



# Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD  
SEVENTH ASSEMBLY

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

28 MARCH 2012

[www.hansard.act.gov.au](http://www.hansard.act.gov.au)

## Wednesday, 28 March 2012

Minister for Community Services—withdrawal of remark .....	1363
Animal Welfare Legislation (Factory Farming) Amendment Bill 2012 .....	1363
Planning and Development (Public Notification) Amendment Bill 2012 .....	1366
Standing and temporary orders—suspension.....	1370
Official Visitor Bill 2012 .....	1371
Canberra centenary .....	1377
Financial Management (Cost of Living) Amendment Bill 2012 .....	1391
University of Canberra and Canberra Institute of Technology.....	1400
Questions without notice:	
Planning—Throsby.....	1405
Construction industry—work safety.....	1406
Schools—Throsby .....	1408
Water—Cotter Dam.....	1410
Roads—cycling accidents.....	1412
Water—Cotter Dam.....	1414
Fitters Workshop .....	1415
Construction industry—sham contracting .....	1418
Crime—domestic violence .....	1419
Economy—health .....	1420
Supplementary answers to questions without notice:	
Kids Under Cover program .....	1424
University of Canberra and Canberra Institute of Technology .....	1425
Planning and Development (Public Notification) Amendment Bill 2012 .....	1425
Official Visitor Bill 2012 .....	1425
University of Canberra and Canberra Institute of Technology.....	1426
Canberra centenary .....	1442
Childcare—Holder.....	1447
Supplementary Capital Works Program 2001-02 .....	1464
Suicide—reduction .....	1465
Interactive entertainment industry .....	1476
Adjournment:	
ActewAGL Canberra area theatre awards .....	1485
Australian Hospitality Association awards.....	1485
ActewAGL Canberra area theatre awards .....	1487
Charnwood community carnival .....	1487
St Francis Xavier college—trade training centre .....	1487
Canberra Mosque open day .....	1487
Greek National Day .....	1487
Ms Suzy Batkovic.....	1488
Riding for Cambodian Kids.....	1489
Canberra Grammar school—cricket .....	1490

**Wednesday, 28 March 2012**

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

**Minister for Community Services—withdrawal of remark**

**MS BURCH** (Brindabella—Minister for Community Services, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Women and Minister for Gaming and Racing): Yesterday afternoon Mr Assistant Speaker was going to review *Hansard* regarding a comment I made, and I am happy to withdraw the comment I made yesterday.

**Animal Welfare Legislation (Factory Farming) Amendment Bill 2012**

**Ms Le Couteur**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Molonglo) (10.02): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I rise today to present the Assembly with a bill to address animal welfare issues in factory farming. My bill covers four areas. It makes it illegal to keep hens in a cage system in the ACT from 1 January 2014. It requires the responsible ACT government minister to advocate at the national level for better welfare conditions for poultry. It outlaws sow stalls and farrowing crates so that only free range pig farming may occur in the ACT. Lastly, it makes minor improvements to the successful egg labelling system that has been operating in the ACT since the 2009 legislation.

Although the bill that I am tabling today has in it a lot of the things that were in the bill that was debated and not largely supported in 2009, I believe there is in fact very good reason to debate this issue again. Last week Ms Porter, who, unfortunately, has just left the chamber, introduced a motion to undertake further negotiations with Parkwood farm to convert to a barn-laid facility. Very positively, this motion was in fact amended and passed in a stronger form so that it said “undertake further negotiations with Parkwood farm to adopt alternative egg production methods”. Clearly the majority of the Assembly does not support the cage egg production methods used at Parkwood.

I very much hope that the government will succeed in its current negotiations with Parkwood. If it does then passing this bill will ensure that battery cage egg production will never again occur in the ACT, and that would be a good thing. If, however, the negotiations do fail, passing this bill is another way of achieving the same aim, by saying that it is the will of the Assembly because we do not regard this as an

acceptable way to treat animals. So regardless of what happens with the government's negotiations with Parkwood, banning battery cage egg production in the ACT is the right thing to do.

Battery cage egg production has already been banned by many countries, including basically the European Union—the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Switzerland, Germany, Austria and Norway—as well as some states in Canada and the US. It has been banned because it is widely recognised that hens kept in cage systems suffer chronically and that they are one of the most abused of all farmed animals. This bill is intended to improve the quality of life for hens by requiring that egg production only be undertaken using more humane alternatives.

A battery cage, just to remind members, is made of metal and it usually houses three to five birds, although I believe the ones in Parkwood house less. In any case, the bird has less space than the A4 sheet of paper that I am reading from. The small size of cages means that birds cannot turn around easily, they cannot stretch out, they cannot flap their wings and they cannot exercise. The floor of the cage slopes down at the front so that the eggs just roll on out. Hens kept in these sorts of conditions suffer. This bill is designed to improve their welfare. Cages simply do not satisfy the hens' behavioural needs. They did not evolve to live in this way. Cages do not enable them to perch, dust bathe, forage and lay their eggs in a secluded place.

If this bill is passed the ban on cage egg production would take effect from 1 January 2014, which would provide time for cage egg producers in the ACT to modify their production systems at minimal cost. Currently there is, of course, only one producer of cage eggs in the ACT, Parkwood farm in west Macgregor, which is owned by Pace. I have written and asked Pace if I could visit their facility to see it myself but Pace has not agreed to this.

Apart from the animal welfare issues, which are the Greens' number one issue, as I mentioned in the debate last week another reason to restrict factory farming—cage egg production, of course, is part of that—is human health and the increasing use of antibiotics. Eighty per cent of antibiotics consumed in the world are consumed in factory farming locations. The World Health Organisation have been warning for a few years about the grim outlook for antibiotics for human beings. They are saying that we are entering into an era where bacteria are increasingly becoming antibiotic resistant and common injuries such as scratches and falls, where the skin is broken and there is an infection, could well end up killing people. A lot of advanced medicine will have to cease because if we cannot control infections then we will not be able to do the major surgery which is now routinely part of Western medicine. So even if you do not care about animal welfare, from the point of view of human welfare we need to seriously look at factory farming.

Not all people agree that we should be getting rid of cage egg production. There seem to be a number of reasons for this. The first is that some people seem to think it is not cruel. This was the argument that was advanced by Mrs Dunne in the debate last week. She basically felt that because the hens keep laying, everything must be okay. That is, I think, not the case. What happens in battery cage production is that hens are kept there for only a year. They are then considered spent, they are taken away and they

are killed. This happens because the hens are spent from a laying point of view. They are simply not going to keep laying. However, in better conditions hens will often live for eight to 10 years and I believe that some live for 20 years. Hens in decent conditions keep laying for many years.

The economic reason that they are taken away from the battery hen production is that they are not being well looked after and they are worn out. Battery cage production basically sees hens as biological machines and under this sort of production method they just wear out. The Greens do not see hens simply as machines. The Greens see hens as sentient creatures and we think that their welfare is important.

The other reason that has been advanced for keeping Parkwood operating as it is at present is the economic contribution and the employment of 14 people. I say 14 people because that is what Parkwood itself said in the 2007 national pollutant inventory. In the debate last week the government stated that Parkwood's turnover was \$3 million annually and that it employed 60 people. But I understand that those 60 people are only employed once a year when, as I said, the chickens are regarded as spent and they are then "destocked"—that is, taken away and killed.

The Greens do support agricultural employment and manual jobs such as these. We think it is really important that there is diversity of employment in the ACT. However, we believe that, if the facility was converted to either barn production or free range production, there would be more people employed, not fewer people employed. So I do not believe that this bill is in any way anti employment.

The other argument that has been expressed is that, if we ban this here, it will just happen somewhere else. That is quite possibly not true. We can see in Australia and in the rest of the world that there is an increasing trend for people to consume free range eggs rather than battery cage eggs. So I think it is very likely that if Parkwood stopped producing cage eggs, the egg production would be replaced by free range production, not by cage production.

The argument that it is the wrong thing to do but, if we do not do the wrong thing, someone else will do the same wrong thing is not a particularly brilliant argument. It is an argument that is used a lot, particularly in the climate change debate, but I do not think there is a real reason for it.

In addition to banning battery cage egg production, the bill requires the responsible ACT government minister to take steps to promote a national ban on cage eggs. The intention is that other Australian jurisdictions will enact an equivalent ban on battery cage systems, eventually leading to the elimination of battery cage egg production in Australia. Other Australian jurisdictions have previously expressed a willingness to move away from cage systems, but no jurisdiction has acted. Enacting this bill will make the ACT the leading Australian jurisdiction and, in combination with diplomatic action by the government and cooperation from businesses, will stimulate positive action in other states and territories.

