor nor Liberal parties really appreciate what the public service means to the ACT.

Mr Seselja: Why do you only focus on one then, Meredith? Is it because you are totally biased, do you think?

MS HUNTER: I just said—and I will say it again for Mr Seselja: he is obviously not listening; I need to say it again—that we have raised the issue around the Labor Party and the unpopular cutbacks that Ms Gillard has referenced. We have talked about those. We have raised those. Of course, this does not fit with your little narrative, does it, Mr Seselja? It is rather unfortunate that you just want to go on the attack rather than listening to what is being put here in the Assembly today. We are concerned about the potential cutbacks to particular agencies and where they might fall as well.

But what we do know—it is quite clearly out there—is that there is a very clear policy from the Liberals with around 12,000 job losses. It has been put out there quite clearly by the Liberal Party. What I am saying here today is that a vote for a Liberal candidate is a vote for the economic havoc they caused to Canberra back in 1996.

Yesterday I talked about the impact of the proposed public service job cuts. I think I should restate that in the context of this debate. Data is available that lists public service employment by electorate. Assuming 12,000 job losses and an even proportion of job losses around the country, this would amount to direct and indirect job losses of—I will list them—3,076 jobs in the electorate of Canberra and 2,652 jobs in the electorate of Fraser. And we live in a region. We know that there are many people who live in Yass, Murrumbateman and Queanbeyan who rely on employment here in the ACT. Not only is this going to affect and impact on the citizens of the ACT; it is going to impact on many of the people who live in our region. Let us go to the electorate of Eden-Monaro—536 job losses. And the electorate of Hume—227 job losses.

Mr Seselja: So the 30,000 is a lie.

Mr Smyth: So 30,000 was the big lie.

Mr Seselja: Lin Hatfield Dodds was lying.

MS HUNTER: These cuts amount to approximately an 80 per cent increase in the unemployment rate in the ACT—

Mr Hanson: You call Lin Hatfield Dodds a liar?

MR SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Seselja: She was lying; you are right.

MS HUNTER: I know you do not like to hear this—

Mr Hanson: And it is on the *Hansard*.

MS HUNTER: I know it is upsetting. That is because what you have is—

Mr Hanson: Beauty!

Mr Seselja: You just called Lin a liar.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Hanson: You disputed her figures.

MS HUNTER: your federal party basically—

Mr Hanson: No wonder Mr Rattenbury wants to shut that one down.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson! Members! Mr Seselja—

Mr Hanson: How embarrassing.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson! Members, Mr Seselja gave quite a contentious speech which he was not heckled through. I expect other members to be afforded a similar standard of behaviour. Is there anything else you would like to say, Mr Hanson?

Mr Hanson: No, thank you, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you. Ms Hunter, you have the floor.

MS HUNTER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It does not surprise me that I am being heckled, because it is a very hard thing to sell out there for this election this Saturday. It is very hard to sell to the people of Canberra that there will be massive job losses which will impact on many families. It is very hard to sell. This is one anti-family policy—I would say it is the major one—that is out there in this election campaign at the moment.

We know we are a small and vulnerable economy and we depend on the economic activity generated from public service jobs. Without them we will quite possibly face another recession, as was the case the last time the public service was cut so heavily.

As I said, we must recognise where we are today and what drives our economy now—that is, commonwealth expenditure. Such a reduction in the territory expenditure as is being proposed is reprehensible. The Canberra bashing by the Liberal Party really needs to be called what it is—Canberra bashing.

I would like to mention something from the ABC news website from 21 May this year. It said:

All three parties in the ACT Legislative Assembly are lining up to criticise Federal Opposition leader Tony Abbott over his plans to prune the public service.

And it quoted Mr Seselja. Let us go to the quotes from Mr Seselja. It said:

Liberal Party Leader Mr Seselja has sent a letter to Tony Abbott and Prime Minister Kevin Rudd urging them to stop “Canberra bashing”.

He says Mr Rudd treats Canberra with contempt and Mr Abbott is wrong to propose public service cuts.

“They shouldn’t use the ACT as a whipping boy for Federal politics,” he said.

Let us just go over that again. The Leader of the Opposition, Mr Seselja, said that Kevin Rudd and Tony Abbott should not be going about doing Canberra bashing. He said that Mr Rudd treats us with contempt but—let us be clear here—“Mr Abbott is wrong”. He said:

... Mr Abbott is wrong to propose public service cuts.

He said that the ACT should not be used as a whipping boy by the federal parties. Let us go back there. Is Mr Seselja still standing by that? He wrote to Mr Abbott to say: “Please don’t go through with these cuts. Don’t go through with these cuts because we know the massive impact it will have on the ACT.”

As we have heard from the Chief Minister, we know that Mr Smyth has a very good understanding of the 1996 cuts and the massive impact they had on the ACT. I would like to know where Mr Seselja and the Liberal Party are now standing on this issue. Are they still imploring Mr Abbott to not go ahead with these massive public sector cuts? Is that Mr Seselja’s stance today? Or has he changed his mind on that since 21 May? And if he does still stand by it, what has he been saying to Mr Humphries? Has he been urging Mr Humphries to do a little bit better than he has been doing to date? As I said earlier, Mr Hockey has just said: “Well, face up to it. This is the way it has to go.” And yesterday Mr Abbott was saying, “This could just be the beginning.”

What we actually need is better representation at the commonwealth level. We need someone who will argue for and actually influence what happens to the ACT. We know that Mr Humphries will not deliver that. Mr Hockey has told us, as I have just said again. The party he represents would subject the ACT to the same economic hardship we had back in 1996 and the years that followed. The Greens do not want that. A Greens senator for the ACT would prevent the coalition and Family First from having a majority in the Senate and ensure that such cuts could not occur.

As I said, the Greens are happy to support the motion. We agree that a strong and stable commonwealth public service is in the best interests of not only the ACT community but the Australian community.

Yesterday, as I said, I brought forward an MPI on the public service and the importance of public service employment to the ACT, to ACT families—the importance of them having employment to be able to purchase homes, feed and clothe their children and do all of the things that we want for a good life for our children: to have stable employment, to have certainty in employment. I put that forward.

I did have to leave early, and I do apologise for that. Early on Monday, I requested from the Chief Minister's office a briefing on the bridge collapse. This is a significant event in the ACT. We do need to ensure that there are investigations, and there are. There are investigations underway at the moment to find out what happened there. We have had 15 workers injured—nine who went to hospital and two who are still in hospital. This was a critical incident, a significant incident that happened over the weekend, which is why I contacted the Chief Minister's office to request a briefing. I did that on Monday. That briefing was set up for 4.30 yesterday, and it was important that I attended. In no way should anyone take from that that I did not think that the matter of public importance was important: it was; we know how critical it is. It was an unfortunate clash of timetables where I did need to attend that incredibly important briefing that was also attended by my colleague Caroline Le Couteur and three members of the Liberal Party. (*Time expired.*)

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (11.00): All is now revealed for us—the true agenda of the Greens. You can make the big lie, you can use the big numbers and you can put things out there that are not true just to attack the Liberal Party. We have just heard from Ms Hunter about how dreadful it will be when these proposed jobs that will go through natural attrition are lost to the ACT, but we never heard a word from the Greens when the Gillard-Rudd government was cutting the ACT—not a word, nary a word. It is that level of hypocrisy, that the people of the ACT are very good at smelling out, that will not stand the Greens in good stead.

We have got the big lie now: 30,000 jobs are going. We have got a report. But Ms Hunter just said that the proposed job losses in Canberra will be 3,076 and in Fraser 2,700. That is not 30,000 jobs. Even if you double that and make it 12,000, that is not 30,000 jobs. So Lin Hatfield Dodds is out there, having lost 18,000 jobs. These are not our numbers. These, I understand, are from the Australia Institute. Somebody said Lin Hatfield Dodds is attached to the board of the Australia Institute.

So you have got the big lie. If you put it in your ads and your press releases and say it often enough, you will believe it; you convince yourself that you are right. What you are after is not the wellbeing of the people of the ACT. What you are after is control of the Senate and the Greens agenda that will lead to increased costs for Canberra families. We have just had it from Ms Hunter. She will not tell you who will pay for all these policies. She will not tell you who will pay off the debt. She will not tell you who will pay off the deficit, but she will tell you that there are 30,000 jobs going.

There are not 30,000 jobs going. By her own numbers, she has just exposed Lin Hatfield Dodds in her own party for what can only be called the crassest example of hypocrisy that we have seen in this campaign—30,000 jobs. It is the big lie. You say it often enough and people will believe it. What the Leader of the Opposition has

said is that jobs will go through natural attrition; they will not be replaced. That is what he said.

We have got to go back to what Mr Stanhope said. Mr Stanhope is good at beating his chest and casting his memory of what happened in 1996, but of course in 1996 what the Liberal Party found when they came to office was not what they were told would be there. They were told that the economic picture of the Australian economy was far rosier. When they got there they found \$100 billion worth of debt. They found the deficit and it had to be fixed.

We have the same situation here and now. If you look at some of the key statistics on the state of Labor's deficit, in 2010-11 there will be \$80 billion worth of debt. In 2011-12, the level of gross debt will be \$209 billion. For 2010-11, the underlying cash deficit will be \$41 billion. Somebody has to pay for that and it will be the taxpayer of Australia and, in particular, the taxpayers of the ACT.

We have got the hypocrisy of the Greens and we have got the blindness of the Labor Party. You have to ask: where were Senator Lundy, Mr McMullan and Ms Ellis when the Labor Party cuts were going ahead? They were nowhere to be found. The chief cheerleader from the ACT government, Andrew Barr, said it would actually be good for tourism to have these cuts because the travelling exhibitions would stop and therefore people would have to come to Canberra to see the exhibitions. Not even Kate Lundy tried to defend that. She said that was the most incredible piece of spin she had ever heard and she could not defend the case. She did not, but she voted for them. She voted for them, as did Annette Ellis and Bob McMullan. They voted for the cuts.

The cuts have been outlined. I have read them out and I will read them out again. More importantly, I might read out the comment by the Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, who did not stand in the way of these cuts, who did not make a fuss, who did nothing. This is Jon Stanhope's quote: "We've come out of it far better than we were led to believe we would. I don't believe the stringencies here in the ACT are nearly as tough as some of the rhetoric we faced in the lead-up to the delivery of this budget." In other words: "It's okay. It wasn't as bad as I thought it might be." Guess what, ACT taxpayer, you are going to pick up the slack. We have got this amazing press release: "ACT gears up to welcome workers affected by possible cuts to federal public service". What have we got as a consequence of their mismanagement? Years and years of deficits.

At the end of the day, somebody has to pay. Somebody has to pay the debt and the deficits that Labor, both federally and in the ACT, create. Look at what the Labor Party are proposing. According to the current election campaign, they are going to strip \$840 million from budgets for administration and information technology. There will be a \$450 million cut to IT spending, breaking a promise to make this spending to this industry, and \$300 million of cuts to administrative functions across the bureaucracy.

That will have a substantial adverse effect on the ACT. But we do not hear the Chief Minister railing against his federal colleagues in that regard. Where was the

Chief Minister? Indeed, where are the Greens on this? I have got a copy of the *CityNews*. Look at this: “Lin Hatfield-Dodds, ACT Senate Candidate, ACT Australian of the Year 2008”. What does it say? “What kind of Canberran would axe 12,000 jobs from the public service”? There you go—12,000 jobs. But we have just heard from the parliamentary convenor here that it is not 12,000. So the big lie. Yet again, we have the big lie from the Greens. The Greens will say anything they can to get the balance of power in the Senate to put in place their anti-family, inflationary policies that everybody will have to pay for.

That is the problem with this debate. The lack of honesty from those opposite is just amazing in this regard. We have got the chief cheerleader for the cuts, Andrew Barr. We have got the Chief Minister, who forgets what he did. It is interesting that Mr Stanhope actually worked for Mr Beazley when Mr Beazley was caught out in Orange, I think. He was asked where should certain things go and he said his preference was that things did not go to Canberra. I did not hear of Jon Stanhope’s resignation at that comment. I did not hear of Jon Stanhope standing up.

What did Jon Stanhope say in the minister’s office in those days? We have not heard a word about that. Did Jon Stanhope stand up for Canberra when Infrastructure Australia did not come to the ACT, when Climate Change was going to go to Melbourne and when national broadband network went to Sydney? Oh no. Where was Jon Stanhope when the tax office, under Kevin Rudd, sent jobs out of the territory? He was mute, silent, because that is the sort of person he is. We have said to Tony Abbott that we do not want these cuts, that we do not like these cuts.

The motion is about a strong public service. You only have to talk to people in the public service to know that they have not appreciated the Rudd-Gillard treatment of public servants with brief after brief, written and rewritten, sent up and ignored, blocked in the myriad of corridors that the Labor Party had filled with staffers who were not up to the job.

We have heard the disgraceful story of the Chief of the Defence Force who was made to sit like some errant schoolboy in the foyer of the Prime Minister’s office for hours on hours, while Australian troops were overseas, at the whim of a prime minister—who was eventually dismissed—because he did not have time to talk to him.

I was at a function a couple of weeks ago when a journalist told the story of being invited to one of Kevin Rudd’s regular meetings with journalists for lunch or dinner at the Lodge. When they went in at about seven o’clock there were four or five public servants with their folders and briefcases waiting to talk to the Prime Minister. When they left after 11 o’clock those public servants were still sitting there waiting to talk to the Prime Minister. It is that arrogance that Labor in government is so special at, dutifully assisted by the Greens, the lackey of the Labor Party, that is upsetting people in the ACT.

If you do not think there are cuts going on, go and talk to people in the departments. There are cuts going on surreptitiously in the departments now. But no, we do not hear the Greens standing up for those people. We do not hear the Labor Party saying, “Stop it, stop it.” No, no, no. I read the numbers out yesterday. If you add up the

numbers in the list that I read out yesterday it is about 4,000 jobs. That was what was proposed in the 2008-09 budget. Did we hear anything from ACT Labor or the ACT Greens saying, “Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard, stop this”? No, we did not.

You are known for your consistency. You are known for what you say. We see the ad where the Liberals will take an axe to Canberra. Here is Lin Hatfield Dodds: “What kind of Canberran would axe 12,000 jobs from the public service? The Liberals will take an axe to Canberra.” It is just wrong and she has been debunked by her own parliamentary convenor, whose numbers add up to about 6,000 jobs in the ACT. Who knows if they are accurate? Four or five-year-old reports from South Australia with multiplier effects—gee, that is a good basis for a decision on these numbers! It is sheer hypocrisy. (*Time expired.*)

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella) (11.10): I thought that was a very interesting speech. One of the things I like about his speeches is the way that he can provide a whole heap of data, a whole stack of numbers, page numbers and paragraph numbers—all of these numbers—and list them so quickly that we have to go back to *Hansard* to verify them. But then he will slide a little one in, like a worm through the belly of a goose, and it goes like this—this is the one he slid through—“and there are cuts going on surreptitiously in departments now”. After having got up in the chamber yesterday and listed a whole tribe full of them, I do not reckon that is surreptitious. You have got to back it up, Brendan. If you really want us to take you seriously and have you go down as the number cruncher of all time, you need to back it up. You cannot say things like “cuts are going on surreptitiously in departments now”. I am sorry, that just does not cut it for me.

The substance of what I wish to talk about today is a subject that I have been talking about and trying to get some action on since 1995 maybe. That is what we call the economic food chain. Tuggeranong is particularly susceptible to the vagaries of an economic food chain. I am not an economist, but I know in my instinct what the issue is. The food chain depends on somebody spending money. In Tuggeranong, there is the most significant dependence on the public service pay packet. We know that in Canberra probably half the jobs are in the private sector and half the jobs are in the public sector. But we also know that half of those jobs, or maybe more, in the private sector are dependent upon—

Mr Smyth: It used to be the other way, John, under us.

MR HARGREAVES: Half and half—I am not going to argue about one or two percentages. The most salient issue is that a significant number of private sector jobs—I would suggest greater than half—are dependent upon the public service pay packet. These are the jobs in the retail industry, petrol stations, cafes, microbusiness and a lot of ordinary small business, contractors, recruitment firms and the like. They are totally dependent on the health of the public service and, in particular, the commonwealth public service. We do not have a sufficient alternative to that economic food chain in the Tuggeranong Valley.

We saw no greater proof of the danger of that dependence than what happened in 1996. I worked in the ACT department of education in Manning Clark House, right in

the middle of the Tuggeranong town centre. I can tell you that it devastated the Tuggeranong Valley when there were supposedly 7,000 jobs lost across Canberra and 4,000 of them came out of Tuggeranong in 1996. That is because the social service, social security, Centrelink—call them what you like this week—had their headquarters down there, and a few other commonwealth departments.

The loss of those 4,000 jobs had a trickle-down effect. Years ago I read, and I stand to be corrected on the actual numbers—the scale of them is really the message I am trying to get through—that for every public sector job there are four private sector jobs. The private sector jobs are either in the community sector or the private sector itself, or in microbusiness. The loss of 4,000 jobs means the loss of 16,000 jobs. What chance do we have of fulfilling the vision that in places in Tuggeranong people can be born, educated, work, have their recreation and die in the comfort of the most beautiful place on earth? What chance have we got if we do not have jobs for the kids to go into? We do not.

Mr Hanson: Oh!

MR HARGREAVES: I hear an exasperated “Oh” from Mr Hanson. Sometimes I wonder about his commitment to young people. I do not think it is there. I know that he would like to bring back conscription so that we could stick them all in the Army. Well, I have been there and it ain’t on. What we really need to be aware of is that this is a back to the future thing. This is *Groundhog Day*. I can remember walking to the Tuggeranong town square, the Hyperdome and Homeworld and seeing shop after shop with “to let” signs on them, cafes out of business and hairdressers out of business. I do not want to see that again.

In fact, it was a major tenet of the campaign in 1996 to give the seat of Namadgi to Annette Ellis. What did we see? Who was the member there? The member for Canberra, in fact, had the seat split, and then Mr Smyth contested Namadgi. There was about a 20 per cent swing against him. It was not only about a 20 per cent swing against Brendan Smyth; it was also about the Liberals’ intention to cut jobs, particularly out at Tuggeranong.

Contrast that with what the Labor government have done in the last couple of years. These guys cut 4,000 jobs out of the public sector and another 12,000 to 16,000 jobs out of the private sector, the community sector. The stimulus package, on the other hand, was to keep apprentices going, keep the economic food chain and keep the dollars trickling down that chain to make sure that we would not be sent into recession, because that is where we were in 1996 in the Tuggeranong Valley—we were in recession. What happens is that when times are good the community sector, for example, looks after those people who are very badly off, but in a recession the community sector looks after the rest of us—all of us.

I also wanted to talk about this abject nonsense of natural attrition. Sure, there will not be any involuntary redundancies. You can trust them, of course, that that will not happen; we know that. AWAs might come back, but involuntary redundancies will not. It will only be by natural attrition. Natural attrition means that you do not fill a job when it is empty. I tell you what: in the public sector people are going to be so

scared they are not going anywhere. People will stay on because they are too scared not to.

So who bears the brunt of it? It is those people on short-term contracts, the microbusinesses that are actually providing someone with work for three months or six months. There are people in this chamber who have family members who are contractors to the public service. They will lose. They will be the first to go. We cannot afford those people to go; we just cannot afford it.

Every one of them belongs to a family. Every one of them has to pay rent. Every one of them has to pay a mortgage. Every one of them has to eat. I can remember the despair that was around in 1996. It motivated me to run in 1998 and it motivated Annette Ellis to run in 1996—to stop it. But we could not. It went into a rebuild and we are now back.

We have seen so much Canberra bashing over the years by a bunch of tourists who come to this place, pitch their tent, abuse the hell out of the place and go home again. They irritate me. Mr Smyth says, “Where were you when they were bashing people?” I can tell you where I was: I was standing up and abusing them back. The worst kind of Canberra bashing that people can visit upon this place is to send it into a recession. We have to look into the eyes of our kids and say: “Well, you know, I would like the world better for you than I inherited it, and we can’t deliver that, sorry. We can’t have the comfort of a public service job for a decade to give some training in the real world. No, forget it. The best thing you can do is try and get a job outside town.”

We also have a regional responsibility. Where are the guys from around the area and the rural properties going to go? I can tell you where they are going to go: they are going to go to the bigger cities, and they are not going to make it there either.

Now is the time for this chamber to be united and reject this notion of an impending recession. Now is the time for us all to stand up and say that the future of our kids is more important than political expediency. Tony Abbott standing up there and saying, “Pick me, pick me, because I will rip the guts out of Canberra,” should not be acceptable to any of us in this chamber. Writing a letter to Tony Abbott is not good enough; it is just not good enough. We should be united. We should be passing this motion unanimously today and getting on with it.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (11.20): I wanted to start by talking about some of the numbers. The motion today is about the impact on the public service and the ACT economy if the proposed cuts to the public service go through. Mr Smyth stood up before and gave us a speech that was all about numbers. He did some rather interesting conflating of numbers and attempted to attribute certain things to certain people, particularly my friend from the Greens Lin Hatfield Dodds. We can hope it was accidental that he distorted the story so badly, because I would hate to think that he had some other motivation.

Mr Smyth talked about a number of different figures, and he tried to say that somehow Lin was responsible for all of them. He talked about 30,000. Well, that comes from an ACTU report, and I think it is important to put that on the record. The

ACTU last week released a report in which they had people do work for them, and they sought to project the numbers out of what the flow-on effects might be as a result of the cuts of 12,000 public servants. Mr Smyth seemed to suggest that that was something Ms Hatfield Dodds had made up, and it was unfortunate that he did that.

He then went on to try and conflate that with the Australia Institute figures. The Australia Institute have done an interesting report this week in which they have sat down and tried to work out the impact of these 12,000 public service job cuts across a number of electorates, to come up with some sort of geographic impact. That was an Australia Institute report, and that was the one Ms Hunter quoted.

What comes out of all of this is that nobody actually knows what the numbers are, because we do not know how many jobs it is going to be and where they are going to be. We have got all sorts of things hanging around. For Mr Smyth to try and somehow smear various of my colleagues particularly who are simply reflecting on some of those numbers that are in the public discourse was unfortunate at best. The real question is: how many jobs is it in Canberra? We have this line being run that somehow it is not going to be so bad in the ACT. That is interesting because we cannot get a straight answer from anybody, particularly Senator Humphries, as to how many jobs it will be in Canberra.

When you start talking about numbers, one of the parts of the policy is that front-line staff will be exempted. When you sit down and start to think about that and analyse it, you think: "Well, hang on a second. That probably will result in a disproportionately negative impact on Canberra." How did I draw that conclusion? I have not done any modelling, but basic common sense tells us that most front-line staff are outside the ACT. The front-line and uniform staff are the sort of people in the Customs Service and the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service, for example. They are the kind of public servants we are talking about here. They are the front-line public servants, and most of them are not in Canberra; they are out in the states. If they are exempted, that means there has to be a disproportionate impact on the ACT.

What is implicit there is that the policy staff, the staff who do the hard thinking on how to design programs, how to roll them out, how to make them happen and how to feed them out to the regions, are largely in the ACT. That is certainly what staff here in the ACT tend to predominantly do, as a broad generalisation. So the exemption of the front-line staff intuitively tells us that there will be a disproportionate impact on the ACT.

I think the numbers remain unclear. In the context of Ms Porter's motion about what the impact will be on the ACT economy, that is of particular concern. It is an area where the ACT should be nervous, because the importance of a strong and stable commonwealth public service to the ACT is undoubted. I think all members have acknowledged that here today, and it is certainly something the Greens are very concerned about. We are aware of the potential impacts of significant cuts to the public service. I would like to dwell for a moment on a couple of those potential impacts that are of particular interest to me, aside from the broader ones.

The first is one I touched on briefly in the debate yesterday afternoon—that is, the impact on graduate recruitment. A public service job freeze will mean that there will

be no new recruitment; there will be no opportunities for people to come in. I presume that is what a freeze means. Perhaps I am misunderstanding the policy, but presumably that is what it means. That means that there will no new graduate positions. Think about that impact on Canberra families and all those young people who are currently working their way through our universities around town, thinking that the public service is a place they would like to work, a place where they can help serve Australia as well as find themselves a good job with good opportunities.

For the next couple of years, those graduates will not have those opportunities. What impact is that going to have on Canberra families? That means that some of those young people will have to leave Canberra. They will have to move away from their families, because the opportunities will not be here in the ACT. That is one potential impact on graduates. In addition to that, if we do not bring in graduates, are we renewing the public service in a way that we need to? Are we bringing in the brightest young people coming out of our universities into the public service? We want a solid public service; the public service delivers policy advice for government as well as the rollout of other services around the country, and we want our governments to have the best advisers working for them. I am particularly concerned about the impact on young people who are aspiring to work in the public service and the families of those young people who may have to see their offspring leave the ACT in search of a decent employment opportunity.

The other area of concern—it has been touched on in the debate this morning already—is the impact on small business. Several members have spoken about it already: we know the reliance that many small businesses in the ACT place on the work that comes to them from the federal public service. This debate has been going on for many years. For a long time we have talked about the need to diversify the economy in the ACT. I can remember Kate Carnell talking about this more than a decade ago. We have seen over time, to the ACT's benefit, an increasing proportion of the economy driven by the private sector, but the reality is that much of that still thrives around a strong and stable commonwealth public service.

The potential ripple effects of these sorts of cuts are perhaps challenging to exactly quantify, but, again, everybody in this place knows that they will take place. They will happen; they will have an ongoing effect and it will take Canberra a long time to recover from those. It will see us lose some of those gains we have perhaps made in the last decade or so as we seek to reduce our reliance around the public service.

In the context of having a clear picture of what the federal Liberal Party's proposals are for the public service, there was a very telling moment at the Liberal Party launch in Kingston on Sunday when Joe Hockey came along to cheer for the Liberal Party in the ACT. He stood up there and he said, "You know, Gary Humphries came along and told me that this was going to be really bad for Canberra, and Gary gave me a bit of a mouthful." Then he said, "But, frankly, we're going to do it anyway." To me, that underlined the simple ineffectiveness of the current senator for the ACT for the Liberal Party. Gary can stand up all he likes and say: "I'm going to take this up to my party. I'm going to stand up for Canberra." But the bottom line is that he is an irrelevant backbencher in a party machine that is happy to use Canberra as a political football, because it suits them in marginal electorates to stand up and talk about, "Canberra this, Canberra that. Canberra is fat cats. It's this, it's that."

Gary Humphries does not make an iota of difference to the Liberal Party's willingness to use the ACT as a political football. That is the choice that Canberra voters face on Saturday. They can have a choice between an irrelevant Liberal Party backbencher or a Green frontbencher, who will be a part of the balance of power team in the Senate. That is what Joe Hockey's comments made very clear when he joined the Liberal Party launch on Sunday.

Back to Ms Porter's motion, I welcome the fact that Ms Porter brought it on today. I think it is important that we talk about the importance of the commonwealth public service to the ACT. I think members today have done a good job of outlining that, and I am glad there is an understanding across the chamber. I hope that understanding can be passed through to some of our federal colleagues, because we do see—I heard what Mr Smyth was saying before—on both sides of politics that Canberra bashing can be a sport. At the end of the day, the people who live and work here in Canberra are ordinary Australians. We do not have the good fortune of having marginal lower house seats—one day we might hopefully reach that point; certainly my colleagues and I are trying hard to make it that way. We do have the good fortune now of having a marginal seat in the Senate, and that is an improvement for the ACT; it puts us on the map and it means we can have a chance to be heard and to hopefully see an end to the Canberra bashing by the two old parties so that the ACT is not subjected to this in the future.

The Greens will be supporting Ms Porter's motion today. We thank her for bringing it on, and we hope that, no matter what the outcome is on Saturday, the public service continues to be valued by our federal government.

MS BURCH (Brindabella—Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Women) (11.30): I thank Ms Porter for bringing this motion to the Assembly. I think the majority of people here agree that it is, indeed, important that we here in the ACT respect the commonwealth public service, and we do share a concern at the possibility that there will be such severe job cuts to the federal public service. As others have mentioned, it is not just the 12,000 jobs that are at risk and will be cut; it is recognition of the multiplier effect for each public service job cut across the private sector, the small business sector and the community sector. So 12,000 is indeed a multiplier. We can have various views on what the number will be, but there is no doubt it is a multiplier in large proportions that will have a significant impact on our community.

Mr Hargreaves mentioned 4,000 jobs that were lost in Tuggeranong in 1996 and the effect that that had on the community. Indeed, in my work as a local member for Brindabella, I talk to many in the community, and they have spoken to me about their memories of the effects of 1996—the effect on the community sector where St Vincent de Paul and the Salvation Army had increased demand for services and support. There is anecdotal evidence that domestic violence and youth difficulties increased as families were devastated through these job losses in the public service, small businesses and the community sector. The impact is also felt in self-esteem, when people are no longer employed. We all understand the impact that that has, not

only on individuals but on their families as well. Mr Rattenbury and others mentioned the impact on small businesses because of that interconnection and the relationship between small business dependency and income from the federal public service.

There are a few dates that involve one of our members of the opposition. As has been said over the last couple of days, Mr Smyth was a federal member from 1995 to 1996. But it is interesting to note that between 1996 and 1998 he worked for Peter Reith and Amanda Vanstone as the small business adviser. To understand these time frames—1996 to 1998—that was the period when John Howard brought in these massive job cuts, with the impact being felt most predominantly in 1997. That is right smack in the middle of the time Mr Smyth was offering his advice for small business. So I do wonder what advice he offered up. What was his advice to Reith and Vanstone? What was his advice as the small business adviser? Was it to support small businesses? Here he is, a local member, seeing the devastation that is falling out in his community, and what was his advice? Was his advice to support and grow local business in the Tuggeranong Valley? It appears not. I will actually ask Mr Smyth: was your advice to grow or was your advice to slash and burn?

Mr Smyth: Go and read the report, if you know so much about what you think I think.

MS BURCH: Either way, the fact that you sat there, providing your words of wisdom that resulted in such devastation in the local community is something that is—

Mr Smyth: Your ignorance is devastating.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Hargreaves): Order, Mr Smyth! You were heard in silence.

MS BURCH: Well, I do not know if you wear that badge with honour or whether you still try and brush it off with snide comments, but it is interesting to me to know that Mr Smyth was the small business adviser who provided all the advice that saw such job cuts and negative impact for the area of Brindabella. We can relive 1996, but let us just understand that this is the same policy—there is over there the small business adviser who supported it then and supports it now. This policy has come back, and we know from history that this will increase the call on community assistance through loss of jobs and loss of income of the public service employees and their families themselves and in the small business and community sectors that benefit from those business connections.

Who will pay for this increase in community demand? Well, I think it is fairly clear who will pay for these increases as a result of job cuts—it will be the ACT community and taxpayers. There will be more demand on community sector services, more demand on our community support services and more demand on our Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services.

Currently, Tuggeranong business owners are concerned about their own businesses. Indeed, I attended a meeting with members of the Tuggeranong Community Council, with the Hyperdome, on the prompting of concerns from small traders in the area. Their concerns are about the ongoing sustainability of the Tuggeranong area in a

business sense. They are now waking up each and every day with their existing concerns and those members opposite are now threatening more job cuts. Their noses are just above water now. If we were to relive the experience of 1996 and 1997, I do not think there is one small trader in the Tuggeranong Hyperdome that would be saying: “Bring on this policy. This is a good thing to do. Let’s rip the heart out of the federal public service here in Tuggeranong and across the ACT.” If that happens, our small businesses will be nought, because those opposite have no sense of or concern for their sustainability.

The loss of jobs—this is the Liberal Party policy—will result in a decline in business, a decline in employment, a decline in opportunities for youth—Mr Rattenbury has mentioned the need for a vibrant graduate program within the federal public service—and, in short, it will be a decline in our community resilience and feel. It is a shame that those opposite consider that it is acceptable to watch over the burden and despair that this will bring to the ACT community. It is an absolute shame that they do not fight this tooth and nail, because the impact will be felt by each and every one of their neighbours, where their children go to school, where they buy their papers, where they buy their milk and bread and everything else. I do not support their position at all. I think it is flawed; it is almost anti Canberra. I thank Ms Porter for bringing this motion to the Assembly.

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (11.38), in reply: I thank members for their contribution to this debate. However, I thought it was interesting that more than two opposition members were not in the chamber. In just three days time our nation will go to the ballot box to elect a federal government, and the outcome of this election will have direct consequences on the people of Canberra.

Mr Smyth: But there is only one Labor member in the chamber. Where are the rest of the ministers?

Mr Seselja: Where are all your friends, Mary?

Mr Smyth: Where is Jon? Where is Katy? Where is Andrew? Where is Simon?

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Hargreaves): Order, members! You guys are outnumbered.

Mr Smyth: Apparently not.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Apparently so.

Mr Smyth: Apparently not.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Count.

MS PORTER: In my speech, I referred to how each one of the proposed 12,000 job cuts will affect Canberrans and their families. As these inevitable job cuts occur, the fear that will run through the public service will bring down productivity. Conversations held in workplaces will revolve around one question: who will be next?

I recall this happening very clearly last time, when the insecurity was palpable and the guilt by those still with their jobs was very real. This level of insecurity will not only touch the wellbeing of our community, it will drastically affect our economy. There is no doubt about it.

On the issue of our economy, these job cuts will also strangle the private sector, as we have just heard from Ms Burch. The economic food chain of the ACT, as you said, Mr Assistant Speaker, works from the public service down, and this multiplier effect, as you said, illustrates the great reliance that our economy has on the public sector. The ratio of public sector job cuts to private sector job losses is one to four. And many of those 12,000 lives I have previously talked about will be touched. The public sector is critical to the economy of the ACT, and all of us know that.

As you said this morning, Mr Assistant Speaker, the last time the Liberals cut the public service back in the 1990s, it had a devastating effect in Tuggeranong. How will Mr Smyth feel, walking down the road in his electorate in the months that follow an improbable Liberal victory, seeing small businesses close? How will Mr Doszpot feel?

I spoke of the effect these public sector job losses will have on the provision of healthcare in the ACT. Mr Hanson is not here to hear me reiterate these points but I would like to. Mr Abbott neglected health, as we all know, when he was the health minister. He stripped back funding and, given the chance, he will do it again in a flash. We are on the cusp of achieving historic national health reforms as we complete the first stage of an historic agreement on how to better fund and manage the growing health needs across the country.

Through the strength of the federal Labor government and its dedicated public service, the ACT has already made great gains, in the form of a new walk-in centre, extra subacute care, new operating theatres and extra elective surgery procedures. That is what has already been delivered through our strong commonwealth public service and our focused federal Labor government. And if the Labor government is returned federally, we will see a GP superclinic established in the ACT.

If Tony Abbott had his way, all of this would never have happened and these health reforms that we are eagerly awaiting would not even be given a chance to achieve what we know they can achieve. Mr Abbott will undo and undermine our health reforms, and the public service job cuts will do the rest.

I repeat: we must never forget the then health minister, Mr Abbott, cut \$1 billion from public hospitals, enough to fund more than 1,000 beds, and froze GP training numbers. The Liberals love to decry the low number of GPs in the ACT and the lack of bulk-billing. Always look to the root cause, not at the symptom, the root cause being the lack of GPs caused by the freezing of GP training numbers way back then. Now he is proposing further deep health cuts, including eliminating GP superclinics. Just as we are on the cusp of getting our GP superclinics, he is proposing to cut them, which will hurt 400 communities and obviously cut the after-hours GP hotline.

We are going to get a very sick health system if Mr Abbott has his way. The ACT is also going to get a very sick economy if Mr Abbot has his way. And those opposite

did not even try to excuse his behaviour or try to defend their own constituency. No, as long as they can play follow my leader with Mr Abbott, they are happy.

Things will work out all right of course, will they not? How are they going to work out all right? Ms Hunter and her colleague Mr Rattenbury, Mr Stanhope, Mr Hargreaves and Ms Burch realise that these cuts will have a devastating effect on so many levels of the community, and things will not work out all right. As Ms Hunter said, the effect is keenly felt.