The bill recognises that other poultry housing systems also have adverse animal welfare impacts. It requires the minister to promote improvements to the living

conditions for poultry set out under the national code—the model code of practice for the welfare of animals: domestic poultry.

The bill also addresses intensive pig farming by banning the use of sow stalls and farrowing crates so that only free range pig farming could occur in the ACT. We do acknowledge that currently there is no commercial pig farming in the ACT but this is still an important issue because we do not want to see it start here. In intensive pig farming, pregnant pigs are confined to sow stalls, also known as gestation crates, which make feed management easier and prevent pigs from biting each other. The stalls, however, are about the same size as the pig, which makes movement all but impossible. They are then moved to even smaller farrowing crates until their piglets are weaned.

This bill, as well as ensuring, if it is passed, that we will never have sow stalls in the ACT, also makes a statement that it is an unacceptable practice. It adds to the growing movement to get rid of this unacceptable part of animal husbandry. This issue has been recognised in Tasmania, which will phase out sow stalls for pigs, with the first restrictions taking place in 2014.

In addition, the bill makes minor improvements to requirements introduced in the Eggs (Cage Systems) Legislation Amendment Act 2009 which required retail cage eggs to be displayed separately from other eggs, and with descriptive signage, in the ACT. There has now been considerable experience with how this legislation works, so this bill proposes to make two changes.

The first change is to no longer require a red border to separate the different types of eggs. We understand that some customers have actually seen the red border as a sign that there is a sale on; thus it is misleading people. The second requirement is to make labelling a strict liability offence, which will enhance the enforceability of the provisions.

I commend this bill to the Assembly. I am very pleased that cage egg production is again on the Assembly's agenda, and I very much hope that the bill will be supported.

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

## **Planning and Development (Public Notification) Amendment Bill 2012**

**Ms Le Couteur**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Molonglo) (10.16): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

The Planning and Development (Public Notification) Amendment Bill 2012, which I will just call “the bill”, because it is a long title, has been developed because the

Greens have received a lot of community feedback on a number of issues relating to public involvement and notification and interest in the ACT planning system. This bill is an attempt to get the balance between the need for an efficient planning system—a planning system which has certainty for all sides, a planning system which is not bogged down by red tape, green tape or any other coloured tape—and the rights of residents to have a real say in what affects them in their neighbourhoods, what affects them in terms of what is happening next door to them.

This bill is part of a balancing act. What the Greens are saying with this bill is that we would like to see the balance move a bit more in favour of consultation and ensuring that people know what is happening in their neighbourhood and have a say in it.

The bill does five key things to extend public notification and information requirements. Firstly, it requires written notification of proposals for deconcessionalisation to houses within 500 metres of the site. Secondly, it requires written notification of draft variations to the territory plan to houses within 500 metres of the site if the variation contains a proposal for a change of zone. Thirdly, it moves proposals for the building of some single-dwelling houses in existing suburbs from being exempt from the need for development approval into the code track. Fourthly, it requires public notification for single-dwelling proposals in the code track. And, lastly, it inserts a requirement for signage at building sites of single dwellings in existing suburbs to give information about where the approved building plans can be examined.

The bill also extends the period before regulations made under the Planning and Development Act can commence, to ensure that the disallowance period in the Legislative Assembly has passed. At present, when a planning regulation is notified it generally commences the next day. But the minister then has six sitting days to table it in the Assembly, and then there is a six sitting day disallowance period when the Assembly can move a motion to disallow the regulation. This bill proposes that the regulations cannot commence until after the disallowance period has passed.

I am moving these because of the issues from the regulation that was introduced last year and to disallow third-party appeals in the Kingston foreshore area. This was eventually debated in the Assembly. I moved a disallowance motion. This was amended by the Liberal Party, I think, so that third-party appeals were reinstated in some, but not all, of Kingston.

This has led to the situation where there is a case in the Supreme Court and a case in ACAT. They are both at this stage, it is my understanding, debating whether ACAT has standing—whether or not it is possible to bring an appeal to ACAT. That is because it is very unclear what the legal status of the regulation was in this interregnum period between when it was notified by the minister and then when it was disallowed by the Assembly. Given that this is potentially quite a long period of time—in months, even if not a long period in terms of Assembly sitting weeks—we think it is important to have clarity here. That is what is behind that.

I will go through the specific issues. Firstly, I go to public notification requirements for deconcessionalisation. This is on the agenda because of the first deconcessionalisation under the new Planning and Development Act 2007.

I acknowledge that this is a substantial improvement compared to the situation before that act. But when we were going through the deconcessionalisation process for the Brumbies site, it was very notable that, I believe, there were around 200 submissions to ACTPLA about the change in territory plan but only eight submissions about deconcessionalisation. The reason for the difference in number, I understand, was that very few people actually realised that the deconcessionalisation process was happening. They did not see the signs; they did not put anything in about it because they simply were not aware of it.

This bill would require that there is better notification. Deconcessionalisation is an important issue—and it is an issue which, generally speaking, is very controversial. The areas that are being deconcessionalised are areas which have been community facilities, generally, for quite some period of time—50 or 60 years, typically. And the plan is to change their use. This is something the community want a say in, but unfortunately the notification requirements at present are such that they may not manage to have a say in it.

I move to the public notification requirements for draft variations to the territory plan. This is another area where we are getting increasing feedback that people who are affected do not know about it. At present they are notified through a public notice in the newspaper. Unfortunately, the *Canberra Times* does not have the circulation it used to have, and that is not a very effective method of notification. The bill proposes that if a draft variation includes a change to a zone, houses within 500 metres of that site should be notified by mail. We all know that it is quite cheap to do letterboxing, so I do not think this is a very onerous requirement on the proponents. What is happening at present is that by the time residents find out about these things it is often too late and they are not able to lodge representations in a timely fashion—possibly not able to lodge them at all.

The next area that I am moving to is about the construction of single dwellings in existing areas. Members may recall that when the Planning and Development Act 2007 commenced in 2008, the construction of single-dwelling houses in existing suburbs was in the code track and the construction of single-dwelling houses in new suburbs was exempt from the need for development approval. In April 2009, the Planning and Development Regulation was amended to include single-dwelling houses in existing areas as exempt from development approval, instead requiring code track approval.

Over the years, this change has led to much angst in the inner parts of Canberra, because residents are unable to view the plans or comment on the proposal. This bill would return these single dwellings in the existing suburbs to the code track, which will ensure that ACTPLA is able to assess the plans against the residential zones single-dwelling housing development code. At present all the work is done by the private certifiers. Over the years, we have had much concern about private certifiers; it is important that ACTPLA does get to see these and is in a position to assess them.

Next, my bill will increase notification for certain code track developments. Single-dwelling houses are currently exempt from development approval and can be demolished and rebuilt in existing areas under the current legislation with no public



notification and without their plans being assessed by ACTPLA. Development applications in the code track are currently not required to be publicly notified. The bill ensures that applications for single-dwelling houses in existing suburbs will need minor public notification under section 153, which is a public notice to adjoining premises.

As members may know, I am a frequent attendee at community council meetings. This is a live issue for both north Canberra and inner south community councils. These are existing areas where what is happening is that people are finding that the house next door to them is being demolished; a new house is being built; and the new house is a lot bigger and in many cases is damaging trees on their property and in many cases is overshadowing either their building or parts of their garden which they regard as important. In many cases they have said that what has been built is not suitable for RZ1 but in fact meets the requirement for RZ3. This has no public notification, so residents next door cannot scrutinise. Basically they have to wait and see what is being built; then it is too late to object.

In good cases, where we have things working well from the neighbourhood point of view, the proponent, the person who is going to knock their house down and rebuild, will actually go and see the neighbours and discuss this, but often this does not happen. We have the crazy situation where a few things still are not code exempt and get notified and we have comments that other things are not notified. For instance, over the road from me there was a knockdown and rebuild. There was no notification or consultation about the actual house, but they put their carport a bit forward of the building line, so we had notification and the opportunity to comment about the carport. With the house, which was clearly a much bigger thing, there were no options.

We also know from experience with public notification and consultation, and when things end up going to ACAT, that sometimes ACTPLA does not have a lot of time to look at these sorts of plans, and sometimes things get through which are not compliant. If neighbours are notified, we have another set of eyes to see whether the plans are in fact compliant.