As Ms Burch said, the effect will be keenly felt across the community sector and across the whole community, affecting our mental health, affecting the fabric of our family life, seeing family members make hard decisions about whether they can remain in the ACT or have to leave to find work elsewhere. Some of those small business owners that Ms Burch was talking about will have to make hard decisions about whether they try to struggle on with their businesses or whether to close them. Families leaving the ACT will have to make the hard decision about whether they leave older relatives behind, older relatives that have decided to retire here to support their sons and daughters and their grandchildren.

As Mr Hargreaves said and Ms Burch mentioned, some of our town centres can become almost like ghost towns, small shadows of their former self, with so many businesses closing their doors. Ms Hunter and Ms Burch reminded us about the drain that the loss of these jobs will have on our community sector through the increase in demand for their work.

I must say something about what Mr Hanson attempted to turn into a joke earlier. I am very disturbed about this. I find it most disturbing that Mr Hanson attempted to laugh off my reference to depression by saying I was confusing it with recession. I think mental health is not something that we can joke about. As we all know, there are many people that suffer from depression. It touches a lot of our families, and I think it is highly inappropriate for us to joke about such a serious mental health issue. So I am shocked about that. I am really disappointed that he tried to make that into a joke in this place. He is a champion, or he used to be, or he tries to be, for changes in our health system and has spoken on many occasions about mental health. To try to score political points about depression, I think, really trivialises the whole issue.

We have heard a lot in this place, both yesterday and today, about the effect Abbott's job cuts to the public service will have on the ACT. I think that, unlike Australia, Canberra has not been provided with many of the things that could buffer other parts of Australia. For instance, we have not got much of the infrastructure necessary to support a vibrant private sector. The absence of port facilities, substantial rail services, major highways linking territory and other capital cities, these are essential elements of successful cities but are missing in the ACT. Without the federal public service, Canberra would not survive economically. The Canberra community benefits enormously from having the federal government here.

The multitude of knowledge-based industries that evolved in the territory would not be present without the highly skilled workforce that the public sector attracts. Specialists in finance, information technology, environmental science, the law and

many other fields of endeavour have flourished by servicing and supporting the Australian government across a broad sweep of activities.

We are able to draw on a large pool of skilled and experienced people in maintaining the long-term health and vitality of the ACT's own bureaucracy. It is common practice for the territory to benefit from crosspollination of fresh ideas and approaches that come from supplementing our considerable home-grown talent with new recruits that work either directly or indirectly for the commonwealth.

I am sure that there are many specific examples that we could point to about the way the ACT and the Australian governments work together. The Australian Federal Police, for example, is a federal institution that provides a range of security-related services both to the ACT community and to the nation. Conversely, the fire and ambulance services are provided by high-quality people in the ACT, both to territory and federal institutions.

So we see that the territory community benefits from these arrangements in two ways. Our community is protected by the most sophisticated and professional police force in the country and the added operational scale provided by the ACT emergency services allows us to effectively spread our costs over a larger population.

We do need a strong commonwealth public service in the ACT and we do need to protect ourselves against Mr Abbott's job cuts.

Motion agreed to.

Australian Greens—policies

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (11.48): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the cost of living pressures on Canberra families, particularly in the areas of housing, education, health care, childcare and utilities;
- (b) the policies of the Australian Greens Party which will put upwards pressure on the cost of living, including electricity costs, non-government school fees, student levies and childcare fees;
- (c) the policy of the Australian Greens Party which would remove funding for the private health insurance rebate;
- (d) the immediate and significant pressure that removing this funding would place on the public health system in the ACT;
- (e) the policy of the Australian Greens Party which would gut funding to non-government schools;

- (f) that the ACT has the highest proportion of any jurisdiction of students who attend non-government schools;
- (g) that removal of funding for non-government schools, as proposed by the Australian Greens, would put immediate and significant pressure on parents and the public school system in the ACT;
- (h) the policy of the Australian Greens Party to lower childcare carer to child ratios to one to three, from the one to four ratio that will come into affect from 2012;
- (i) the immediate and significant impact this would have on childcare fees;
- (j) that around 80 per cent of childcare in the ACT is provided by the community sector;
- (k) the difficulties:
 - (i) faced by childcare operators, particularly those who are community based, to attract and retain suitably qualified staff; and
 - (ii) already faced by parents to find suitable care for their children at an affordable price; and
- (2) condemns the Australian Greens Party for their irresponsible policies which would have a significant financial impact on Canberra families.

Mr Rattenbury interjecting—

MR SESELJA: I have already had an interjection from Mr Rattenbury before I have started. He does not think the Greens will get a mention in this speech. Well, I will try not to disappoint him. I will mention the Greens. But this is about cost of living pressures. That is the fundamental point that we want to talk about today. We want to talk about cost of living pressures on Canberra families and the kind of extra cost of living pressures that would come from the Greens having the balance of power in the federal Senate.

There is no doubt about that, and we will simply talk about the Greens' policies that are on their website and continue to be on their website—their actual policies. This is not our interpretation of their policies. It is not us manufacturing a report that someone may have written five or 10 years ago and trying to apply it to their policies. No, this is what their policies actually say. We will actually go to the cost of living pressures.

There is no doubt that there are serious cost of living pressures for many Canberrans. We often hear how Canberrans earn higher than average incomes, and that is true, but we also have a lot of expenses that are higher than average. We have higher than average childcare costs, higher than average costs of housing and higher than average rents. So on the one hand we get better incomes than the rest of the country but there is no doubt that, on the other hand, Canberra is an expensive place to live for many

families in respect of many of the core services—childcare, housing in particular, and education.

I want to talk today about some of the dangers of some of the Greens' policies as stated in their documents. There are three areas that I want to touch on that will put extra pressures not just on household budgets but in some cases on the provision of public services, namely in education and in health. I will go to the various aspects of Greens policy in these areas.

The Greens plan to abolish the private health insurance rebate. That is one of the Greens' federal policies. They plan to get rid of the private health insurance rebate. In the ACT approximately 55 per cent of the community have private health insurance, so that Greens policy of getting rid of the 30 per cent private health insurance rebate will put up the fees of the 55 per cent of the community who pay private health insurance. Their private health insurance will go up.

As night follows day, if the Greens get the balance of power, a vote for the Greens is a vote for higher costs for private health insurance. That is without a doubt. Sometimes they try and back away from their policies but on this one I have not actually heard any dispute. They proudly trumpet this policy. So the 55 per cent of Canberra families who are paying private health insurance, who are having 30 per cent of it subsidised, will lose that subsidy under Greens policy. Greens policy is for Canberra families to pay more. This will happen right around the nation if the Greens get the balance of power but it will be most keenly felt right here in Canberra, where we have 55 per cent of families paying private health insurance.

A 30 per cent increase can in some cases mean thousands of dollars per year on the family budget. Of course, the other thing that it will do is that, as there is less private provision of health care, there will be more pressure on the public sector. There is no doubt that we already have the longest waiting lists in the country and the Greens' policy is to make that worse. The Greens' policy, by forcing people out of private health insurance—and some of these Canberra families will be forced out of private health—will lead to more people relying on the public system.

So on the one hand Canberra families will pay 30 per cent more for their private health. On the other hand, public hospitals will have more pressure put on them as people abandon the private system in some cases. They are the twin elements—the twin results of this Greens policy. It goes to a hostility that the Greens have to the private sector right across the board.

Let us look at education. The Greens have stated in their policies on education that they will cut funding for non-government schools and they will take it back to 2003-04 levels. That is what they have said. That Greens policy would mean the non-government schools sector, which educates around 43 per cent of ACT students, would have \$60 million ripped out of it under the Greens' policy. So a vote for the Greens is a vote for \$60 million being ripped out of the non-government schools sector in the ACT. That is their policy.

Bob Brown estimates that the Greens' policy will mean \$1,000 per student in fees every year. He may or may not be right. In Melbourne they are talking of hundreds of

millions of dollars as a result of the policy. The Melbourne Director of Catholic Education, Stephen Elder, wrote last week that Greens policies would “force school closures, increase fees and change the ability of Catholic schools to be genuinely Catholic”. I will just repeat that. Stephen Elder, the Director of Catholic Education in Melbourne, wrote last week that Greens policies would “force school closures, increase fees and change the ability of Catholic schools to be genuinely Catholic”. The report of his comments went on:

This meant a “much diminished” ability to help the poor and the marginalised and to serve the neediest students, he said.

“Cuts would likely flow through to cuts to our current programs, to recent arrivals and refugees in Catholic schools ... We estimate the Greens funding policy would cut \$427 million from Catholic schools including more than \$110 million taken from Victorian Catholic schools ...”

The Greens’ hostility to the non-government sector needs to be noted. We also need to consider the position of the Labor Party in this. We have the prospect of a returned Gillard government—this election is very close; we do not know which way it will go—and potentially a Greens balance of power.

What does the Labor Party think of non-government schools? Well, they are not very favourably disposed to them either. In 2004 Mark Latham attacked the non-government sector, egged on by Julia Gillard. Julia Gillard was his closest ally in the Labor Party at that time; she egged him on—Medicare gold and cutting funding to non-government schools. So you would have Julia Gillard as Prime Minister, who already has a hostility to the non-government sector, and the Greens’ stated policy of slashing funding to non-government schools.

What will that mean for Canberra families? It will mean higher school fees and less choice for Canberra families. It will mean that the unique nature of non-government schools in the territory will be compromised. That is what the Catholic Education Office says. That is what the Greens’ policy would do.

You have to ask the question: why are the Greens so anti non-government education? We happen to believe that both the government sector and the non-government sector should thrive, that Canberra families and families right around the nation should have choice in education. That is why we promised lower class sizes in the government sector—because we believe we can do better in our government sector.

But why does it have to come, according to the Greens and in some cases the Labor Party, at the expense of the non-government sector? We actually believe that the non-government sector adds value. It not only adds choice; it actually saves the taxpayer when parents choose to stump up some of the costs of education themselves. Why should they be denied that choice? Why should we make that choice harder for them? Why should we discriminate against those families? That is what this policy would do.

The Liberal Party, both nationally and locally, takes a very different view. First and foremost, we support educational choice. We do not support the Greens’ plan to slash

funding for non-government schools. This is a serious issue for families here in the territory, with over 40 per cent of students being educated in the non-government sector. We want to see a public sector that thrives and a non-government sector that thrives.

But this policy that we are discussing today would not see that. It would see \$60 million ripped out of the ACT non-government schools sector. What will that do to fees? What will that do to the family budgets of those tens of thousands of Canberra families who send their kids to non-government schools? This policy is a dangerous one for the territory. It is a dangerous one for the nation but it will be felt perhaps most keenly here in the ACT due to the high proportion of students who are educated in the non-government sector.

We happen to value that contribution. The Liberal Party value that contribution. We value the fact that it complements the very good work that is done in our public schools. We do not have hostility towards either sector, but what we see unfortunately in this policy is that the Greens do. They want to rip money out of the non-government school sector.

We also see policies that will affect childcare. The Greens say in their policies that they will end any form of subsidies to for-profit childcare operators. At the moment most childcare in the ACT is conducted by the community sector but 20 per cent is still in the for-profit sector, and ending any subsidies presumably means ending the tax rebate. So families who send their kids to for-profit childcare centres will get no tax rebate, because that is a subsidy to the for-profit sector. That is the Greens' policy.

We have seen the childcare ratios already going down. Now what they want to do is have carer to child ratios of at least one to three for children up to two years old and one to four for children older than two years. You cannot get around the fact that that comes at a significant cost. We might all want to have one to two or one to one in a perfect world, but how much will it actually cost? We know that Canberra families already pay more for childcare than anyone else in the country. The Labor Party has attacked them through the changes to the rebate, through capping that rebate. Many Canberra families are disadvantaged by that policy. And now what we have from the Greens is a policy to actually significantly push up the costs of childcare.

So in these three critical areas that are of significant consequence to family budgets, we see Greens policies that will push up costs. In the case of education, they will push up the cost of educating a child. They will push up school fees. They will also put more pressure on the public education system. In the area of private health, the cutting of the 30 per cent rebate that the Greens propose will mean that Canberra families who pay for private health care will pay at least 30 per cent more. So an ordinary Canberra family that has school fees to pay will pay maybe \$1,000 per child more, that has private health will pay 30 per cent more and that has a child in childcare will pay significantly more. What does that mean for the family budget? It means that families will be stretched. These policies will hurt families in Canberra more than anywhere else in the country.

We have not heard much from Lin Hatfield Dodds on this plan. We have not heard why she believes it is a good idea to raise school fees, to raise the cost of private

health care, to put more pressure on our public health system, to raise the cost of childcare.

Ms Hunter: She has been to every forum. I do not think Mr Humphries has been turning up.

MR SESELJA: We have an interjection again from Meredith Hunter. These are the kinds of policies that they do not want to talk about. They do not want to talk about the fact that the Greens' policies mean higher costs for Canberra families. A vote for the Greens means higher private health costs, more pressure on our public system, higher private school fees, more pressure on our public system, higher childcare fees and a complete reduction of subsidies for those who send their kids to the for-profit sector. These are dangerous policies and they should be taken very seriously by the people of the ACT. *(Time expired.)*

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (12.04): Let us start this debate by being very clear about something. The reality here is that Mr Seselja and his Liberal colleagues, including federal Senate colleague Mr Humphries, seem to think that they have the moral high ground, standing up for Canberra's families. But the truth is that it is actually Greens policies that support all Canberra families, while the Liberals' policies support only some Canberra families. The Liberals' policies divert funding away from public health and education services, yet all families deserve access to high-quality education and all families deserve high-quality, accessible public health care.

The irony of this motion today is that Mr Seselja seems to have forgotten just how necessary these services are when you do not have a job at all—a promise that the Liberal leader, Tony Abbott, has made to the people of Canberra through his slashing of the commonwealth public service. They will not have jobs. They are going to need access to health care and to education. This will have an impact, not just on those public service employees but also on the numerous small businesses that rely on a thriving ACT economy.

The reality is that we will be much worse off under the proposed Liberal ideas. Let me outline to you why that is. The truth here is that the Liberal Party's ideas about equity are really all about some being more equal than others.

Let us go to the cost of living. Firstly, it is fair to say that there are many people in our community who are experiencing cost of living pressures. In every electorate, in every demographic, there are people who are really doing it tough. The Greens are the only ones who have consistently stood up for these people.

For years, we have been talking about the acute problems of homelessness and poverty, as well as all the ongoing difficulties. We have been arguing that the age pension should be increased and, importantly, indexed to provide a reasonable standard of living for older members of our community. It is a national disgrace that older Australians were given such a pathetic allowance under the Howard government. Older Australians deserve better than to be subject to the whim of the government of the day. They need and deserve a fair and reasonable living allowance that is indexed and maintained at a reasonable level.

We are the only ones out there supporting better indexation for Defence Force and commonwealth superannuants. I do not hear Mr Humphries talking on this matter.

The traditional short-sighted approach of the Liberal Party would not help reduce the cost of living pressures. The Greens' policies will. Energy prices will rise significantly in the next 10 years. To fail to provide people with an alternative or a plan to offset and mitigate that cost is to do a great disservice to Australia.

Mr Seselja interjecting—

Mr Rattenbury interjecting—

MS HUNTER: Giving people options so that they do not have to own a second car, so that they can live in a house that does not cost a fortune to run—

Mr Seselja interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Le Couteur): Excuse me one minute, Ms Hunter.

MS HUNTER: Stop the clock.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Stop the clocks. Members of the opposition, I cannot hear Ms Hunter. You will have your chance again.

Mr Hanson: Madam Assistant Speaker, I will just point out that it is not just members of the opposition interjecting.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Ms Hunter, please continue.

MS HUNTER: Thank you. Giving people options so that they do not have to own a second car, so that they do not have to live in a house that will cost them a fortune to run and so that we have a renewable energy industry that can provide electricity at a steady price well into the future is a real solution to cost of living pressures.

The Liberal Party do not have a transport plan. They have no idea what to do to make the way we move around sustainable. Instead they want to effectively ensure that people have no option but to drive their car and pay for increasing fuel costs. Fuel in Europe is already the best part of double what it is here. It will not take long before we start paying similar prices. The alternative, of course, is a comprehensive, efficient, fast public transport network, built around light rail, so that people can easily get around. But the Liberals have no plan.

On private health, the private health insurance rebate and the impact on the public health system, the Greens believe that the \$3 billion spent by the commonwealth government annually on the private health insurance rebate would be better spent on the public health system. The rebate is false—and it is notional only. In fact, in real terms, the cost of a private health insurance policy is approximately the same as it was

in 1998 before the rebate was introduced. It makes no significant difference to the real cost of the policy. It is a public subsidy to the private health system. What public money should be doing is subsidising the public system that provides healthcare services for everyone. We know that the federal Treasury and a range of policy experts do not support the policy and that the independent economic advice is that the rebate is not a good policy and is not delivering any real improvement to the quality of health outcomes.

The internationally recognised social determinants of health framework has been created from research showing that the poorer a person's economic standing is the poorer their health outcomes are likely to be. In February this year, our Greens senators proposed that there at least be a means test applied to the private health insurance rebate. This would have delivered an estimated \$1.8 billion back to public hospitals over four years. Surely that makes sense. Surely that is reasonable—that millionaires and people who are incredibly well off do not get this rebate. In that way, we can ensure that we do have a decent society where everyone has access to health care.

I would like to quote some statistics from a speech Mr Hanson gave in February this year, when he delivered the Canberra Liberals' discussion paper on health. It was a little light on solutions, but this is what it stated:

Currently, we have a figure 18 per cent above the national average of people who use the public hospital system here in the ACT when we have actually one of the highest take-ups of private health care. What that means is people who should otherwise be using the private health system are accessing our public system.

What is it that their private health insurance is doing for them? The main reason a person is likely to benefit from private health insurance is for some kind of chronic disease or injury, yet a great proportion of people who have a chronic condition are using our public health system. Surely it follows logically that we should be putting public money into a most necessary public good rather than subsidising private insurance companies. As I said, the economics do not make sense. The money contributed by the commonwealth adds to the cost of the policy. Perhaps it makes some small savings, but overall the community benefit must be greater if we are going to provide good facilities.

And on health care, I should just mention the "denticare" scheme put up by the Greens. The Greens are the only party with a comprehensive plan for dental care in Australia. It is utterly ridiculous that teeth are treated differently from every other part of your body. What sort of impact does it have on the family budget when you have to spend \$400 or \$500 to see a dentist? Comprehensive dental care should be available for all in the community as part of the public health system. The Liberal Party disagrees. Shame on you.

On non-government school fees and any pressure on schools and parents, the Greens' policy is that, as a wealthy nation, we should be providing a high standard of education to everyone. Long-term prosperity lies with knowledge. The more innovative and creative we are, the more capacity we have to respond to the

challenges before us and the more prosperous we will be. There are more opportunities for people.

The ACT Liberals are running a one-sided campaign of misinformation about the Greens' education policy. The Greens support the review into schools funding, as promised by the current government in 2007. We agree with educational experts that the current federal school funding model is flawed. However, the current government have delayed that review. If they are re-elected, that review will be done in 2013.

If elected, the coalition would keep the current funding model, first introduced under the Howard government, which heavily favours private schools. The coalition education spokesperson, Christopher Pyne, told the Christian Schools National Policy Forum in May this year that the Howard government was a great friend of the private school sector and that, if elected, a new coalition government would "take up the reins where the Howard government left off".

This is despite the fact that this funding model been criticised as inequitable and unsustainable, delivering up to \$7,000 per year per private school student compared to \$1,000 a year per public school student. In fact, research commissioned by the AEU after the coalition made this announcement has shown that the election of a coalition government would see significant funding increases for private schools and a cut in the share of funding for public schools.

And we can go on to some research from the University of Sydney that found that between 2012 and 2016, under the coalition government, private schools would get a \$2.3 billion increase whereas public schools would get \$652 million. The research showed that in the period 2012-16, the total funding for private schools would be \$9.5 billion compared to \$3.1 billion for the public schools. Under this coalition arrangement, public schools, which teach more than two-thirds of students across Australia, would receive only a third of the funding. Is this really what the Liberals think is standing up for all Canberrans? I am sure that people who have children in our public schools do not quite see it their way.

Until the review is undertaken, the Greens will be working with the new government to ensure that funding is provided and flows to all levels of the public education system, to ensure a high-quality education for all students. We welcome debate on the issue of funding equity. It is crucial to get the balance right between supporting private and, in particular, less well-off independent and Catholic schools and supporting our public schools.

It is interesting that the Liberals have chosen to attack the Australian Greens on this issue. Without the Greens' support, the building the education revolution program that was part of the stimulus package would not have been passed in the Senate.

Mr Barr: How was the ceremony, Steve? Was it a rip-off?

MS HUNTER: The Liberals and Nationals opposed this program to put better facilities out there in our schools—

Mr Seselja: It was delivered by a non-government school.

Mr Barr: Right.

MS HUNTER: not just in our government schools, but also in our non-government schools. And I do find it—

Members interjecting—

MS HUNTER: Stop the clock.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Le Couteur): Mr Barr! Mr Seselja! I cannot hear Ms Hunter.

MS HUNTER: I do find it quite ironic—

Members interjecting—

Mr Barr: But I was here. I am elected to serve in this place.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Barr, I cannot hear Ms Hunter. Please be quiet.

MS HUNTER: I do find it ironic that we have some of our Liberal MLAs busting themselves to get out there to the openings of these facilities in our non-government schools when they were out there saying, “No, do not pass this. Do not get the money out there.” I find it quite astounding. But then again, I should not be surprised.

Mr Rattenbury interjecting—

MS HUNTER: On childcare, it is clear that the Greens have always supported the provision of quality childcare services.

Mr Rattenbury: Did you get a photo op?

MS HUNTER: Where children are in childcare, they deserve to be well looked after, and parents expect that their children will be well cared for. Quality childcare is important. Australian families want access to affordable and quality childcare when they need it.

And the Greens want nationally consistent early childhood education and care standards that are linked to the quality cost drivers. We want to see higher ratios in our childcare centres. We do not want to follow the Liberals’ line, which is to have poor-quality places for children during their childcare years. We want to see well qualified staff. We want to see proper ratios out there. These are our children. They deserve to be in places with well-qualified staff with proper ratios. That is what we want.

Mr Seselja: Are you saying they are poor-quality now?

MS HUNTER: Not at all. What we are saying is that—

Mr Rattenbury: Come on, Zed.

MS HUNTER: Like any system, Mr Seselja, it can do with improvement. It can do with improvement. We always need to be striving for greater improvement in our childcare, in our education—in any of our services.

Mr Seselja: You don't want poor-quality policy. So it is poor quality now?

Mr Rattenbury interjecting—

MS HUNTER: Of course, Mr Seselja goes on to verbal yet again.

Mr Seselja: You are the one who used the term “poor quality”, not me.

MS HUNTER: What we want to see is proper funding out there—

Mr Seselja: You didn't say, “We want better quality.” You said, “We don't want poor quality.”

MS HUNTER: but of course the Liberal Party are arguing against improvements.

Mr Rattenbury: Point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker. Mr Seselja continues to intervene in spite of your efforts to let Ms Hunter—

MS HUNTER: Would you stop the clock?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Yes; please stop the clock.

Mr Rattenbury: In spite of your efforts to ensure that Ms Hunter actually be heard in her speech, Mr Seselja has intervened right throughout Ms Hunter's speech. He constantly is verballing her. I would ask you to get Mr Seselja to pay a little respect, because he was heard in silence on the whole.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Seselja, I do have to agree with Mr Rattenbury's comments about your behaviour. Please, we heard you in silence. Let us hear Ms Hunter—

Mr Seselja: On the point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker, I would again draw your attention—this has happened before—to the fact that when you were calling the opposition to order, you were not calling Mr Rattenbury to order when he was interjecting. I just find it interesting that you are only calling to order people on the opposition side and not your colleague Mr Rattenbury. Could you just explain to me the difference between our interjections and Mr Rattenbury's, perhaps?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Seselja, I do not intend to take part in this conversation. What we deserve is to hear Ms Hunter in silence. Ms Hunter, you have the floor. Members of all parties, Ms Hunter has the floor.

MS HUNTER: Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker. Finally, I would like to turn to the economic impact on families. I know we have already discussed it in the chamber this week. I am genuinely astounded that the Liberal Party can make such a claim in their motion today when they are out there promoting a policy that will rip jobs out of Canberra, that will have a massive impact on Canberra families, that will mean that families cannot afford to pay their mortgages, cannot afford to feed and clothe their children. They will struggle greatly.

This is going to be the big anti-family policy of this campaign. This is going to be the one that has the biggest impact on families here in the territory. I refer to the slashing. We can argue about how many jobs in the ACT. We do not know. We do now know exactly what Mr Tony Abbott has in mind. But what we know is that it will have a massive impact.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Planning, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation and Minister for Gaming and Racing) (12.20): It is with a degree trepidation that I rise to speak in this debate to stand between the spears that are being thrown in this most heated of—

Mrs Dunne: Well, sit down, Andrew.

MR BARR: Come on, Vicki. You really are in a very bad mood this morning, aren't you? Madam Assistant Speaker, I think it is fair to say that this motion is very unfair to the Greens party. It does follow a pattern of unfair attacks on the Greens party during this campaign, both locally and nationally. The Greens party has been unfairly attacked from the outset.

In the local context, Senator Humphries has become more and more desperate. As he has become more and more desperate, he has been prepared to pretty much say or do anything. So today, he can get some of his old colleagues here to run a motion that contains obviously inaccurate attacks on the Greens' policies. I will come back to that point in a moment.

I think it is also worth noting that the Greens party has also been unfairly attacked from the inside. In emails leaked to the *Age*, the Greens party candidate for the Victorian seat of McEwen complained:

I am bloody angry! It seems that the Greens are becoming more like the other bastards—I wonder why I bother!

And the Greens party candidate for Bendigo replied:

We need people like us so that the Greens don't turn into 'just another party', which I am sad to say is what is happening.

That is very unfair and it is very unfortunate. But I can assure you that I do not believe that the Greens party is turning into just another party. You will always be a little bit different, Madam Assistant Speaker, and I believe that absolutely.

I can say that there are emerging points of agreement, as our Prime Minister would say—perhaps it has become a more famous statement now—between the Labor Party and the Greens on education in particular and within education on the funding of non-government schools. I think that is why it is important in the context of this emerging agreement between the Labor Party and the Greens to respond this morning to the Liberals' very unfair attack.

It is worth being clear about the background to this debate so that people who might be listening or the media would not take the risk of believing what the Liberals have had to say this morning. What are the facts?

Mr Doszpot: So you are endorsing the Greens' policies, Andrew?

MR BARR: What are the facts?

Mr Doszpot: Are you endorsing the policy?

MR BARR: What are the facts? Yes, it is true that the Australian Greens party policy that was issued in March of this year—

Mr Doszpot: The lines are blurry. I mean, who is speaking for the Greens—

MR BARR: No, hang on.

Mr Doszpot: Who is speaking for the Liberals?

MR BARR: Just let me finish, Mr Doszpot. It is true, and this is where the Liberal Party are correct in their motion, that the Australian Greens policy on education still on the Greens website and issued in March of this year says, in part, that they will “support the maintenance of the total level of commonwealth funding for private schools at 2003-04 levels”.

Yes, it is true that the Greens Senate candidate Lin Hatfield Dodds did initially defend that policy. On 5 August the ABC reported, “The ACT Greens Senate candidate, Lin Hatfield Dodds, has defended her party's policy to cut funding to non-government schools.” But it is now clear that the Greens party has listened to the community and they have learned.

Mr Seselja: It is still on their website. Why did Meredith not say this, then?

MR BARR: And you have to say that is the beauty of democracy, because on 6 August—

Ms Hunter: Mr Rattenbury is going to mention that point.

MR BARR: And we will come back to that in a moment—on 6 August—

Mr Doszpot: I have not heard such a disclaimer before from the Greens.

MR BARR: On 6 August, the Independent Schools Council—

Mr Seselja: You would think that if it wasn't policy you would take it down.

Mrs Dunne: Andrew Barr—apologist for the Greens.

MR BARR: On 6 August the Independent Schools Council of Australia called on the Greens party to clarify their position.

Mr Doszpot: Sit on the same benches, guys. Sit on the same benches.

MR BARR: If you guys would just listen and let me—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Le Couteur): Yes, let us hear the minister.

MR BARR: On 6 August the Independent Schools Council of Australia called on the Greens party to clarify their position pointing to, in their words, “a significant disconnect between what Senator Brown is saying in relation to schools funding and what is detailed in the Australian Greens policy documentation”—what is on their website.

That is a fair comment. That is the only legitimate element of the Liberals' motion today. It is that the Greens party must seriously, before federal election day, update what is on their website to reflect what Senator Brown is saying.

Mr Seselja: Because they do not really believe it. That is why they will not update it—

MR BARR: And on 10 August—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Barr, one minute. Mr Seselja, please stop interjecting. I think I have to warn you at this point. Mr Barr, please continue.

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker. So on 10 August, Lin Hatfield Dodds began to clarify the Greens party position. Her media statement on that day promised—I think Ms Hunter has referred to this—to support private and, in particular, less-well-off independent and Catholic schools. I believe that to be a very fair statement of the truth of the matter.

Even more impressive statements were made on 14 August and in response to the Fairfax press on 15 August. Senator Brown was as clear as you could hope when he said, “We have argued that circumstances have changed since that policy setting was made a number of years ago. We do not have to take \$1,000 per student from the private schools.” So that is the truth of the matter, Madam Assistant Speaker—

Mrs Dunne: The only economic rationalist in the Greens party.

MR BARR: The Greens party needs to clarify their position—

Mrs Dunne: Nobody else in the Greens would be an economic rationalist, but here he comes.

MR BARR: The Greens party need to clarify their position; they need to update their policy statement—

Mr Doszpot: I think you need to clarify your position.

MR BARR: The Greens party need to update their policy statement to indicate the position that Senator Brown has put and clarify, once and for all, where they stand on this issue. But, in the context of today's debate, we should not risk believing what the Liberals say because the old public versus private debate is over. Senator Bob Brown knows it. Lin Hatfield Dodds knows it. Julia Gillard knows it because she made it happen.

The only people who do not know it, Madam Assistant Speaker, are Senator Humphries and the Canberra Liberals. This motion today ably demonstrates that they are the only ones interested in keeping this debate going. But I do reiterate for the public benefit that the Greens party does need to take down this policy that was posted in March. Please let people know where you really stand according to your own leader's words and put that on your website now.

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 12.29 to 2 pm.

Questions without notice

Taxation—revenue

MR SESELJA: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, the real tax revenue per person in the ACT has increased by 41 per cent since 2001-02. Earlier this month, you announced a mini review of tax headed by former Treasurer Ted Quinlan. Have you commissioned the Quinlan inquiry in order to further increase the amount of real tax revenue per person?

MS GALLAGHER: No.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Seselja, a supplementary question?

MR SESELJA: Thank you, Mr Speaker. What impact has the increase in real tax revenue per person had on the cost of living for ordinary Canberrans during the term of your government?

MS GALLAGHER: I can certainly assure the community that this government has done everything it can to keep increases in taxes modest. They certainly have not grown at the speed with which the demand for government services has grown. Indeed, our effort on efficiency within the public service has ensured that we have

been able to keep any growth in taxes and charges very modest. That has been the focus of this government—to keep those increases, where they are required, modest and affordable.

But, as our city continues to grow, and demand for services continues to grow, governments of all political colours will always have to look at their revenue. The issue with the taxation revenue, as I have said a number of times, has not been about growing the revenue base of the territory at all. It is about ensuring that what we are collecting is done on a fair and equitable basis. And that is the issue that Ken Henry drew attention to in his taxation review.

MR SMYTH: A supplementary, Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Treasurer, are there any new or additional taxes that you will rule out?

MS GALLAGHER: I know where Mr Smyth is trying to get to with this—a bit of scaremongering—but I am not, prior to the taxation review starting, seeking to limit the extent of that review. There may be changes that come out of this taxation review, and I am going to leave that to the panel to provide their advice to government.

MR SMYTH: A supplementary, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Treasurer, is Mr Quinlan's brief to find more ways to tax them till they bleed but not until they die?

MS GALLAGHER: Mr Quinlan's brief has been to chair the panel and follow the terms of reference for the review which have also been released.

ACTION buses—Belconnen bus interchange

MS HUNTER: My question is for the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services and it concerns the new Belconnen busway. Minister, what is the date proposed for the opening of the Belconnen busway, and what ministers have been invited to attend the opening?

MR STANHOPE: I thank Ms Hunter for the question. I did ask Tony Gill, coincidentally, just a few days ago on what date he expected the new Belconnen busway to be open, and he said the middle of August. He preferred not to be more precise than “the middle of August”.

As to the opening, Ms Hunter, I must say that I was not aware that there was to be one. If you think we ought to go out with whistles and bells, maybe we could. Unless I am mistaken, Ms Hunter, now that you have raised the question, I will have to make inquiries of my office and perhaps at TAMS, but I am not aware that there was a scheduled opening. If there is to be one organised and I am not invited, I will be interested to know which ministers are going if I am not.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Hunter, a supplementary?

MS HUNTER: So, minister, is the busway completed and, if not, what further work needs to be done?

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Ms Hunter. I think the remaining work—as I said, I have not kept particularly close tabs in terms of structural work that needs to be undertaken—the last of the work that was being done, was finishing off the cycle path as it connected to the footpath on Barry Drive opposite the Australian National University. The last of the work that I understood needed to be completed was finalisation or finishing of the cycleway. It may be that there was also some line marking that needed to be concluded.

As I said, it is now the middle of August. I did discuss it with Tony Gill from Roads ACT. I just asked him casually and he said, “Well, we’re on target for it to be completed in the middle of August.” He did not wish to be more precise than that and I think that is quite reasonable, having regard to the weather and other vagaries.

In the context of the work that has been done, I think it is absolutely fantastic; it really is a piece of what will be the completed or concluded Belconnen to Civic busway in the fullness of time. The next two pieces of the work that will be undertaken in relation to that are to connect it from Clunies Ross Street. The section that has been completed will be fantastic. It will—and money was provided in the most recent budget to—take the work from Clunies Ross into and through the Civic exchange, almost straight through the middle of McGregor Hall, actually, I think, depending on its future. I think that was the proposal. But that work has been funded and we have also funded a consultancy to look at extending it from—(*Time expired.*)

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Coe?

MR COE: Yes, Mr Speaker. Chief Minister, will you rule out at some point turning the bus lane into a T2 or T3 lane?

MR STANHOPE: Will I rule it out? I will not rule anything in or out, but at this stage the government is now moving progressively through this latest budget quite vigorously to support public transport and enhanced bus-specific lanes and ways throughout the whole of Canberra.

There is, as you know, Mr Coe, in the most recent budget just on \$100 million dedicated for directed and specific public transport initiatives. I was once again in Brisbane this week. Again, I had the opportunity to see in operation the amazing busways that have been developed in Brisbane. I do believe that they are the future and they are the future for this city.

One certainly hopes that, in the fullness of time, bus lanes would be convertible to light railway lanes. But the government is committed to enhancing public transport. I think one of the most fundamental requirements—unfortunately, it is very expensive—is dedicated busways throughout the city. I believe that we should be now

seeking to complete the Belconnen to city busway, just as I believe, and we had signalled, that we would provide busways between Fyshwick and Queanbeyan. We are about to begin the work for a study of the best options for providing priority bus travel down Northbourne Avenue.

These are works that we have recognised. We are funding them in terms of feasibility. In relation to some of those proposals that I just quickly noted, we are funding them.

MR COE: Supplementary question, Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Do you have any plans to convert the bus lane into a T2 or T3 lane?

MR STANHOPE: The one on Belconnen? I do not have any plans. I must say that I am more than happy to take some specific advice on longer term thinking in relation to that, but at this stage, Mr Coe, noting your eagerness in relation to this particular issue, I will get you some further advice.

This work that we have just completed on Barry Drive is very much a deliberate completion of a segment of a dedicated bus transit way from Belconnen to the city. We have provided, I think, \$14 million—I would have to check—in the current budget to continue that work from Clunies Ross into the city. We have also provided funding in the budget for further feasibility or design in relation to the trickiest aspect of a dedicated busway to Belconnen. That, of course, is the more controversial aspect of how one would get through the Bruce precinct, essentially. We are looking again at how best to achieve that outcome.