That brings me to my last major point—to make plans for single-dwelling proposals available to the public for inspection. Right now I have heard of a number of people who have had to put in FOI requests to find out the plans for what is being built next to them. It could be felt that people should have some privacy for what is inside their house. I do not really have a problem with what is inside their house. The problem is that this means that next-door neighbours cannot see what is going to be built next to them, so they cannot know whether something is going to overshadow them, whether it is compliant with the rules or whether it is going to lead to the death of their trees. It is really crazy that people have to put in FOI requests for things like this. This sort of information should be routinely available. It used to be routinely available and it does not appear to be anymore. People should be able to know in advance what is going to be built next to them.

Amendments made last year to the Building Act 2004 by the Planning and Building Legislation Amendment Bill 2011 (No 2), otherwise known as PABLAB 2, do make a small improvement. They require a sign to be erected at such building sites that

outlines the type of work to be undertaken and provides builder contact details. This bill extends the signage requirements to also require information to be shown about where copies of the plan are available for public inspection. This, of course, is largely a transitional requirement, because once single dwellings in existing suburbs are moved into code track they will be publicly notified and neighbours will know of the plans. The regulations from PABLAB 2 have not yet been finalised and thus have not commenced. Thus the provisions in relation to extending the signage requirements will not commence until the later of either the commencement of the rest of this bill or the commencement of the regulations relating to PABLAB 2.

I commend this bill to the Assembly. I think it is a reasonable approach to trying to get a better balance between the needs for information by existing residents of an area and the needs for efficiency and certainty in our planning system.

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

## **Standing and temporary orders—suspension**

**MS BRESNAN** (Brindabella) (10.30): I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Ms Bresnan from presenting a bill without its explanatory statement.

I am moving to suspend standing orders as the explanatory statement for the Official Visitor Bill that I am seeking to table today has not been prepared in time to be provided with the bill today in accordance with the standing orders. I do apologise to members for this. Due to the illness of a staff member in my office, we were not able to prepare the explanatory statement in time for the tabling today. We will distribute the explanatory statement as soon as possible to relevant ministers and Liberal spokespeople. I apologise once again for this occurring and seek the agreement of members to suspend standing orders and table the bill today.

**MR CORBELL** (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development) (10.31): The government will support the motion proposed by Ms Bresnan, but we wish to make the point that it is not a precedent we would like to see extended in general. It is important that explanatory statements are supplied with bills when they are tabled. I appreciate the particular circumstances in Ms Bresnan's office in relation to this particular instance, but we would like to place on the record that we do not consider this a precedent.

**MRS DUNNE** (Ginninderra) (10.31): I was not going to comment, but I rise briefly to indicate that I agree with the minister that this should not be a precedent. We will be supporting the suspension of standing orders. I do sympathise, because when we introduced our campaign finance reform bill we were in the situation where we had the illness of someone in our office who had been doing the bulk of the work and it meant that at 9 o'clock the night before the bill was introduced we were still finalising the explanatory statement with the help of volunteers. So I do empathise and I know where Ms Bresnan has been on this. But it should not be a precedent, although it is

worth noting that the requirement for explanatory statements is a recent change to the standing orders and it is sometimes difficult for non-government members to provide all of these things in a timely way.

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

## **Official Visitor Bill 2012**

**Ms Bresnan**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill.

Title read by Clerk.

**MS BRESNAN** (Brindabella) (10.33): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Firstly, I do thank members for allowing me to present this bill today without an explanatory statement. It will not set a precedent and we do recognise that. This will be just a one-off circumstance in this instance. Thank you once again for that.

Official visitors play a very important role in our community. They were established over 100 years ago to go into places where people are detained against their will and to ensure they are receiving fair treatment and adequate care. Currently in the ACT we have three legislated official visitor roles—for mental health, corrections, and children and young people. Five people perform the role of official visitor for mental health, two people perform the role of official visitor for corrections, and one person performs the role of official visitor for children and young people.

Over the past decade there have been many reports, reviews and recommendations addressing the need to provide official visitors with greater independence by ensuring they are not funded by the directorates they investigate. The bill I am tabling today proposes to implement those recommendations, while recognising the current policy context.

The key elements of the bill include: separating the official visitors from directorates by having them funded through the Office of the Public Advocate, with the office also providing official visitors with administrative support; creating a new official visitor role for people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people; ensuring there will always be an official visitor for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults in the corrections system; increasing the oversight of the official visitor for mental health beyond the traditional institutions and further into community facilities; and creating a register of approved disability accommodation.

In drafting the Official Visitor Bill I have conducted a thorough consultation process. In January this year I released an exposure draft of the bill and an accompanying discussion paper. My office sent material to organisations identified as having an interest or who would be affected by the proposed changes. I received responses from approximately 29 organisations and individuals and a submission from the ACT

government. I held meetings with a range of bodies, including all current official visitors, the public advocate's office, and the Human Rights Commission. I also held a public forum which about 30 people attended.

From those responses, my office was able to tailor the bill to ensure it addressed the current policy context and any human rights and other concerns. Almost all respondents provided high levels of support for the creation of new official visitor roles for people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. There was also overwhelming support for securing the official visitor role for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in corrections.

The role of official visitors for people with disabilities is incredibly important because, while people with disabilities are not technically being "detained" in accommodation, it is arguable that they are vulnerable, dependent on the people who provide the accommodation to them, and have a diminished opportunity to move to other accommodation if unsatisfied with their current status.

The ACT government has previously stated that it does not support the introduction of official visitors for people with disabilities in group homes because they are not being detained against their will and have a choice in their residential setting. However, most other states in Australia have recognised that such an argument does not accurately reflect the situation of people with disabilities and have provided official visitors for people with disabilities for a number of years. The same arguments and responses also apply to people who are experiencing homelessness.

Several women's health groups provided well-developed submissions to the consultation process and requested that an official visitor role for women be created. Statistics show that women in institutions have suffered extensive trauma prior to their detention, with 89 per cent of women in prison, for example, having suffered sexual violence prior to incarceration. It is therefore understandable that many women would prefer to discuss issues with a woman. In response to this request we have provided, through the functions of the official visitors, that all official visitors must be sensitive to gender, and we envisage official visitors receiving training to assist them in achieving this outcome.

The bill also provides for an entitled person, being the person entitled to make a complaint, to be able to ask to speak to an official visitor of the same gender. Given the constraints of resourcing, if an entitled person requests to see an official visitor of the same gender, and such an official visitor for that specific portfolio area is not available, we believe an official visitor from another portfolio area should be able to assist on a short-term basis. We note, however, that the official visitor would have to meet eligibility criteria to be the official visitor they are acting for. The best way to achieve this goal is not, however, through the legislation, we believe, but through ministers ensuring that this does occur.

Responses to the consultation process strongly supported the legislative requirement for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander official visitor for children and young people and for adults in the corrections system. Aboriginal people continue to face

higher rates of incarceration and have specific cultural needs. While we recognise that the ACT government has from time to time appointed an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander official visitor for corrections, it is based on policy, and there should be assurances that such an official visitor is always appointed. It may be the case that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander official visitor for children and young people could be the same person who is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander official visitor for adult corrections.

Another of the key goals of the bill is to maximise the collective benefit from official visitors programs. By creating a collegiate model we believe each of the different categories of official visitors can provide a high level of peer support to each other. This is especially important for official visitors that have one or two people appointed to the role, or if their role is to be newly created like that of the official visitor for disability.

All of the current official visitors have expressed support for a collegiate model. However, they did express concerns about maintaining their autonomy if they were to be supported by the Office of the Public Advocate. Official visitors want to know they will still be in charge of their work, priority setting and budget. They do not want to take directions from another entity, including the Public Advocate's office.

These concerns have been taken into consideration, and in response we have substantially changed the legislation. Where originally we intended to create a bill that inserted new sections into the Public Advocate Act, we now have created a bill that set out stand-alone legislation for official visitors.

The bill presented today also establishes that the role of the Public Advocate is to provide support to the official visitors when the official visitor requests it. This is a different approach to that taken in other Australian jurisdictions, where official visitors generally sit within the public advocate's office or ombudsman's office and those offices have some form of direction over official visitors.

One aspect of the bill that we are proposing as an Australian first is that the official visitor for corrections sits with the other official visitors. In other Australian jurisdictions different models of combining official visitors are used. However, in all cases the official visitor for corrections sits separately from all other official visitors.

One argument that the government may raise in objection to official visitors being moved away from directorates is that the relationship between directorates and official visitors may change and that there would be a lessening of the relationship between the minister and the official visitor. I do question that argument and believe this bill actually strengthens that relationship particularly between the minister and the official visitor.

I would also put to the government that the appearance of independence is extremely important, particularly to the entitled people who can make complaints. We have heard reports that entitled people in some cases mistake official visitors to be government staff and can be hesitant to trust the complaint process or the official visitor. An appearance of independence is vital to a successful official visitor program.

This again has been the approach taken in other states and I am not aware of issues relating to relationships with departments being raised. A further issue identified through the consultation process was that each official visitor views their role differently. The mental health official visitors believe that they are an inspector of facilities, the corrections official visitors are informal complaints handlers, and the children and young people official visitor describes her role as being an auntie or an advocate for the people she sees.

The exposure draft of the bill proposed that all official visitors have a consistent method of handling and referring complaints. We noted that the model set out by the current official visitor for children and young people was the most recently updated in legislation. However, official visitors stated a preference for a more flexible complaints system than that provided by the children and young people legislation, and the best way to achieve this was by collectively drafting a set of guidelines and not having prescriptive legislation.

In the bill I am tabling today we have removed reference to generic official visitor complaints handling processes and referral powers and provided for ministers to issue those guidelines as disallowable instruments. The bill has widened the scope of the type of facilities that official visitors may visit and services they can take complaints about.

With regard to mental health, official visitors will now be able to inspect places that are funded by the ACT government and provide mental health services, but are not considered to be a typical government institution. Such facilities would include step-up, step-down facilities and respite facilities run by the government or a non-government organisation and may have just one person staying. It will not, however, cover any facility that is funded privately or by the commonwealth and it will not cover places such as GP facilities or private psychiatric offices.

With regard to who can make a complaint, we have expanded the definition of who is entitled to make a complaint so that it is not only people staying at a mental health facility but also people who are under a mental health order, irrespective of where they are staying.

With regard to the new disability official visitor, they will be able to inspect ACT government funded disability accommodation that is intended for respite for long-term residential purposes. They will also be able to visit a residential aged-care facility that accommodates a person with disability who is less than 65 years old.

The disability official visitor will be able to take complaints about ACT government funded disability services provided elsewhere and be able to visit with the complainant with their permission. The official visitor for homelessness will be able to visit any temporary or short-term supported accommodation for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness provided by an organisation that is funded under the ACT Housing Assistance Act.

The bill does have human rights implications. These implications were raised during the consultation process and we recognise the challenge of balancing the need to respect vulnerable people's right to privacy while ensuring that they are protected from harm. To address this we have built into the legislation a notification and consent process to ensure that rights are protected.

If an official visitor is to visit a site that is not an institution, such as a disability group home, a mental health step-up, step-down facility or emergency accommodation for people experiencing homelessness, the official visitor must provide the owner or operator with at least 24 hours notification. The owner or operator may not stop a visit occurring but an entitled person—the person with the disability, the mental illness or who is homeless—does retain the right to refuse entry to the official visitor to what they consider to be their personal space, and the official visitor must respect that.

We note that existing official visitors do have the right of entry without notification for government-run institutions. One place where we have expanded this power to the community setting is when official visitors for disability are concerned that a person is at risk. We want the official visitor for disability to have the ability to act and visit without notification if that is required.

In such a situation the official visitor for disability would not have to give the owner or operator of a facility 24 hours notice. However, the entitled person—that is, the one who is at risk—retains the right to refuse the official visitor entry if they do not want them to visit.

The Human Rights Act also protects equality before the law and protects against discrimination on any ground. The premise of the concern in this case is that it is because of their disability that the people will fall within the visitor inspection scheme and that because of this they are having their rights limited discriminatorily by virtue of their disability.

Whilst it is true that legal requirements are being created and applied to people in particular circumstances because of their disability, it should be noted that in doing so a range of other human rights are being protected. An analogy may be made to measures provided for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to address historic disadvantage and to respond to their particular cultural needs.

Similarly, in this instance the protections being created for people with disability are necessary to protect other human rights and any minor limitation that is created has been limited to the greatest extent possible. The scheme is the least restrictive and reasonably available means to address the legitimate and recognised purpose of protecting their personal safety and other human rights.

The bill also proposes reforms regarding the manner in which disability accommodation is recognised as being a safe place of care. The bill establishes that the minister can provide for a set of disability standards, and for the Community Services Directorate to maintain a register of disability accommodation including long-term accommodation and respite accommodation that meet the necessary standards for safety and quality of care.

We want to know that when ACT government funding is being provided to pay for people with disabilities in care, the care is deemed to be safe. We do know of instances where government funds have been used to pay for people to stay in places that the government knew were not deemed safe. This is what this register is addressing.

Currently, the government does require anyone it has a funding agreement with to meet a set of standards. However, this part of the bill proposes a new level of legislative recognition. Such a register would not preclude people on individual support packages or any future national disability insurance scheme from spending their funding where they choose.

A number of groups through the consultation expressed a wish to see official visitor roles created for aged-care facilities. This is an issue we examined. However, the ACT does not have jurisdictional responsibility for this because the federal government has the funding responsibility for residential aged care. We recognise this is another area where there are vulnerable people. However, due to jurisdictional funding issues we do not believe it is possible to address this in the bill at this time.

There will need to be discussion about the financial impact of this bill. We have been able to gather data via questions on notice about the funds provided to existing official visitors per annum. The five mental health official visitors are funded \$75,000 a year. The main corrections official visitor is funded up to \$34,000 per annum, while the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander official visitor's position is unfunded and is absorbed into the ACT Corrective Services existing budget. The official visitor for children and young people is entitled to about \$30,000 per annum.

I have made a number of requests to the government to be provided with the costings, including most recently this week directly to the Chief Minister. However, they have not as yet been provided. I would again like to formally request that the government work to provide this information. On costs, I believe it is important that we consider the costs of not providing a role such as the official visitor, in particular for disability.

What is the cost of someone being in unsafe care and the impact it has on their life and their loved one, or if this places their life in danger? I actually find it extraordinary that we do not have a disability official visitor in the ACT, despite it being recommended a number of times, most recently in the multi-party Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services report into respite.

In conclusion, I note again that I do intend to prepare an explanatory statement and thank members for allowing me to table the bill today. I acknowledge the standing orders that relate to the tabling of explanatory statements with bills and, as I said earlier, this is not a precedent that has been set. My office will provide a copy of the explanatory statement as soon as possible and make this available to the respective government ministers and Liberal spokespeople.



Once again, I would just like to say that I think this is a bill we do need in the ACT. It is a process that has been applied in other states and territories. I actually think it strengthens the relationship of official visitors to ministers. Also, as I pointed out, the fact that we do not have a disability official visitor in particular here in the ACT is something that should be addressed. I commend this bill to the Assembly.

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

## **Canberra centenary**

**MS PORTER** (Ginninderra) (10.51) I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that the 2013 Canberra Centenary provides an excellent opportunity to boost the ACT economy through increased interstate and international visitors;
- (b) that the ACT Government has released a brochure giving a sneak peak of the 2013 Canberra Centenary program;
- (c) that the program includes a number of opportunities for tourists to experience historic, cultural, sports and entertainment events and exhibitions throughout the 2013 calendar year;
- (d) that tourism opportunities are best realised through collaborative efforts of the ACT Government, business and tourism industry;
- (e) that the ACT Government has recently set up a taskforce to coordinate the ACT's efforts to secure international flights to Canberra Airport and the group will comprise of Government, Canberra Airport, business and tourism industry representatives; and
- (f) that the ACT Liberals have voted against measures that boost tourism opportunities in successive ACT budgets;

(2) calls on:

- (a) the ACT Government to work with the business and tourism industries to leverage opportunities to bring interstate and international visitors to the ACT during the Centenary year; and
  - (b) the ACT Government to work with the Canberra Airport, local business and tourism industries to secure international flights to Canberra Airport; and
- (3) supports all budget measures that enhance and promote our tourism opportunities for the 2013 Canberra Centenary.

I am happy to rise this morning to speak to this motion in relation to Canberra's centenary and the associated celebration events and opportunities that it affords. As we know, 2013 marks the 100th anniversary of the official naming of Canberra by Lady Denman on 12 March 1913. All Canberrans, in fact all Australians, should be very proud of this significant milestone in our history. Planning is underway for a year-long program of celebrations that will mark this anniversary and showcase Canberra to a national and international audience.