Taxation—revenue

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, in your submission to the Henry review you said, “States should not be overly dependent on growth in vertical fiscal transfers to fund their expense responsibilities and should have access to own-source revenue bases which grow at rates equivalent to these responsibilities.” Minister, what additional revenue sources were you referring to in your submission?

MS GALLAGHER: I think the general submission that we put to the Henry tax review was that states and territories need ability to grow their own revenue in pace with their demand for government services. That was the view we expressed and it is one which I stand by. I think there was a level of concern with the tax review from states and territories that there would be a view expressed by the Henry tax review that would seek to curtail own-source revenue for states and territories.

In the end, that did not occur, although the Henry tax review did have a number of recommendations which encouraged states and territories to examine their own revenues to ensure that they are efficient. That is exactly what we are going to do. That is the response to the Henry tax review. In relation to our own-source revenue, we were talking about—the submission was talking about—the revenue lines that already exist but the fact that they do need to grow in pace with demand for government services.

MR SPEAKER: Now your supplementary, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Treasurer, how much additional revenue do you estimate that the territory will obtain from these own-source revenues?

MS GALLAGHER: They are all published in the budget papers.

MR HARGREAVES: A supplementary, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: My supplementary question to the Treasurer is this: is the Treasurer concerned at the announcement that there may very well be significant cuts to the public sector, and that the trickle-down effect on to small business will have a detrimental effect on the taxation base?

Mrs Dunne: A point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Stop the clocks, thank you.

Mrs Dunne: The question was about own-source revenue and the Henry tax review. Mr Hargreaves is not being relevant to the substantive question, and he is using the opportunity to perhaps score a point in this election week.

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, to be honest, I thought Mr Smyth's question was about the tax revenue base for the ACT, and I think Mr Hargreaves has framed his question to be about the revenue base for the ACT.

MS GALLAGHER: Of course, any attack on employment in the territory is going to have a flow-on effect, not only for small business but also for our own revenue lines. Our big four revenue lines are payroll tax, general rates, land tax and conveyancing. Largely, they are the big four. Of course, all of those will be affected if there is a significant decline in employment numbers in the territory. So we are worried. We are worried as a community about those potential job cuts and what they mean for our city, Canberra, that we all love.

In terms of the flow-on effects, apart from employment in the private sector, there are the flow-on detrimental effects to our own revenue lines. Our budget is facing a tough next two or three years, and any decline in our own revenue lines will have an impact on the already quite significant deficits that we are facing, particularly in the next two years. So employment, and keeping our employment levels to where they are now, is certainly very important in terms of the recovery of our own budget. Indeed, that is the view we took when we thought a longer term strategy to recover our budget was not to attack our own employment levels, specifically because of the flow-on effect to our budget.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Seselja, a supplementary question?

MR SESELJA: Treasurer, how much do you estimate or does Treasury estimate that own-source revenue will have to increase in order to keep up with the responsibilities referred to in your submission?

MS GALLAGHER: I think what the opposition are trying to create here is a belief that we have some new ideas or we have costs factored in for increases in our own-source revenue.

Mr Coe: We haven't seen new ideas from you in a very long time.

MS GALLAGHER: I can certainly say that that is not the case. Of course, it is not just your own-source revenue that you look to when you are looking at how you provide good government services; it is your own efficiencies and it is your savings targets that you set as part of that.

Mr Seselja: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, on relevance, the question was very specific: it asked about how much the Treasury has estimated own-source revenue will have to increase to keep up with the responsibilities referred to in the submission made by the Treasurer to the Henry tax review.

MR SPEAKER: I think that the Treasurer was in the process of addressing that question. I think interjections, particularly from Mr Coe, did encourage her perhaps down a slightly less direct path to the answer. Nonetheless, I invite the Treasurer to return to the question.

MS GALLAGHER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Certainly, in terms of the decisions open to government, we have factored in taxation growth across the forward estimates. They are published in the budget papers. They show slight growth in most of the revenue lines. I think there are a couple where we expect to see some declines. But, overall, there is revenue growth in those taxation lines, and Treasury have not factored in anything over and above that.

Canberra Hospital—surgery cancellation

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, I refer to a statement you made in late July about possible cuts to elective surgery due to high demands at the emergency department. You said, "If this is sustained into another two weeks, you may actually look at winding back on some surgery to free up some beds but not at this point in time." Minister, has any elective surgery been cancelled or postponed at the Canberra Hospital over the past month to free up beds?

MS GALLAGHER: I cannot answer if there has been any cancellation because, as a normal part of operating the elective lists, there will be cancellations from time to time. But your question is whether there have been cancellations due to lack of available beds in the hospital. To my knowledge, no. The beds in the hospital—and thank you for giving me the opportunity just to remind you that you cut 114 beds and we have replaced all of those and, indeed, are now for the first time in the history of self-government—

Mr Hanson: I take a point of order on relevance. This is a statement the minister made when she was looking at a policy of winding back elective surgery so that she could free up beds because, obviously, of the increased usage at the Canberra Hospital. She certainly needs to come to the point of the question, which is: did you or did you not cancel any elective surgery as part of that policy to free up beds because of the increased demand?

MR SPEAKER: Treasurer, let us move on from the analysis of the Liberal Party's performance.

MS GALLAGHER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is linked to the ability to absorb huge amounts of people coming to our emergency department, with high numbers of them being admitted to the hospital as medical patients. The fact that we have more beds available than ever before—on average, it is probably about 440 beds operating at the Canberra Hospital every day—is because of the extra beds that we have put into that hospital. If you did not have the beds, yes, we would be cancelling surgery to deal with the demand for things through medical admissions.

As a part of the winter plan, have we cancelled elective surgery like we did when we had the swine flu pandemic the year before? No, we have not. Bed numbers and occupancy rates have actually been travelling pretty well.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, a supplementary?

MR HANSON: Why is it that we have the longest waiting lists for elective surgery in Australia?

MS GALLAGHER: I am not sure if we do have the longest waiting lists for elective surgery in Australia. In relation to median waiting time, which is the length of time once somebody is removed from the list, which is quite different from the number of people on the list, there are a number of reasons why the ACT struggles. If you look at all of the small health systems—Tasmania, the Northern Territory and, I think, South Australia—you will see that all of them, for different reasons, at times struggle around median waiting times. Some of that is to do with capacity, some of that is to do with demand, and some of that is to do with 30 per cent of our lists coming from New South Wales. All of those impact on access to elective surgery.

Where we can control it is on outputs, and what we can deliver is increased surgery, and that is what we have been doing over the last six, seven, eight years. Now our elective surgery output is up to 10,000 procedures a year. The demand continues to grow, so we need to look for other alternatives to supplement our own ability. They include the private sector; they include looking at options with Queanbeyan hospital. We are doing all of those things.

MRS DUNNE: Supplementary question, Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mrs Dunne.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, have any specialists been asked to reclassify the category of elective surgery for their patients over the past couple of months to free up beds?

MS GALLAGHER: Not to free up beds. I do not actually understand the link between reclassifying and beds. Whether a specialist has been asked about the management of their patients in accord with the waiting list policy, I would imagine the answer is yes. But have they been asked to do that because there are no beds available? The advice to me is that the beds have not been an issue in the hospital. We have had capacity in the hospital to deal with medical and surgical admissions.

Education—outcomes

MS PORTER: My question is to the minister for education. Minister, we know that the ACT has an excellent education system. Can you advise the Assembly of the steps the ACT Labor government and the federal Labor government are taking to further improve ACT schools?

MR BARR: Thank you again, Ms Porter, for your ongoing interest in improving education outcomes in the ACT. I am very pleased to advise the Assembly that there are indeed great things going on in schools right across the ACT. The ACT and federal governments are working together to invest around three-quarters of a billion dollars in upgrading every school in the territory. These projects are making education better for every single student in every public and non-government school in the territory. This timely, historic and well-targeted stimulus investment is keeping thousands of Canberrans in jobs.

There is a great range of projects being delivered under the building the education revolution program. Last year I had the pleasure of opening the very first BER project completed in the ACT, and we believe completed in Australia, at the Turner school. Turner received a new shade structure which was manufactured locally. The community is also the beneficiary of a new library, thanks to a further \$3 million grant from the federal government.

Turner school is a special school. It has a large proportion of students with special needs. The school does a fantastic job in catering to the needs of all its students. An important part of the education routine for many of the students at Turner involves some time in the hydrotherapy pool. That is why the ACT government has invested three-quarters of a million dollars to upgrade that hydrotherapy pool. Turner is a great example of the ACT government being able to work with the federal government to deliver better outcomes for students.

I opened the first completed BER project last year and I turned the first sod on the last one to get underway this year. That project is a \$3 million environmental learning centre at the Gold Creek school. The multipurpose centre is designed to give students a place to learn hands-on about protecting the environment and growing and caring for plants. It will use the latest design techniques to save energy and water.

Because the ACT government understands the challenge of climate change, the design aims to achieve a six-star certification from the Green Building Council of Australia.

Rainwater will be captured and stored and used for garden irrigation and toilets. Natural cross-flow ventilation will cool the building. Solar power will be generated and excess energy will be returned to the grid. The school will be paid for the excess energy, indeed all of the energy generated, under ACT Labor's feed-in tariff.

Labor is determined to ensure that ACT students get the environmental education that they need to face the future. We are doing this by working with the federal government on the national curriculum. We are doing this by working with the federal government on national partnerships to ensure that we have the best teachers in our classrooms. We are doing so by working with federal Labor to ensure that all new and upgraded school buildings are as environmentally friendly as possible. I am very pleased that the new building at Gold Creek, funded by the federal government, and the BER projects across ACT schools complement the work that the ACT government is doing in building more environmentally friendly schools.

The recent interim report of the Orgill committee found that, when it comes to delivering BER projects, the ACT government has done a good job. The interim report finds the ACT Department of Education and Training achieved the lowest cost averages at about \$1,800 per square metre of gross floor area. This compares favourably with all other jurisdictions, and indeed with all other school systems in Australia. All projects in ACT public schools started on time and they are due to finish on time, meeting the stimulus objective.

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Porter?

MS PORTER: Thank you. Minister, can you give the Assembly an indication of the stimulus impact of the investments Labor is making in education in the ACT?

MR BARR: I am sure that we are all well aware of the massive educational value of the BER projects. Anyone who has visited a school would know just how much the school communities value them. Certainly, I believe Mr Doszpot and Mr Coe are now aware of this, having taken the opportunity to attend a BER opening this morning.

We must remember that this historic investment is also about keeping Canberrans in work. There are two parties in this place who believe in keeping Canberrans in work—Labor and the Greens. But for the Liberals, this is a foreign notion. Starting from next Monday, they want to start sacking 12,000 Canberrans. But because Labor believe in keeping Canberrans in jobs, we have been proud to work with the federal government to deliver BER projects.

To deliver the BER program, seven companies have been engaged in 152 projects across 82 ACT public sites. Each of the P21 projects at public schools involves facilities that are specifically designed for each site rather than the purchase of generic structures that would be constructed outside of the territory. This increases opportunities for local architects, design teams, engineers, quantity surveyors, cost planners, builders and associated tradespeople to get work on these projects.

In addition, specialist consultants in occupational health and safety and environmentally sustainable design have been engaged to work with the construction

managers for the duration of the projects. The construction managers estimate that, on average, each of the larger P21 projects involves 200 workers at the various stages.

It is also estimated that 68 P21 projects continuously support, on average, 915 on-site workers each day, including 179 apprentices. As an indication of the number of workers involved with the projects, the department of education has provided 3,700 police checks.

MR HARGREAVES: A supplementary, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. My supplementary is: can the minister please advise of any risk to future improvements in relation to schools?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Hargreaves for the question.

Mr Hargreaves: I've got a continuing interest, by the way.

MR BARR: You certainly do. There are very real risks that the BER programs in the ACT will not be able to be completed if Tony Abbott wins on Saturday. There are jobs at risk; there are unfinished projects. All ACT government projects in public schools are due for completion, and are on track for completion, by the end of this calendar year. But that final amount of money—and it is nearly \$32 million that we are expecting from the commonwealth government—is at risk if Mr Abbott is elected.

What will happen to those payments if the Liberals are elected on the weekend? We know Mr Abbott hates Canberrans—he wants to sack 12,000 of us. We know he hates Canberra—he will not live here. So we can assume that he hates Canberra taxpayers as well. There are \$30 million worth of BER projects that need to be completed by the end of this year and that funding is at risk. If it does not come from the federal government, it will have to come from the territory government, and we would have to find \$32 million in the next four months, Mr Speaker, in order to complete those projects. I am sure that you would understand, as would the majority of sane people in this chamber, that leaving those projects unfinished because the funding was cut off by Tony Abbott would be a very poor outcome for ACT schools.

So that is what is at risk—the completion of all of these BER projects. If Mr Abbott gets his way, after this Saturday he will commence sacking 12,000 public servants. And the overwhelming majority, of course, will be located in this city.

Mr Smyth: That is a lie. You can't lie to the Assembly.

MR BARR: The fact that Mr Smyth is squealing so much indicates the sensitivity of the Liberal Party on this issue.

Planning—affordable housing

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is for the Minister for Planning and concerns draft territory plan variations 301 and 303. Minister, how will these variations impact on

the provision of affordable housing in the ACT, especially given that the new code will require new blocks in an estate to be a certain size or change the mix of sizes?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Le Couteur for the question. Indeed, one of the elements of DV 301 involves a recommendation or a series of suggested outcomes for varying block sizes within estates. That policy, that draft variation, concurs with the ACT government's stated policy objective of 20 per cent of new estates having an affordability component. That is, indeed, set through that draft variation in line with that policy. However, it is certainly the view of the government that there is a need for a mixture of different housing types within large new estates. It is not the policy intention that all new estates will be released with small or compact blocks.

Of course, size of the estate is one of the other factors that needs to be considered in this context. In a large estate, such as a suburb, one would anticipate that there would be a variety of different block sizes, noting, of course, the government's commitment to affordability through a mandated percentage of new housing developments meeting that affordability criterion.

In my view, the totality of the reform agenda as outlined in DV 301 and 303 gets the balance right in terms of affordability and sustainability. There is obviously a variety of views in relation to this. That is why it is a draft variation; that is why it is out on a two-month public consultation process; that is why, of course, the variation will proceed through the usual process in this place of a reference to the planning committee for, I would hope, a detailed examination of the variety of issues contained within it.

The reality for this city is that there is a series of difficult policy choices that we confront in the months and years ahead that involve a series of trade-offs. There are some who have a very strong view in relation to affordability at all costs, and there are others who have a very strong view in favour of sustainability at all costs. There are others who are perhaps looking to move beyond just that very simplistic black-and-white debate and who can see, in fact, that sustainability and affordability can go hand in hand—that is, if you take a long-run look at the affordability issue, indeed, having more sustainable housing is more affordable in the long run. But we do have to work through the issues and the detail in relation to the up-front capital cost versus the long-run operating cost, if you like, of new housing infrastructure.

These are complex issues; they are ones that I believe we need a detailed community debate on. I am pleased that that process, in fact, began in earnest with the sustainable futures program last year. It ran all through 2009, and it led to a draft variation, or a number of draft variations, being put out for public comment. This is the beginning of that more detailed examination. I am fairly sure that, by the time we emerge from the end of this process, there will be some changes to what is proposed in the draft variation, because it is just that—a draft variation out for comment.

We look forward to a considered debate that balances all of the issues, because these are important decisions that we need to make for the future of our city. If we are serious about setting targets for greenhouse gas emissions, we have also got to be serious about setting policies that will achieve those targets.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Le Couteur, a supplementary?

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, given, as you said, the importance of these two variations, and given, as I will say, the difficulty in understanding them, why has ACTLA not held any public meetings as part of the consultation process?

MR BARR: That is just fundamentally not an accurate statement. In fact, the planning authority has held a number of workshops, meetings, and is more than happy to attend a range of events that are organised, not necessarily entirely by the planning authority but in conjunction with community councils. I know there has been a workshop and a roundtable with the community councils. I know, for example, that the Woden Valley Community Council organised its own forum. I know a number of other organisations have, as part of their own working through of these issues, organised forums or opportunities for their own members or for the broader public to be involved.

As I said, this is just one stage in the process. There are further opportunities. I am sure the planning committee will hold public hearings, for example, on this matter. So this will not be resolved this calendar year. It will go well into 2011. But, in the context of having this community conversation and resolving this issue, I do note that in the context of the parliamentary agreement and in the context of many of the issues that you raise, Ms Le Couteur, there is an urgent need to move ahead with this work. And there is, again, a trade-off with how much time you can spend in the consultation phase, noting that this is not a new issue; this is something that was worked through in some detail all through last year in the sustainable futures program.

So it is not as if we are addressing these issues for the first time in calendar year 2010. This has been an ongoing process, dating back to the work of Mr Corbell in this portfolio, way back at the beginning of this decade. So we have been having this community conversation in varying forms really since this government were elected, and this is just a further step in that community conversation and we will continue to engage with the community in the months and years ahead on these important matters.

MS HUNTER: Supplementary, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Ms Hunter.

MS HUNTER: Thanks, Mr Speaker. How will the government ensure that time lines for estate approvals are maintained, given that both TAMS and ACTPLA will be approving bodies?

MR BARR: Having government agencies work together is a very key element in terms of the government's own administrative response to this challenging agenda. We recognise the importance of ensuring that there is sufficient supply of new housing. We recognise the importance of having a balance in new housing product between urban infill and new greenfields estates.

We recognise the importance of planning well in advance and the work that was completed as part of the 2004 spatial plan process, which identified, for example, the Molonglo Valley as an area for future greenfields development. That work was done through 2002 and 2003, leading to the release of that policy in 2004. And here we are six years on with much further progression in relation to that greenfields estate. We know that we just need to complete the rollout of suburbs in Gungahlin and we know, of course, that we need to do a lot of intense work on urban infill to achieve our 50 per cent target in terms of future residential settlement opportunities in the next period.

Ms Le Couteur: Point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Ms Le Couteur.

Ms Le Couteur: Ms Hunter's question specifically asked about the interrelation between TAMS and ACTPLA, which the minister has not yet touched upon.

MR BARR: Mr Speaker, if Ms Le Couteur—

MR SPEAKER: Can you say it again? Perhaps you could repeat it, Mr Barr.

MR BARR: Yes. Ms Le Couteur was not listening, apparently. It is a two-minute answer, and I did go directly to that in the first 15 seconds. Yes, we acknowledge the importance of those agencies working together, but we have one ACT government. In the context of our policy response on this issue, I care not for the individual agency issues; I care about what the ACT government response is, and that means agencies working together. That is a clear and stated desire for the government. We will, of course, be working very closely with portfolio ministers and agencies to ensure that our response to this issue is right.

MS HUNTER: A supplementary?

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Ms Hunter, a supplementary.

MS HUNTER: Minister, what impact does the government expect the new provision will have on student accommodation and secondary dwellings?

MR BARR: A positive one, in short. The capacity, through this variation, to enable some greater diversity in housing stock will, indeed, have a positive impact. It is combined with a number of other ACT government initiatives, most particularly the partnership with the federal government and the Australian National University in relation to, initially, student accommodation on the university campus—I know, a topic of some controversy, because it would mean displacing a particular building that has recently become popular.

Nonetheless, in all these policy decisions and dilemmas, there are tradeoffs. If we are serious about improving student accommodation options, then we must take these opportunities in areas where it makes sense to do so. And clearly, this particular

project at the ANU is one of those areas, and it would be, I think, a very poor outcome if the territory were not able to take advantage of an important federal government program in partnership with the ANU to achieve a positive outcome for students.

Overall, in relation to the draft variation, it does provide the opportunity for more diverse housing and more accommodation to be located closer to academic institutions. Of course the Assembly would be aware that the Lawson south variation is one that is due to proceed in the near future, providing more student accommodation opportunities closer to the University of Canberra.

Canberra Hospital—alleged bullying

MR DOSZPOT: My question is to the Minister for Health. I refer to the recent review of service delivery at public maternity units. You stated yesterday in this place:

What has the clinical review found? It found that there are no concerns around the quality of care at the Canberra Hospital.

However, the review found:

Clinical governance at the Canberra Hospital maternity unit appears to be inadequate.

How do you reconcile the claim that you made yesterday with the findings of the review of service delivery at public maternity units?

MS GALLAGHER: Clinical governance and clinical outcomes are two entirely separate matters.

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Doszpot?

MR DOSZPOT: What actions have you taken to determine whether clinical governance in other areas of the Canberra Hospital is satisfactory?

MS GALLAGHER: We are at the moment consulting on the recommendations around the review. As I said, there are mixed views about a number of the recommendations in relation to how we move forward and the views expressed by the review team. So we are consulting with staff now.

In other areas of the hospital, the ACT Health restructure document is out there. It is being consulted on and is available for any member in this place to have a look at if you are interested. That goes to all the positions across ACT Health, a large number of which exist at the Canberra Hospital. It seeks to improve governance at the Canberra Hospital.

In relation to clinical governance, I think there is a range of measures in place at the hospital. I have not had any complaints around those—around clinical governance structures across the hospital. I have had concerns raised around governance and

feelings about how doctors have input into management decisions at the hospital. But in relation to clinical review processes and clinical privileges processes, I think those processes are robust at the hospital.

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary, Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: Yes, Mr Speaker. Minister, why did you not act earlier to ensure that clinical governance at the maternity unit was adequate?

MS GALLAGHER: The governance arrangements at the maternity unit are robust. The review has identified some concerns that we have to address. I just do not have that section of the report in front of me, but there is an executive director in this area, there are directors, there are views expressed around how we can strengthen those clinical procedures within the unit. We will consult with staff before implementing any changes, although we have already identified that we need an extra position within that unit to take some of the load off the clinical director, to free them up to focus on clinical decision making rather than administrative decision making. So all of that is in place and we are consulting on it at the moment.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Porter?

MS PORTER: Minister, could you tell the Assembly if the constant negative focus from the opposition on this matter is having a detrimental effect on the staff of the Canberra Hospital?

MS GALLAGHER: I certainly recognise the public interest in this matter, and I think it is important. I think some of the negativity being expressed by the opposition and their constant focus on the maternity service is having an impact on staff. In a meeting I held recently with staff, when they raised this with me, I reminded them that the opposition were not after them per se; they were after me.

Mr Smyth: What a victim complex.

MS GALLAGHER: Well, no. I said, "If it's any consolation to you, I am the target of their attention, not you." I was just trying to explain it. When people who do not know the operations of this place are brought into the public focus like this unit has been, some of how it plays out is a mystery to them and needs to be interpreted. I have done that and let them know that they should not read the negative complaints being about them as a service; they should understand that it is the Liberals' unrelenting political attack on me and that I can stand up for myself.

Health—general practice superclinic

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves, a question without notice?

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I note that most of those opposite have been tuned in to Dr Phil or Oprah Winfrey on their television screens in front of them. But I would like to ask a question.

Members interjecting—

MR HARGREAVES: Well, look at her go!

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves, the question.

MR HARGREAVES: Watch the rabbits run!

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, members. The question, Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks very much, Mr Speaker. How good is it, this entertainment.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves!

MR HARGREAVES: My question is to the Minister for Health—

Mr Hanson: Is that Colonel Sanders over there?

MR HARGREAVES: and I am not a signed-up member of the Liberal Party.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves, the question, or you will sit down.

MR HARGREAVES: And I don't have as much bling as you do.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves!

MR HARGREAVES: Minister, the federal Australian Labor Party have committed up to \$15 million for a GP superclinic for the ACT should they win the federal election. Can you please explain to the Assembly how the GP superclinic will benefit our community?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mr Hargreaves for the question. The commonwealth government has indeed promised that the ACT will be included in its national network of GP superclinics. This is something that I have been lobbying for for some time, as we missed out on being included in the first round. It means that \$15 million has already been allocated for a GP superclinic in the ACT—fantastic news for the territory. It will not solve the GP shortage alone, but it is just another mechanism in government responses to some of the shortages that we are seeing here in the territory, and indeed some of the pressure that existing GPs are under.

The idea of a GP superclinic has, I think, been welcomed by everybody other than the local Liberal Party and some concerns from the AMA nationally, although the AMA here locally and the division of general practice locally, I think, who have a better understanding of just how much pressure GPs are under, are more moderate in their views around this. I think they, and we as a community, once we get through next weekend, need to work out how we can best use this \$15 million for very important health infrastructure to address everybody's needs.

It is not about trying to disadvantage one group over another. Existing GPs can apply for access to this \$15 million. I know that the universities, both the ANU and the University of Canberra, have a health role—at UCan there is the allied health and the nursing role and at ANU there is the medical school—and there are some very nice synergies with having the university linked to the idea of a GP superclinic.

I note that the Health Care Consumers Association are also very positive about the idea of health care in the suburbs with a multidisciplinary team with access to general practice and to allied health professionals as well. I think it shows that the federal government have listened to the ACT when we have continuously and continually written to them and lobbied them over extra support for general practice in the ACT.

I think the views by the Liberal Party are somewhat surprising, considering they campaigned pretty heavily on the idea of a GP superclinic during the last ACT campaign. In fact, they were going to offer a bulk-billing GP clinic—

Mr Seselja: An after-hours clinic.

MS GALLAGHER: After-hours GP clinics, bulk-billing—all the things that they were not able to deliver on, and would not have been able to deliver on. Not even the federal government can actually require general practitioners to bulk-bill. It is an individual practitioner's decision. But apart from that little problem with their whole policy, their policy is very similar to the infrastructure proposed in this policy, except they do not like it now.

As we have seen with the job cuts, and indeed their views around building the education revolution, not standing up for Canberra and rejecting \$15 million worth of vital health infrastructure just because it suits a political point at this point in time, they come into this place and consistently criticise the government about lack of support for GPs. Here we get a \$15 million gift from the federal government and what do the Liberal Party say? “Oh no, that's not needed; it'll jeopardise existing general practice.” What a load of rubbish! How can any member of this place say no to \$15 million worth of health infrastructure? Regardless of what position you sit in, how can you say no to it?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: Minister, does this current position represent a double backflip with pike with a degree of difficulty of 4.0? And how does this million dollar investment by the federal ALP complement and fit in with the ACT government's investment in health services in the territory?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mr Hargreaves for his supplementary. The GP superclinic alone, as I have said a number of times, will not solve the GP workforce problem but it is part of a broader range of measures. If you look at some of the initiatives that we have introduced here, aside from our advertising campaign to attract GPs, we have funded scholarships at the ANU Medical School. We are now paying GPs to train medical students, which has not happened in the past. We have an

infrastructure fund, a development fund, that provides money—\$1 million a year for the next four years—for payments to GP practices to support initiatives that attract staff, support existing staff or enable them to extend their facilities.

Of course, we are just about to get going with the new in-hours locum medical service for residents of aged care facilities. Again, that is supporting, I guess, the hospital and is an area that has been identified as a gap in some of our services for people who are in aged care facilities and who do not necessarily need to come to hospital but need access to primary care where they live. This service has been specifically tailored to meet that.

The commonwealth government also have funded an infrastructure fund similar to ours to support extensions to GP facilities. I note that, in Jeremy Hanson's rejection of the \$15 million, in his media release he put out rejecting the \$15 million, he said that more money should be put in to support the training of student doctors and, potentially, extend their hours and their facilities, both of which are initiatives that we have sought to cover off in paying GPs to take on students—\$300 a day if you take on a student in your practice now. I do not think that is done anywhere else in the country. Our infrastructure fund has been complemented by the commonwealth fund.

MR HANSON: Supplementary, Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Minister, given that Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard delivered only three of the 35 GP superclinics that were promised at the last election—that is, at the rate of one a year—can we expect the GP superclinic in Canberra, based on that rate of delivery, to be delivered within the next 30 years?

MS GALLAGHER: I do not agree with the question—what a surprise. I think 25 of the 33 are finalised, under construction or finished. And it was always intended—

Mr Hanson: Under construction?

MS GALLAGHER: The truth hurts, Mr Hanson, but that is the truth. And then it is a five-year program. The money that has been allocated to the ACT, as I understand it, was appropriated in the previous federal budget, so that money is there.

As a community, instead of saying no to \$15 million, Mr Hanson, what we need to do after the federal election—of course, we have to wait for that, because this might not go ahead if Abbott is elected as Prime Minister. Indeed, with his comments about Canberra today—about how real people do not actually live in the ACT; he wants to live where the real people live—my feeling, my sneaking suspicion, is that he will not think that we are entitled to \$15 million for a GP superclinic either. But assuming that we proceed with federal Labor, my suggestion is that we as an Assembly—indeed, with all the stakeholders in the community—get together and work out the best use of this \$15 million, get the application process signed off and get in as soon as we can.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary, Ms Porter?

MS PORTER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, can you please provide more insight into what the GP superclinic means for the ACT and how they are viewed by other groups in the community?

MS GALLAGHER: One of the options is that it supports existing general practice, so existing GPs are able to apply for this. I have said, and I think the federal health minister has said, that this alone will not deal with GP shortage. What deals with GP shortage is uncapping the medical school places, which has happened, providing more training opportunities for general practice, providing state-of-the-art facilities for young doctors to do their training in, so they can see that there is life and a career ahead in general practice, and ensuring that they do not have to take out large private loans in order to establish their business.

This is a new way and another way. It complements the existing GP practices and provides an opportunity to collocate—and this is the brave new world—other health services within that clinic. So it is not all about GPs. It is about allied health professionals; it is about nurse practitioners. They have to be part of the solutions as we move forward and deal with the workforce shortage across a whole range of specialities. It is not just about GPs.

We have, after successful lobbying—and I would be interested to see what efforts Mr Hanson has gone to in lobbying the federal government on GP issues; I would almost guess what the answer to that would be: nothing—increased the GP training places in the ACT. We have secured this \$15 million. We have put our own initiatives into this to support existing GPs. What have the Liberals done? Nothing.

ACT Health—clinical risk management

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Health and I refer to the recent review of service delivery at public maternity units. You stated yesterday in this place in question time: “What has the clinical review found? That there are no concerns around the quality of care at the Canberra Hospital.” However, the review found:

There is no ACT Health policy guiding standardised clinical risk management that covers both public maternity services in the ACT.

Minister, why hasn't ACT Health developed a policy guiding standardised clinical risk management covering both public maternity services in the ACT?

MS GALLAGHER: Because we do not run Calvary Public Hospital—and it goes to that in the report, Mrs Dunne, if you had read it.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mrs Dunne, a supplementary question.

MRS DUNNE: What other areas of ACT Health lack policies regarding standardised clinical risk management?

MS GALLAGHER: There is a range of different clinical specialities that operate across the two public hospitals, Mrs Dunne. Thank you for bringing this to the

attention of the Assembly again. These are, indeed, some of the issues that we were trying to address when we sought to own and operate Calvary Public Hospital. It was to make sure that we could run a standardised service across the two hospitals. That is what we wanted to do when we came out and said that we wanted better networking of the two hospitals—

Mrs Dunne: It was to fix your balance sheet so you could invest.

MS GALLAGHER: There were two reasons. There have always been two reasons. Go back and have a look at them, Mrs Dunne. You may have had something in your ears when we were talking about the first option. It was about improving the operations between the two public hospitals.

Now, I do not necessarily take the view that not having standardised risk processes across the two public hospitals impacts on clinical outcomes. I do not necessarily take that view. However, the review of the review is that we move to establish a territory-wide maternity service and standardise all those processes across the two public hospitals. I have already sought support from the AMA to work with the obstetricians who work across both of those public hospitals about how we might do that, considering that there are differences of opinions between Calvary Public Hospital and the Canberra Hospital. I think we need to work carefully through those issues.

In terms of risk management and the issue that was raised in the review, it was about the fact that if there are adverse events, or potentially adverse events, clinicians at Calvary Public Hospital have to put that data into both Riskman through ACT Health and then they have to fill out another process for Little Company of Mary Health Care. The view expressed in the review is that this does not encourage doctors to report those incidents if we are making it onerous for them to fill it out. But we do need them to fill out the ACT Health one and LCM need them to fill out their one.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, a supplementary question?

MR HANSON: Minister, are you entirely satisfied with the management of clinical risk within the maternity services at the Canberra Hospital?

MS GALLAGHER: Yes, I am.

Canberra Hospital—visiting medical officers

MR COE: My question is to the Minister for Health. I refer to the recent review of service delivery at public maternity units. It found that one of the three key barriers to medical clinicians working at the Canberra Hospital was a “perceived culture of resistance by the Canberra Hospital to the engagement of VMOs”. Why has this “culture of resistance” developed at the Canberra Hospital to the engagement of VMOs under your leadership?

MS GALLAGHER: There is not a resistance to engaging VMOs at the Canberra Hospital. VMOs make up a very large proportion of the doctors who work very

happily at the Canberra Hospital. Some of the issues around the employment of staff specialists versus the employment of visiting medical officers do cause disagreements between staff from time to time, but I and ACT Health managers have no problem with employing visiting medical officers at the Canberra Hospital. Indeed, in some services they are the only specialists that we have working in that area.

We need them. We are very dependent on them. They work very hard for our public system. In the area of obstetrics, some of the issues have been about VMOs not being able to work the roster because they have private businesses which they need to manage. When you are running a private business you cannot necessarily be at the hospital on the roster. That has impacts for their on-call requirements as well. There has been discussion over a number of years around the best way to staff the obstetrics unit, but there is certainly not a culture of resistance to VMOs at the Canberra Hospital.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Coe, a supplementary question?

MR COE: Given the review did say a “perceived culture of resistance” by the Canberra Hospital to the engagement of VMOs, what impact has that anti-VMO culture at the Canberra Hospital had on patients of VMOs on the list for elective surgery?

MS GALLAGHER: Sorry, in access to—what was the last bit?

MR COE: On the list.

MS GALLAGHER: There is not. To address your question, there is not an anti-VMO culture at the Canberra Hospital. Every hospital needs a mix of clinicians, whether they are VMOs or whether they are staff specialists. There is no resistance to employing VMOs at the Canberra Hospital. It may be down to doctor choice as to whether doctors come on as VMOs or staff specialists, and there are views around whether they should be employed as staff specialists or VMOs, but there is certainly no culture of resistance. We use VMOs all the time to manage a whole range of areas within the hospital, not just the elective surgery waiting list. I think the key word that is being ignored in this is a “perceived” culture—okay—“perceived”.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary, Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: Yes, Mr Speaker. Minister, the current lack of VMO appointments at the Canberra Hospital means that women under the care of private obstetricians who require transfer to the Canberra Hospital are almost always unable to maintain a continuity of care. Have your policies let those women down?

MS GALLAGHER: No, they have not. This indeed is a matter I discussed with clinicians at the Canberra Hospital in the obstetric unit recently. It is one of the recommendations that we are consulting with staff over. How we progress some of the recommendations around workforce is going to be very important to the overall success of a territory-wide maternity service. I would like to take the time to talk to people. There are different views around access for private patients with private

VMOs accessing a public service. I accept that. They have been put to me. I know private VMOs have a different view about that. But these are not simply sides, I guess, where you can say one person is right and one side is wrong. We need to build a territory-wide maternity service that has the support of private obstetricians and public obstetricians, where they work together on a range of employment relationships, if we are to have any success in addressing some of those issues that have been noted in a few reviews over a number of years.

Mr Hargreaves: A supplementary?

Mr Hanson: A supplementary?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, yes.

MR HANSON: You have got to say “supplementary”.

Mr Hargreaves: I wanted a supplementary.

MR HANSON: You should say it.

Mr Hargreaves: I did say it in fact, but I believe seven supplementaries is a bit much.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR HANSON: Minister, why did you not act earlier to change the culture at the Canberra Hospital, given that you have stated previously that you were aware of the 10-year war in obstetrics?

MS GALLAGHER: I can certainly say that I think everybody in this place understands some of the differences of opinion within the obstetrics community. I am not sure they are issues politicians can resolve. I did not have an approach from private doctors wanting to work in the public service until November last year. In November last year, I received four letters within two days from private obstetricians saying that they would like to work at the Canberra Hospital but they did not feel they could at that point in time due to workplace issues. I think they were the words. That was the first approach around a willingness to work but feeling unable to do so.

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

Schools—information and communications technology education

Clarification by minister

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Planning, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation and Minister for Gaming and Racing): Yesterday in question time Mr Hargreaves asked me a question in relation to risks of ICT projects not being delivered in ACT schools and, in my answer, I referred to the leader of the federal Liberal Party. I have been provided with a proof *Hansard* that shows that I referred to the leader of the federal Liberal Party as a lowlife. I would

like to correct the record. At no point did I refer to the leader of the federal Liberal Party as a lowlife. I am sure members would recall I referred to the leader of the federal Liberal Party as a Luddite on more than one occasion, but it has come up in *Hansard* as a lowlife. The Leader of the Opposition is not a lowlife but he certainly is a Luddite.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you for that clarification, Mr Barr.

Australian Greens—policies

Debate resumed.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (3:10): This is a very important motion and, when Ms Hunter spoke before, at no time did I hear her disavow any of what Mr Seselja has in his motion. So what we really do have is confirmation that, under Greens policy, if they have the balance of power in the Senate after Saturday, cost of living across Australia will go up. And that is the great fear, because you never get a costing from the Greens.

We saw it indeed after the ACT election where, simply, their policy on public housing was worth—what?—about a billion dollars. It was only a billion dollars, but no detail, no answer as to where it is coming from, no notion of how it should be paid for. It was just a good idea. Indeed, if you look at the Greens' policy platform for the coming election, there are a tremendous amount of expensive ideas in the platform.

One of the costs of living, particularly in the ACT, of great importance is the cost of electricity. A lot of families use electricity for their heating. The Greens intend to reform the national electricity market to remove the bias towards centralised coal-fired generation. If you are going to reform the national electricity market in this vein—and it goes on to talk about not subsidising coal, not allowing public funding to refurbish any existing coal-fired power stations, no matter how inefficient they are—any reform of this sort of level to the national electricity market is simply going to drive prices up. But yet again, at the end of the day, there is absolutely no costing on how to achieve it and what will be the impact on ordinary Australians.

In speaking to the motion, Mr Seselja spoke about health care in particular. Again, we had confirmation from Ms Hunter that the policy is that the 30 per cent rebate goes. And it is aimed at the rich, apparently. "Millionaires should not be getting a rebate." Who gets the rebate? Who gets this money? Who is assisted to remain in private health care by the 30 per cent funding? According to a press release from the AHIA, if you look at public health cover:

It is a myth that private health cover is for the rich. The latest statistics from the Australian Tax Office and Australian Bureau of Statistics show that of the 11.5 million Australians who have Private Health Insurance: (9.9 million have hospital cover)

- 5.6 million Australians have an income less than \$50,000 per annum ...

Welcome to the Greens' new rich. If you have got \$50,000 as an income, you are rich and we are going to take your private health cover subsidy off you. The AHIA also

noted that 3.4 million Australians have an income of—guess how much—\$35,000 per annum. That is a lot of mums. That is a lot of pensioners. It is single mums. It is people on disability pensions. It is the unemployed. There are 3.4 million Australians who have incomes less than \$35,000 per annum who have hospital and health insurance, and these are the people that the Greens are going to take the assistance away from.

The Greens' health policy reads:

... abolish the private health insurance rebate and redirect funds to the public health system, including public hospitals.

That is what it says. Ms Hunter had the chance to correct this, but of course she did not. She did not correct the record because she cannot. And the problem is: no-one can believe the Greens on this, because they say and choose what they want. Here it is. Let us go to the fifth dot point in measure 22 on page 80, under "Taxation":

22. reduce inequities in the current personal tax system by: ... abolishing the 30% Private Health Insurance Rebate in order to increase funding for public hospitals;

That is it. It is gone, abolished. The rebate goes. So this should read in full: "Abolish the 30 per cent private health insurance rebate in order to increase funding for public hospitals, by taking it away from 5.6 million Australians who have an income of less than \$50,000 per annum." Then there should be a second dot point that says, "Abolish the 30 per cent private health insurance rebate from the 3.4 million Australians that have an income of less than \$35,000 per annum." There it is in a nub. That is their policy. That is what it says. There are no caveats. There are no riders.

We had no disavowal or explanation of this from Ms Hunter before lunch. Hopefully, one of the other Greens, one of the more financially literate Greens, will get up after I finish speaking and actually tell us what this means. You can only look at it in the context of the document. There is no costing. They do not tell you how many people it affects, because they do not do the work.

They write this stuff and put it in their policies, but they give no thought to the 3.4 million Australians who have an income of less than \$35,000 per annum, who understand the importance of having private health insurance and who, not to be a burden on the health system, have taken out that private health insurance. And it would be tough for a family or an individual on less than \$35,000, I suspect, to be paying private health insurance.

But the Greens want to slug them. That is the party of equity. That is the party of fairness. That is the party who profess to look after those less well off. But we are going to slug 3.4 million Australians. And there it is in the policy. I would welcome any of the Greens standing up and telling me that is wrong and point to where in their document it says that it will not affect those people.

But we are going to reform the national electricity market and that reform, I guarantee you, can only come at additional cost to the price of electricity. If I am wrong, stand

up and give me the numbers. Show me the numbers. Give me your impact statement. Give me the business impact statement, the regulatory impact statement that says you can bring the price of electricity down by this reform. I do not believe you can. And I do not believe any of the Greens can stand up, when I finish, and prove me wrong and show me where is the caveat. Where is the rider on this that it will not affect those poor, less well-off, 3½ million Australians by taking away their private health insurance?

If you go down to the next measure, they are going to introduce an estate tax with full provisions. This is the comparison. On private health insurance rebates, it is mute. At least in their estate tax proposal, they do say that they will exclude a few things. In measure 23 on the same page, page 80, they say:

23. introduce an estate tax with full provisions to protect the family farm, the family home and small business with a threshold of \$5 million as indexed from the year 2010.

For now. I would like to see the full detail on that. If you are not going to include those 3.4 million Australians under \$35,000, why do you not state it in your policy? And the reason is: you are caught out. You are exposed. You just do not care. It is lazy policy. You do not do the work. You have not got the numbers. You do not care.

Then we go to childcare. I want to see the numbers. The demand of the coalition is: "We want to see your numbers." I want to see the numbers from the Greens. Measure 24 on page 54, under "Childcare", there it is:

24. establish nationally consistent childcare standards including carer-to-child ratios of at least 1:3 for children up to 2 years old and 1:4 for children older than 2 years old.

Every one of us wants the best childcare we can provide for our kids. But again, what about those families on a single income, potentially under \$35,000 per annum? A lot of young families starting out have one income, because, let us face it, one of them at least, normally the mum, is at home minding the kids. And if you want to get back in the workforce early you have got to use childcare of some sort. But we are going to make, through this Greens policy, childcare more expensive.

You are paying more for your electricity in a cold Canberra winter. You are going to either have to reduce the benefits that you have in your private health insurance or get out of it because the rebate is going for 3.4 million Australians. Some of those 3.4 million do live in the ACT. And we are going to charge you more for your childcare. Where are the numbers on that? We do not get any numbers from the Greens' financial spokesperson. Perhaps one of the other Greens could tell us how they are going to fund that and how they are going to make sure that the poor are not disadvantaged.

If, perchance, you earn under \$35,000 and you used to have health insurance and you wanted to access childcare and, because you have a faith, you want to send your kid to a non-government school, whether it be Catholic or Muslim, under the Greens you are going to pay more for that. At the Press Club luncheon today, Bob Brown was asked

what was his policy on funding the non-government education sector and he would not answer. He did not even have the courage to go to his policy and tell people the truth. That is what you never get from the Greens—the full impact, the truth on what their policies will do to the ordinary people of Australia.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (3.21): I thank Mr Seselja for bringing forward this important motion in this important week that highlights so much that is lacking in policy formulation when we look at the Greens, so much that is lacking in relation to care and consideration for the average Australian.

Before I consider at length the issues that I wish to consider in this debate, which centre on childcare, I have to draw the house's attention to the bizarre experience that we saw just before lunch. First of all, we saw this little interplay between you, Madam Assistant Speaker Le Couteur, and Mr Barr, to ensure that he got the call, which was pretty unedifying. Then we saw a very interesting display of the only economic rationalist in the Greens party. Mr Barr carried on as if he were a member of the Greens party. So he has gone from being a severe and critical—

Mr Rattenbury: On a point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker, I believe that Mrs Dunne has just questioned your independence as the chair. I would like her to clarify exactly what her point is. If she has complained about the conduct of the chair, she needs to move a substantive motion of complaint.

Mr Seselja: No, she was stating a fact. She was stating what she saw.

Mr Doszpot: Just stating a fact.

Ms Hunter: No, she has been nasty and rude.

Mr Rattenbury: On the point of order, to seek clarification, I think Mrs Dunne is impugning your motives and I think she needs to either withdraw or clarify what she is saying.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Le Couteur): I am advised that it is in fact disorderly to reflect upon the chair; so, Mrs Dunne, I invite you to withdraw your reflections.

MRS DUNNE: Madam Assistant Speaker, there was no reflection on the chair.

Ms Hunter: Of course there was. It was damn clear.

MRS DUNNE: It was a statement of what happened in this place. Mr Barr essentially indicated to you that he wanted the call the next time and he got the call even though I was on my feet.

Mr Barr: I was on my feet before you—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, I invite you to withdraw your allegation.

Mr Barr: and it is normal practice to rotate between the parties.

Ms Hunter: Outrageous!

MRS DUNNE: If you insist, Madam Assistant Speaker, I will withdraw, but the matter is on the record.

Ms Hunter: Appalling behaviour!

Mr Barr: The Liberal speaker had already spoken; so it was over to this side of the house.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, have you withdrawn?

MRS DUNNE: I withdraw.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

Mr Rattenbury: I have a further point of order. Mrs Dunne did not withdraw unconditionally. She said that it is now on the public record. She has not withdrawn wholeheartedly.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I think, Mr Rattenbury, she said, “I withdraw”—

MRS DUNNE: I withdraw.

Mr Rattenbury: This is grubby politics from the opposition impugning the motives of the Assistant Speaker—

Mr Seselja: Point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker.

Mr Hanson: We heard “warn him, warn him!”

Mr Seselja: I have been warned this morning. Mr Barr has been interjecting and not called to order. Mr Rattenbury is getting up and abusing the forms of this house to make political points and I would ask you to call all members to order, not just members of the opposition.

Mr Hanson: You have got to warn him if you are going to be consistent. We are not allowed to yell out “warn him, warn him!” That is what Mr Rattenbury did, and you warned someone. Good enough for him, not good enough for us. It is inconsistent.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Members, I have made my ruling. I believe it is time to desist from this interruption. Mrs Dunne, you have the floor for a substantive debate.

Mr Seselja: Sorry, Madam Assistant Speaker—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Seselja—

Mr Seselja: Sorry, are you ignoring my point of order? Is my point of order not worth addressing in relation to the interjections of Mr Barr and the unruly behaviour of Mr Rattenbury?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Seselja—

Mr Seselja: You have not said a word about it.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Seselja, it is quite disorderly to continue to make comments about the chair's comments. I suggest that Mrs Dunne continue her speech.

Mr Seselja: I am sorry, I am just seeking your clarification as to why you are not addressing my points of order in relation to the behaviour of Mr Barr and Mr Rattenbury.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Seselja, it is disorderly to reflect on the conduct of the chair. I suggest that you cease and desist from this and let your companion, your fellow member of the Liberal Party, make her substantive speech.

Mr Doszpot: Madam Assistant Speaker, can I get a point of clarification? I also saw the fact that Mrs Dunne—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot—

Mr Doszpot: I need to get clarification. There was an interchange between you and Mr Barr while somebody else was speaking. The indications were that he was going to be next.

Mr Rattenbury: On the point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker, it is quite common for members, first, to sometimes approach the chair in order to facilitate debate and, second, to rotate around the chamber from one party to the next. I think Mr Doszpot is reflecting on your decision and he is reflecting on your impartiality. I ask him to withdraw.

Mr Doszpot: I am asking whether there has—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot!

Mr Doszpot: Madam Assistant Speaker, I am asking whether that happened—whether you and Mr Barr had an interchange.

Mr Seselja: This is how they exercise the balance of power.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Sit down. You are reflecting on the chair. I ask all of you to sit down.

Mr Hanson: Are you trying to exercise the Speaker's rule from the crossbench?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, I would ask you to stop interjecting. Mrs Dunne, you have the floor for a substantive debate if you so desire.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker. What we saw this morning was a truly bizarre interaction between Mr Barr and the Greens, where he was actually going out of his way to coach the Greens about what they should be doing to cover up their embarrassment, which is their policy, as has been highlighted by Mr Seselja's motion here today. It is interesting because what he actually asked for was for Senator Brown to come out and clarify the position in relation to funding for non-government schools. He had his wish.

At the National Press Club yesterday the question was asked. The question was asked and Mr Brown refused to answer the question. Mr Brown refused to answer the question and on the basis of that, Madam Assistant Speaker, I now move the amendment to Mr Seselja's motion circulated in my name:

Insert after paragraph (1)(e):

“(ea) the unwillingness of the Leader of the Australian Greens, Senator Bob Brown, to disavow this policy during his address to the National Press Club on Wednesday, 18 August 2010;”.

On the basis of that, I have moved this amendment, because it goes to the heart of the policy. The policy is about cutting money out of non-government schools and Mr Barr fell over himself, in an embarrassing way this morning, trying to get the Greens to clarify their situation. Now Mr Barr is just as embarrassed as the Greens are in relation to this policy.

He can speak again and justify how, after the pleadings of the left of Australian politics—one part of the left of Australian politics pleading with the other part to at least look a bit credible—he cannot come up with a situation where there is clarity. The only clarity is the clear written words in the Greens' policy. Senator Brown was given an opportunity to take away from that policy and somehow disavow it, and he would not do so. So the clear facts of the written policy remain the policy of the Greens.

We also had the unedifying spectacle of Ms Hunter trying to come up with a more palatable approach to private health expenditure and private health insurance. What she was saying is what I would prefer would be the case—that there should be a means test. But the policy does not talk about a means test. It talks about plain old-fashioned abolition. That is plain old-fashioned abolition of health rebates for ordinary, everyday Canberrans and ordinary, everyday Australians—people like my 90-year-old mother, who spends a considerable part of her pension income ensuring that she has private health insurance.

It relates to people like that who have always, for 90 years or for 60 years, had private health insurance. They want the comfort of knowing that they have the doctor of their

choice when they need to go to hospital. That is what they want and the Greens want to deprive them of it.

But the substantive matter that I wish to address here today is the issue of childcare. I have dealt with this matter a lot recently and we have seen the sort of hand wringing and hand washing of the current minister about the cost of childcare. She keeps saying: "Look, it is not a matter for me. It is a matter for the provider to determine the cost of childcare. I just set the policies that determine what childcare costs will be."

As Mr Smyth and Mr Seselja have said, the whole issue of childcare and the quality of childcare is very important. The federal Labor government want to lower childcare ratio incentives to come into force in 2012. But now we have the Greens, who want to go one better than that. They want to reduce childcare ratios in childcare centres even lower from Labor's one to four to an all-new record low of one to three. Like Labor, they want to say to the people of Australia, "Do not worry about it; it will be good for you and it will be good for your children."

They are not telling the people of Australia that a further reduction in child-to-carer ratios will cost mums and dads even more. They are not telling the people of Australia that it will put pressure on the ability of childcare centres to meet demand for childcare places. They are not telling the people of Australia that their plans will put pressure on the ability of childcare centres to recruit staff or that their plans will put pressure on childcare centres to meet requirements of that plan.

The Australian Greens, like Labor, are not telling mums and dads that this pressure will affect their ability to keep their kids in childcare and keep themselves in work. What the Greens are telling the people of Australia is just what the ALP are telling people, that they have a plan and that that plan is good for them, but let us not worry about the detail.

There is no denying that the quality of childcare is critical in giving a good start to children in life. Parents place a lot of trust in their childcare centres to deliver high-quality services to care for their children. I note the disparaging comments made by Ms Hunter this morning about the quality of childcare. She implied—in fact, she said—that the quality of childcare was low and that is not the case. But there are some real issues here and they head around cost.

The Productivity Commission's ROGS report for 2010 released in January this year tells us that Canberra's mums and dads pay the highest childcare fees in Australia. The median charge last year was \$65 a day, which is more than \$8 above the national average. The report shows that a family with a combined income of \$50,000 spends 14 per cent of that income in after-tax terms if they have two children in long-day care. What we have seen, and these figures have been disavowed by Ms Burch who thinks it is not important, is that if you are on \$65,000 you are actually \$2,400 worse off in the ACT than if you are in another part of Australia. If you are on \$50,000, you are \$2,150 worse off.

If you do not think that there are many families in that category, let us just think about it. The latest census shows that 7,000 families in Canberra who require some form of childcare earn below \$65,000 a year. So we are talking about real money for real

people in this community. The Guild Accountants on behalf of 170 childcares centres in New South Wales have recently conducted a survey. They looked at the cost impacts of Labor's reforms in New South Wales. They are not exactly comparable—it will probably cost more in the ACT—but what they have found is that there will be a 30 per cent rise or a rise of \$20.56 a day in New South Wales childcare. That is an additional \$102 a week for each child in childcare. If the child is a two or three-year-old, that increase will be 38 per cent—\$23 a day or \$116 a week.

That is what Labor's proposed changes will cost. On top of that, the Australian Greens want to change those staff ratios even more. What we are seeing is that a poor policy, which has not been thought through in relation to the impacts on families, will be made worse if the Australian Greens gain the balance of power in the Senate after Saturday's election. The people of Australia and the people of the ACT cannot afford the policies of the Australian Greens when it comes to families.

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (3.35): Quite clearly, there are some philosophical differences in this place. The Canberra Liberals have policies and the federal Liberals have policies aimed at keeping the cost of living down for families, for the working families that Labor pretends to support. What we have seen from Labor and, worse, from the Greens are policies that are going to put upward pressure on almost every aspect of the family budget, from healthcare costs to education costs, childcare costs, everyday living expenses and your power bill. Let us not pretend any different.

Although the Greens' policies sound warm and fuzzy and they sound aspirational and they look good on a piece of paper and people can go out and feel in their heart that they are doing the right thing, you just need to peel away the facade and what you find underneath is essentially a big bill—a big bill for Canberra families. That is going to drive Canberra backwards. Remember it was Ms Le Couteur who said famously, "We do not want to move back to the caves yet." So "we do want to move back, but just not yet, but we are heading in that direction".

What is it that the Greens want to do? As shadow health minister, I am particularly interested in the Greens' plan to abolish the private health insurance rebate. That is a cost to Canberra families of \$37 million. So that is \$37 million, before you even start on the others, that is going to be ripped out of Canberra households—\$37 million that people are going to have to find to pay for their private health insurance. And, as Mr Smyth explained, these are not rich Australians—this is every other Australian that we are talking about. In actual fact, 11 million Australians have private health insurance. So it is not taxing the rich or attacking the rich who can pay for this anyway. This is about ordinary Canberra families from Tuggeranong, Belconnen, Weston Creek, Woden, throughout our city; and from Gungahlin—do not forget the great people of Gungahlin.

We need a strong private health system, and private health is absolutely essential here in the ACT. In fact, we have the highest rates of take-up of private health insurance in the country—55 per cent compared to an average of about 44 per cent across the nation. We need that. Can you imagine, Madam Assistant Speaker, the impact on our health system if people said, "Okay, private health insurance is now too much because the Greens have got rid of our rebate and so I'm going to opt out of private health"?

Fifty-seven per cent of surgical procedures are done under the private health system. So let us assume that a whole bunch of people—I do not know what it will be, 10 per cent, 15 per cent or 25 per cent—decide to opt out of the private health system and go back to the public system. Can you imagine the impact that is going to have on our elective surgery waiting lists? We already have the worst in the nation. Our median waiting lists are 75 days compared to a national average of 34 days.

What you are going to see out of this Greens policy is a flow-on effect for ordinary people—because the people that will opt out are the poorest people. The most wealthy will continue to be able to afford it. This is going to affect the people who are struggling, people who say they really wanted it but now they cannot afford it because they are on a wage that just cannot sustain it—they are paying too much rent or a big mortgage, and they are paying school fees that are going to go up under the Greens as well. This is going to rip people out of the private health system, and those queues in emergency departments waiting for treatment, for elective surgery, are going to get longer and bed occupancy rates will go up. Our system will not be able to cope as a result of this reckless policy.

We need to turn now to education. About 50 per cent of parents in the ACT send their kids to an independent school of one sort or another. The Greens' policy will rip \$60 million out of the pockets of those schools. You have to realise that private education, independent education, is about choice. There is a philosophical difference here. The Greens want everybody to be the same, to come down to the same level—everyone has got to be the same. That is called socialism. We are not supporting socialism. You, in the Greens —

Mr Barr: That is from a political science lecture.

MR HANSON: Well, it is socialism. There is no support for independent schools. They would take away all the support for independent schools; there would be a gradual erosion of support for independent schools.

Mr Barr: Are you suggesting they are actually —

MR HANSON: I know you want to defend the Greens and I know that you, Mr Barr, equally are not a supporter of independent schools. You were dragged kicking and screaming because you had to—

Mr Barr: I was a student at an independent school, Jeremy. I went to an independent school.

MR HANSON: When it comes to half and half, you do not support independent schools. You were sent to an independent school—so was Mr Rattenbury; he was the beneficiary of a private school education. He got a scholarship to attend Canberra Grammar School, so he has been the beneficiary and he has got where he has on the back of, largely, or in some part, a private school education. Now Mr Rattenbury wants to rip money out of those same schools that he is the beneficiary of. That is the sort of hypocrisy that we get from the chardonnay-sipping socialists of the Greens. And that is what you are with these policies.

Mr Hargreaves: Put your hands up if you have been kicked out by the Marist Brothers.

MR HANSON: Do you think it is a joke? Do you think that the struggling families out there in Belconnen and in Tuggeranong who are trying to meet private health insurance fees that they have to pay, who are trying to pay for their kids to attend the local Catholic school, who have power bills that are coming in that are too big, are a joke? These people look at these Greens' policies, which are about attacks on families, that are about taking money away from independent schools, that are about taking away their ability to pay for private health insurance because everything has to be in the public system, and they are rightly frightened about the cost pressures and the agenda of the Greens.

These Greens policies are dangerous for Canberra families and it is frightening to me that they may—after this federal election—have the balance of power in the federal Senate. But let us not make any pretence that Lin Hatfield Dodds, the Greens candidate, is a great advocate for Canberra, that what she is focused on is Canberra families out in the suburbs. She is not. This is about trying to get Bob Brown power in the Senate. It would be reckless if Canberrans found themselves in a position where they did not have a single representative in either the House of Representatives or the Senate from one of the two major parties in this country.

Mr Barr: You really are seriously worried he is going to lose on Saturday, aren't you? You are seriously worried.

MR HANSON: The Liberal Party will either form government or be in opposition. I am confident that the good people of Canberra will see through—

Mr Barr: What is all this then, if you are not worried?

MR HANSON: Can you just stop the clocks please, Madam Assistant Speaker? I have been continually brought to order by you and by other Speakers in this place when facing interjections. Mr Barr has been sitting there throughout the bulk of this speech, interjecting on a continual basis, and you have just been nodding and smiling at him. Why is it, Madam Assistant Speaker—and I asked you to stop the clocks and you will not—that when I interject or when others interject, you warn—

Mr Seselja: Could you stop the clocks, Madam Assistant Speaker. Could I request that you stop the clocks while a point of order is taken?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Le Couteur): Do you want to make a point of order, Mr Hanson?

Mr Seselja: Yes, he is making his point of order.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Yes, he is on a point of order.

MR HANSON: I do not understand, Madam Assistant Speaker, why continually when Mr Barr is interjecting, as he has done through the bulk of my speech, you are

sitting there nodding and smiling, whereas if members of the opposition were interjecting throughout a speech by either the Labor Party or the Greens we were being warned and being shut down. Can you explain that inconsistency or could you please, as I continue to progress my speech, tell Mr Barr to desist? I do not mind, as long as there is consistency. If we are allowed to talk when other people are speaking, that is fine, but please be consistent, Madam Assistant Speaker.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, are you moving a motion of dissent from my ruling?

MR HANSON: No, I am asking you, Madam Assistant Speaker—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Well, in that case—

Mr Hargreaves: Madam Assistant Speaker, can I assist, with your indulgence?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Yes.

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Hanson was not actually challenging the authority of the chair; he was seeking your protection, in fact, as I understand it, against the interjections or the demeanour of Mr Barr and was seeking your ruling on that, so he was not actually seeking, at this point, to move dissent from your ruling. But I do not know whether you have authority to stop Mr Barr nodding or grinning across the chamber.

MR HANSON: No—she was nodding. The point was that there is an inconsistency, Madam Assistant Speaker. I do not mind if Mr Barr is going to be allowed to interject throughout my speech, as long as you apply the same standard to the opposition. If that is the way the performance in this place is going to be, that is fine. But could you please apply it consistently throughout this debate, so if Mr Barr does continue and you continue to ignore him that is fine, but then you must also, I would contend, do the same for the opposition members.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, thank you for your comments. If you would like to continue your substantive speech, you have the floor.

MR HANSON: Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker; we do not have a ruling so we will just run with the inconsistency.

Let us be very clear about what the Greens' policies will do to the people of Canberra. They will put up their bills. They will put up the cost of living. It is quite clear that the Greens are really, with an ideological agenda which is about trying to diminish private enterprise and choice, trying to drive everybody into a public system, be it a public school or a public hospital, going to be damaging both to individual Canberrans, to their pay packets and their bills, and to the systems.

The public education system cannot cope with a big influx of kids whose parents can no longer pay for them to go to an independent school. Likewise, the public health system in the ACT cannot afford to receive the 10 per cent, 20 per cent, 25 per cent or whatever the figure is of people who will drop out of private health insurance and now

become an increased burden on the health system. So the points that have been made by others are very true, that this will have a real impact on Canberra families. But let us not forget that the consequences of these policies would be incredibly damaging to the public school system and to the public health system, because both have been structured, both have been resourced, to enable only a certain number of students and patients at a time.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella) (3.47): I actually have to share with you a concern, Madam Assistant Speaker. If the Greens get their way in this country, we'll all be rooned! I do not believe I can vote for a party that eats its own young! I think this is dreadful.

In all seriousness, it all seems to me like a bunch of people standing in the headlights of a Mack truck. I do not see anything in this motion which asks, "What about the Democrats' policies on education, housing and childcare?" I do not see anything about Family First and the abrogation of our rights that those people keep pontificating about. I do not see any of that. All I see in this motion is an all-out attack on the Greens.

The people I have a difficulty with—apart from the substance, of which there was not very much—is the idea that you can do this under privilege in this house. I think, in fact, that is an abuse of parliamentary privilege in this place.

Mrs Dunne: You could have had a ruling on this yesterday when it was listed, if it is such an important issue.

MR HARGREAVES: The grumblings of those on the waiting list for mental health do not impress me.

Mr Hanson: Well, have you listened to Mr Barr?

MR HARGREAVES: I am listening, and I listened.

Mr Hanson: What Mr Barr said—

MR HARGREAVES: You will recall, Mr Hanson—through you, Madam Assistant Speaker—that I listened to you in silence.

Mr Hanson: Mr Barr didn't. Your colleagues didn't.

MR HARGREAVES: I listened to Mr Hanson in silence, but he is incapable of listening to anyone in silence.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Le Couteur): One minute, Mr Hargreaves. Mr Hanson, please, let us listen to Mr Hargreaves in silence.

Mr Hanson: On a point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker, I spoke for about eight minutes before I asked—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Could we please stop the clock.

Mr Hanson: And you immediately stop the clock. This is just bizarre. I asked, after eight minutes, that Mr Barr desist. It has taken less than two minutes for you to make a ruling, and you immediately, of your own initiative, asked for the clocks to be stopped. I had to plead with you about that. In actual fact, Mr Seselja then had to stand up—

MR HARGREAVES: What is the point of order?

Mr Hanson: The point of order is that you are not applying any consistency to this.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Are you moving dissent from my ruling?

MR HARGREAVES: On the point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: I was not referring to any interchange between Mr Hanson and any other member here. I was merely drawing to your attention, and to his, in fact, that I listened to him in silence. I gave him the respect of him being able to stand in this chamber and make his view known. I was asking for him to extend to me the same courtesy. I do not give a monkey's whether or not other people are doing different things. I was merely asking for the same courtesy that I extended to Mr Hanson. But, Madam Assistant Speaker, if Mr Hanson does not want to extend to me that courtesy, let him stand up and say so.

Mr Seselja: On the point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker, I seek your ruling on Mr Hanson's point of order. I have raised points of order, and none of them have actually been addressed. When we have raised points of order about disorderly conduct across the chamber, about interjections across the chamber, you have not devoted one word to actually addressing those points of order. You have simply gone on. So I now seek your ruling on whether it is acceptable for Mr Barr and Mr Rattenbury to interject and not acceptable for Mr Hanson or members of the opposition to interject. I seek your formal ruling.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Seselja, as you well know, it is not acceptable for members to interject. However, as a matter of practicality, some interjections happen. I would have to point out, as someone sitting here, that there is a difference in volume between people. I try to chair as fairly as possible. If you wish to move dissent, you can move dissent. Otherwise, I believe Mr Hargreaves was attempting to make a speech and has the floor.

Mr Seselja: No, I am actually seeking a ruling on a number of points of order that have been raised by members of the opposition in relation to their interjections. We have not had a ruling. In fact, you completely ignored both me and Mr Hanson when we raised them, and then you came back and again brought Mr Hanson to order after that time. So I seek your ruling or your explanation as to why it is that you did not even answer our questions in relation to their constant interjections and the disorderly behaviour of Mr Rattenbury.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I do not believe there is a point of order here. Mr Hargreaves, you have the floor.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much, Madam Assistant Speaker. What we are actually seeing is the politics of distraction—that is, trying to distract our minds away from the real issue. The real issue is that somebody who is running for public office is absolutely scared witless that they might not get elected. As I understand it, as I am reading it, the Liberal Party over here are attacking the policies of the Greens as they may affect the ACT. For a person from the Liberal Party who would be the great defender of that—

Mr Hanson: Are you apologising for the Greens?

MR HARGREAVES: Beg your pardon?

Mr Hanson: Are you apologising for the Greens?

MR HARGREAVES: Madam Assistant Speaker, Mr Hanson asks if I am apologising on behalf of the Greens. Let me assure Mr Hanson—through you, Madam Assistant Speaker—that I have not, and will not apologise to anybody. It was some great Labor bloke who said, “Never explain and never apologise.” Well, I am him. Suits me.

Mr Hanson: Are you defending the Greens?

MR HARGREAVES: I am not defending anybody, but I am suggesting that these guys are like rabbits staring at a Mack truck on the highway. Who is the rabbit? It is not Brer Rabbit. It is not Mr Rabbit. In fact, it is Senator Humphries. Now, he has never needed support from this place. He was a very popular individual here and he won a succession of elections—did not need anybody else’s help. And then he went into the Senate, and guess what?

Mr Smyth: On a point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker, the member has now been going for 3½ minutes.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Please stop the clocks.

Mr Smyth: He has made no reference to the motion as such, and I ask you to direct him to be relevant.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Smyth. There is no point of order.

MR HARGREAVES: On the point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker, I actually have referred to this motion. I have, in fact, referred to the very motion which is in my hands.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Hargreaves. Please start the clocks again. Mr Hargreaves, you have the floor.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much. We have to ask the point—

Mr Hanson: You are rambling, Johnno.

MR HARGREAVES: I am rambling? Listen to this. The Midnight Rambler over there talks to me about rambling. The issue—

Mr Barr: Very good Rolling Stones references.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much, Mr Barr. The real issue is that these people have sprung to the defence of the former Chief Minister in this place against the Greens. They have, under the guise of parliamentary privilege, used this motion to say, “Let’s be concerned about the Australian Greens party this, the Australian Greens party that.” I am exposing this for the fraud that it is. It is a fraud. This is an abuse of the parliamentary privilege of this place.

Mr Seselja: On a point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker, it is completely disorderly and irrelevant for Mr Hargreaves to be debating whether this motion is in order. If he wants to move that the motion is out of order, he should do so. Otherwise, it is irrelevant and disorderly for him to be claiming that, because this was listed on the notice paper with the consent of all parties.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Seselja. There is no point of order. Mr Hargreaves, you have the floor.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much, Madam Assistant Speaker. The real issue here is that those opposite are attacking the Greens’ policy. It refers in paragraph (h) to the policy of the Australian Greens party to lower childcare ratios. Right? We are talking about the policy of the Australian Greens party that would gut funding to non-government schools. This is really just a thinly veiled attempt to protect Gary Humphries from the immediate attack from the Greens party on Senator Humphries’ position. It is as simple as that.

Do you know what this is? This is quacking like a duck. It walks like a duck, it quacks like a duck. Guess what? It has got ducked! It is well and truly ducked. Your whole scheme of things is well and truly ducked. There is nothing you can do that can rescue your position. You are just a bunch of six musketeers coming out of your corner trying to protect Gary Humphries from Lin Hatfield Dodds. In the meantime, you are trying to attack the Greens. You are saying: “We’ll all be rooned. We’ll all be rooned.”

Well, let me tell you, you said we would all be rooned at the beginning of this Assembly. You all said we would live to regret it at the beginning of this Assembly. We have a parliamentary agreement with the Greens, because the Greens have certain things that they feel are beneficial to the community, and so do the Labor Party, and we came together because of that. That is what you are afraid of. You are afraid that the Labor Party and the Greens might have something in common which might work to the good of our community. You are afraid that we will deliver to the community something that will actually benefit them.

Mr Hanson: So you agree with his policies, John?

MR HARGREAVES: No. The trouble is that the Greens do not have the divine right to rule. That is the problem.

Mr Hanson: Do you agree with their policies? Say yes or no.

Mr Smyth: He has.

MR HARGREAVES: I tell you what I do agree with: I do agree that you guys are in real trouble. Gary Humphries is in real trouble. If I were you blokes, I would not be helping Lin Hatfield Dodds roll him, because that is what you are doing right now. You are making a spectacle of yourselves.

Mr Hanson: Do you agree with the policies or not? Just answer the question, John—yes or no? Do you think that they should get rid of the private health cover?

MR HARGREAVES: The day that Mr Hanson becomes Speaker in this place is the day he can demand that I answer a question. I am not going to dignify him with a response. I am going to treat him with the contempt that he is due, because I have no difficulty in standing up here and supporting the parliamentary agreement between the ACT Greens and the ACT Labor Party, because it has been good for the people of Canberra. What else has been good for the people of Canberra has been keeping you people out of power, because if you people are a reflection of what Abbott is going to do to this town then we are all going to be rooned. Let us make no mistake about it.

Mr Smyth: On a point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker, it is now four minutes since I last raised this point of order. He is entitled to attack us if he wants. He can do that by substantive motion or his own motion. This motion is about cost of living pressures on Canberra families. He refuses to come back to that point. If you will not direct him then you are being deficient in your job.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Smyth. Mr Hargreaves, you continue to have the floor.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much, Madam Assistant Speaker. I am aware—

Mr Smyth: On a point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker, I have asked you on the question of relevance to direct him. You have just said “continue”. Do you believe he is being relevant to the motion and that he is addressing the cost of living issues for the people of Canberra?

Mr Barr: The motion is more than just that, Mr Smyth.

Mr Smyth: The motion is about cost of living. Read the motion.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Stop the clocks. Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: Madam Assistant Speaker, to assist your good self and to assist Mr Smyth, I will, in fact, refer to the cost of living pressures.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I think we can restart.

MR HARGREAVES: The cost of living pressures in this town will suffer very badly if the Liberal Party get anywhere near power. The cost of living pressures in this town will accelerate if Brer Rabbit happens to be in the Lodge. In fact, he is not going to live there; he is going to live somewhere else. In fact, the problem with these people here is that their cost of living pressures are being resisted by the Greens. Lin Hatfield Dodds has exposed them and they do not like it. So what do they do? They come into this chamber and use parliamentary privilege to put a whole stack of spin out there that nobody is really going to believe.

This whole motion is a fraud. This is all about them being frightened to death. This is all about the fight between Gary Humphries and Lin Hatfield Dodds, because Gary Humphries has never had a decent fight in his life, and now he has got one. Madam Assistant Speaker, I do not need to speak anymore.