The centenary is an opportunity to engage all Australians by encouraging people to interact with centenary initiatives and take the opportunity to participate in centenary activities by visiting Canberra. After all, this is the nation's capital. We all think of this place as our home—the place we work, the place we participate in community activities and bring up our families. However, Canberra belongs to the whole nation and we are just fortunate to live here.

Australian Capital Tourism is working closely with the centenary team to develop a marketing campaign that will raise awareness of the centenary activities and, importantly, drive increased visitation to the capital during this important year. The ACT government delivered \$1.8 million in the 2011-12 budget towards a national fund for marketing the centenary.

As we know, any increased visitation provides a valuable economic return to the ACT economy via increased consumer spending on ACT goods and services. On our 99th birthday, at an event attended by the Chief Minister and the Prime Minister, we got a sneak preview of what awaits us. The full calendar of centenary events will provide multiple reasons for Australians to visit their capital during the centenary year. The calendar of events is diverse and contains performances, exhibitions and events that will appeal to a range of audiences and special interests.

I am pleased to say that the centenary of Canberra program is extensive and includes a wide variety of events and exhibitions throughout the year covering a spectrum of sports, science, arts, community, architecture and the environment. The program will also umbrella a wide range of partner events and events that regularly occur in Canberra. Canberra's traditional high visitation events will continue to provide important reasons for people to visit Canberra during the centenary. These include the actual birthday celebration in March, Enlighten, the National Folk Festival, Floriade, Floriade NightFest, the Anzac Day national ceremony and the Australia Day celebrations, to name but a few.

It will be a big year for sports fans with the ISPS Handa Australian women's golf championship and the Brumbies, Raiders and the GWS Giants hosting a number of exciting clashes in Canberra. 2013 will also see the British Lions Rugby team play the Brumbies at the Canberra Stadium. The Lions only travel to Australia every 12 years, and this happy coincidence will see many international visitors travel to Canberra for the game and stay on to experience the national capital.

The centenary of Canberra launched a preview brochure to the local media on 7 March 2012 and, as I said, to key stakeholders on 12 March. The brochure, which

offers a glimpse of the full program, was launched to create public awareness about the centenary of Canberra. It also provides Canberra and the broader community with a preview of the scheduled calendar of events that will unfold in 2013.

The brochure was distributed through the *Canberra Times* as an insert on 14 March and continues to be distributed via the Canberra and region visitors centre, ACT libraries, Canberra Connect shopfronts, ACT hotels, national institutions and other key tourism venues. The brochure has also been distributed via Canberra centenary sponsors' shopfronts and is also available for download on [www.canberra100.com.au](http://www.canberra100.com.au). I am sure you will all have a copy and have enjoyed reading it and are looking forward to seeing more about what is on offer later in the year. However, I encourage you to make sure that your family and friends also have a copy.

A number of announcements will be made in the coming months, with the full program of activity revealed in September this year. I am sure all of you are looking forward to that. I know I am. By working collaboratively with ACT government, business and the tourism industry, Australian Capital Tourism is able to develop and promote recreational, leisure and cultural tourism assets with greater effectiveness by obtaining access to new markets and broadening the reach in existing markets. These assets, if promoted as part of a comprehensive and integrated program, have the potential to attract significant numbers of interstate and international visitors.

A cooperative approach to marketing Canberra as a destination will ensure industry stakeholders have an understanding of the centenary program and are able to maximise opportunities associated with the centenary by promotion through their own distribution channels. The 2012 Canberra Festival, including Enlighten, is an excellent example where a collaborative approach to realising an opportunity has been successful. As an evolving festival, I am sure we will see an even bigger and better Enlighten in 2013.

Earlier this week Minister Barr announced the establishment of a task force to coordinate Canberra's efforts to secure international flights to Canberra Airport in 2013—a very good move indeed. There is a very real opportunity for our city to have regular flights from New Zealand flying into the Canberra Airport. The long-term plan is also to seek flights into South-East Asian airports, possibly Singapore, which will link Canberra into Asia and Europe. The upgrade of the airport terminal is designed to incorporate all facilities needed for overseas travel. I am sure we have all been watching the developments in this precinct with great anticipation.

The task force announced by Minister Barr will bring together Canberra Airport, our local business and tourism industries and government to put forward a united front in working with airlines to deliver the direct flights that I mentioned. The formation of this group has already received broad support from the local business community.

The ACT government is working smarter and delivering more to ensure a strong and prosperous tourism industry and create opportunities for all Canberrans to come together for recreation, entertainment and cultural experiences. The centenary year provides multiple reasons for Australians across the country to visit their capital and learn about its culture and history and to enjoy everything it has to offer. This is a

once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to capitalise—if you will excuse the pun—on this significant milestone. With a diverse program of events, the centenary year will appeal to a range of audiences and special interests, and, as I said at the outset, this government will continue to work to maximise the opportunities that the centenary year presents in increasing tourist visitation in the nation's capital.

**MR SMYTH** (Brindabella) (10.59): I thank Ms Porter for putting this motion on the notice paper today. This is indeed a very important motion, and 2013 is a very important year for this city because it is our centenary and it is a great opportunity to reassess where we have been and where we are going. But it is not just a local thing; the important thing about this is that it is the centenary of the federal government saying that the nation's capital of one of the newest nations on earth at the time would be in a place called Canberra.

I have some concerns about the federal government's commitment to this celebration, and I will be moving some amendments in a few moments to further the appreciation of what it is that we are celebrating and, indeed, calling on the federal government to fully commit to it.

As Ms Porter said, yes, the Prime Minister did on Monday, 12 March this year make a statement of commitment to Canberra at the launch for the centenary of Canberra. It is worth reading a few paragraphs, because in one of the paragraphs the Prime Minister said:

I know you are preparing a strong program of events and commemorative projects ...

I thought there was a working group on this, a federal working group, and I thought that might have been "we"—both the federal and the ACT governments. It is quite clear that the federal government have abrogated their responsibility in this case. The speech then goes on:

I'm also delighted the Commonwealth has been able to make a contribution through the redevelopment of Constitution Avenue and the National Arboretum.

Well, the redevelopment of Constitution Avenue payment is money the Howard government had in their budget that was taken out by the Rudd government. It is restoration of funding that had already been agreed to and really is not a contribution to the celebrations of the centenary—in many ways it is the federal government paying their way. We acknowledge the \$20 million for the National Arboretum.

The speech goes on:

Today I commit the Commonwealth to continuing to build and grow the nation's capital, its cultural institutions and its role as the focus of ceremonial, parliamentary and national leadership.

I commit to Canberra remaining the heart of the Australian Public Service and the primary location of government departments and agencies.

Those two paragraphs should be of great concern to anybody in Canberra. Let us go through it again:

Today I commit the Commonwealth to continuing to build and grow the nation's capital ...

Really, in the last four or five years since we have had a Labor federal government, there has been very little in real terms that we have seen in the building and growing of the nation's capital. In fact, in most budgets we have missed out completely on funding, and it is only recently that we have managed to get the money for the Majura Parkway.

"I continue to commit the commonwealth to building its cultural institutions." The cultural institutions have suffered; their funding has gone backwards; they have suffered cuts. They are struggling to perform their statutory obligations let alone the things that they would do that might enhance tourism to the ACT and enhance the visit of all Australian and international visitors to Canberra. "And continue its role as the focus of ceremonial, parliamentary and national leadership."

Now, the next paragraph:

I commit to Canberra remaining the heart of the Australian Public Service ...

Well, we have seen agencies that should be here go interstate. We see functions of various agencies that are here being moved interstate. And we see the cuts that they are going about surreptitiously, as we all know.

The speech then goes on to say:

Canberra is a success; our collective success over ten decades.

And it deserves to be celebrated.

That is true. How about the federal government contribute in a meaningful way and an appropriate way to funding to make it a success? The Prime Minister goes on to say:

What we are really celebrating, in a sense, is our ability as a nation and a people to get things right.

We agree. Make sure you contribute appropriately, Prime Minister. She then goes on to say:

So I want this to be a celebration of Canberra as our capital.

That, members, is a federal responsibility. Today I think it is fair to say the federal government is dragging the chain.