MS BURCH (Brindabella) (4.00): I am just responding to one of Mrs Dunne's earlier comments on the Labor Party policy on childcare. From what I heard upstairs, Mrs Dunne stood up in this Assembly and said, in relation to the figures and reports from last week about the New South Wales report, that they were not exactly comparable. That is indeed right, but the rest is terribly wrong. She went on to say that it will probably cost more in the ACT. I just want you to get that there is a significant difference, Mrs Dunne, between the current ACT and New South Wales childcare regulations. In New South Wales, current childcare regulations are not the same as in the ACT. I will say it again and again to you.

Except for the under-twos, the ACT has had the same child to worker ratios as the new quality standard since 1996. That is, all our childcare centres except for the under-twos currently meet the existing standards. New South Wales is only just adjusting to these increased ratios. Its ratio for two to three-year-old children is one to eight. So there is a fundamental difference that will impact on the cost modelling. As for the under-twos in the ACT, 25 per cent of our current childcare centres already meet these ratios, and they are confident that they will meet the new standards by 2012.

The reports on the childcare survey commissioned by Child Care New South Wales on childcare costs are misleading. We expect that the quality agenda will increase the average out of home cost of a family on \$80,000 by around 57c to one dollar and something per week in 2010-11 for a child who attends full-time childcare for 50 hours a week. I could not find the report, and I must admit that I was a bit rushed to get down here, but from memory the Access Economics report indicates a cost of between \$1.20 and \$1.30 per day in 2012.

The Labor government has increased the childcare rebate and has brought down childcare costs by 20 per cent. We have increased the childcare rebate from 30 to

50 per cent. To help families with the cost of childcare, the federal Labor government has delivered an increase in the childcare rebate from 30 to 50 and increased the cap from 4,354 to 750. This means that families in the ACT receive a rebate quarterly rather than in the year, and next year families will be receiving that rebate fortnightly. A family earning \$80,000 per annum now receives \$2,239 a year more—that is, more—in childcare rebate than they would have done under the coalition.

Mrs Dunne also made mention of COAG data. She was wrong on that as well, but I did not have time to check the data so that I could understand that.

In regard to childcare and childcare support for families in the ACT, at the last election, childcare was absent in the costed proposals by those opposite, but in their release the day before the election, almost word for word, there was their policy on building two new childcare centres. Missing in action indeed.

Since that thought bubble, the only thought bubble that has come out of Mrs Dunne in this most recent budget debate was her position that she was going to move forward and solve the problems of the world with a centralised booking system. Information that is finding its way to your desk, Mrs Dunne, will show you—I will let you find it but I am sure you will—that the Children's Services Forum discussed the difficulties of managing the demand for childcare centres across the market, which sometimes resulted in confusion of parents re an inflated sense of demand. This is noting that in 2009 there were over 800 vacancies across over 105 centres. But the forum—these are the providers, the experts, the people that do this work—agreed that it was not feasible or desirable to establish a centralised or coordinated booking system for the ACT. That is the sector managing your thought bubble.

In regard to the Greens, it seems that the Greens also recognise the benefits of quality childcare.

It seems that those opposite disagree with esteemed academics, disagree with the research, disagree with the community care sector and, indeed, disagree with the families on the benefit and the value of a quality early childcare environment. The Libs talk about living pressures, but they seem to ignore and disagree with the research that clearly shows better outcomes for children that have an experience with quality childcare—the quality childcare that this Labor government is delivering. They do not see that. They want to pull the plug on quality childcare. They have no respect for the academics, no respect for the research, no respect for the sector and no respect for the family. Indeed, they have no sense of the positive outcomes and the increased participation that can influence children through a quality environment as they are children, as they develop and as they reach adulthood.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (4.07): You cannot imagine how disappointed I am to have only 10 minutes to speak and so many preposterous points to respond to, but I am going to give it a good shot.

It starts with Mr Smyth. Mr Smyth stood waving around this great sheaf of Greens' policies. He was very outraged by them, but the interesting point is that Mr Smyth could wave around that sheaf of Greens' policies, because every single one of our

policies is available on our website. We are proud of them and we are happy to make them available for public debate—unlike the Liberal Party, from which, frankly, policies are still coming out. Maybe Tony’s five-point action plan sums it up. If that is the best they have got, I would take the Greens’ transparency any day over the Liberals’ failure to put their policies on their website.

Mr Smyth was also somewhat concerned that we in the Greens have not costed our policies. Clearly he was not paying attention during that part of the Press Club address today when Senator Brown spoke about it. When asked about Greens’ costings by a journalist at the National Press Club today, Senator Brown said, “Actually, the Greens asked to submit our policies to Treasury for costing, and Treasury and the government refused.” Treasury and the government refused to allow the policies to be costed by Treasury. He also noted that the Greens’ policies cost less than the revenue measures that we have proposed.

Finally, let me touch on something else. One of the members over there raised the old hoary question of the public housing costings from 2008, the one they keep coming back to. It is an interesting example, because the Treasury costing does show a billion dollars, but one has to look behind the assumptions for that. Treasury made an assumption that that policy would be delivered in four years. That is not actually what the policy says; that is what Treasury assumed. Mr Coe has heard that explanation at least several times now; he continues to refuse to accept what the actual policy is. He prefers the Treasury assumptions, but that perhaps reflects more on him than it does on Treasury.

I am not going to spend a lot of time on health and education, because Ms Hunter addressed those points in some substance. Even though the Liberal Party did not listen, I am not going to waste people’s time going over them again. However, in light of Mrs Dunne’s proposed amendment, it is an opportunity for me to touch on what Senator Brown had to say at lunchtime today.

Senator Brown has announced that the Australian Greens wish to put an extra \$2 billion into the Australian education system—\$2 billion. We believe this is a good news story for all students, for all Australian parents. This is a good news story. This is about putting more money into our education system, because we believe in education. As Senator Brown said, “The Greens are committed educationalists.”

The interesting question is this. Will the Liberal Party, when the opportunity comes up, support the mining tax?

Mr Hanson: Where’s the money coming from, Shane?

MR RATTENBURY: Will they support that extra revenue to come into the Australian government coffers so that we can improve our education system? That is the question that you should answer. Senator Brown made it perfectly clear where the money is coming from. The question is: will the Liberal Party enable the money to be made available?

Mr Hanson: Where’s the money coming from, Shane?

MR RATTENBURY: You were too busy interjecting to listen, Mr Hanson. I just explained very clearly that it is going to come from the mining tax—the mining tax that the Liberal Party opposes, because the Liberal Party does not believe in the Australian public getting value for money for the non-renewable resources that are being ripped out of our—

Mr Hargreaves: Point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker.

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you. The clocks, please, Madam Assistant Speaker.

Mr Hargreaves: I am having to shout. I could not hear Mr Rattenbury.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mrs Dunne): Would you like to stop the clock?

Mr Hargreaves: My point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker, is this: I seek your intervention to lower the cacophony from the cockatoos opposite so that we can hear what Mr Rattenbury may or may not have to say.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: First of all, Mr Hargreaves, I would ask you to use parliamentary language to make a—

Mr Hargreaves: Okay. Can you ask those people opposite to shut up so we can hear Shane, please?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, Madam Assistant Speaker?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I will ask again: can you use parliamentary language?

Mr Hargreaves: Okay. Madam Assistant Speaker, I beg your indulgence to ask those opposite to desist forthwith from their elevation of volume to such a degree that I can actually have an auditory appreciation of the dissertation given to us by the speaker, Mr Rattenbury.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: There has been a high level of interjection throughout this debate, but I remind members of the general rules of this place—that Mr Rattenbury does have the floor and to keep their interjections to a minimum. Mr Rattenbury. Clerk, can you start the clocks again, please.

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker. Whilst there has been a high level of interjection in this debate, I am particularly flattered that it has been constant since I rose to my feet.

I want to touch on health policy. When you were on the floor, Madam Assistant Speaker, you raised a point about your 90-year-old grandmother and her need for private health insurance. Personally, I believe that your 90-year-old grandmother

should not necessarily need private health insurance—that we should be able to provide the sort of health system in Australia where, at the age of 90, having contributed to our society for an extended period of time, having contributed to Australian society for a long period of time, she should get the health cover she deserves without needing to sign up to private health insurance.

I want to come to some of the cost of living pressures that Mr Seselja flagged in his motion. He has made a series of quite broad, sweeping statements. I want to focus on a couple of the points that he has picked up on that affect Canberra residents. One of those is going to be electricity prices, but I would like to start first of all on the cost pressures Canberra families face on transport.

One of the themes of this motion is that there is a sense that the Greens are going to somehow make it worse for Canberrans. The Liberal Party seems to think that the Greens' strong advocacy of public transport and good planning is all about getting Canberrans out of their cars. Mr Seselja has made that point in this chamber on a number of occasions, particularly in the context of us making the observation that we believe Canberrans should be able to choose to not need a second car—that they should be able to have the choice to perhaps need only one car.

The reason we advocate this is that the cost of having a second car is extremely high. Let me turn to the *NRMA Motoring & Services 2010 whole of life fixed costs vehicle operating costs report summary*. This is the NRMA telling us what it costs to run a car. They have the least expensive whole-of-life costs by class of vehicle. They have taken the cheapest vehicle in each of the classes and worked out what it costs to run it—the whole-of-life costs for a medium car. So let us take something medium—\$147.83 a week to run a car. Let us talk about cost of living pressures. Let us try to give some of these Canberra families the choice to not have to spend that \$148 a week. That is nearly \$300 a fortnight out of the pay packet, yet the Canberra Liberals, every time—

Members interjecting—

Ms Hunter: Point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker. I cannot hear Mr Rattenbury at all. I would ask if the conversation across the chamber could be lower, but we have constant interjections. I cannot hear Mr Rattenbury, Madam Assistant Speaker.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: On the point of order, there is a high level of discussion. I have not witnessed any actual interjection for the last little while, but there have been very loud conversations on both sides of the chamber. Can members keep the volume down, please?

MR RATTENBURY: I will just try and speak through the stench of hypocrisy, Madam Assistant Speaker. The point I was making was that there is \$148 a week that the Greens would like to see Canberra families not have to spend on a second vehicle.

Mr Seselja: Point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker.

MR RATTENBURY: The clocks, please, Madam Assistant Speaker.

Mr Seselja: Point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker. I am not sure if the “stench of hypocrisy” claim was aimed at you in some way. I am not sure if that was a reflection on the chair from Mr Rattenbury. I ask him to withdraw.

MR RATTENBURY: For the sake of clarity, on the point of order, it was not directed at you, Madam Assistant Speaker. It was directed at those opposite.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: It should be withdrawn. It is inappropriate and unparliamentary.

MR RATTENBURY: On what basis? I seek clarification, Madam Assistant Speaker, as to on what basis it should be withdrawn.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Because I rule that it is unparliamentary language and I am telling you to withdraw it.

MR RATTENBURY: Fine. I withdraw it. It is not much of a concern. It is withdrawn.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you.

MR RATTENBURY: The point I am simply trying to make is that the Greens would like to reduce the cost of living pressures on Canberra families by not needing a second car.

Let us come to electricity. Mr Smyth went to that at some level. Let us take Mr Abbott’s well-known opinions about the science of climate change. Let us put those to one side, because they are really not even worth spending time on, and talk about what he wants to do on reducing carbon emissions. He does not want an emissions trading scheme. He wants no carbon tax and no burden on consumers. He wants his simple, direct action plan. That is basically taking taxpayers’ money and giving it to companies to maybe do something about climate change. It is the most inefficient way. It is a case of “rent seeker central”. It says, “Let’s see who wants to come along and apply for a government slush fund and hand it over.” It is economic rationalism. It is bizarre. It is so inefficient, coming from the party who believes that the market can find the most efficient way. It is simply bizarre from Tony Abbott. It is an absolute travesty of policy and it beggars decency.

Let us talk about electricity. One of the jokes of Mr Abbott’s climate change policy, the random “don’t give the price of carbon; give handouts to industry” policy, is that it is likely to cost more than the Greens’ policy of putting a price on carbon. In his efforts to put no additional burdens on power generation and to have no emissions trading scheme, no carbon tax and no burden on consumers, Mr Abbott has completely missed the point.

Firstly, there is the \$3.32 billion direct action slush fund for industry. Secondly, the electricity industry has come out and said that prices could still rise under Tony Abbott’s plan because it offers no investment signal to any other power

generators besides the ones that get the government's handouts. Indeed, the chief executive of the Energy Supply Association said the coalition plan could get rid of the highest emitting of Australia's 33 coal-fired power plants, but that it would need to be followed by a carbon price to prevent investments in inefficient and more expensive stopgap technologies. Tony Abbott's denial—and listen to this—

Mr Seselja: Madam Assistant Speaker, a point of order on relevance.

MR RATTENBURY: Can we have the clock stopped, please?

Mr Seselja: I am not sure this is sticking anywhere near to the points that are in the motion. You might want to direct Mr Rattenbury to return to it.

MR RATTENBURY: On the point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker. Can we have the clock stopped, please? He is running my time down.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Stop the clock. First of all, members, it is not mandatory to stop the clock. It is something that is done at the discretion of the chair. It is absolutely unedifying—and I have witnessed it a lot today—to have members shouting out across the chamber to stop the clock. It has been unedifying. On Mr Seselja's point of order, the wording at the beginning of the motion relates to the cost of living pressures on Canberra's families. I would ask you, Mr Rattenbury, to be relevant to the motion.

MR RATTENBURY: On the point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker, Mr Seselja's motion specifically refers to utilities. Mr Seselja's motion specifically refers to electricity costs. I was speaking directly to a quote from the Energy Supply Association of Australia, a well-known stakeholder in the electricity industry, about the impact of the federal coalition's policies on electricity prices. It is directly relevant to Mr Seselja's motion because we are debating electricity prices.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I draw your attention to the terms of the motion, and I will ask you to speak to the terms of the motion, Mr Rattenbury. Can you start the clock?

MR RATTENBURY: What else is there to say, Madam Assistant Speaker? You have made your very clear position. At the end of the day, this is a preposterous motion. It is going to get the vote it deserves.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Rattenbury, would you like to withdraw that assertion about the operation of the chair?

Mr Hanson: What was the assertion?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: The assertion was that he had nothing else to say and that I had made my position very clear. That is unacceptable and I seek you to withdraw it now.

MR RATTENBURY: I was being quite literal, Madam Assistant Speaker. You made your position perfectly clear. I was unable to continue with that point, so there was

nothing else for me to say. If you find that dissent, I withdraw, but I do not think it was dissent.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: It is not dissent. It is an aspersion on the chair and I asked you to withdraw.

MR RATTENBURY: I withdraw.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Rattenbury.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (4.20): Madam Assistant Speaker, I thank you for bringing forward the amendment. We all listened with interest to Senator Brown's comments at the Press Club today. We were all interested, particularly because of Mr Barr's passionate and spirited defence of the Greens' education policy. He was saying they had to clarify it. They clarified it. We have had two Greens speakers, neither of whom has walked away from it. In fact, Mr Rattenbury said, "We've got all our policies on the website." The policy on the website says you are going to slash \$60 million from non-government schools. So there is your answer.

But we also got the answer through the non-answer of Senator Brown. Senator Brown was asked what the position was: was it the pragmatic position or the more strident position, let's say, of cutting the \$60 million? He refused to answer. He said, "We have not taken a vote." I guess it will depend on how the Greens are feeling on any given day. There was no answer on that question.

Mr Barr: That's a problem then. They need to clarify—

MR SESELJA: Mr Barr agrees that it is a problem, and it is a problem. We can take it from that that the policy on the website is correct.

What different standards are there now? Your policy is on your website. It is still there three days out from an election. You are asked whether or not it is your policy. You do not say that it is not your policy, but somehow we are to believe that maybe it is not. It is crystal clear, and it has been confirmed now through Senator Brown's non-answer and through the contributions from the Greens in this place. They have not walked away from it; they have backed it up. They have backed up the \$60 million slashing of the non-government school sector. They have backed up the \$37 million slashing of the private health rebate in the ACT, cutting the 30 per cent rebate for all Canberrans—for all Australians.

Senator Brown had some other interesting things to say and Mr Rattenbury referred to them in his speech. He talked about the fact that they were going to put extra money into education. Senator Brown was asked about this. He was asked about, firstly, the mining tax. He said he wants the old mining tax which brought down a prime minister. Senator Brown wants that mining tax. They asked him, "What if you can't get that? What are you going to do? Are you going to vote it down?" He said, "No. We're going to take the alternative between the Liberals' position, which is not to have a massive increase in the mining tax, and the compromised position which the Rudd-Gillard government has come up with." They have chosen it.

He was asked where he was going to get the money from. He has been pointing to all this extra money to fund education and he did not have an answer. Again, he did not have an answer. So the \$2 billion is reliant on a tax that will never happen. It is reliant on the old tax. The prospect of that getting up, as I believe was acknowledged by Senator Brown, was clear. Again, we have this pretending that you are going to do something when you are not. When it comes to issues where the Labor Party and the Greens are of one mind, or of a similar mind, we know there is a much greater prospect that they will get it through.

How do we know the Labor Party's philosophical position in relation to non-government schools? We have seen it over a number of years. It was only two elections ago that they went to the electorate with a hit list of non-government schools. That is their true position when it comes to non-government schools.

Mr Rattenbury: I rise on a point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker. Mr Seselja and his colleagues have raised a number of points of order about how this is a motion on the cost of living pressures on Canberra families. I am not sure how Senator Brown's press conference or any of this is relevant to the point that Mr Seselja is making.

MR SESELJA: Madam Assistant Speaker, on the point of order, if I could, please—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Okay. Could you stop the clock, please?

MR SESELJA: I will just slowly talk you through perhaps all of the bits and how they are relevant.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: No, Mr Seselja, you can sit down. Mr Rattenbury, the question is that the amendment moved by me be agreed to. The amendment reads:

Insert after paragraph (1)(e):

“(ea) the unwillingness of the Leader of the Australian Greens, Senator Bob Brown, to disavow this policy during his address to the National Press Club on Wednesday, 18 August 2010;”.

I think that Mr Seselja is being entirely relevant. Thank you. Can you please start the clocks?

MR SESELJA: Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker. There is a hint of desperation in some of the points of order. Where they may—and this our concern—actually get somewhere is if a Labor government is returned and there is a Greens balance of power. On those issues that they philosophically agree on—

Mr Doszpot: Andrew has already agreed on everything.

MR SESELJA: We saw Mr Barr's passionate defence of them, which suggests that there is some philosophical agreement. I think he used the Prime Minister's words:

“some emerging points of agreement”. So we have got emerging points of agreement between—

Mr Barr: Because their policies moved to align with ours.

MR SESELJA: Apparently not, but there were “some emerging points of agreement”. If you go far enough to the left I am sure you will catch up with them. We know that what the Labor Party say and what they do is different, and we can see them blaming the Greens for having to abolish the private health rebate. Remember, they opposed the private health rebate as well. So we have got the Labor Party who always philosophically opposed it and the Greens who have said they will abolish it. When you do the numbers, if the Greens and the Labor Party have the majority between them after the next election, if there is a Labor government—so a majority in the House of Representatives and a Labor-Greens majority in the Senate—I am backing that some of these policies will get through.

We will see the 30 per cent health rebate slashed, with 55 per cent of Canberra families seeing their fees go up 30 per cent. As for funding to non-government schools, Ms Gillard was part of that shadow cabinet that had the hit list. Philosophically, it does not seem a big move when, even in this election, they have flipped and flopped as to exactly how long they will guarantee funding into the future. They have had to move on that at the last minute as well.

It is right that we are concerned about that. We know that Bob Brown will not be able to get every one of his policies and there has been a level of pretending. It was put to him again that there would not be a vote in the Senate on issues around the public service and he could not refute it. So the Greens are pretending they are going to do something about the public service when they are not. There are areas where they are pretending they are going to do something that they cannot and there are areas where they are pretending they are not going to do something when their policy specifically says that they will.

This is the sort of back and forth that we have seen again today. We heard earlier today that the Greens have never used this 30,000 figure: “No, no, no, we didn’t use that lie. That lie was used by other people. We just backed it up.” Of course, Senator Brown again used it today. He used the lie. He referred to the lie. Even the Australia Institute put a completely different figure on it. On this issue perhaps we have to have some scepticism when we look at the board of directors of the Australia Institute. They are making an argument in favour of Lin Hatfield Dodds.

Who is on the board of the Australia Institute, Madam Assistant Speaker? Let us have a think about it. There is Sharan Burrow, who is from the ACTU, who backed the 30,000 figure. Who else is on there? There is the chief of staff to Senator Bob Brown and there is a Senate candidate called Lin Hatfield Dodds. We have got the Greens in here today saying that we should take seriously these numbers, and these are much lower numbers than the lie that was repeated again by Senator Brown. They are much lower numbers, but even these numbers cannot be trusted because we are being asked to say on behalf of the Greens’ Senate candidate that an organisation she is on the board of has come out with figures that back up her argument.

Mr Hanson: Who would have thought?

MR SESELJA: Who would have thought? It is about integrity, Madam Assistant Speaker. We saw it and they were caught out, and Senator Brown has confirmed it. We have heard from both Mr Rattenbury and Ms Hunter today. They have not for one moment walked away. These policies are clear. They are on the table and on their website. They have not been refuted. Senator Brown had the opportunity to refute them today. They go to the real cost of living pressures for people in the ACT. They go to school fees. They go to the cost of childcare. They go to the cost of private health insurance—the 55 per cent of Canberrans who pay for private health insurance. As Mr Smyth pointed out, a large number of these people are on low incomes. A large number, again, are on middle incomes. Pensioners and ordinary workers right around the territory who pay for private health insurance will see it go up 30 per cent if the Greens get their way in the Senate. They will see their school fees go up. They will see their childcare costs go up. These are the facts.

I am pleased that, despite the attempts to distract, neither of the Greens speakers has pretended today that the policy is any different. There has been some pretence at other times, but we have had it absolutely confirmed—and we had it confirmed at the Press Club today—that these are the Greens' policies. They will push up the cost of living. They will hurt Canberra families.

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (4.31): The Greens' assault on private institutions and the private school sector over the past few weeks, this ideology-driven posturing, is becoming increasingly concerning to our community, on a number of levels. The economic impact on the ACT and the cynical and dangerous attack on the freedom of personal choice, not taking for granted the liberties we enjoy, the freedom to choose, to live one's life the way one sees fit, to be what you aspire to be and not just what you are born into, are all things worth fighting for. This motion broadly frames that the Greens' policy will put considerable upwards financial pressures on Canberra families.

As shadow minister for education, I would like to comment on the Greens' policy on non-government schools which, it needs to be said, smacks of bitter class envy. And if carried and supported by Labor, as seems fairly obvious by Mr Barr's comments, it is vindictive enough that it will make parents and children in non-government schools suffer for it.

Take away choice in healthcare delivery, take away choice in insurance and now take away choice when it comes to our children's education, the mantra of the Greens seems to be "the government can provide all". And before long, if they have their way, parents can choose from a plethora of school options, that being public school or public school or public school. As Mr Barr so clearly illustrated just a few moments ago, these policies of the Greens are like watermelons: green on the outside and red on the inside. And I thank Mr Barr for that quote.

Ultimately, Canberrans will have to foot the bill for these unnecessary social engineering aspirations. As a Liberal and an elected member of this Assembly, I do

not believe that we can micromanage the lives of Canberrans. We do not have the mandate to do so. Furthermore, it would violate the civil liberties of Canberrans.

Education, the reason why all of us here can read and write, is a fundamental human right. As taxpayers, parents have the right to send their children to public or private schools. And the government should fund both to an appropriate level. The Greens' proposed policy intends to rip approximately \$60 million from ACT private schools by diminishing commonwealth government funding to 2003-04 levels.

In addition to that, the Greens' policy on education will reduce the level of government funding to non-government schools by taking into account moneys raised locally via school fees, fetes, philanthropic support and decoupling it from public school spending. It will take away the freedom of religion by forcing faith-based schools to employ people who do not share their values, in effect making it mandatory that Christian, Muslim and other religious schools must hire non-believers. It will treat non-government school students as pariahs not worthy of government funding, and stop the development of new non-government schools if they endanger the viability and diversity of existing public schools.

All in all, there are approximately 16 sections and subsections that have a negative impact on non-government school communities and the overall ACT school system at large. Leadership, true leadership, is about doing what is good for the community, living up to our fiduciary responsibilities, not following some personal agenda and forcing people to kowtow to it.

The facts in the ACT are these: the ACT currently has the highest proportion of non-government school students in any jurisdiction, at approximately 40 per cent and that to remove or reduce funding of non-government schools into the Greens' image will destabilise the present school system in the ACT.

At the moment, at only 17.2 per cent, non-government schools are already receiving government funding at levels well below the national average of 25 per cent. Seen as a glass-full proposition, this means every non-government school student technically saves the government 82.8 per cent of funding for a public school student. According to an ACT independent school organisation, private ACT schools save the government more than \$100 million a year.

The real upshot of what the Greens are proposing, in truth, will be a handful of non-government schools that will become more elite. The Greens will drive up the cost of non-government school education beyond what most Canberra families can afford, leaving the choice of a private school education something only accessible to the upper middle class and the rich. This, I find, un-Australian; and the Greens' policy regarding non-government schools, draconian.

Already we see the possible effects of their policy in other jurisdictions. In a 15 August *Sydney Morning Herald* article, the Melbourne Director for Catholic Education estimated that the Greens' funding policy would cut \$427 million from Catholic schools, including more than \$110 million taken from Victorian Catholic schools, to serve the neediest in the community.

As I deliver this speech now, even though they have pledged that no money will be taken out of any Canberra private school, the Greens' policy to reduce funding for non-government schools still remains on the Australian Greens' website. It has been there for over six months and we have heard all sorts of reasons why that should not be taken into account. Even Mr Barr was alluding to the fact that that is not current policy.

We have not heard, if it is not current policy, why it is still there. Why, six months down the track, if they are so keen on making sure that the community knows what their policies are, do these idealistic individuals within our midst not point out to their counterparts in Canberra or their constituency, "This is not accurate; no, it is not on"? I have never heard any of our members in the Assembly point out the error of their policy or the fact that the policy is on there in error. John F Kennedy once said, "An error does not become a mistake unless you refuse to correct it." And I believe that backs it up pretty well.

I stand by this motion's thesis that the Greens' policies mentioned in this motion are irresponsible and detrimental to our community. As we are fast approaching the federal election on 21 August, we, the Canberra Liberals, have drawn a line in the sand. Should the Greens have their wish, let it not be said that no-one cared or that no-one objected to these watermelon policies.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Planning, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation and Minister for Gaming and Racing) (4.39): In short, having just read as much as I can of Senator Brown's speech to the Press Club today, not having had the benefit of seeing the question and answer session and whether he was directly questioned on this matter, I have some sympathy with the amendment that you have moved, Madam Assistant Speaker Dunne. In fact, should the Liberals seek to amend the entirety of this motion to reflect something more along the lines of calling on the Greens to absolutely clarify their position then the government would be inclined to support such an amendment.

The comments I made earlier were based on written statements from Lin Hatfield Dodds, someone whom I hold in high regard and someone who, I believe, when she makes a statement outlining her position and the position of her party, is to be believed. And she did say, in a media statement on 10 August, that she welcomed the debate about getting the balance right and about supporting private and, in particular, less well-off independent and Catholic schools and ensuring that public schools are of the very best quality.

If that is the Greens' position, and clearly that is different from what is on the website that goes back to March, I think it is entirely appropriate for this Assembly to seek some clarification in the context of this debate about exactly what the Greens' position is. It would help if Ms Hunter, as education spokesperson, came down and repeated the comments of Ms Hatfield Dodds—

Mr Seselja: In *Hansard* would be pretty good, wouldn't it?

MR BARR: If she put it in *Hansard* and said very clearly that the Greens no longer support cutting funding from non-government schools in order to fund their policy priorities in other areas of education and, if that is the case—and that is, as I understand it, what Lin Hatfield Dodds has said and what Senator Brown said a few days later in relation to some specific questions on this matter—then my comments this morning stand, and this is an unjustified attack from the Liberal Party.

But if the Greens are not prepared to back up what Senator Hatfield Dodds—I am getting ahead of myself there—candidate Hatfield Dodds said on 10 August and what Senator Brown said a few days later, if that is no longer their position then they do need to declare that. So some clarity on the matter from the Greens party would be, I think, useful in aiding the Assembly to have an informed vote on the motion before us.

My comments are confined only to the education aspects of the original motion that has been moved by Mr Seselja. Unless some evidence is put before us to the contrary, Madam Assistant Speaker, the amendment that you have moved would appear to be a statement of fact and one that I think is quite reasonable for the Assembly to consider. But if it is contained within the rest of the motion, that does appear to be unnecessarily political and something that we do not agree with, then I do not believe the government could support that.

It could perhaps lead to the withdrawal of your amendment, Madam Assistant Speaker, if the Greens leader were to come down and reiterate the Greens' policy as I believe it to be, as stated by Lin Hatfield Dodds and Bob Brown. I would not, of course, put words in your mouth, Madam Assistant Speaker, but it would be important to get some clarity on that matter, would it not? There is an opportunity for Ms Hunter to do that and to formally put on the record what the ACT Greens' position is. Obviously, this level of government will be considering schools funding policy into the future as well.

Mr Smyth: I downloaded that at 3 o'clock.

MR BARR: Yes, indeed, and I downloaded the Greens' policy this morning.

Mr Smyth: And there it is.

MR BARR: And there it is. And that is legitimate. It is still there in that context. I gave them the benefit of the doubt that they had more recent statements on the record, dated 10 August and 15 August.

Mr Coe: Foolish.

MR BARR: That may well have been foolish. But the opportunity is there in this debate for the Greens to come back into the chamber, for Ms Hunter to come back down, or for Mr Rattenbury, as he is sitting here, to clarify it once and for all so that the Assembly can make an informed decision on both this amendment and the substantive motion moved by Mr Seselja.

Again, my comments this morning in relation to the Greens' policy were on the basis that I accepted what Lin Hatfield Dodds and Senator Brown had said last week, that they no longer held the position that was outlined on their website in March.

Mr Smyth: He did not disavow it today.

MR BARR: That is a problem, if he did not disavow it today. That is a problem, because it would appear he will be wanting to walk both sides of the street on this matter. And that is concerning. I have heard Mr Rattenbury say how important it is to have clarity on policy, and certainly I am aware, as minister, how accountable I am for every word I say. There is no prospect at all for me or the Labor Party to try to walk both sides of the street on any issue. There is always someone, be it the Greens or the Liberal Party, trying to hold us to account on everything we say. To be fair to the Liberal opposition and the alternative government, we are certainly applying that level of scrutiny to them. For a party that holds a significant number of seats in this place and is, if we are led to believe, within 2,000 votes in the closest Senate contest in the country—if all this is to be believed—clarity on this matter is important.

I think now is the opportunity for the Greens to once and for all put this issue to bed, to either come in here and say, "No, what is on our website from March is our position," or come in and say, "No, what Lin Hatfield Dodds and Bob Brown said last week is our position." One or the other, let us know and then we can have an informed vote on both the amendment and the motion. I think that is the only reasonable position that this Assembly can take this afternoon.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (4.46): I too share the concerns of the opposition—we are quite genuinely scared that the role about the Greens could play in Australian politics post Saturday, or, perhaps more accurately, post July 1 next year, when most of the senators that get elected on Saturday, will come into the chamber.

The Greens are a threat to Canberra's families. They are a threat to the future of Canberra and they are a threat to the overall prosperity of our nation. I think what makes this particularly interesting is the fact that it is usually the Greens that are out and about in the media or in this place or in other chambers across the country talking about morals, talking about integrity, talking about hypocrisy and trying to stamp it out, yet it is the Greens of late that have demonstrated the hypocritical side to their politics and the hypocritical side to their campaign.

The classic case over just the last few days is of course the four-wheel drive issue. I have been criticised in this chamber for the car that I drive, and my colleagues on this side of the chamber have also been criticised, and I know that, privately, those opposite and the Greens have also criticised us as well. You have a situation whereby people like myself get a sticker slapped on the back of their car near the Legislative Assembly saying, "I am driving a climate killer," yet here we have a Greens candidate and a Greens senator-to-be driving a four-wheel drive V8 Landcruiser.

Is that not hypocrisy? I wonder whether she drove the four-wheel drive when she went to the Climate Crusaders Walk Against Warming—or should it be the Climate

Cruisers Walk Against Warming to take into account the V8 Landcruiser that she probably drove to this event? I see her there, arm in arm with Bob Brown. I wonder what the people in the Greens party thought when they opened up the paper last week and saw that. I wonder what the Greens MLAs thought when they read that. I wonder whether they thought, “You know what? Maybe this person is not a true believer. Maybe she is not one of us.”

But I am afraid I think Lin Hatfield Dodds is one of the Greens. I think she is one of the true believers, yet she seems to be hypocritical on a few different things. To that end, I believe she will vote with Bob Brown in the Senate on every single matter should she be elected on Saturday by the people of the Australian Capital Territory. It is a very real risk the people of Canberra are confronting. It is a very real risk that Canberrans must choose to avoid on Saturday, because so much is at stake if we do lose that Senate spot to the Greens.

One thing which does complicate any predictions of what might happen in the Senate would be what has happened in this place over the last couple of years. If your perception of the Greens was “radical whale-hunter chasers” or “radical dam-avoidance campaigners”, people that are advocating 10 per cent public housing, or whatever it may be, I think the evidence of this place has shown that the Greens have had next to no impact whatsoever on the policies of this government. I would think the Labor Party would be pretty pleased with how the last two years have gone with the Greens on the crossbench. I wonder what it is in the Labor platform over the last couple of years that they have not got up because of the Greens. What is it in their suite of policies that they took to the 2008 election that they have not been able to progress because of the Greens?

This is as good as it is going to get for the Greens. They have got four members, and they have never had four members before. It is as good as it is going to get; this is the high point of the Greens in the Australian Capital Territory. I wonder whether these four people, when they come to work each day, think, “I am living the dream. This is as good as it is going to get. This is the ultimate moment for Greens politics in the ACT.” I wonder whether they turn up and think, “I am making a difference. I am changing the way the ACT is governed.” Well, they are not. The Labor Party is having a field day with this crossbench, because the Labor Party is getting exactly what it wants—exactly what it wants.

They might put on a show every six months and they will have a joint caucus meeting. Or every now and again they might back a Greens motion saying, “We will do a report into a review into something we might do in three terms time.” Whatever it might be, this Labor Party is having a field day with the four Greens members of the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly.

Unfortunately, I do not think Bob Brown is as much of a pushover as are Shane Rattenbury and Meredith Hunter. I think he is probably the real deal when it comes to conviction and standing up for what he believes in. So, should Lin Hatfield Dodds be elected to the Australian Senate on Saturday and should other Senate races go their way, it would mean that the Greens would have the balance of power in the Senate and, unlike the Australian Capital Territory Greens, I think they would

probably flex their muscle. I think they would probably demand the things that we are seeing on this table today—the very things that Mr Seselja has highlighted in his motion today.

The hypocrisy that I spoke about earlier, about the Greens' four-wheel drive, is of course not dissimilar to the hypocrisy we are seeing with regard to their policy on private education. This is a policy which, as the ALP education minister rightly said, is one that is vague and one where the Greens are trying to walk both sides of the street. It is absolutely vital that the people of Canberra, when they are making a decision on Saturday about the future of the Australian Capital Territory and the future of education for the 40-odd per cent of Canberrans that go to a private school, know exactly what they are voting for and exactly what the consequences will be should Lin Hatfield Dodds become Senator Hatfield Dodds. I think that is a worrying concern and it is something that the people of Canberra have a right to know.

Yet here we have the moral preachers of the Greens refusing to actually give us answers on whether they stand by their policy, or whether the policy is in fact a sham. Either what they are saying is a sham or the policy is a sham. It can only be one of the two—it has got to be one of the two. Unfortunately, the people of Canberra simply do not know and they simply cannot make a judgement about the future of the 40-odd per cent of Canberra's students that are going to a private school at the moment. What would happen if those 40-odd per cent were to move across into the public system? What would that mean for taxpayers? What would that mean for all the schools in Canberra and the teacher to student ratios? It would have a devastating effect. It would have a devastating effect for the Canberra taxpayer, a devastating effect for our budget and indeed a devastating effect for the future of the territory.

On Saturday, Canberrans will have a choice before them. It is a choice to preserve the economic integrity that the Liberal Party brings to the Senate or to take that economic integrity for granted and to bring about a Senate controlled by people that are socialists in everything but name—so much socialists in fact that the Socialist Alliance used to preference them, number two after its own candidates. I am sure the Greens are lamenting that the Socialist Alliance is not running this time round—it would have been great to have done some joint press conference with James Vassilopoulos and Senator Hatfield Dodds to be, perhaps. But, alas, that is not going to happen. No longer can we have the Socialist Alliance and the Greens candidates as one standing for the Senate.

It is time for the ACT to find out the truth about the Greens. It is time for the Greens to tell the people of Canberra what is actually going to be their education policy and whether they are actually going to cut \$60 million from private schools.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (4.56): Madam Assistant Speaker, there are important issues here, and the issues do need to be resolved. The leader of the Greens, Bob Brown, spoke at the Press Club today and was asked specifically whether this was his policy. He ducked and wove and did not answer the question. What happens if you go to the Greens' website if you are an ordinary voter out there and you are seeking information about what the Greens stand for? During question time today, I downloaded the Australian Greens' policy, issued in March 2010, from

www.greens.org.au. It is the policy that any ordinary person going to the website would find. It clearly says that they will reduce funding to the non-government sector.

Now, \$60 million taken out of the non-government sector in the ACT would be devastating for the non-government education sector. I think I heard the figure of \$37 million on private health insurance rebates mentioned. That would be devastating to people who need that money to survive. It is important that we get to the bottom of this matter.

It is like so much that comes out from the Greens. This morning Ms Hunter was quoting figures out of the Australia Institute document about purported losses of jobs and the multiplier effects, so direct job losses and indirect job losses. But when you look at the document, there is no substance to it. There is no mathematical formula; there is no multiplier effect. In some, the direct job losses are less than the indirect; in others, the indirect job losses are greater. The maths on this is quite interesting.

I also note that, when you look at who are the directors of the Australia Institute, there are some very interesting people who are behind this document. One would be Sharan Burrow, listed here as President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions. There is this other person called Lin Hatfield Dodds, the National Director of UnitingCare. And there is a third person, Ben Oquist, chief of staff to Senator Bob Brown. When the Greens quoted this document and put it into play, they did not tell us they had written the document.

They are hiding behind the institute. "Yes; let's start an institute—the Australia Institute, whatever." We need a little bit of honesty here. If you have got people, including the candidate, who is one of the directors of the institute from which you are quoting the document to give some sort of academic validity to your claims, you should have the courage of your convictions, your words and your work, and stand up and say: "I approved that. I am on the board that set this in play, along with Sharan Burrow, along with Bob Brown's chief of staff." That is the genesis of this document.

Mr Rattenbury: Go outside and accuse the Australia Institute of bias, Brendan. Go on.

MR SMYTH: I have not accused anybody of bias. I have said that you should tell people you are on the board. The convenor of the Greens quoted a document from an organisation that the chief of staff of Bob Brown and Lin Hatfield Dodds are on the board of. If you do not see that as something that one should question, Mr Rattenbury, I am very concerned. I thought you had more integrity than that. I thought you understood how important it is to present an honest front and an open front to people so that they can get a reasonable argument.

If you think, as you so clearly do, that it is a joke that you have got the convenor of the Greens quoting from a document on behalf of the Greens Senate candidate when the Greens Senate candidate is on the board of the organisation that promoted the document, you need to go and have a good look at yourself. This is the problem with the Greens.

When Mr Rattenbury got up, when he started his speech, he said, “Mr Smyth waved around the document.” I will wave it again. Yes, I have got your policies. We have got you. These are your policies. These are your words—cuts to the private health rebate, cuts to education, greater taxes. There is a little corker up the back: “We will put the company tax rate back up to 33 per cent.” This morning we were championing small business and enterprise, but we forgot to mention in that debate that we are going to put the tax rate up. That is what the Greens are about, and that is what this debate is about today.

Mr Rattenbury did not mention their costings, of course. I have had the discussion. In fact, I was asked by staffers out in the anteroom about costings and things we were doing. I said, “Where are your costings?” “Not our responsibility. We are not Bob Brown’s office.” Perhaps one of the Greens can bring us down their costings. When Bob Brown was asked about the costings of his policies today, his first defence was that “Treasury did not want to do it for us”. I do not know whether that means that they have not done their costings, but Treasury is not going to waste their time on them. And then, when a journalist asked for a copy of them, he said, “Well, I can give you an outline of our costings.” An outline? I am not sure what an outline means to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, but an outline can be a very vague thing, particularly when you are talking about billions of dollars in taxes.

Remember that the Greens want to go back to the original superprofits tax. They want more tax on mining. The Greens want death duties. That is what it is. When you look at what they are saying in their economics section, you will see that they want to return to death duties. It is slightly more detailed than the promise to abolish the 30 per cent private health rebate, but they want to introduce an estate tax with full provisions to protect the family farm, the family home and the small business with a threshold of \$5 million with indexation.

I am not sure what that means. What it means is that there is a new tax coming courtesy of the Greens—a tax Australian jurisdictions got rid of about 30 years ago. But no: back to the future with the Greens; we are going to put this tax back in place.

On page 80 of their promises, at point 29, under “Taxation”, they have got:

... return the company tax rate to 33% and broaden the company tax base by reducing tax concessions.

So there is a big tax grab here. That is the problem with the Greens. It is interesting. There is an editorial from the *Financial Review* that talks about the Greens. It talks about the effects—

Ms Hunter: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, resume your seat, please. Stop the clocks, please. Ms Hunter?

Ms Hunter: My understanding is that Mr Smyth rose to speak to the amendment that has been put forward by Mrs Dunne. He seems to be floating off into all sorts of other

places, but he is not addressing the amendment that was put forward by Mrs Dunne. I ask you to direct him to focus on the amendment, Madam Deputy Speaker.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you.

MR SMYTH: If I can speak to the amendment, the amendment talks about Mr Brown—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Just a minute, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: I ask to speak to the point of order. Sorry; I said amendment. I do apologise; I meant the point of order. If Ms Hunter had bothered to read the amendment, she would have seen what the amendment says. I will read it for you, because obviously you have not read it.

Ms Hunter: I have read the amendment.

MR SMYTH: It says:

... the unwillingness of the Leader of the Australian Greens, Senator Bob Brown, to disavow this policy during his address to the National Press Club on Wednesday, 18 August 2010 ...

That is what I was talking to. I do not see how it is irrelevant.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, I believe it is my job to—

MR SMYTH: I am speaking to the point of order.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, but I believe it is my job to decide what is in the amendment.

MR SMYTH: No; it is your job to rule.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes. I think that Ms Hunter has it in front of her just as you do. I think that you do need to get back to the subject.

MR SMYTH: Sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker. On the point of order, she said I was speaking about things not in the amendment. But I have just finished speaking about Bob Brown saying, “I will give you an outline of the costings.” I am talking about what he said at the Press Club today. This is about what he said at the Press Club today. It is entirely in order.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Just keep to the amendment. Continue, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Yes. So there are questions here, and all of these questions go to the cost of living. The Greens’ policy document is loaded with additional cost for ordinary Australians. As Mr Hanson has already pointed out in his speech, 9.9 million Australians have hospital cover and 11.5 million have private health insurance. Of those, 3.4 million have an income of less than \$35,000 per annum.

So we do have a dilemma here. Mr Barr is right. It is not often that Mr Barr and I agree, but in this case he is absolutely right: there are conflicting reports about what the Greens are saying and what they stand for. Mr Barr has, I believe, put forward an amendment. The offer has been made to allow the convenor of the Greens to speak again so that she can come down and clarify this matter. But this entire motion is about the cost of living—the cost of living pressures on Canberra families, particularly in the areas of housing, education, health care, childcare and utilities.

I am not sure where this comment came from—a blog—but there is a thing out there called a quick test of your financial knowledge. It goes:

Quickly now, in 3 seconds answer this question: does your family have private medical insurance? If you know the answer, give yourself 5 points. Now another quickie (no cheating, by looking at your will or asking your accountant) Do you own any properties? If you got that right, you get another five points and hit the jackpot.

You have now scored better than the Greens candidate for the Senate in the ACT, Lynn Hatfield Dodds, who, according to an article in today's Canberra Times, could not say whether her family had private health insurance, even though she was holding forth on the topic.

It is that level of doubt that exists. The doubt is out there. It has now been exacerbated by the federal leader of the Greens, the man who desperately seeks to hold the balance of power in the Senate so that he can implement his policies, which is his right. We are politicians; we all come from political parties. We develop policies; we contest these elections so that we can put our policies in place. But people deserve to know what your policies mean.

There has been a lot thrown across the chamber in the last couple of days about some of the Liberal policies. The Greens deserve the same level of scrutiny, because this should not be a surreptitious process—and again in addressing the cost of living in the substantive motions. There is an editorial in the *Financial Review* from 5 August this year that says “Don't flirt with Greens”. There is a particular paragraph that says:

The Greens stand for more power and less accountability for unions, guaranteed minimum incomes for all, a 50 per cent tax on \$1 million incomes, and intercity high-speed rail with a price tag to rival the National Broadband Network and no cost-benefit study. They would heavily vet skilled immigration and oppose using population to boost the economy or counter the effects of demographic change—despite population being one of Treasury's “three Ps” weapons for dealing with it. Corporations would be shackled by stakeholders and social and environmental campaigners, company tax would be increased to 33 per cent, private health insurance (and much of the health industry) would be wiped out and private school grants slashed if the Greens got their way.

The standard response to this undergraduate wish list is that it will never happen because a minority party can't originate legislation and the Greens have moved on since two West Australian eco-warriors held the Keating government's budget to ransom in 1993.

Mr Brown and his immature list of policies may well hold the government to ransom. The people of Canberra deserve an answer from the Greens on their policies, and they deserve that before the election. (*Time expired.*)

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (5.08): As Mr Barr requested, I have come down to clarify recent statements on the Greens' education policy.

I will just go back over what I said in my speech earlier today. The Greens support the review into schools funding as promised by the current government since 2007. We agree with educational experts that the current federal schools funding model is flawed. However, the current government has now delayed any review, if it is re-elected, until the end of 2013. We know that nothing will happen before the review takes place, and we agree that there should be a comprehensive review into education funding and that we need a more equitable system that provides the most funding to the neediest schools.

So until the review is undertaken the Greens will be working with the new government to ensure that funding is provided, particularly through—we did talk about the application of the mining tax and being able to get money from there to put more money in to ensure high-quality education for all students. It is, as I said, about getting the balance right between supporting private, and in particular less well off independent and Catholic schools, and our public schools. That is crucial.

Sarah Hanson-Young is the spokesperson for education for the Greens in the federal parliament. She has a letter on her website that states:

The Greens support the review into schools funding, as promised by the current government since their election in 2007.

It went on with the words I just stated about agreeing with educational experts that the current federal schools funding model is flawed and welcoming constructive debate on federal schools funding to ensure a more equitable funding model that properly accounts for the needs of schools. She goes on:

However, as both major parties have delayed the review until 2013, there will be no changes to the current funding model in the next Parliament.

Let me go to a press release by Lin Hatfield Dodds on 10 August. Yes, she is standing by this statement. This is the position of Lin Hatfield Dodds, who is running as our Senate candidate here in the ACT:

I welcome debate on the issue of funding equity, and getting the balance right both supporting private and in particular less well-off independent and Catholic schools, and ensuring that our Public Schools are of the very best quality.

This is the stance of the Greens in this election campaign. This is where it is standing. We do have a policy up on our website, but, as we all know, circumstances can change from where a policy may have sat. What is clearly being said here is that both

major parties have said that they will review this funding in 2013. What the Greens have clearly stated is that there will be no change—no change—to any funding for schools. It will remain with the current model until that review. We look forward to that review, because there are problems with the current funding model. Educational experts have told us that there are some problems with the current funding model.

What we need to ensure through that review, and I am sure it will be a comprehensive and thorough review, is that we get a fair funding formula and allocation. And what we need to understand, and I am sure it is understood here, is that there are many different types of independent schools, of Catholic schools. There are some that are better off than others. As I said before, and I will state it again, we want to ensure that we get the balance right—both supporting private schools, and in particular less well off independent and Catholic schools, and ensuring that our public schools are of the very best quality.

I am hoping that that has clarified for Mr Barr, and others in this chamber today, where the Greens are standing. We are not saying that we will be moving to change these funding formulas. There is a review in 2013. We look forward to that review being undertaken.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (5.13), by leave: What Ms Hunter has done is again avoid what is actually in the policy. The policy specifically goes against that. One point is to support the maintenance of the total level of commonwealth funding for private schools at 2003-04 levels. Now that would cut \$60 million. But then it actually goes on—and Ms Hunter did not go anywhere near addressing this—to say that the Greens will end the current arrangement for recurrent funding to non-government schools by no later than the end of 2010. So, far from it being in 2013, their policy says to end it by the end of 2010 and return it to 2003-04 levels.

That is why there is this significant confusion. I think it is important that we have this debate. I have seen Mr Barr's amendment—I will not speak to it before he moves it—and it is important that we get absolute clarity. On the one hand, we have got policy which is very clear on a number of those things, but it contradicts what Ms Hunter was just saying even then. The Leader of the Greens today had the opportunity with the megaphone of a National Press Club address, an opportunity afforded only to the four party leaders—the leaders of the Nationals, the Liberals, the Greens and the Labor Party—to answer the question, and he refused to answer it. Because of that lack of clarity and the words of Ms Hunter that are contradicted by the parts of the policy that she did not address, it is reasonable that we as an Assembly actually seek that clarification.

Amendment negatived.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Planning, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation and Minister for Gaming and Racing) (5.16)(by leave): I move:

Omit all words after “notes”, substitute:

“the conflict between the Greens’ education policy as outlined in their ‘Australian Greens Education Policy’ issued in March 2010 and the recent statements of Greens’ Senate candidate, Lin Hatfield Dodds, on 10 August 2010 and Greens’ Leader, Senator Brown, on 15 August 2010 and 18 August 2010 at the National Press Club; and

- (2) calls on the Australian Greens to clarify their position on schools funding as a matter of urgency.”.

I have made one clarification to this amendment, given Ms Hunter has now made what I believe to be a reasonably clear statement on behalf of the ACT Greens in relation to their position. So excuse my little handwritten addition there in paragraph (2), but this really now goes to the point of the Australian Greens’ policy position. I think Ms Hunter has outlined the position of the ACT Greens eloquently, and I do not take the same issue that Mr Seselja does with the position of the ACT Greens. I think it is now fairly clearly on the record that they do not support the position that is outlined in the March national policy statement, and they will not be supporting cutting funding from ACT non-government schools or any change to funding for ACT non-government schools in advance of the national schools funding review.

Ms Hunter has outlined some important principles that I agree with in relation to needs-based school funding, regardless of the sector—public or private—but looking at the needs of individual schools and recognising that there are, indeed, some low-fee independent and Catholic schools that require additional assistance, and that their school results, as outlined in NAPLAN 2008 and 2009, demonstrate the need for targeted funding support for those schools.

There are schools that are in need of targeted additional support in the public system and in the Catholic system, and there are also one or two in the independent system that require that targeted support. So what I believe we are seeing this afternoon is an emerging consensus in relation to the ACT’s approach to this national schools funding review to move to a more needs-based system.

It is very clear from the results we have seen for ACT schools that the bulk of new funding for schools in the ACT should be targeted towards those schools in the public and Catholic systems in particular that require additional support to lift literacy and numeracy standards. What I believe we have this afternoon, after many hours of debate, is consensus. I welcome that change in position from Ms Hunter and the ACT Greens. I think it is an important position. It means we have finally, at least in the context of the Labor Party and the Greens, now moved beyond the public versus private debate.

The invitation is now open to the Liberal Party to also move beyond this and to work with the government as we approach this national schools funding policy debate, to present a view as a parliament to the commonwealth government for a needs-based funding system, one that looks at improving the results and the outcomes for those students, regardless of whether they are in public schools, Catholic schools or independent schools, who are not meeting the national minimum benchmarks in terms

of literacy and numeracy outcomes, and providing that additional targeted support through the national partnerships program and through the range of other policy interventions—the low SES national partnership, for example—all of those areas that the federal and ACT governments have been working on for some time now.

I am very pleased with what I have heard from Ms Hunter this afternoon. Again the opportunity is now open for the Liberals' education spokesperson to come down and also agree that we move beyond the public versus private debate. The Prime Minister has set the agenda here. We agree as an ACT government; the Greens now agree; and if the Canberra Liberals agree, then I think we have a way forward that new funding for schools should be targeted where the greatest need is. Clearly, from the report of the Assembly committee into addressing the equity and achievement gap within ACT schools and the available data we have through NAPLAN, targeted new funding is required in the new schools funding arrangement, most particularly for public schools but also for some Catholic schools and some independent schools. That is evidence-based policy, and I welcome what I believe to be an important breakthrough in education policy here in the Assembly this afternoon.

Having said that, if this clarity can extend to the Australian Greens' policy position—that is the second part of my amendment—then I think this small consensus that appears to have emerged in the ACT parliament might indeed lead to an important breakthrough in the federal schools debate. That would be another example of where this jurisdiction shows national leadership and where this Assembly can come together in the new form of politics that we are all calling for and all seeking to achieve. If it has to be done on the eve of an election, then you take the opportunities when they arise.

What we have seen this afternoon from the Greens is a significant move in their policy position. It is to be acknowledged and welcomed as an important advance in education policy debate in this country. We look forward to seeing a similar reaffirmation of the position that Senator Brown put only three days ago and that Lin Hatfield Dodds so courageously put a week ago in indicating a change and leading the way for the Greens party away from their highly ideological position of March of 2010 and a welcome step into the mainstream of education policy debate.

Lin Hatfield Dodds is to be congratulated for taking that important step and for being willing to engage in such a debate. It now falls on the Liberal Party to see whether they are prepared to join with Labor and the Greens in this important education policy debate.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (5.23): I think it is important that members understand what Senator Brown did say at the press club this afternoon. I will just read three paragraphs from his speech. Senator Brown quotes Professor Richard Teese from the University of Melbourne from an article in the *Age* on Monday:

It is a failed vision of public schooling that subjects the Labor Party to the indignity of scavenging on the scrapheap of failed educational reform. The Greens, by contrast, start from the premise that public schooling is intrinsically valuable and the best vehicle to engage all children. They want a public system that is "recognised as among the best in the world". Can either of the big parties

say this or mean it? Is either prepared to draw out the consequences—setting high standards for all public schools, adopting the funding priorities that this requires, and making durable improvements in the quality of the teaching force?

Senator Brown goes on to say:

Australia ranks 18 out of 30 in a comparison of OECD for funding to public education (excluding tertiary) as a percentage of GDP. Based on the most recent available figures, for Australia to be a leader in OECD, spending around 4% GDP, would require an additional \$5.2 billion.

As you know, the Greens support the Mining Super Profits tax as originally proposed by Wayne Swan and Treasury which would raise that 20 billion. However as a first step in the new parliament, the Greens will negotiate an adjustment to the mining tax so that it raises an additional \$2 billion that will boost the public school system to fund a range of important areas.

So what we have is a policy worth \$5.2 billion. We have a source of \$2 billion worth of funding, and the interesting question is: where does the other \$3.2 billion come from? As long as this policy stands on the Greens' website uncorrected, it is very important that paragraph (2) of Mr Barr's amendment be passed. It simply calls on the Australian Greens to clarify their position on school funding as a matter of urgency.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 3

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (5.29): Just to briefly close, I think there has been a number of extraordinary parts to this debate, but the Greens voting against that amendment is probably the most extraordinary. The Greens have essentially voted against an amendment that simply calls on the Australian Greens to say what their policy is. What is it that they have got to hide about their policies? The amendment calls on the Greens to clarify their policies; it calls on Senator Bob Brown and the Australian Greens Party to say whether they are going to rip \$60 million out of non-government schools in the ACT? That is what the policy on their website says. He had the opportunity to say, "No, that's wrong." He had the opportunity to take it

down off his website. He had the opportunity to say, “No, our policy is not to rip \$60 million out.”

You have to ask the question: why he would not give that answer? Is it because he does not want to alienate those who are genuinely against non-government education in his party, his supporters? He is sort of walking both sides of the street. He says, “Look over here, look over there.” Then, after the election, no matter which position he takes, he can say, “Well, it is on our website. Didn’t you believe it?” They will say, “Well, you’re not keeping your promise,” and he will say, “No, but it was on our website the whole time. We had it there in black and white on our website. We were going to cut 60 million.”

It is legitimate that these questions be asked; it is legitimate that the party seeking to hold the balance of power is asked these questions and then answers these questions. When the Leader of the Greens had that opportunity to, he chose not to. There is absolute confusion as a result of the duplicitous messages that have been going back and forth on this issue. We know what they really want to do, but they realise there might be some electoral consequences from that, so they sort of run away from it but they do not really. Not enough to, say, take it out of their policy. Not enough to take it down off their website. Not enough for the Leader of the Greens, on national television, three days out from the election, to distance himself from it.

I would have thought that, if that genuinely was not their policy, if it was some sort of mistake or they saw the light some time ago and said, “No, no, we realised we were wrong on that; we don’t want to cut that funding to non-government schools,” Senator Bob Brown would have been very clear about that. I would have thought he would have said, “No, that’s not our policy. That policy on the website is wrong. It’s wrong and I refute it. I am causing it to be taken down to show that I am serious that that is not our policy. I am causing the amended policy to be put up on our website.” That is what you would do if you were fair dinkum. That is what you would do if you did not want to send two different messages to two very different constituencies.

This is about saying to the true believers: “Don’t worry, have a look on the website. That’s what we stand for. We do stand for getting rid of private health. We do stand for getting rid of funding to non-government schools.” But when they are trying to appeal to a broader constituency, some families who might send their kids to non-government schools—they might be the sort of voters that the Greens are trying to attract—they say, “No, no, no. Don’t believe what’s on our website, believe what’s in another statement somewhere else, in a letter somewhere.”

We had two speakers from the Greens who came down. They each had 15 minutes, and neither of them—

Mr Rattenbury: Actually I had 10, and you shouted at me the whole time.

MR SESELJA: I apologise; Mr Rattenbury has interjected. Between them, they had 25 minutes to disavow the policy. They had 25 minutes, not 30 minutes—my sincere apologies to Mr Rattenbury—and they could not bring themselves to walk away from it. That is why it is important.

So the parliament of the ACT has now said, “Because it is so unclear, because you are giving so many mixed messages to so many different constituencies, you need to clarify it.” I mention in passing that it will be difficult to believe whatever they say on this. It would be far easier to believe if they came out and told the truth and said, “Yes, that’s our plan. That’s what we always planned. We are going to cut funding to non-government schools,” and were proud of it. It would be easier to believe if they said, “We believe that funding should be taken out of non-government schools and we will do other things with it and we will have a higher mining tax and we will spend it on other things,” but they have tried to run away from it and they have got caught out. I commend the fact that the Assembly has now called the Australian Greens on it and said, “Well, put it up.” They had the opportunity before a national audience today to do it and they did not. They had the opportunity in 25 minutes of speeches on this issue today, and they did not. The running around on this issue is becoming apparent, but we can see what is happening.

I thank members for their contributions. I thank members for a spirited debate, but I think the onus is indeed now on the Australian Greens to actually put out a statement as to which way they will go. I think, though, that the people of the ACT in particular, having seen this, will look very carefully and perhaps very sceptically at whatever position the Greens end up adopting.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 3

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Roads—works and traffic management

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (5.37): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) over the past 12 months the ACT Government undertook rehabilitation works on London Circuit, Northbourne Avenue and Bunda Street, which

- cost approximately \$12 million and disrupted traffic for around three months;
- (b) at the time of the above works the ACT Government had before it, or was developing, a number of plans and reviews that envisaged redesigning:
 - (i) London Circuit – the greater Civic plan;
 - (ii) Northbourne Avenue – the Northbourne feasibility study; and
 - (iii) Bunda Street – the Cardno review of the ACT cycling and pedestrian network;
 - (c) implementing the designs proposed in the above plans and reviews would make the rehabilitation works undertaken in the areas largely redundant;
 - (d) when construction work interrupts the pedestrian and cycling networks, there are often insufficient substitute routes established for walkers and riders; and
 - (e) poor coordination and planning of road works has meant that a large number of major projects have occurred in the ACT simultaneously with negative impacts on commuters;
- (2) condemns the ACT Government for wasting public money on rehabilitation road pavement, and rebuilding footpaths and kerbs in areas of Canberra without maximising opportunities to significantly improve sustainable travel, road safety and cycle paths and footpaths; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) ensure that:
 - (i) road works and rehabilitation are not undertaken on areas that are subject to incomplete community consultation or planning processes; and
 - (ii) when construction works interrupt pedestrian and cycle routes, there are safe, convenient and well signposted alternative routes made available from the start of the works; and
 - (b) implement a project management strategy for roadworks and other construction that minimises disruption to travel routes and considers the long-term use of roads, footpaths, cycleways or other traffic infrastructure.

This motion condemns the ACT government for wasting public money on rehabilitating road pavement and rebuilding footpaths and kerbs in areas of Canberra without maximising the opportunities to significantly improve sustainable travel, road safety, cycle paths or even footpaths.

At a more macro level, this motion is about the government's attitude toward planning for future travel options in Canberra. The crux of the motion is this: there is a current

trend for the government to spend millions of dollars to knock down and rebuild key travel routes in exactly the same design. The government is entrenching the existing designs instead of taking opportunities to improve the travel routes which we know need changing.

This is bad enough, given the pressing and acknowledged need to change and improve our transport networks to address climate change and peak oil and to promote active and sustainable transport. But there is an additional layer to the government's actions as well. Not only has the government spent significant funds rebuilding roads and kerbs in exactly the same design; it has also undertaken these works on areas that are currently subject to incomplete community consultation or planning processes.

This means that we are spending millions of dollars in this city resealing and refurbishing parts of the city and this work could become redundant if the government follows its plans for redesign. I note that in the Assembly yesterday, when I asked Mr Stanhope about this issue, he said that sometimes the government undertakes roadworks and upgrades that have a short life span. But he said, "These are almost always appropriate." That statement "always almost appropriate" suggests there are some of these short-term roadworks and upgrades which are inappropriate.

I am glad that Mr Stanhope made that admission, because I have a list of actions from recent times which appear to be inappropriate. I refer first to London Circuit. The Chief Minister talked about it yesterday in question time. He said that the works there come at significant cost—\$5 million, according to him. As anyone who drove a car would know, the works involved resealing the roads. As anyone wanting to catch a bus would know, the work also involved demolishing the gutters, blocking off bus stops and then rebuilding them in exactly the same spot.

Yet at the same time, the government had out for consultation its greater Civic plan. The greater Civic plan specifically set out new design options for London Circuit. Some of the treatments in the plan included changing the median island, changing the width of the verge, adding new kerbside bus stops and adding indented car parking spaces.

If these new options are taken up then the current \$5 million roadworks, which involve digging up the street and rebuilding the gutters, will be at least partially wasted. You cannot change the width of the verge without demolishing the gutters yet again. I really doubt you can add new kerbside bus stops without doing the same again. You could not widen the median strip without pulling up some of the newly rehabilitated road.

Those of us who are committed to active and sustainable transport know that London Circuit needs to prioritise transport like buses and cyclists. But this will mean changing the road and taking away some of the kerb that has just been rebuilt. So why did this expensive roadwork go ahead? Did the government undertake the works without giving any thought to the future plans for this part of the city? If that is the case, it is bad planning and a careless use of public money.

Perhaps on the other hand, the government did these roadworks with full knowledge of the plans to redesign this part of the city. But in that case, it presumably had no

intention of carrying through with the plans. So the government is being disingenuous about its commitment to planning a better Canberra where planning is more sustainable and less congested.

I found it particularly ironic that the London Circuit work went ahead through May and June. This, of course, is the very period that the government said it would finish consulting and release its final greater Civic plan. According to the draft, the final plan was due for endorsement in June, but we still have not seen it. In addition to the fact that millions of dollars were spent rebuilding London Circuit in basically the same design, it makes me wonder whether the government has any intention of making any transport improvements to London Circuit at all.

Yesterday I asked Mr Stanhope to tell us his position on the Civic cycle loop. He said he would defer giving us his position until he saw where the government was up to on the greater Civic action plan. A good idea! This is exactly what should have been done before London Circuit's roads and gutters were torn up at a cost of \$5 million. I would like to suggest a new catchphrase for the government to commit to memory. Like the ActewAGL mole which says "dial before you dig", the government should "plan before you pour".

Unfortunately, London Circuit is not the only example of roadworks and rehabilitation pointing to a lack of long-term thinking by the government. Any commuter from north Canberra will know that recently Northbourne Avenue underwent major roadworks. The road surface was re-done. The kerbs were re-done. The works caused significant disruption to traffic over a number of months. The work proceeded into the night and this generated noise complaints from nearby residents who discovered to their dismay that roadworks are in fact exempt from noise regulations. The cost of this work, in conjunction with the London Circuit work, was approximately \$8 million.

It is surprising, then, that the recent budget allocated \$4 million specifically to redesigning Northbourne Avenue in order "to identify the best priority bus and cycle path options". These sorts of options that we have been discussing—like making the on-road cycle road into a separated cycle lane or adding a bus priority lane—are likely to mean widening the verges or making other changes which will make the work that has just been done on Northbourne Avenue redundant. Spending millions of dollars today on cementing in the existing Northbourne Avenue design—literally cementing—is a strange action for a government that says it wants to redesign Northbourne Avenue to make it more sustainable.

The list goes on. Unfortunately, Bunda Street is undergoing a major refurbishment right now. As Mr Stanhope said yesterday, these works come at a significant cost—\$5 million, he said. Government consultants talked to the public about the redevelopment of Bunda Street early last year. I attended one of the consultations. Many good options were put forward to redevelop this key area in a sustainable way. I put in a submission along similar lines. In addition, the 2010 consultants' report on the ACT cycling and pedestrian network ranked changes to Bunda street as the two highest priority infrastructure projects. These projects were to convert Bunda Street into shared space and to add protected cycle paths to Bunda Street.

But as with London Circuit and Northbourne Avenue, the government ignored these projects. Instead, the money is again being spent on resurfacing the existing road and putting in new paving. All this is cementing Bunda Street into the exact same configuration. We know that configuration has problems with a high volume of motor vehicle traffic, noise, pollution and reduced pedestrian and cyclist safety.

Why did the government once again ignore the good redesign options that came from its consultation on Bunda Street? Why did it ignore its consultant report that said the redesign of Bunda Street was the number one priority project and the number two priority project for a cycling and pedestrian network in Canberra? If these projects do proceed at some stage in the future, the refurbished pavement and the re-laid roads will need to be taken up again. The street will need to be shut down once again, disrupting traffic and business.

My last example is Hibberson Street, which is the main town centre street in Gungahlin. The government commissioned a review as part of the pedestrian and cycling infrastructure review. It looked at Gungahlin and recommended that the government look at converting Hibberson Street into shared space. The shared space design was a way to reduce the traffic speed and traffic danger that the residents of Gungahlin were concerned about. The Greens had been calling for this also last year, as had of course the Gungahlin Community Council.

But the government instead spent its funds reconstructing three existing pedestrian crossings off Hibberson Street. Again, the government entrenched the same street design. The crossings that were already there were resurfaced and remarked. But if at some stage in the future the redesigning of Hibberson Street was to proceed and it was converted to shared space, the government's recent work and spending would be wasted.

I have listed some of the existing expensive short-term works being undertaken by the government, and I want to remind the Assembly of a very relevant motion we passed in May. The motion was about active and sustainable transport. The Liberal Party did not support it, but the government did, although only after removing some significant aspects. In that motion, the government committed to some interesting statements. I will read them out:

The government released a Sustainable Transport Action Plan in 2004, however the government did not implement many of its recommended actions and priorities.

Perhaps most bravely, the government specifically supported the motion's text that said:

... there remain many barriers in Canberra for walkers, riders and public transport users, especially as government funding strongly favours car travel.

I had hoped that when the government agreed to that statement we had opened up a window to changing, but looking around the city at the moment makes me think we are not changing much at all. We see literally millions of dollars being spent on

upgrading and entrenching the design of key parts of our travel network. They have redesign options flagged for them right now, at this minute, and the government is ignoring those options.

So this motion calls on the government to ensure that roadworks and rehabilitation are not undertaken on areas which are subject to incomplete, not-yet-finished community consultation or planning processes. We are saying to the government: plan before you pour.

I would just like to put this motion in some context and possibly pre-empt some of the government's speech on the topic. We do acknowledge that the government faces many transport challenges. Combined with budgetary pressures, it is not an easy task to change Canberra's transport patterns. I also acknowledge the good things that the government has achieved. This budget has many good new transport initiatives in it. It is a step in the right direction.

But that is what makes the signal coming from the wasted roadworks so worrying. Why is the government wasting these opportunities for safe and sustainable redesign and ignoring the plans that are out there? You have to wonder whether the government just says that it wants these very green-sounding plans about a sustainable city and sustainable transport, but it just does not follow through. Why?

I want to touch on a couple of other points raised in the motion. As well as being concerned about roadworks in specific city areas, we are also concerned about the coordination of roadworks across the city at once. The recent Engineers Australia report card on the ACT picked up this point.

It specifically pointed out the poor overarching planning by the government in that they let multiple large road projects occur simultaneously, which makes it of course very difficult for people to get around. That is why this motion calls for a project management strategy for roadworks and other construction that looks at overall travel routes and minimises disruption.

Another point I wish to raise is the fact that the government often fails to properly provide for walkers and cyclists when routes are blocked off and changed. Woden Green is a good recent example. That development blocked off the main cycling trunk route from south Canberra, a change that was to stay in place for about nine months. Suddenly hundreds of commuting cyclists were shunted out to busy Callam Street without any warning. It was dangerous and chaotic.

An alternative safe route was put in after a considerable community uproar. But why was it not planned earlier? We have seen similar things happen around Canberra. What is happening at present is not good enough. We know that easy, uninterrupted, safe routes are an absolute key to getting people using active transport. If there are not safe alternatives and the safe alternatives are not maintained and supported, people will have no alternative but to drive.

In conclusion, I hope that the government takes seriously the points raised in this motion and commits to prudently using public roadwork funds and not waste money

on areas which are flagged for redesign. I hope that, in fact, it does look at the sustainable design options seriously, the design options which its own consultation, its own engineers and its own consultants are getting up. It needs to look at these design options and make them not options, but actually implement them.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Health and Minister for Industrial Relations) (5.51): I am very happy to stand here in relation to the Chief Minister's portfolio area and do this on his behalf, as he is sick and has left the Assembly for the day. I should start by saying that the government will not be supporting this motion. We have an annual program for the rehabilitation of road pavements that need replacement due to wear and tear. Almost 3½ million square metres of road pavement are maintained every year.

As members of the Assembly would appreciate, if road pavements are not repaired when they are in poor condition, a range of other issues arise which can seriously compromise the safety of road users. Failing to maintain our transport infrastructure in a timely manner can also mean that more costly works are needed in order to rectify what will have become a much larger problem.

While the annual road condition surveys confirm that over 90 per cent of road pavements in the ACT are in good condition, some are in poor condition and are deteriorating. London Circuit, Northbourne Avenue and Bunda Street are all roads where the road pavement conditions have been assessed as poor and require attention to maintain driver safety and to manage increasing maintenance costs. Indeed, road rehabilitation works on Northbourne Avenue have been underway since 2006-07, when works on this road began at the intersection of Northbourne Avenue and the Barton Highway and headed south towards the city over subsequent years.

In 2009-10, some additional funds were made available through the federal roads to recovery program. The road pavement rehabilitation work on Bunda Street has been incorporated as part of the Bunda Street verge upgrade which has been planned in consultation with city businesses over the last few years, before going out to tender in 2009.