It is appropriate to note that the government signed on 12 December 2008 an agreement with the commonwealth government called the centenary of Canberra

intergovernmental agreement. The agreement acknowledges that the overall objective of the centenary activity is to engage communities around Australia in the celebration of the establishment of the national capital. Let us acknowledge that. It is about the celebration of the capital. If you get into the agreement you see this:

This Agreement is made in the following context:

- A. The centenary of the establishment of Canberra as the national capital of Australia occurs on 12 March 2013 ...
- B. The parties are committed to supporting the celebration of this nationally significant anniversary and providing an opportunity for all Australians to celebrate.

Part 2 goes on:

The parties acknowledge that the overall objective of the Centenary activities is to engage communities around Australia, including residents of Canberra, in the celebration of the Centenary of Canberra as the national capital of Australia.

In many ways this government are to be congratulated on the early start and their commitment in terms of funding to it—it is the federal government that is letting us down, and it is the federal government's lack of contribution that has led to some of the uncertainty and, indeed, to the late publication—because we still have not got it yet—of the full program. It is important that we get it right. It is not just a celebration of where we live; it is a celebration of our nation's national capital, and it is important that it be funded in that way.

I seek leave to move the amendments circulated in my name together.

Leave granted.

**MR SMYTH:** I move:

- (1) Omit subparagraph (1)(f) and rename existing subparagraphs (a) to (e) as (b) to (f).
- (2) Insert new subparagraphs (1)(a), (g) and (h):
  - “(a) the national significance of celebrating the foundation of the centenary of Australia's capital city;”.
  - “(g) the failure of the Federal Government to match on a dollar-for-dollar basis the funds committed by the ACT Government to programs planned for the Centenary celebrations in 2013;”.
  - “(h) the Federal Government's commitment of \$20 million in capital funding for the Arboretum.”.

(3) Add new paragraph (4):

“(4) calls on the Federal Government to:

(a) to at least match on a dollar-for-dollar basis the funds committed by the ACT Government to programs planned for the Centenary celebrations in 2013; and

(b) to restore funding to the National Capital Authority to enable this agency to contribute effectively to the Centenary celebrations in 2013.”.

(4) Add new paragraph (5):

“(5) calls on the Speaker to write to the Federal Government on behalf of the ACT Legislative Assembly advising of the terms of this motion.”.

It is important, I think, to tweak the motion slightly to encompass what is said both in the Prime Minister’s speech and in the intergovernment agreement. Basically what my amendments will do is insert a new subparagraph (a) so that the leading thing that this Assembly notes is:

... the national significance of celebrating the foundation of the centenary of Australia’s capital city;”.

I think that needs to be up front. The current (a) to (e) are renamed (b) to (f) and then I want to insert two further paragraphs that we note, firstly:

... the failure of the Federal Government to match on a dollar-for-dollar basis the funds committed by the ACT Government to programs planned for the Centenary celebrations in 2013;”.

The minister, I am sure, can enlighten us but I think the government has put in about \$20 million and the federal government is matching that with about \$6 million just for the programs. Subparagraph (h) goes on to note:

... the Federal Government’s commitment of \$20 million in capital funding for the Arboretum.”.

It is interesting, though, that a lot of people had hoped we might get some money for a convention centre. I see the federal government has actually committed \$47 million for a state-of-the-art entertainment stadium and convention centre for Townsville. I am not sure whether the minister is aware of that, but Townsville obviously rates a lot higher in the scheme of things than the nation’s capital does. So what this does is say that, first and foremost, this is a national event, that this should be funded as a national event by the federal government, with matching funding from the ACT as appropriate, and that, of course, we have got some money for the arboretum.

What I want to do then is add a new part (4). Part (1) of the motion sets out a few items, part (2) calls on people to work with the government, part (3) says “supports all budget measures”—and I note, Mr Speaker, you have an amendment to that—but

what I then want to do is insert a new part (4). We have got in part (3) a local activity. Part (4) becomes:

“(4) calls on the Federal Government to:

- (a) to at least match on a dollar-for-dollar basis the funds committed by the ACT Government to programs planned for the Centenary celebrations in 2013; and
- (b) to restore funding to the National Capital Authority to enable this agency to contribute effectively to the Centenary celebrations in 2013.”.

The *raison d'être* of the NCA, or part of it, used to be that they had a job to build in the heart of all Australians an appreciation of Canberra as the nation's capital. They cannot do that on the budget that they have currently got. They cannot continue their statutory requirements and their maintenance work because they were gutted by an incoming Rudd government, at the behest of Senator Lundy. Settling old scores is not something people should do by damaging the city they live in, and that is what happened. I do not think anybody in this place likes what has been done to the NCA. So I think at least the government should restore funding for the NCA to enable this agency to contribute effectively to the centenary.

I note there might be a use of the words “restore” and “ensure adequate”. The problem is that, if you go to the “adequate” line, the federal government will simply say, “They have got adequate funding and they should do the job.” I think we all know they do not have adequate funding. One of the things that I believe are truly suffering because of federal government cuts is the effectiveness of the NCA to contribute to this. This is their job. It is up to the NCA. It is part of their charter to make sure that we build Canberra in the hearts of all Australians and I think it is important that that occurs.

Then there is a new part (5) which calls on the Speaker:

... to write to the Federal Government on behalf of the ACT Legislative Assembly advising of the terms of this motion.”.

So I hope that that is done and I hope these amendments are agreed to.

It is important that this happens. I note that the tenor of the motion is largely that there are benefits to be had here from tourism, and that is true. We need those benefits. All would remember the gutting of tourism by this government in 2006. It has been rebuilding slowly but I do not believe the funding is anywhere near, in real terms, what it was when this government took it to pieces in 2006. You only have to look at the numbers. The numbers in for the year 2010-11 said that there were 3,374,000 visitors to Canberra in that full financial year. In 2003-04 there were 4,013,000. So we are still 16 per cent lower than we were almost nine years ago.

Yes, we do need to do something more for tourism and we do need to make sure that it is adequately funded, that it is appropriately legislated for and that it has the backup of the federal government because the federal government have an obligation and a role to ensure that they are promoting the nation's capital, whether they like that or



not. Yes, we now find that, after 11 years of Labor rule in the ACT, our visitor numbers are 16 per cent less than when they started. That is a genuine shame.

The motion also says we need to work with business. I think part of the reason that the visitor numbers are down is that this government do, I think in some ways, fail to work with business. We get all the noise. For instance, there is some funding for the Convention Bureau, which we have always supported, and we said that that was appropriate. But when you look at this brochure that they have put out and you talk to the business community, they are saying what this lacks is appropriate dates and details. The cynic in me might say: "They are going to put out the full program in September. That would be during the election campaign. There is a government who are looking for a good news story for a government rather than adequately assisting business to plan."

If you want to go to the business events market, they are planning three, four, five years out and they did not have anything to take to the market at that time to say: "This is what is on in Canberra in 2013. Come here. It is going to be a great year." We have missed the business events market. People in the community will tell you that. People in the industry will tell you that.

**Mr Barr:** I spoke to Robyn Hendry the other night and she said it is going to be one of the best years ever.

**MR SMYTH:** Yes, they are having it despite you, minister.

*Members interjecting—*

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Mr Hargreaves): Order, minister! Order, members!

**MR SMYTH:** I am paying you a compliment. If you do not want to take it, fine.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Order, Mr Smyth! Sit down, Mr Smyth. Stop the clock. I will not have a direction to cease ignored. It will not happen. Minister, I would appreciate it if you did not incite him and, Mr Smyth, I would appreciate it if you did not enjoin battle across the chamber. If my request to cease that sort of behaviour is ignored—I asked three times and I was ignored—I will not hesitate to take some action on it. Mr Smyth, you have the floor.

**MR SMYTH:** The problem for, particularly, the hotel sector is that—and they are telling me—it is very hard to start packaging what is in this glimpse because they do not have solid dates on which to plan. If you go through it, there are very few solid dates, except, oddly enough, on 1 February we are opening the arboretum, a favourite of the government. We know that the full program will be announced in September 2012. Call me a little cynical, perhaps a bit jaded after all of this, but it then goes on and the only other dates that seem to appear are: the Canberra City Band will turn 150 on 14 March; the Canberra Black Opal, which we know is always on that weekend of 11-12 March, has got a date attached to it—18 June, for the Lions game; and the International Music Festival will run from the 9th to the 19th.

They are welcome but if you are trying to plan and you want to get into people's agenda now, every day that we leave this—and if we leave it until September—we let the business community down. Yes, I support that the government work with the business community because they will help drive the benefit but they have got to have something to work with. Saying “here is a glimpse but we have not got the detail” is not helping the business community.