These projects are being developed with an understanding of various plans for the city. Ms Le Couteur's suggestion that these projects have ignored various planning initiatives in the city is not true. Far from seeking to condemn the government, we would suggest that Ms Le Couteur amend her motion to one which actually praises the work being undertaken by the government in rehabilitating road pavements in the city, however unlikely that suggestion might be.

The Northbourne Avenue works have been underway for a number of years, long before the decision to undertake a feasibility study on public transport options on Northbourne Avenue, which is now occurring as part of the 2010-11 transport for Canberra program. The road pavement rehabilitation works on London Circuit most recently benefited from input from the Department of Land and Property Services, the department which is now responsible for developing the greater Canberra city plan.

While the pedestrian and cycling infrastructure plan for Civic is still to be finalised, the current works on Bunda Street do not preclude any of the possible options that

have been identified in the draft report to date. The works on the Bunda Street verges and road pavements have been identified for a number of years as important safety upgrades to the deteriorating pavement.

The Cardno pedestrian and cycling infrastructure plan being prepared by Territory and Municipal Services is new on the scene, still to be finalised, and its recommendations, if accepted, would render little of the current work being undertaken unnecessary. The suggestion that a Cardno proposal would make the road pavement rehabilitation work “largely” redundant has no basis in fact. The facts are that the road pavement width on London Circuit or Northbourne Avenue is not going to be reduced in the foreseeable future and none of the recent pavement works will be redundant.

Should these roads end up being widened to accommodate, for example, a cycle lane or a bus lane, then some of the associated kerbing and guttering would be replaced. This replacement would be at a small cost in comparison to the very large costs associated with any widening of the roads.

On Northbourne Avenue, in some locations several layers of asphalt have been laid in previous years and it was not possible to place another layer without compromising the drainage. In these locations the kerb and gutter were reconstructed at a higher level. This meant that the existing pavement could be retained, so minimising the use of scarce quarry products and reducing the energy required for this work.

On London Circuit the pavement was reused by using a new treatment called in situ foam stabilisation. In some locations several layers of asphalt had been laid previously and it was not possible to place another layer without compromising the drainage. In these locations the kerb and gutter were reconstructed at a higher level. These techniques also minimise the use of scarce quarry products and minimise energy usage for the works.

I accept that roadworks can disrupt all road users, including walkers and cyclists. However, every effort is made by the department to limit this by including specific requirements in the traffic management plans, consulting with groups such as Pedal Power about alternative arrangements, and having work undertaken at night time or at the weekend.

The recent works in the city are a good example where a considerable proportion of the work was undertaken at night time and over the weekend. Residents and businesses were consulted and this major work was completed in a three-month time frame. Working in the city is never easy but the work still got completed on time.

Given the scale of the capital works program in 2009-10, improvements have been implemented in the coordination of roadworks being undertaken not only by the ACT government but also by the National Capital Authority on behalf of the commonwealth government.

The department has spent \$20,000 providing information to make travel easier for road users while roadworks occur, and this has included information on local radio and in print media, as well as improving the information on the departmental website covering major roadworks.

There is no waste of public money that can be attributed to the road rehabilitation program. Indeed, every opportunity is taken to provide for the needs of all Canberra road users, including cyclists, when undertaking road rehabilitation projects. For example, the recent works on London Circuit have resulted in an additional two kilometres of on-road cycling being provided on this road. None existed prior to the work. The road reseal program each year results in 40 to 50 kilometres of additional on-road cycle lanes being provided. Far from being a waste of public money, this is a very productive use of it and is consistent with the government's commitment to sustainable transport.

Annual road maintenance programs are developed and implemented taking into consideration various planning initiatives. Further coordination will be achieved in the city as a result of the role of the new Department of Land and Property Services and the establishment of a senior position in that department to coordinate and, in some cases, oversee the implementation of city projects.

The Chief Minister will take on board any specific requests to ensure that adequate alternative arrangements are put in place for cyclists and pedestrians at the start of roadwork projects when existing arrangements are impacted. He has also asked the department to continue to program and manage roadworks in a way that seeks to minimise the impact on all traffic, pedestrians, cyclists and other users, such as motorcyclists and horse riders, where this is practical.

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 COE (Ginninderra) (7.30): I also thank Ms Le Couteur for bringing forward this motion today on private members' day. The Canberra Liberals have some sympathy with the position that Ms Le Couteur has put forward in her motion. Going through it, I think the issues that she raises are significant ones and ones that affect many Canberrans.

Of course, all of these issues are very much in the public's awareness, especially for northern Canberrans, with the bridge collapse on the weekend and the impact that alternative arrangements are having on the lives of thousands of people, particularly in north Belconnen and Gungahlin. Then there is the flow-on effect of that for people in the inner north. In fact, I dare to say that people in the inner north are probably getting an easier run on their roads at the moment with the traffic being diverted to Barry Drive and Ginninderra Drive.

The ACT government need to be condemned for their poor planning of our current and future infrastructure needs. So often we see in the territory a situation whereby the government respond to growth in our outer suburbs when in actual fact they should be able to predict it. If they can predict the land sales and the sale of blocks of land in Gungahlin, why can they not also predict the population which is going to be out there and the need that there is going to be for infrastructure such as roads?

Too often we see in Canberra the government going gung-ho in selling blocks of land to get the stamp duty and to get the land sales but not actually backing up the residents with infrastructure prior to demand being there. What we are seeing is infrastructure reaching near capacity before this government responds. There is no better example of that than the Gungahlin Drive extension. There was obviously a need for a dual carriageway for a very long time, yet the government refused to take action until the last minute, before the last territory election. They committed only after the Liberals had made that very commitment.

Further to Ms Le Couteur's motion, it is worth while calling upon the government to develop road, parking, cycling, pedestrian and public transport infrastructure before existing infrastructure reaches capacity. I understand that Ms Le Couteur may object to this. She may well say that we should just be planning for it. I think we should not just be planning for infrastructure before existing infrastructure reaches capacity; we should, in fact, be rolling it out. We should, in fact, be developing it. It is all very well to have a plan, but if the plan is not implemented then we are no better off than we are at the moment.

I note that Ms Le Couteur mentioned the greater Civic plan, the Northbourne feasibility study and also the Cardno Young review of Bunda Street. These are significant and they certainly should be taken into consideration. Whether that should necessarily hold up other works, I am not completely sure. For that reason, I think that it is worth amending paragraph (1) of Ms Le Couteur's motion. I will be moving an amendment. My amendment will replace parts of (1) and (2) but also add to (3).

MR SPEAKER: Mr Coe, if I might interrupt you, the secretariat does not have your amendment.

MR COE: I am about to table that. I am sorry, it has only just been finalised. Paragraph (3) would read:

calls upon the Government to:

- (a) develop road, parking, cycling, pedestrian and public transport infrastructure before existing infrastructure reaches capacity;
- (b) ensure that roadworks and rehabilitation are not undertaken on areas that are subject to incomplete community consultation or planning processes;
- (c) ensure that, when construction works interrupt pedestrian and cycle routes, there are safe, convenient and well signposted alternative routes made available from the start of the works and the public is made aware of alternative arrangements prior to commencement of works; and
- (d) implement a project management strategy for roadworks and other construction that minimises disruption to travel routes and considers the long-term use of roads, footpaths, cycleways or other traffic infrastructure.”.

Paragraph (3)(d) is not dissimilar to Ms Le Couteur's motion. I move the amendment:

Omit all words after “around three months” in paragraph (1)(a), substitute:

“(1) (b) poor co-ordination and planning of roadworks has meant that a large number of major projects have occurred in the ACT simultaneously with negative impacts on commuters;

(2) condemns the ACT Government for:

- (a) poor planning of our current and future infrastructure needs; and
- (b) releasing an inaccurate infrastructure plan that lacked vision and direction for our city’s future needs; and

(3) calls upon the Government to:

- (a) develop road, parking, cycling, pedestrian and public transport infrastructure before existing infrastructure reaches capacity;
- (b) ensure that roadworks and rehabilitation are not undertaken on areas that are subject to incomplete community consultation or planning processes;
- (c) ensure that, when construction works interrupt pedestrian and cycle routes, there are safe, convenient and well signposted alternative routes made available from the start of the works and the public is made aware of alternative arrangements prior to commencement of works; and
- (d) implement a project management strategy for roadworks and other construction that minimises disruption to travel routes and considers the long-term use of roads, footpaths, cycleways or other traffic infrastructure.”.

MR SPEAKER: The question now is that Mr Coe’s amendment be agreed to. The fact that it has not been circulated—

Mr Smyth: Perhaps, Mr Speaker, I could speak.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, thank you, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (7.37): Just to give people time to receive the amendment, while it is being circulated, I will now speak largely about my experience as the minister for roads. It is important, particularly when you look at paragraph (3) of Ms Le Couteur’s motion, that roadworks and rehabilitation are not undertaken in areas that are subject to incomplete community consultation or planning and processes.

The road resealing program is very important. The nature of the roads in the ACT and the nature of our weather patterns dictate that of course maintenance must be undertaken in a regular way. If you have been driving around tonight, you will know that there is an excessive amount of water on the roads. If the roads have cracked and

the surface of the bitumen is starting to deteriorate, it allows the water to seep into the base. I was given some examples once of the particular problem that occurs once it gets into the base. The compacting effect of the vehicles on the road and the liquid in the—the Treasurer is laughing at me, Mr Speaker.

Ms Gallagher: No, I am enjoying it. I am enjoying the story.

MR SMYTH: I am shocked that she would laugh at an important issue such as road base. If you get a plastic bag of the aggregate, as it is when it is laid, and you have got those large stones, which are often 20 millimetres in diameter or bigger—now Mr Coe is laughing at me, Mr Speaker; I seek your protection. The problem is that the issue of the compacting, along with putting water into the equation, can turn it almost into a claylike substance, almost like a putty, and it becomes quite soft. Once large amounts of water get in under the upper layers of the bitumen it lifts and you get the start of potholes.

If it is not treated properly and effectively, the long-term debt that comes to the people of the ACT because of insufficient road rehabilitation gets out of hand quite quickly. Mr Hargreaves has joined us. He knows all about resealing programs, as a former Minister for Territory and Municipal Services. The important thing is to make sure that the process goes ahead. It must be done annually. The amount of road surface that is resealed needs to be done consistently and it needs to meet the age profile of the roads that exist in the territory so that, as taxpayers, we get the safest roads that we can have to drive on but we also get the most effective and efficient use out of the financing of rehabilitating roads and keeping that road surface working adequately for the people of the ACT.

I note Mr Coe's amendment has been circulated. It is a very fine amendment. It is important, as I think Mr Coe says in one note, that the poor condition and planning of roadwork has meant that a large number of major projects have occurred in the ACT simultaneously, with negative impacts on commuters. We saw that recently with work being done on London Circuit and Northbourne Avenue at the same time.

Paragraph (2) condemns the ACT government for the poor planning of our current and future infrastructure needs. You can see that in the Gungahlin Drive extension debacle that this Chief Minister has presided over. We await the outcomes of the inquiries into the collapse of the bridge on the weekend. But the point is that this road should have been completed on time and on budget, which to my memory was July 2005. Here we are in August 2010 and the road still has not been completed.

It causes an enormous amount of grief to those people coming from outside the territory every morning down the Barton Highway and, in particular, those residents of Gungahlin that rely on this road. This road should have been in place in 2005, as promised. We all remember Mr Corbell's mantra of "on time, on budget". Well, it is not on time and it is not on budget and the completion date seems to have been pushed back further and further and further.

Mr Coe then goes on to call on the government to develop road, parking, cycling, pedestrian and public infrastructure before existing infrastructure reaches capacity. That is a prudent move.

Ms Gallagher: You can stop now, Brendan. We've got it.

MR SMYTH: I can stop now, Treasurer? Do I pass? What score do I get?

Mr Hargreaves: Three.

Ms Gallagher: Three out of 10. It was better before you started reading the amendment out.

Mr Hanson: Is that the content or the style?

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, members. Let us focus on the debate.

MR SMYTH: I am focusing on the debate, but I keep getting chuckles from the Treasurer over there. She is clearly amused by the fact that we can stand up on any issue and are quite competent in our portfolios. We in the Canberra Liberals have done the hard work. We are across the portfolios. We discuss these issues and we have a consistent view, unlike anybody else in this place, on the provision of infrastructure.

You can only commend the Leader of the Opposition for his infrastructure bill. We would not need this motion today if we had an infrastructure commissioner. That is something that the Labor Party have rejected and resisted because they know that, if there was an infrastructure commissioner, that person would clearly highlight the failings of the delivery of infrastructure over the past nine years under the Stanhope government. I commend the amendment to the house.

MR SPEAKER: Members, whilst I am sure I hardly need to comment, can we please endeavour to bring our amendments to the secretariat rather sooner.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Health and Minister for Industrial Relations) (7.42): I do not think it will come as any surprise that we are not going to support Mr Coe's amendment. I was enjoying Mr Smyth's presentation until he started reading out the amendment as his contribution to the debate.

We reject the assertion essentially being put forward in the amendment around the planning of infrastructure needs. I think this government has done more than any other government in this place to pull together an infrastructure plan and actually deliver the infrastructure our city needs. You only need to look at education, health or transport to see the effort that has gone into infrastructure across this city.

There will be times when people get irritated about the level of infrastructure development across the city, but that is one of the challenges that I think comes with living in a city that needs a significant step-up in its infrastructure needs. I do not think there is a simple answer to these issues. Certainly, our officials work very hard to coordinate and develop their infrastructure priorities across government and also to ensure that every dollar is wisely spent. A lot of work goes into that.

I know, from taking over responsibility for the delivery of capital works across the government when I took on the Treasury portfolio, that there were concerns that we were not delivering enough of the program each year. With the nation building and jobs task force that was set up—a coordinator-general and her team that was set up—and the work that we have put into streamlining our processes, we have significantly increased the delivery of that program with very positive results. The government is not in a position to support the amendment or indeed the motion. I cannot really see a huge amount of difference between the two of them.

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (7.44): I rise to speak about Mr Coe’s amendment, which I will attempt to go through. His note (b) was in fact (e) in our original, so clearly we are happy with that. He then deleted parts (b), (c) and (d), which I found very strange because part (b) is a matter of fact. These plans were in existence. The Liberal Party may or may not think the plans are good plans but, nonetheless, the plans were in existence and they certainly envisaged redesigning.

As to point (c)—“implementing the designs proposed in the above plans and reviews would make the rehabilitation works undertaken in the areas largely redundant”—basically, that was one of the major points we were trying to make. These plans exist. They envisage significant redesigning. If the government were serious about those redesignings then the work that has just happened would be largely redundant. That was a large part of the point we were trying to make. So clearly we do not agree with removing (b) and (c), particularly (b), as it is a straightforward fact, without any analysis.

Also, I would have thought that (d)—“when construction work interrupts the pedestrian and cycling networks, there are often insufficient substitute routes established for walkers and riders”—again, is a matter of fact. It often happens and we must all have been in a situation where the footpath is no longer there. If you have not then I guess you have not been around north Canberra very much in the last few months and you have not even been outside the Assembly very much in the last few months. If you remember, we had our footpath torn up in front of us. I think that (d) is really a matter of fact. As I pointed out during my speech, there was a particularly bad example in Woden, the Woden Green development, where the major northern commuter route, the bicycle commuting route, was broken and there was no alternative provided.

Mr Coe’s amendment goes on to condemn the government for the poor planning of current and future infrastructure needs. I do not have a problem with that or with the statement “releasing an inaccurate infrastructure plan that lacked vision and direction for our city’s future needs”. What I have most issue with is (3)(a)—“develop road, parking, cycling, pedestrian and public transport infrastructure before existing infrastructure reaches capacity”.

The problem with this is that it could be interpreted as meaning a number of things. I suspect that what the Liberal Party means by this is that there should always be an abundance of parking, there should always be an abundance of roads and there should always be an abundance of public transport. In reality, I do not think that is possible

and to still have space in the city for other things, apart from transport infrastructure, and space in the budget for other things, apart from transport infrastructure.

Decisions have to be made. That is why the Greens, when we discussed this with Mr Coe, suggested that we should put in the concept of planning, because decisions will have to be made. We will not have an inexhaustible supply of roads, an inexhaustible supply of parking or even an inexhaustible supply of public transport infrastructure.

The other three parts of Mr Coe's motion basically come from ours, except (c). He has added a bit more. We are quite happy with his additions. We are happy with (c). It is just really (3)(a). Because I think that the meaning of (3)(a) is probably very clear to the Liberal Party and not what the Greens will support, I am afraid that the Greens will not be supporting Mr Coe's amendment.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella) (7.49): I had hoped not to have to speak on this motion but I am moved to because there are some things in it which I think need a bit of an historical correction. Ms Le Couteur, for example, could do well to think back a little on her history. I would like to attack it in a couple of ways. Firstly, we need to understand that—and those new to this place would not know this—when the ACT inherited self-government in 1989 we inherited an ageing roads and footpath infrastructure. We inherited it with no funds from the federal government of the day to actually pay for it. Much of our road infrastructure was beyond its whole of life at that time. And we had, within the limited resources of a government, to come up with a way in which we could address that.

To suggest that we should be condemned for poor planning of our current and future infrastructure needs, I think, is a little rich. This particular government, over the time since it came to office in 2001, has put significant effort, funds and planning into our roads network, into our footpaths network and into our cycle paths and shared paths network. And I do not see in any of the debate so far any recognition that it was this government that initiated the on-road cycle paths.

Mr Speaker, you and I spoke at a forum in the 2001 election campaign, both of us supporting the provision of an on-road cycle path from Dickson to Woden. It was this government, when it became the government, who delivered on that. And it is now standard policy that, whenever there is major infrastructure done, an on-road cycle path will be provided as part of that policy. Therefore you cannot condemn us for poor planning if that provision is made. You cannot look at the state of the road between Russell Hill and the airport now and say that is poor planning—you cannot. It has on-road cycle paths on it, it has good infrastructure and there is a lot of money put in there.

You cannot say that there was poor planning by this government into the Athllon Drive duplication—you cannot. It was in fact the former government that stopped it dead at a certain point—the Liberal government stopped it dead—and it was this government that put it right through to Isabella Plains. You can now, if you select your routes, in fact go from Banks—no, I tell a lie—from Conder to Sydney or Melbourne on a dual carriageway. You can do that. You could not do that before this government came to office.

To suggest that there has been poor planning is wrong. To condemn us for poor planning is wrong. If it is insufficient in your view, then that is fine with me. If you have suggestions to make, that is fine with me. But to condemn this government for poor planning is just not on. It is wrong.

I heard earlier in the debate—I think it was today; it may have been yesterday—Mr Seselja saying that the federal government has put no money into roads in the ACT. That is actually wrong. At the intersection of, I think it is, Morshead Drive and Majura Road, part of the airport road infrastructure, the federal government put in—

Mr Hanson: You can think of one example?

MR HARGREAVES: Just be quiet and learn something, will you? The federal government put in \$50 million. That is not nothing. They put \$50 million in and then we matched it. And the airport contributed, I think, between \$4½ million and \$5 million to do that. We also did our share, the ACT did its share, to do the Lanyon Drive duplication. It was this government that did the Tharwa Drive duplication, not the half-baked measure that was going to be provided.

Mr Coe: How did the bridge go?

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Coe scoffs but the simple fact—and you cannot escape this—is that people were driving on the GDE. They were actually driving on it—maybe not as quickly as you would like, but they were driving on it. They were actually on it. It was this government that actually got it to a stage where people could use the thing.

The motion says:

... when construction work interrupts the pedestrian and cycling networks, there are often insufficient substitute routes established ...

Nobody would disagree with that. But let me tell you, Mr Speaker, before this government came to office there were no cycling networks being provided on the roads. If you have a look at the bit of work between Yarralumla and Mount Stromlo, what is going on there? An on-road cycle path to keep the cyclists safe. There is no recognition in any of this motion of that particular piece of work, and it is expensive. There is no recognition in here at all.

Certainly, providing people with alternative routes is a challenge. Of course it is. But I defy anybody in this chamber to come up with a road or a cycle path network that can go around everything in every single case. But the mere fact that they are trying to avoid roadworks means that there is an improvement taking place. There is no recognition in here that what you are saying is: “You do not have a substitute route to go around what you are doing.” We are actually doing something. There is nothing in there.

Both the amendment and the motion seem to indicate that our infrastructure and this government are substandard, and I reject that absolutely. We have put enormous funds

into this. We have put an enormous consultation process into this. I did the consultation process around the Tharwa Drive issue and I got bagged because it did not happen quickly enough. I got bagged mercilessly about the airport road, and it is a dream to go to the airport now on that road. It is a dream. And I got bagged out. Why? For having the temerity to make it difficult for people to get to the airport while we were doing some work.

There should be recognition in here. There should not be: "This government is condemned for not doing something." If you wish to say, "We are encouraging the government to do something more than that or to take a different tack," then I do not have a problem with that. I welcome it, in fact, because it is constructive. I see this sort of stuff "condemns the government for this, that and the other". The Greens say:

...condemns the ACT Government for wasting public money on rehabilitation road pavement, and rebuilding footpaths and kerbs...

Tell that to the people in my street. Tell that to the people in Gaunson Crescent where we have to go and grind down the footpaths and replace the footpaths because people are tripping over them and hurting themselves. Tell that to the people outside the schools where we are trying to rehabilitate the pavement.

When I was the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services some 2½ or three years ago, I asked TAMS to tell me how much in the way of potholes they fixed in a year and to give me something graphic to describe how much they did. The hole was the equivalent of a full-sized Olympic swimming pool. That is about the size in cubic metreage of the holes that they fill in Canberra in a year.

To suggest that we are wasting public money on that sort of rehabilitation, I am sorry, I have to reject that. I cannot support this. There is a lot of sentiment behind this that I have sympathy with. If you want to condemn us for not doing something, feel free. Whilst I see a condemnation of the government for doing something, I am sorry but this is not only wrong, it is an insult to each and every person that works in Roads ACT for the forethought and the thinking that they put into things.

When the bridges at the Glenloch interchange went in, we had to take the original two out and we had to implode some bridges there. The amount of consultation, the amount of forethought and the amount of technical advice that we got over that particular issue were phenomenal. It was about three months longer than I would have expected, and I was the minister at the time. I am sorry, I cannot support either the motion or the amendment while ever they contain the words "condemns the government" for doing something. I find it a personal insult.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 4

Noes 8

Mr Coe

Mr Hanson

Mr Barr

Ms Hunter

Mr Doszpot

Mr Seselja

Ms Burch

Ms Le Couteur

Ms Gallagher

Ms Porter

Mr Hargreaves

Mr Rattenbury

Question so resolved in the negative.

Amendment negatived.

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (8.02): I rise to close this debate, so I will make a few comments on what my colleagues said. Thank you very much, Mr Coe, Mr Hargreaves and Ms Gallagher for your contributions to this. I totally appreciate the point made by Ms Gallagher and Mr Hargreaves that our roads do need maintaining. Nobody is disputing that. What we are saying, though, is that, as well as needing maintaining, they also need planning for the future.

We were quoted examples of three studies the government had quite sensibly done, which talked about what should happen to our roads for the future. But what happened, in fact, was that we just rebuilt the roads in the same way, even though we had parts of the same department planning and saying that the roads should be different. So we do not disagree that the roads need maintenance. We disagree about where and when you do those.

Mr Hargreaves, we are not condemning the government for all the things that it is doing. We are condemning the government for not taking into account its own planning, for not taking into account the planning that it is doing. In many cases it has got it right in the planning but it has not yet got it right in the implementation. There are many things that this government has done well but there are things that it has not done well.

I would also say that we were not making any comment on the ACT public servants who, I think, are doing a very fine job. The issue is short term versus long term and planning for the future rather than just putting a bit of tar on and putting the road back exactly the same as it was before.

There has been about \$5 million spent on each of Bunda Street, London Circuit and Northbourne Avenue. Each of these streets currently has redesign options for it before the government. I fear that what is going to happen is that these expensive roadworks will mean that we have spent so much money on maintenance that the government feels it does not actually have the money to do the full improvement, the full plan, which will be in the planning work the government is currently doing, in particular, the greater Civic plan, which I am sure everyone in this Assembly eagerly awaits.

While I have got a few minutes, I point out a few other pieces of evidence for my claims that road upgrades sometimes suffer from a lack of planning. The Auditor-General's report on budget initiatives said:

...the lack of effective planning and project management were the main reason affecting the delivery of many [capital works] projects.

The same report confirmed that a high percentage of budget initiatives were being implemented without a structured implementation plan. Given these comments, it is not surprising that we are seeing what we are seeing. I am just repeating what the Auditor-General has said.

Here is another, somewhat different, example. I understand the government is proposing to extend Sandford Street out near Kenny. This road extension is subject to an EIS. The Greens, of course, feel it is very important to get this EIS done and see the results, because there is some quite significant woodland in Kenny. But if you were to go out and look there, you would find that the intersection at Sandford Street and Flemington Road is already being upgraded to a four-way intersection. The only reason to upgrade this intersection would be that the government have pre-empted the result of the EIS. They seem to have jumped the gun. What happens if the EIS actually raises serious environmental issues?

The government is paying for the upgrade of the intersection in anticipation that the road extension will proceed. I sort of hope it is not a waste, and obviously I hope that, given everything that has happened, the EIS does not raise any issues. If there are significant environmental issues then the Greens clearly will be vocal about our concerns.

The other key point, of course, is design and redesign. Key travel routes in Canberra need redesign. I think we all recognise that. We spend a lot of time in this Assembly talking about travel, talking about transport, talking about making it more sustainable, talking about the need to improve it so that the normal family does not need to have two cars to survive in this city. We all agree that there is an issue and we all want to see action.

I think we would all say that the \$15 million which has been spent on three city refurbishment projects, ones which really entrench the existing design, could have gone a long way towards redesigning one of those streets for better bus, cycle and foot travel. What we are really saying here is that the government needs to think that way rather than continuing to cement "business as usual".

Although I suspect that the government will vote against this motion, I do hope they heed some of the points I have raised. I do hope that they note the lessons that are pointed out in that Auditor-General's report that I quoted from earlier. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

Question put:

That **Ms Le Couteur's** motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 3

Noes 9

Ms Hunter
Ms Le Couteur

Mr Rattenbury

Mr Barr
Ms Burch
Mr Coe
Mr Doszpot
Ms Gallagher

Mr Hanson
Mr Hargreaves
Ms Porter
Mr Seselja

Question so resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

Canberra Hospital—alleged bullying

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (8.11): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that the Review of Public Maternity Units in the ACT released on 5 August 2010:
 - (i) has provided a damning report on the management of The Canberra Hospital (TCH), including a lack of cohesion amongst the executive team and considerable confusion over roles and functions of senior management;
 - (ii) found that reporting lines between TCH and ACT Health were ‘blurred’ and that the ‘chain of command often fails’;
 - (iii) has found that numerous serious complaints made by staff were not addressed and that their complaints were ignored in a ‘systematic and long-standing reticence by management to address disruptive or inappropriate behaviour’, and that ‘most staff interviews indicated that they had tried to raise issues about clinician behaviour with various managers, but had not been able to effect change’;
 - (iv) has found serious concerns within the obstetrics department of TCH, including:
 - (A) inadequate clinical governance;
 - (B) significant staff shortages;
 - (C) a heavy on load call inconsistent with the safe working hours concept;
 - (D) poorly coordinated clinical handover between shifts; and
 - (E) significant reductions in genealogical surgery;

- (b) that with regard to the obstetrics department, urgent action is required for the hospital to retain its high clinical standard;
 - (c) that as late as February 2010, the Minister and senior ACT Health officials repeatedly denied that there were any problems at TCH or that any complaints had been made;
 - (d) that the Minister attacked the doctors who raised the serious concerns accusing them of 'doctor politics' and 'mudslinging';
 - (e) that the Minister and Chief Minister attempted to intimidate the doctors who raised the serious concerns by threatening to audit all complaints to the medical board over the past 10 years that involve obstetricians;
 - (f) that the clinical review into obstetrics and the review into bullying were only reluctantly established by the Government after significant pressure from the media and the Opposition;
 - (g) that despite the review finding that numerous complaints were made by staff and that they were 'systematically' ignored by TCH management, the Minister refused to accept any responsibility and blamed the staff for not having made complaints, stating on 9 August 2010 that 'you can't investigate allegations that don't exist'; and
 - (h) that significant concerns remain in the community and amongst staff that the Minister and/or senior bureaucrats have, through their actions and misleading statements, attempted to cover up the serious problems at TCH that are addressed in the report; and
- (2) calls on the Minister to:
- (a) apologise in writing to all obstetrics staff employed at TCH in the last three years for her and ACT Health's failure to adequately address their concerns and for her ongoing attacks on their credibility;
 - (b) apologise to the Assembly and to the community by the close of business on 19 August 2010 for her repeated misleading statements that no complaints had been made and that there were no issues that needed to be addressed in obstetrics at TCH; and
 - (c) ensure that the bullying review is released in full, with only personal information deleted, to ensure that staff at TCH and the public have confidence that the Minister and senior ACT Health bureaucrats are not continuing to ignore serious allegations of poor conduct at TCH.

We come to this issue once again because it is a very serious issue. This goes to the heart of our health system. It goes to patient safety. It goes to staff safety and it goes to whether we have a health and hospital system that we can trust and rely upon or one that is under increasing stress and pressure not just because of patient demand but because of failures within management to address very serious issues of harassment.

In February this year a number of obstetricians came forward and made some very serious complaints in the media, on the ABC, about what was going on at the Canberra Hospital in obstetrics. Their concerns were about a number of things, but principally they were about patient safety. They were concerned that if the situation at the Canberra Hospital were to continue, because of the degrading work conditions and situation there, this could lead to potential harm to patients.

They came forward with allegations of a toxic workplace culture and they had some concerns about staff sustainability at the Canberra Hospital—about doctors leaving and others refusing to work at the Canberra Hospital, about pressure being put on the staff at the Canberra Hospital, increased workloads and, as a result of all that, the increased risk.

All of that has been proven in the report that was tabled on 5 August to be correct. The allegations, the serious concerns that they raised, were all found in the report which was conducted by an independent panel of, I think, four members external to the ACT health system to be entirely valid. The allegations that were made by the obstetricians were prominent throughout the media but the minister denied at that time that there were actually any legitimate concerns.

Although very articulate and, I think, measured concerns were put forward by a number of obstetricians, she refused to accept what were proven to be entirely legitimate and entirely truthful concerns. As we know and as we have discussed in this Assembly previously, she described these concerns as mud-slinging and as doctor politics. She described the complaints that had been made as having no substantiation. It is difficult to correlate the minister's comments with the findings of the report that she actually commissioned herself.

What she actually did was pick sides before the report had had a chance to be tabled—in fact, before the inquiry actually started. She was actually publicly attacking the doctors that made the complaints. She was denigrating them in the media and she was basically saying that there was nothing to see here. She said: “There is no problem. This is mud-slinging. This is doctor politics. This is all about a 10-year war we have known about for some time.”

The doctors did not like that. Numerous doctors, after that ABC issue had occurred and they had heard the minister in the media, came forward to me and said: “You have got to do something. The minister is wrong. There is a real problem there at the Canberra Hospital. Please make sure that something is done.” Those comments were made publicly by Andrew Foote, who is the chair of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. He said, “We are concerned that the minister is trivialising this issue and writing it off as doctor politics when it is really about patient safety and the safety of women and babies.”

Now we know as well that Katy Gallagher and Jon Stanhope then went one step further. They tried to have the complaints that have been made over the last 10 years to the Medical Board dug up and trawled over in a dirt digging exercise. That was called for by Jon Stanhope. Katy Gallagher backed it and that was absolutely

disgraceful. It was described by the AMA and by other doctor groups as witch-hunts and as thinly veiled threats. It is quite clear that that is what it was.

What we know is that this report was tabled. What we know is what it said, and this is what is in black and white. I read from this in part the other day when we had some discussion on this during the vote of no confidence but I will go through some more of what the report has found. It states:

The caseload program at the Canberra Hospital is oversubscribed, with a number of women expressing significant frustration at a lack of access to this model of care. In particular, women from the Tuggeranong region in the ACT cannot access the model and are only able to receive midwifery continuity through a team midwifery model ... There was a high level of dissatisfaction with access to public antenatal clinics at the Canberra Hospital. Waiting times at the Antenatal Clinic were also identified by women as unacceptable and problematic.

The current lack of VMO appointments at the Canberra Hospital means that women under the care of a private obstetrician who require transfer to the Canberra Hospital are almost always unable to maintain continuity of care.

The people who are being affected are the women who are trying to access the service. This is what this report has found. The report states:

The review panel identified an apparent systematic and long-standing reticence by management to address disruptive or inappropriate behaviour by certain medical staff ... Most staff interviewed indicated that they had tried to raise issues about clinician behaviour with various managers, but had not been able to effect change. Some issues, such as the consistent failure to provide sufficient notice of intended leave ... materially affect the efficient operation of the unit.

These were not trivial matters. They are matters that affect the efficient operation of the unit. The report continues:

Both medical and midwifery staff reported that they had discussed their concerns about disruptive behaviour within the unit with their line manager and with various executive team members; however they did not believe these issues were addressed.

Then the management team acknowledged that they had received complaints about inappropriate behaviour by a senior clinician over a number of years. The report found:

The clinical governance of the Canberra maternity unit appears to be inadequate.

The re-credentialing process of clinical staff at the Canberra Hospital maternity unit does not appear to be robust.

The report also noted:

There was an apparent lack of cohesion amongst the executive team at the Canberra Hospital ... There appeared to be considerable confusion over the role and delineation of some senior management positions ... Reporting lines are

perceived as blurred between the Canberra Hospital management and ACT Health. It appears the chain of command often fails ... While there is a recognised code of conduct, there appears to be a lack of clarity around who has responsibility for ensuring the code is policed and behaviour management plans developed ... There is a lack of understanding by staff at all levels within the Canberra Hospital as to how a complaint should be made and to whom it should be addressed ... The Canberra Hospital management team appears to lack cohesion and a clear understanding of the roles and responsibility. Formal lines of responsibility appear to be regularly breached. Reporting lines and accountability at the Canberra Hospital appear confused in relation to ACT Health Executive and hospital management. Members of the management team appeared to have responsibilities at a range of levels within ACT Health ... On-call registrars at the Canberra Hospital are expected to cover Labour and Delivery units as well as the Birth Centre, the acute gynaecology presentations and some clinics or operating theatre lists. This creates a potential risk for a patient who requires urgent surgery ... There is currently a significant shortage of senior staff specialists ...

This has an effect on teaching and supervision of registrars. The report continues:

Staff specialists and VMOs are currently working 3 day weekends on call. This is a very heavy on-call load and is inconsistent with “safe working hours” concepts ... registrars are routinely working well in excess of 100 hours per fortnight. This may be outside the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) allowances and also be inconsistent with “safe working hours” concepts ... Both midwifery and medical staff are currently carrying out unsustainable work loads ... Maternity management staff at the Canberra Hospital appear to be carrying a full clinical load and do not have or have not been accessing sufficient non-clinical time from management.

And so on and so on. There is also reference to a lack of management and supervision of trainees and inexperienced staff. If I get the time I will come back to that.

I read those extracts because what they show quite clearly is that there were increased risks. There was a risk there. The lack of training, the lack of supervision, the increased workloads were creating an unsafe environment. The clinical outcomes have been good. But I make the point very strongly that that is despite the management and the clinical governance.

The doctors, nurses and midwives have been working—this report tells you this—incredibly long hours in incredibly difficult positions having their complaints ignored. Despite that, they have been able to achieve good outcomes. But for how long under those circumstances will they be able to do that? This report basically says that unless urgent action is taken, we will not maintain the high clinical standards.

That is what Katy Gallagher said were complaints without substance. I find it remarkable that she could have said it. Those statements that she made were entirely wrong. The attacks on the obstetricians that made the complaints were unfounded.

The Acting Chief Executive of ACT Health also made incorrect statements. The minister may wish to clarify these. On ABC Online on 17 February, Peggy Brown said:

No complaints, specific complaints, have been brought to the attention of ACT Health.

She said that she would be happy to investigate any concerns. She went on:

We have an open approach and if there are concerns we clearly want to address them. But we can't address them in the absence of information about what the concerns are.