2013 should be a great year, looking forward, for the people of the ACT because it allows us to say: “We have grown out of our adolescence period. Here we are, a modern, competent, mature, culturally diverse city that offers so much not just to Australia but to the world as an example of how cities can work in the future.” But I think at this stage we are not capitalising on it. I commend my amendments to the motion and seek the support of the Assembly.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (11.15): The Greens welcome the opportunity today to discuss the centenary of Canberra and the tourism potential attached to that, as well as issues relating to Canberra Airport. The year 2013 is a major milestone for our city. It is one that there is a palpable level of excitement around amongst many people who are looking that far ahead. From my own perspective, it has already started to build up. In the build-up to the centenary there have already been some marvellous events put on in the city. I remember very clearly the event up at Black Mountain tower when the box was cut open that contained the original design package for the competition to design Canberra, which, of course, was ultimately won by the Griffins. The opening of that box was quite an event. It is something that I will remember for a very long time. There was the exhibition at the National Library of the maps that helped form Canberra. Maybe I am just a bit of a history geek on these fronts, but I am certainly enjoying learning more about the history of our city.

That said, next year needs to be much more than just a celebration for Canberra residents. As I think Mr Smyth has touched on, it is vitally important that this is a national celebration. It is a point of national significance. It is, I believe, an opportunity for all Australians to celebrate their national capital. Of course, loaded into that is a tourism benefit for the city, one that will be very important for our local businesses. We know how significant the tourism sector is. Of course, in the context of this city, any sector that is not in the government sector is a good one to develop.

Research from groups like the Canberra Convention Bureau shows that people who come to this city to attend conferences come back. There is also the impact of the school visits. Many people that you meet who come as tourists talk about the fact that they have not been here since they came on a school tour when they were 12 or 13 years old, but they have always had it in mind to come back to Canberra. In that context, the centenary is an excellent opportunity to encourage perhaps those people who have had a taste or always thought they should come to check out the national capital. It is a perfect opportunity to invite them to come back to this city and to showcase what this city is. It is not just about looking back. It is about examining our history—reflecting on the growth of the city, the way it has matured and how it has changed over the years—and then showcasing what the city currently is. It is a very vibrant, cosmopolitan city. It is an opportunity for us to tell the story about what the city has become. I think that is an important part of it as well.

The early indications are that the program for next year is looking tremendous. Mr Smyth has just spoken about some of the matters that are contained in the brochure. Unfortunately, I missed the presentation by Robyn Archer, the director for next year, a couple of weeks ago to coincide with the 99th anniversary of the city. All of the indications are that it is going to be a tremendous program. Certainly, community organisations that I have spoken to and individuals who are promoting events for next year are very excited about it. It is going to be a great year to be in Canberra and one to be truly celebrated.

It is an opportunity to highlight much more than just the parliamentary triangle. In some ways when people think about Canberra they tend to think about those buildings and that precinct—the parliament, the War Memorial, the National Library and the like. They are all tremendous attractions, but I think this city is much more than the parliamentary triangle, as those that live here from time to time know. Perhaps some of the visiting MPs do not know that—the ones that come to the federal parliament who get an apartment somewhere along Canberra Avenue, dine at Manuka and Kingston and never go much further.

There is, of course, much more to the city. I think there is an opportunity here for some of our rural villages—Tharwa, Hall and Pialligo—to be part of the story. Other historic sites across the city are often hidden gems. One of the privileges of being an MLA is that you end up discovering more of these things as you go along. People say: “Come and have a look at this,” “Come for a walk here,” or, “There’s an event on.” The history of this city is quite broad in that sense. Certainly, the natural history of this region is fascinating, both the Indigenous history and the pre-Canberra days of the Limestone Plains. The stories I have heard about Canberra’s natural history are very fascinating.

The centenary is an opportunity for our local artists and multicultural groups to again step into the limelight. I believe Robyn Archer has made a public statement that she hopes to use the centenary to create an ongoing cultural legacy for this city. That is an excellent vision to have. I am pleased that sporting events will feature as part of the program next year as part of that, I guess, rounded approach to the year. Certainly, sports fans across the city will enjoy visits by the British Lions and various other events that are being canvassed and are already scheduled. All in all, it is an excellent package which has the potential to draw a range of people from across Australia.

There are a series of amendments that have been put on the table. Let me touch briefly on some of those. I have flagged a couple. Mr Smyth has moved his and I understand Mr Barr has some further amendments. This is not to steal his thunder, but to explain the context. I have suggested to members that after these speeches we might adjourn the debate to a later hour this day. I think the intent is there for us all to get to a similar place. Perhaps we can tidy up our proposed amendments. If we work over the lunch break we can perhaps come up with a singular set. That will at least make it easier for the secretariat to keep track of all the amendments. I believe there is agreement from members to do that and I think that is a good approach.

I did want to comment on the remarks about the airport in Ms Porter's motion. I note the announcement by Minister Barr earlier this week of the task force to secure international flights and that Wellington seems likely to be the first destination, particularly in light of the minister's recent trip to New Zealand. When it comes to the airport, I think members know that the Greens have some conflicted views. There is an opportunity for this city in having direct flights here. Some might even argue that there are greater efficiencies in not having to go via Sydney to some of these places. You might even argue there is a greenhouse benefit in that. Discussions around the airport highlight a couple of issues that we have pursued at various times. We maintain the view that Canberra needs to put in place a curfew at our airport. It is really about protecting quality of life in this city. I think that we can offer a greater diversity of services at the airport without having to detrimentally impact on quality of life in this city.

One of the great joys of Canberra is that, despite being a cosmopolitan city, it is still a very peaceful city. I think a lot of our residents value the notion that it is a big country town. The idea of having a 24-hour airport detracts from that sense of the city. As I have said before, it is absolutely appropriate for us to put a curfew in place sooner rather than later so that the airport is given a clear set of operating guidelines and a clear set of operating constraints so it knows exactly what its business scenario is.

The airport and those that operate it have demonstrated their tremendous capability to understand the rules and operate within them. I disagree with a number of the ways the development of the airport has distorted the fabric of this city, but I can only acknowledge the fact that those who own and operate the airport have understood the rules perfectly clearly and have taken the greatest possible entrepreneurial advantage of those rules. One can only acknowledge that skill and capability. I still do not think it has been necessarily good for this city in some ways, but that is a discussion for another day. I think the curfew remains a live issue.

I also think that this discussion highlights the urgency of moving forward on developing high speed rail between Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne in the first instance. This has been debated before. Apparently there are discussions at a federal level as well. Not only is it an opportunity to transform our transport system and boost Australia's future but also it could eliminate a great deal of the air traffic between Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne. These are extremely busy flight corridors. It is highly inefficient flying. They are short flights. They can be covered by high speed rail. This is also a way to tackle some of the greenhouse issues and the issues around oil supplies that may impact on the air industry in future. We need to be planning for these eventualities. I think that moving to high speed rail gives us the opportunity to address some of the concerns that we have.

Again we see the airport floating the idea that if we were to get high speed rail between here and Sydney, we could become Sydney's second airport. Again, I have deep reservations about that. I do not want to see this city becoming the noise dump of Sydney. I do not think that is what our residents want. I do not think it is the future that this city needs. We can be a vibrant and economically sound city without needing to have such a detrimental impact on the quality of life of our own residents. They will not thank us for that sort of outcome.

Those are some of the broader issues around the airport. Nonetheless, I acknowledge the opportunities that exist in having those direct flights. I think we can find a balance where our airport has the opportunity to offer a greater diversity of services. I certainly do not endorse the full business intent of the airport with its significant expansion plans in terms of the number of flights, freight and 24-hour operations. However, the observations in Ms Porter's motion are ones that we would not be opposed to.

With those few remarks, I welcome the fact that Ms Porter brought this motion forward today. As I said earlier, I think the centenary is going to be an event of great significance for this city, one that hopefully not only the residents of Canberra but also many from across Australia will enjoy. I look forward to discussions later in the day to work through some of the details of the amendments that are being proposed.

**MR BARR** (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation) (11.26): I thank Ms Porter for raising the motion this morning and Mr Smyth and Mr Rattenbury for their contributions. It is important that the Assembly has the opportunity to discuss our centenary—the opportunities that it brings to boost tourism in the ACT and the opportunities it brings us to market the territory interstate and overseas.