We have the minister and the acting chief executive saying that no complaints have been made, but we have in this report all of the staff saying that for a protracted period they were making complaints. And we have the senior management of the hospital admitting that those complaints were made.

The acting chief executive did not know and the minister did not know. I do accept that. I do accept that, but they should have known. If they did know, that would be a very serious matter. My understanding is that the minister was oblivious to what was going on in the hospital, but she should have known and the chief executive should have known.

Peggy Brown said that there are a number of ways that staff can raise their concerns. She said, "They can raise them through management at the Canberra Hospital." So she does acknowledge that those were legitimate complaints and that complaints can be made in a number of ways, including through the management of the Canberra Hospital. But she also denied that any complaints had been made.

I really do not understand what has gone wrong but quite clearly before this report was tabled the minister and the acting chief executive denied any complaints had been made. They were saying that those complaints can be made through a number of different processes, including to the management of the Canberra Hospital. They denied any complaints were made, but we have it in black and white from an independent report that was initiated by the minister that those complaints were made.

Even after the report was tabled, the minister has come out and said that you cannot investigate allegations that do not exist. You said that on WIN news.

Ms Gallagher: And what did I say after that?

MR HANSON: You talked about formal complaints, minister—

Ms Gallagher: And what did I say at the time—at the time?

MR HANSON: You may have been unaware of them. The point is that the minister may have been unaware of the complaints but the complaints were made. The fact that she was unaware of them, the fact that Peggy Brown was unaware of them, does not excuse the fact that they were wrong when in February they were saying no complaints were made, when actually complaints had been made. They may have been unaware of them but when they are out in the media saying no complaints had been made, that was wrong.

No wonder the doctors were so frustrated, because they knew that they had made the complaints. A number of them rang my office and said: "Trust us, we have made complaints. We have been making these complaints repeatedly." What I am asking the minister to do, I think, is reasonable. It is to apologise in writing to the obstetrics staff at the Canberra Hospital over the last three years for ACT Health's failure to adequately address their concerns and their ongoing attacks on their credibility.

It is quite clear that the doctors who made these complaints and who work in these very difficult circumstances then had the minister and the Chief Executive of ACT Health denying that they had made those complaints. Can you imagine if you were a doctor or a midwife and you had been trying to make those complaints for years, the management acknowledged that, yes, those complaints were made, but you see in the media the minister coming out and saying, "No, this is doctor politics. This is mud-slinging. No complaints have been made"? I think that warrants an apology. I think that would be the right thing to do and would help in the healing process as we move forward here. I think that would be very important.

I think that she should also apologise to the Assembly and to the community for her misleading statements that no complaints had been made and no issues need to be addressed. As we have addressed in the motion, just as she has denied the complaints and matters between the doctors, there are a number of times in this place, and we have gone through them previously in the *Hansard*, where she denied to us that there are any problems. I call on the minister to release the bullying review—

Ms Gallagher: There is that healing side of you again. You are just caring about healing.

MR HANSON: Well, cut the names out but let us release it. Let us be open, honest and accountable because when people have seen you denying in the media that complaints were made around May, then the natural conclusion is that this was a cover-up. This was either a cover-up or negligence. I think people want to know which one it is.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (8.26): The Greens value the work that has been undertaken through *A Review of Service Delivery and Clinical Outcomes at Public Maternity Units in the Australian Capital Territory*. The review has provided evidence to show that issues affecting our obstetrics units are not black and white and a range of policy responses are required. When it comes to acknowledgement of the problems, and identified solutions, it appears that the Greens agree with neither the Liberal nor Labor parties on all matters.

There are inaccuracies and omissions in Mr Hanson's motion that the Greens cannot support. The Greens do believe that it is important that motions we pass in the Assembly be an accurate reflection of the facts. Starting with paragraph (1)(a), it seems inaccurate for the motion not to recognise that the recently completed review into clinical outcomes provides evidence to show that the obstetrics units at the Canberra Hospital and also at Calvary are achieving clinical outcomes that are consistent with comparable hospitals in Australia and New Zealand.

This is an important finding, given the very public allegations that were made by private obstetricians and the Liberals about public safety. Some of the actions they have taken have caused unnecessary anxiety amongst a number of women about the quality of clinical services they will receive if they use public maternity wards. If they only had concerns about staff behaviour they should have said that from the beginning; they should not have included allegations also about public safety. Twice now the issue of public safety has been raised by private obstetricians in a very public manner in recent years, and twice that concern has been found to be unsubstantiated. I draw your attention to the health commissioner's 2005 investigation in making this statement.

Another problem that we Greens have with paragraph (1) of the motion is that it blurs the lines between what were official findings of the report and what were matters that were discussed in its chapters. The Greens believe it is important that the Assembly only note information that is fair and accurate, and it is inappropriate to skew the author's findings. It is also concerning that he lists the reduction in gynaecological surgery as a finding of serious concern but the reason for the drop is not stated. I also would just like to point out his mis-spelling of the word "gynaecological". I hope this does not reflect his poor knowledge of women's health. I think we have "gynealogical", which sounds more like studying family trees.

As readers of the review, we do not know if the drop in gynaecological surgery is because there has been a drop in demand for this kind of surgery, and, if that is the case, is Mr Hanson seriously suggesting that more gynaecological surgery be performed even though it is unnecessary?

There are other policy findings from the report that are important to the Greens, like the passive way ACT Health has been found to have conducted patient surveys and the high level of dissatisfaction women have with the limited access to public antenatal clinics. These are issues which directly affect pregnant women, and are issues which Mr Hanson does not address. In fact, I urge Mr Hanson to represent a larger constituency than just that of the private sector. Does he, for example, represent those staff who are not privately employed and are not in a senior position? What about the nurses and midwives? Has Mr Hanson spoken to them?

Other parts of this review and the government's response to it, which the Greens believe to be important and have asked the minister's office about, include how the \$8.6 million in new funding will be spent on new staffing positions and what will be done to ensure there is a robust performance management appraisal process for all staff that incorporates more than just clinical practices.

In light of the findings about the Canberra Hospital's management team, the next major area the Liberals and Greens must engage in is the impact the restructure of the Canberra Hospital will have on funding for different divisions of the hospital, especially given questions are starting to be asked by interested stakeholders. The full range of concerns that have been raised through the review require more complex policy responses than the Liberals have proposed to date.

Looking at paragraph (1)(b) of Mr Hanson's motion, it is the Greens' judgement, based on consultation with stakeholders, that urgent action has already been taken. Staff relationships have already changed because of recent actions, and more staff are being brought into the unit. If Mr Hanson had talked to prominent stakeholders outside the private obstetricians he would know that they are of the opinion that the matter is now being appropriately dealt with and it is time to move on. I assume by having put this motion today he is seeking to represent requests that have been put to him by private obstetricians, and if he is not I am not quite sure who he is seeking to represent.

Looking at paragraphs (1)(c) to (1)(e), these are matters that were debated here in the chamber yesterday. The Greens have already addressed the minister's actions in relation to the code of conduct. It is our view that, while the minister did not specifically say that there was absolutely nothing to look into, she did imply, based on advice she had received from her department, that it was unlikely that any of the complaints could be substantiated. We do not agree with what the Liberals have listed in their clauses (1)(c) to (1)(e), but we do not agree, either, that the government has a completely clear record of events on this.

Going to clause (1)(f), the Greens do recognise that the local ABC radio station did provide a public forum through which concerns about public safety and bullying and harassment were raised. We recognise that between 16 and 20 February this year there were a number of articles and interviews conducted by the ABC which resulted in the minister writing to her department on 21 February seeking an independent review of clinical outcomes and inquiring as to how ACT Health may engage on the public concerns around bullying and harassment.

On 24 February Mr Hanson brought a motion to this place calling on the government to facilitate an inquiry through the Inquiries Act. The Greens did not think using the formal and public processes of the Inquiries Act was an appropriate manner in which to deal with concerns regarding bullying in the workplace and we ensured that the inquiry into this area of the concerns was conducted independently rather than internally, as may have occurred if the matter had not come before the Assembly. Both major parties may continue to try and claim credit for certain actions but, really, is it not about time all parties focused on the needs of the patients and staff rather than those of politicians?

On paragraph (1)(h), I am interested to know who exactly Mr Hanson is referring to when he says that significant concerns remain in the community and amongst staff, because that is not a view that has been put to the ACT Greens when we have spoken to stakeholders.

As to paragraph (2) and looking to suggestions by Mr Hanson about the appropriate way forward, the Greens disagree with Mr Hanson's suggestions. The only people that probably deserve an apology are those people on the ground at the unit who do not have a voice in this affair, did not have their complaints properly handled, and continue to be affected by public discussion on this issue.

Mr Hanson proposes through paragraph (2)(c) that the Public Interest Disclosure Act inquiry be released in full with only personal information deleted. In response to this suggestion the Greens do wonder how many times Mr Hanson has been told that allegations of bullying and harassment must be dealt with in a confidential and sensitive manner. Viewing this from an industrial relations perspective, a perspective that the Liberals obviously do not understand, it is not appropriate to release information about certain events that have taken place, even if names and positions are deleted, because individuals could still potentially be identified by colleagues, subordinates and supervisors.

The Greens support the bullying and harassment inquiry being conducted through the Public Interest Disclosure Act. We believe that the legal protection and the assurance of anonymity allow people to talk more freely with the independent expert that the government brought in to conduct this review. These protections ensure that the expert is able to get a full and fair picture of what has happened in the unit, without causing additional stress and harm to those people who were affected.

Of course, these individuals should be provided with support and assistance where they have been wronged, but that is a matter for them to pursue, as individuals, through a fair process. We have always advocated that bullying and harassment be treated with delicacy. Where individuals feel that they have been bullied or subject to inappropriate behaviour, it is imperative that they as victims, not we as politicians, have control over the processes that they have been subject to.

The Greens have to this point worked in the best interests of the workers in the obstetrics unit, and that is what we will continue to do through our proposed amendment to this motion. That is why we are calling on all members in this place to respect the Public Interest Disclosure Act. Sections 4 and 33 of the act are especially important in tonight's debate as they outline what sorts of information can and cannot be disclosed, and the penalty units that apply to individuals if confidential information is inappropriately released.

Bullying and harassment is not an easy problem to solve. No amount of emotions in the Assembly or strongly worded press releases will ever stop bullying occurring, or will even guarantee that cases will be dealt with appropriately. It is a matter that causes great discomfort and stress to everyone involved—to the worker, to the management of their organisation, and even at times to the accused.

Balancing the needs of these various stakeholders is, and always will be, difficult under a work safety legislation framework that is better at dealing with the physical danger of a fall hazard than the mental health impacts inherent in bullying. It is a matter that requires delicacy, confidentiality and sensitivity, and we would encourage all parties to resist the urge to use accusations of bullying and inappropriate behaviour as a political football, and rather work to secure the best outcome for those affected.

Similarly, we recognise that, particularly when it comes to difficult issues like bullying and harassment, organisations find it hard to self-diagnose and treat the cause of the problem. The Greens have asked the minister's office what is being done to

ensure that problems regarding the complaints process do not happen again. We have been advised that ACT Health is planning to engage other ACT government agencies to develop better processes and practices in relation to managing bullying and harassment, with a particular focus on training and supporting managers to deal with these issues. It is also reviewing its antidiscrimination, bullying and harassment policy and procedures to ensure that the process clearly outlines responsibilities of all parties and includes fact sheets for staff and managers on how to deal with issues when they are raised.

As I alluded to earlier, a purely internal review often leads to conflicts of interest and potentially inaction. To ensure we are getting the right kinds of results for the staff of the Canberra Hospital, we will be moving an amendment to this motion. Paragraph (2)(b) of the amendment ensures that ACT Health will work with the Work Safety Commissioner to develop and implement best practice bullying and harassment standards for the department. I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit all words after “notes”, substitute:

“all findings and recommendations from the ‘Review of Service Delivery and Clinical Outcomes at Public Maternity Units in the Australian Capital Territory’ released on 5 August 2010; and

(2) calls on:

(a) all Members of this Assembly to respect the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 1994*; and

(b) the Chief Executive of ACT Health to seek the assistance of the Work Safety Commissioner in ensuring ACT Health has in the medium to long term best-practice policies for preventing against bullying and harassment in ACT Health workplaces.”.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Health and Minister for Industrial Relations) (8.40): The government will not be supporting Mr Hanson’s motion today. The motion does cover a lot of what we discussed in this place yesterday.

It is interesting that Mr Hanson opened his address to the Assembly tonight by discussing that his chief motivation, principally his concern, was about patient safety. That is a good place to start, rather than again going over a lot of the issues I spoke about yesterday—although if I have time I will do that. When you look at the clinical services report, which I commissioned to address those issues of public concern about patient safety and the issues that arose in the media that led to the staff meeting which uncovered concerns within the workplace about the workplace environment, you will see that the issues were actually around patient safety at the hospital. That led to the clinical services review.

When I have been talking with staff out in the maternity unit around the clinical service review, one of the things that they have said to me is that they are very disappointed that the review said that they were consistently comparable to

benchmarked hospitals. Staff at the Canberra Hospital think that they do a lot better than being consistently comparable with other benchmarked hospitals.

When you look at the sections of the review which deal with the benchmark data and you go through all of those, you can see that, on the ACHS—the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards—clinical indicators, of the 18 indicators used, for 10 there was no significant variance. Against seven of those indicators, Canberra Hospital performed better than the benchmark performance. And on one of them it was unspecified or the opinion varied about that indicator. So on 17 of the 18 indicators used to assess the clinical standards, and therefore the patient safety, at the Canberra Hospital—on 17 of 18 measures, independently verified—the Canberra Hospital came out at or better than the benchmark.

When you look at Women's Hospitals Australasia, and 38 of their indicators, you will see that in 23 of them there was no statistical variance or no significant variance. On 10 of those indicators, they were better than benchmark performance. On four of them, they were worse than benchmark performance. And on one it was unspecified or opinion varied about the outcome. Again, when you add those up, on 33 of 38 indicators, the Canberra Hospital's maternity service performs at or above the level of its peer hospitals.

If you look at the ones that are worse than benchmark performance—I have gone to all of those as well—and the reasons for that, you will see that there are slightly higher rates of use of general aesthetic for caesarean sections. I am advised by the doctors that this is largely to do with the fact that women with high BMIs are often referred to the Canberra Hospital if they are unable to birth in their own area. For example, in rural areas women with high BMIs traditionally have a higher rate of failed attempts at epidural, and therefore a caesarean is the option after the epidural fails.

In relation to forceps-assisted deliveries, where there is a slightly higher use of forceps in deliveries at TCH, this has to be read in conjunction with the extremely low caesarean rate. The TCH caesarean rate is 14 per cent of deliveries assisted by caesarean section compared to the peer benchmark of 22 per cent of births in first-time mothers. So part of the reason is that you are trying to avoid major abdominal surgery and there is a natural link between a very low caesarean rate and a higher use of forceps to deliver babies in those situations.

Turning to the neonatal death rate within seven and 28 days, and the indicator in this area, the Canberra Hospital is the major neonatal intensive care referral centre for many of the surrounding regions. There are very small numbers of neonatal deaths, which means that small changes to those numbers will increase the percentage, particularly when you are gathering six-monthly data. And this is data that is collected every six months.

So when Mr Hanson stands up and tries to again raise and put forward the view that this has been all about patient safety, I reject that view. I think that is the vehicle that commenced some of the public discussion around the maternity service and women who were unsatisfied with the level of care they received at Canberra Hospital. But on

any objective reading of all of the performance indicators used, women should have complete and total confidence in the service offered to them at the Canberra Hospital.

I also note that Mr Hanson said that he believes that the Chief Minister's seeking of an audit of cases before the Medical Board is considered a witch-hunt—whereas releasing information about a public interest disclosure process around bullying and harassment in the workplace, just as long as you delete the names, is not about a witch-hunt. His inconsistency on those matters confirms what I have always thought about the shadow minister for health on this issue: it is not about patient safety, improving the service at the hospital or actually supporting the staff through what has been a very difficult time; it is all about political gain and attacking me in the process. As I said during question time today, that is absolutely fine; it is expected by this side of the chamber.

I commissioned the clinical services review because we were having women who were preparing to birth or attending the prenatal classes at the Canberra Hospital who were worried about the public commentary about the standard of care at the Canberra Hospital. We need to lay those concerns to rest. And as an Assembly, we need to stand behind the staff at the Canberra Hospital obstetrics unit and be very public in saying that the service that is offered at the Canberra Hospital, at the Calvary Public Hospital and indeed in the private units across Canberra are second to none and that women and their families should have confidence in seeking care and assistance with their delivery in these areas.

The government will not be supporting the motion, for a number of reasons, including the fact that we do not agree with a number of the assumptions included in Mr Hanson's motion. On those grounds alone, it is impossible for the government to agree to them.

In relation to the Public Interest Disclosure Act, I wonder whether Mr Hanson has actually read the act. He has had a lot of time to do this since this matter was first discussed earlier this year. Let me go to the Public Interest Disclosure Act. Let me go to what happened at the time, based on advice from GSO and based on feedback we were getting around the preparedness of staff—not staff in our unit, but staff outside the public system—and their desire to engage in a process. They made it clear that they would only engage in a process where they felt they were protected and their contributions could be confidential. The Public Interest Disclosure Act offers that security to people who want to participate—

Mr Seselja: Those are in the Inquiries Act.

MS GALLAGHER: It does not. Mr Seselja has bowled in here to start interjecting that the Inquiries Act offers the same protections.

Mr Hanson: You can have closed hearings, Katy.

MS GALLAGHER: It does not offer them the same protections. We did look very closely at this. Indeed, I do think—

Mr Hanson: I bet you did: “How can we get out of this?”

MS GALLAGHER: I did not hear the strong opposition to the use of the Public Interest Disclosure Act. Once you have lost your fight on the Inquiries Act—indeed, many of the private obstetricians I spoke to when we were formulating the process forward also sought advice around how they could be involved, but in a protective way. Section 33 of the Public Interest Disclosure Act clearly states:

A public official shall not, without reasonable excuse, make a record of, or wilfully disclose to another person, confidential information gained through the public official's involvement in the administration of this Act.

The act goes on to define confidential information as:

- (a) information about the identity, occupation or whereabouts of a person who has made a public interest disclosure or against whom a public interest disclosure has been made; or
- (b) information contained in a public interest disclosure; or
- (c) information concerning an individual's personal affairs; or
- (d) information that, if disclosed, may cause detriment to a person.

Mr Hanson might say that he wants names to be blacked out; however, based on the act as it stands—there has been debate on the act in this place, and members have ultimately supported the legislation that is in this place—the act itself would prevent me from complying with that section of Mr Hanson's motion. What it is actually asking me to do is ignore sections of the act just so that Mr Hanson can gain some joy out of having the results of an investigation into allegations of bullying and harassment tabled in this place—which I cannot, in my time in this place, remember being called for.

It fundamentally misunderstands the role of the Public Interest Disclosure Act. The Public Interest Disclosure Act is not a vehicle for a witch-hunt. It is a vehicle for people to make contributions which enable the improvement of services across government. The Public Interest Disclosure Act provides that. It gives that protection to people—the protection that many of the people that I spoke to were after. But the outcomes of that review process will also provide a basis for ACT Health to improve the way obstetric services are managed at TCH.

We all know that there have been issues with management in this area, in the maternity services area, but we have a good, established process and a way forward to ensure that all issues are identified and dealt with as they arise and that we continue to negotiate or discuss the recommendations of the clinical services review with both interested staff inside the hospital and also stakeholders on the outside. The clinical review—along with some of the other work that is going on in the unit, along with the fact that we are building the women's and children's hospital—really positions the services for women and children in the ACT to be the best in the country. I think that is what all of us in this place would want.

In relation to some of the extra resources that are going into the unit, extra doctors have been and are being appointed. That includes senior doctors, but it also includes extra registrar positions.

For women who want to birth on the community midwives program model, which is basically continuity of care with a midwife, the current constraints of the birth centre mean that we cannot expand that service as rapidly as we would like, and certainly not as rapidly as the feedback we get from women who would like access to that program would indicate. That really is around the fact that the three birthing units within the birth centre are accommodating as many women as they can, although that will change with the new women's and children's hospital. The idea of having the extra midwives that are being employed, being recruited, is to have that continuity of care provided as part of the delivery suite. Women who do not get on the community midwives program but who are still coming through the hospital as a public patient will have access to team-based midwife care with continuity of that midwife support.

That is certainly in all the feedback I get from women who are using the service. That is what they are after. And having gone through the service three times myself, and not had continuity of care, it is something that I think I would have benefited from as well. It can be difficult to achieve in a shift-pattern hospital where nurses and midwives work particular shifts. The model of care that is being developed for the new women's and children's hospital is very much around continuity of care being led by midwives.

In relation to the Greens' amendment, the government will support this amendment. We have already acted on and are seeking to improve our management of bullying and harassment across ACT Health workplaces. The Work Safety Commissioner has already done a fair bit of work across this and developed resources and training. Those resources are across ACT government workplaces, not just ACT Health, but I accept that we need to do more to get the message out around our processes and how people can contribute. There is more to be done in this area. We will work with the Work Safety Commissioner, through ACT Health, to improve our processes there.

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (8.55): I rise tonight in support of Mr Hanson's motion, which calls on the minister to:

... apologise in writing to all obstetrics staff employed at TCH in the last three years for her and ACT Health's failure to adequately address their concerns and for her ongoing attacks on their credibility ...

As Mr Hanson stated, in February this year a number of obstetricians came forward and made a series of allegations about patient safety and the dysfunctional workplace within the obstetrics department of the Canberra Hospital. Their concerns related to the safety of patients and raised the very strong fear that such a dysfunctional workplace could lead to serious injury and perhaps even death. Furthermore, there were allegations of a toxic workplace culture and of complaints being ignored.

The frustrations of these valued professionals about the lack of actions regarding their complaints led to nine obstetricians leaving the Canberra Hospital. Nine much-needed

individuals felt so let down by the system, by the management—and, it could be inferred, by the minister, who referred to these issues as being mainly related to doctor's wars; in fact, even yesterday here in the Assembly she was still pushing this line—that they took the last recourse open to them. When all avenues to address these issues were exhausted, they took the last recourse open to them: they took their frustrations to the media—a very brave step for people who wish to remain in Canberra within their profession.

In the *Canberra Times* of 23 February, Dr Elizabeth Gallagher said she had “raised verbal concerns about harassment with the general manager of the Canberra Hospital in 2007”. She said:

I resigned in 2008. I felt that I could no longer work at the hospital to the best of my ability because I was very concerned about what was going on around me. I was starting to lose sleep ...

As Mr Hanson has reminded us, even after these complaints were prominently played out in the media in February—and raised here in the Assembly, as well as the shadow minister for health moving a motion that called on the government to establish a board of inquiry under the Inquiries Act—the minister continued her denial that there were any legitimate concerns. She described these serious complaints made by the obstetricians as internal doctor politics and said that their claims were without substance. Despite the resignation of nine senior professionals, the minister still refused to face the facts that were costing the Canberra community the services of these much-needed professionals. She not only turned a blind eye to these issues, but actually attacked the doctors and their credibility.

What we have seen here is an incredible situation where we have seen quotes from various people about the frustrations that led to them leaving. But the indignity in this whole exercise is further compounded by the amendments from the Greens. Ms Hunter certainly outdoes herself on this one. She calls on:

- (a) all Members of this Assembly to respect the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 1994*; and
- (b) the Chief Executive of ACT Health to seek the assistance of the Work Safety Commissioner in ensuring ACT Health has in the medium to long term best-practice policies for preventing against bullying and harassment in ACT Health workplaces.”.

Ms Hunter, you have made it virtually your life work to look after those in need. Where is your compassion for the people who have suffered so much—not only from the bullying that took place but from the lack of protection by the very people who they could turn to? Where is your compassion for those people? It is absolutely incredible that there is so little thought given to the people who have been so badly treated.

All we have received is denials from the minister, when time and time again, within the very reports that we have been looking at, it has been proven that these issues that she dismissed so casually were actually legitimate and required her attention. We have

been discussing all of these issues for a quite a while now. Some of these issues actually did crop up in that very serious motion of no confidence.

I and the Liberal Party call on this minister to:

- (a) apologise in writing to all obstetrics staff employed at TCH in the last three years for her and ACT Health's failure to adequately address their concerns and for her ongoing attacks on their credibility;
- (b) apologise to the Assembly and to the community by the close of business on 19 August 2010 for her repeated misleading statements that no complaints had been made and that there were no issues that needed to be addressed in obstetrics at TCH; and
- (c) ensure that the bullying review is released in full—

minister, we are looking forward to seeing just how strongly you stand by all your claims—

with only personal information deleted—

obviously—

to ensure that staff at TCH and the public have confidence that the Minister and senior ACT Health bureaucrats are not continuing to ignore serious allegations of poor conduct at TCH.

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

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Kytherian Brotherhood of Canberra and District Inc

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (9.01): Recently I had the honour of attending the 25th anniversary celebration dinner of the Kytherian Brotherhood of Canberra and District Inc, which was established in 1985. Kythera is a well-known Greek Island at the crossroads of the Ionian, Aegean and Mediterranean seas. In ancient Greek mythology, Kythera was considered to be the island of Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and love. It has been immortalised in the French painter Watteau's famous painting *Embarkation to Kythera*. Kythera is home to only about 3,000 permanent residents today, but tens of thousands of Kytherians have migrated to Australia in the last 150 years, including many settlers in the ACT and region. Most of the early cafes and milk bars in Canberra and the region were opened by Kytherian Australians, and the cafes were renowned for their friendly service and quality.

The Kytherian Brotherhood of Canberra and District celebrated its 25th anniversary in style on 19 June at the Hellenic Club of Canberra with a successful dinner dance for 330 members and friends. Those attending all enjoyed a sumptuous three-course meal and enjoyed themselves on the dance floor as well as appreciating the skills of the talented Hellenic dancers group.

The Ambassador of Greece, His Excellency Mr Alexios Christopoulos, spoke about Kythera's rich history from preclassical times until modern day. He recognised Kythera's cultural and historical significance in laudatory terms and demonstrated his considerable learning. His Excellency made an indelible impression on the audience.

The other distinguished guests included Father George Carpis, who spoke of his own respect for the Kytherians of Canberra and the district since he arrived as a parish priest for the Greek Orthodox Church of St Nicholas in Kingston in the 1960s. I was also joined by Senator Gary Humphries and retiring MP Annette Ellis.

Mr Chris Lourandos, the founder and long-serving past present of the brotherhood, spoke movingly about the history of Kytherians in Canberra and the district and their early struggles and sacrifices. Chris spoke about why it was important to found the brotherhood and to maintain it. On the night, the brotherhood formally recognised the outstanding contributions made by Chris by awarding him a life membership plaque. Chris was also kind enough to share some of his iconic photographs of Kythera, which were on display throughout the evening for all to view.

It was a wonderful night, and I would also like to pay tribute to John Kalokerinos who organised much of the night and emceed the night. I will give him credit—he gave me most of the notes that I just read from, and he did not mention himself. So I pay tribute to John Kalokerinos, who is one of the most active people in our community. You see him at virtually every function, certainly anything to do with the Greek community, the Kytherian community and far broader than that. So, well done, John; well done to the Kytherian Brotherhood. On my own behalf and on behalf of my wife, Ros, I express my thanks for the wonderful hospitality we received on the night.

Greek community Canberra Hospital—staff

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella) (9.04): I echo Mr Seselja's comments around John Kalokerinos. I have known John since the day I came into this chamber, and I have always found him to be the perfect connection between the work that we do and the Greek and, for that matter, Cypriot communities. It is interesting that these notions of service to community is in the genes. His mother, for example—the Lady of the Lake—was probably the most magic lady the Greek community has ever produced. Her role in providing succour, humour and damn fine hamburgers out at Curtin is to be commended.

I would also like to indicate that it was with a little bit of sadness that we ended that debate on the health thing. I wanted to get a little bit involved in it, because I have actually had a fair amount of experience in the field of relationships within the hospital. I spent 20 years in the health system in the ACT prior to and after

self-government, and quite a number of those years was on the hospital executive. I was also the director of rehabilitation and aged-care services for a little while. I do know about the difficult relationships that you have and the tensions which exist between the clinicians and the management. What we are seeing actually being played out in this hospital at the moment is nothing new. Once upon a time we used to say the only thing consistent about ACT Health was the rate of change.

I have to tell you, Mr Speaker, that they are professionals in there; it is the most magic service. Those of us who have ever been through the maternity service—both of my children and all of my grandchildren and most of my nieces and nephews went through that unit—know that it is a magic unit; it really is. I acknowledge that Mr Hanson actually acknowledged that in his speech. But I caution the chamber about being overly critical of the hospital systems when people here have had relatively limited experience in it, and I do not mean that in a derogatory sense.

I have been through their system and been in some pretty hairy events in the last couple of years. You do not go through ICU and into the coronary care unit without being frightened to death, and you look at the way in which the clinicians work as a team on your behalf, and I have to say, they saved my life. I have also been into Calvary and in other places with life-threatening conditions. Again, I have to confess that it was brilliant.

You hear things like “the medical mafia”, “the nursing mafia”, all those sorts of things, and I do not treat those terribly seriously. But you have got to remember that this particular service is an emotionally charged one. It is one where the stakes are particularly high. One mistake could cost somebody their life, so of course people are on the knife edge every single day they go to work. We need to admire the nurses, admire the doctors and actually support them. So we need to be very careful with what we say here in this chamber, in the same way we needed to be careful when we were bagging out the disability health workers and the child welfare workers. When Mrs Burke used to do it, I condemned her; I condemned Mr Pratt; and I will condemn anybody who goes a little bit too far. They will have me to answer to.

We need to appreciate that we could not do the job that they are doing. Sometimes if they go a little bit too far, we need to understand that a little bit of tolerance on our part might be a good idea. What we do not need is to engender a lack of morale in the hospital system and constantly look at the negatives. I would say to Mr Hanson: if you have a good look at the hospital, the glass is half full, not half empty. It is doing fantastic things and leading the country.

So I do say to the chamber: please be very measured in the way we actually address issues that are brought to us. Make sure that they are in a context that is brought forward, and do not be tempted to single one particular part of the hospital out for a bit of treatment. Because I can tell you this: what goes around comes around. I will not be able to resist the temptation to give somebody a really good flogging in this place if they do not have that perspective actually put on the table.

I respect what Mr Hanson was saying in the context in which he was saying it, but I urge that piece of caution. On behalf of the hospitals, I say that we do not need that kind of stuff. On behalf of myself, I say thank you to the hospitals.

Canberra Hospital—staff

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (9.09): Mr Speaker, I will just quickly respond to what Mr Hargreaves said. Of course, we have the greatest respect for the doctors, nurses, midwives, other clinical staff and the administrative staff at the Canberra Hospital and more broadly across ACT Health. I think that that would be the unanimous view of all sides of this chamber, and we give them our absolute support. But it is my responsibility and the opposition's responsibility to hold the government to account and to thereby identify where things are going wrong in the health system and point that out.

If you talk about supporting doctors, if you talk about supporting nurses, when doctors, midwives and nurses make complaints, you then listen to those complaints. You then address them fairly. You do not call it mud-slinging. You do call it doctor politics. That is half the problem that we have had here—that is, instead of the minister taking those reports that she had on face value, and saying, "I've had some reports. I will investigate them. They may be valid, and if they are, we'll get to the bottom of it and we'll address them," her response was to attack the people that made the complaints.

I agree with your sentiment 100 per cent, Mr Hargreaves, but I will continue to hold this government to account. It is this health minister who has actually been the one who has attacked the hospital staff and the obstetricians, not me.

**Kytherian Brotherhood of Canberra and District Inc
Tandem Respite Inc**

MR COE (Ginninderra) (9.11): I would like to add my support to the Kytherian Brotherhood of Canberra and District Inc, as the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Seselja, spoke about earlier. I would also like to acknowledge that John Kalokerinos is the President of the Kytherian Brotherhood of Canberra and District.

I would now like to pay tribute to a very special community group which helps so many people in the ACT and region—that is, Tandem. Tandem do a superb job and I think are certainly worthy of recognition here today. They provide respite, personal care and other support services to hundreds of people in Canberra—young people, people with a disability, people living with mental illness, perhaps frail or older people and their families. They really are a superb organisation.

Their mission is to promote independence and quality of life through respite, personal care and social inclusion. Their vision is to contribute to the ACT community by working in tandem with individuals and their families. Their values include words such as passionate, persevering and professional, creative and caring, respectful and responsive, active and accountable.

I went to the opening of their new facility in the Blaxland Centre, and it is a superb centre. I also went to the launch of the organisation last year. I would like to give a plug to their board members: the President, Ron Kingsbury, the Vice President, Peter Gordon, the Secretary and Public Officer, Karen Noble, the Treasurer, Cath Sutton,

and members Tyler Ellis, Steve Dascarolis, Mark Vergano, Kerri West, Jean McIntyre, Joan Ross and Patrick White. I also give my support to Cheryl Pollard and all her staff. They really do a superb job.

Of course, these sorts of organisations do not just happen by magic; they happen because of the support of their many volunteers and supporters. I would like to acknowledge the supporters: the platinum sponsors, the DECCA Building Group; the gold sponsors, Bendigo Community Bank, Calwell and Wanniasa branches, Efstratiou Electrical and the Lions Club of Canberra, Ginninderra; the silver sponsors, the Australian Medical Council, Capital Insurance Brokers, Eastlake Football Club, Watson Blinds and Awnings, Masa Constructions and Zurich Insurance Limited; the bronze sponsors, All Phones, Capital Veneering, the Content Group, Cricket ACT, Data Voice, DFIG, Dowse Norwood Architects, Music at Midday, Partners in Health and St Edmund's College; and the government funding agencies, ACT Health, DHCS, Disability ACT, Home and Community Care and Mental Health ACT.

I encourage Assembly members and members of the broader community to support Tandem. They have a fantastic website at tandem.org.au. There you can find information about how you might be able to participate in their giving card program, their workplace giving program or other ways to get involved in sponsorship, partnership, volunteering or direct donations. I commend all the people who support tandem.

Education—early childhood

MS BURCH (Brindabella—Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Women) (9.14): I just want to make some comments and actually share with the Assembly a media release I found this afternoon that was issued on 9 August by Early Childhood Australia—a voice for young children. The title of the media release is “Claims of cost increases to childcare are baseless, say experts”. The media release reads:

Claims that improving the quality of early childhood education and care will result in unaffordable cost increases for parents are unfounded says the nation's leading advocacy organisation for young children.

Early Childhood Australia CEO ... says the claims are not based on solid evidence and are simply scare mongering.

It is true that improvements in the quality of ECEC will cost money.

But suggestions that these changes will occur immediately and cost as much as \$110 per week are misplaced and without foundation.

Economic modelling by Access Economics shows that the reforms will actually result in minimal increases in costs for parents. They anticipate increases of \$8.67 after government subsidies.

And the reality is that the proposed reforms will be implemented over time and will not take full effect until 2020.”

The CEO of this organisation has said:

... we should be looking at any increases in cost as an investment rather than a cost. Evidence accepted by the Organisation for Economic Development shows that high quality ECEC is positive for the nation's economy and overall productivity now and into the future.

Investing in quality childcare is proven to be good for the future of our kids—but also good for the nation.

These are formative years for our children. The care and education they receive in these years is a crucial aspect of their development and learning.

Children that have received quality ECEC are generally better educated, healthier and happier adults who are less likely to be involved in the criminal justice and welfare systems in the future.

ECA welcomed the National Reform Agenda put forward by the government and endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments last year.

Commitments from the government to improve staff-to-child ratios for all children including babies and to support childcare workers in increasing their qualifications over time are crucial to achieving acceptable standards of quality care for all children, said Ms Cahir.

And the final sentence in this release says:

Some services have actually already started implementing aspects of the reform agenda on their own terms and without the increases in cost predicted by some.

I notice there is not a single member of the opposition—that is, the Liberal Party—in the building at this time. They could be in the building, but they are certainly not here in the chamber. So I would direct Mrs Dunne to go to the Early Childhood Australia website and have a look at what the sector, the experts, those that actually care for our children, have to say about the benefits of early childcare reform.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 9.18 pm.