Members would have heard me speak before about the ACT tourism industry: its contribution of \$1.5 billion per annum to the local economy and the fact that it employs more than 13,000 Canberrans. The government recognises the importance of the industry to the ACT and remains committed to supporting key tourism opportunities that enhance the overall tourism experience in Canberra. It recognises the opportunity to draw more interstate and international visitors to the territory.

A couple of weeks ago, at an event attended by the Chief Minister and the Prime Minister, Robyn Archer revealed a sneak peek of what can be expected in the centenary year. I can advise members that Australian Capital Tourism has been working alongside the centenary team on a marketing campaign aimed at increasing tourist activity and raising the number of visitors who come to our city during the centenary year. This work, of course, was funded in the 2011-12 budget where the ACT government provided an additional \$1.8 million over three years towards a national marketing fund to promote the centenary. This was part of a \$5.8 million boost in the 2011-12 budget for a range of initiatives aimed at increasing tourism.

I note that, despite the significant contribution that the tourism sector makes to our economy each year and despite the fact that the government put up this series of new initiatives in the 2011-12 budget, the Canberra Liberals voted against them. I thank the ACT Greens for their support of those budget initiatives and recognise that, without that support, we would not have been in a position to deliver these additional funds to the tourism sector. It might be an opportunity for the shadow minister to reflect upon his party's position in relation to votes on budgets and why they consistently vote against measures that they then get up and support later on. But I digress, Mr Assistant Speaker.

Whilst there are a number of events in the centenary year that are still to be revealed, there are many that have been announced and that will undoubtedly draw great interest in our centenary year—the women’s Australian golf open and the British Lions tour in the sporting field and the wide variety of cultural programs and events that have been announced. It is also worth observing that the centenary provides the opportunity to take some of our existing tourism events to a new level. I refer, of course, to Floriade, the Canberra Festival, Enlighten. There are a number of opportunities to use the centenary year to further build on the strengths of those events and to bring in an even larger audience for those events.

Undoubtedly, 2013 presents a fantastic opportunity to further leverage our business tourism opportunities. In speaking to Robyn Hendry at the Brodburger opening the other night, she informed me of a very strong program for 2013 and also a significant opportunity as we approach the few years after that with news of the redevelopment of the Sydney convention centre and that facility being offline potentially for three to four years, depending, of course, on the decisions of the New South Wales government. That will present some opportunities but also some challenges for the ACT.

The ACT government is providing an additional \$1 million to the Canberra Convention Bureau to continue its great work in positioning Canberra as an innovative and influential business events destination. I think it is worth noting that several weeks ago the National Convention Centre was awarded gold in the category of meetings and business tourism at the national tourism awards. I know those opposite were not particularly keen to hear that in question time. I am not sure whether they have put on the public record their congratulations to Cindy Young and the team at the National Convention Centre. It was a fantastic result and good to see a Canberra business achieving so well in the national tourism awards.

It is worth noting that our centre beat the Melbourne Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Shoal Bay Resort and Spa in New South Wales which took silver and bronze respectively in that category. That the National Convention Centre received this prestigious award is a reflection of the team’s hard work and dedication in a very successful year. They hosted 375 events which contributed very strongly to the territory’s economy. The ACT government will continue to work with the Convention Bureau and the Convention Centre, and indeed with the other organisations that participate in this area of the economy, to deliver another bumper year for business events in 2013.

As previous speakers have alluded, I announced the establishment of a task force to coordinate Canberra’s efforts to secure direct international flights to and from the Canberra Airport. This task force will comprise members drawn from the business and tourism sectors to work with the airport, Australian Capital Tourism and the Economic Development Directorate in a united “team Canberra” approach. Undoubtedly, the investment at Canberra Airport presents the opportunity for regular international flights for the ACT. That is something that will be of great benefit to local businesses, tourism and hospitality operators and to the broader territory economy. Indeed, the time now is to come together to pitch to airlines to start direct international flights to Canberra.

I had the opportunity when I was in New Zealand to meet with counterparts in Wellington—Wellington airport, Wellington Tourism and Air New Zealand—to discuss these proposals. Certainly, there was a consensus reached from those discussions that with the appropriate level of investment and collaboration at both destinations we could attract a significant level of business and leisure travellers. We have had some very positive discussions with Tourism Australia to market cooperatively into the cities that would be serviced by direct flights. This work comes on the back of a budget commitment previously of \$100,000 towards the airline access development fund. From this work has come a demand analysis report—which included consultation with key stakeholders—that identifies and evaluates potential markets.

We will continue to work closely with the airport in relation to this particular proposal. I note there has been some very positive feedback from within the business sector—the ACT Exporters Network. We have received emails from a number of businesses that operate on both sides of the Tasman who are very keen to see these direct flights come to fruition. They have noted the significant cost savings to their businesses that would be associated with such an activity. We will continue to work towards that goal. I certainly welcome other broad support that we have received for that from the community to date.

In relation to the series of amendments that have been proposed by Mr Smyth and Mr Rattenbury, the government is largely content to support a number of them. We think that there could be some further strengthening of some elements of Mr Smyth's amendments. We do not disagree with moving forward the national significance of the celebration of the centenary of the foundation of Australia's capital city. We are happy to see that. We think that, as a statement of fact, it would be worth recognising the \$42 million that the commonwealth have provided for Constitution Avenue and the money that they have committed in relation to the centenary celebrations.

We recognise that what is needed is bipartisan support from the federal parliament for the ACT centenary celebrations and bipartisan support for restoration of funding to the National Capital Authority. In fact, what we should be doing is writing to all political parties, and indeed all of the independents in federal parliament, advising them of the Assembly's position. That, I think, would be a constructive way forward. We would like to see commitments from other political parties in the federal arena to the national celebration of Canberra's centenary and to restoring funding for the NCA. As we know, the government is in minority in both chambers and it requires the support of other parties. It would be good to see the federal Liberal Party supporting this as well. (*Time expired.*)

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

## **Financial Management (Cost of Living) Amendment Bill 2012**

Debate resumed from 22 February 2012, on motion by **Mr Smyth**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MR BARR** (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation) (11.37): The government will be providing in-principle support to the Financial Management (Cost of Living) Amendment Bill. The government has always been mindful of the effect of its policies on families and households. We recognise the importance of information to the community regarding the impacts of government policy. The government knows that whilst we have a strong economy and labour market, the benefits of this prosperity are not always shared equally.

In principle, the government sees no reason why information of this sort could not be included in the budget papers, as is proposed in this bill.

**Mr Seselja:** This year?

**MR BARR:** Yes. However, the information provided should be relevant and meaningful. The explanatory memorandum to Mr Smyth's bill says:

The analysis of the cost of living effect will be an estimate of the average effect on the average household for the following financial year.

The government knows that averages can often hide significant statistical ranges and not present a real picture.

The bill proposes to include in the assessment charges such as general rates and conveyance duty; land and payroll taxes; motor vehicle registration and driving licences; a utilities network facilities tax and water abstraction charge; and a fire and emergency services levy. A number of these charges do not legally apply to households, although they may incur some of the economic incidence. In addition, increases in costs of living may be offset—fully, partially or even more—by concessions for lower income households or be driven by changes in consumption.

The government has examined the detail of this bill and has taken further advice from Treasury on administrative requirements and the appropriate measures to be included. It is my expectation that the government will propose amendments to the bill to be considered at the next sitting of the Assembly. In this, the government will be guided by models used in other jurisdictions but we are particularly interested in the model used in the Western Australian budget papers. That model includes an estimate of the impact of taxes and charges on a standard representative household. Of course, characteristics of a representative household for the territory would be different from those in Western Australia, and appropriate adjustments would be needed. Nevertheless, the Western Australian model is worth considering as a starting point.

In summary, the government will support this bill in principle today but we flag that we will be bringing forward amendments that we believe can improve the bill. Once Ms Hunter has spoken, I will seek leave to move that, after the in-principle stage, the debate be adjourned.



**MR SESELJA** (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (11.40): I rise to support Mr Smyth's very important bill today, and I welcome the fact that it appears that it will get the support of the Assembly.

There was an easier way that we could have done this. I think it was in relation to last year's budget, in the reply in budget week, that the Liberal Party first started raising the issue in relation to a cost of living statement. It may have even been the budget before; I would need to check that. But we have called on the government to provide this. They could have done this without legislation. They could have developed any model that was reasonable to give information to the community about the cost of living. They have resisted. It is unfortunate that we have had to have legislation to actually direct a government to care about the cost of living and to have a situation in the budget where they express the real impact on households of their budget and of the decisions that are taken. The government have just completely been playing catch-up on this.

I want to go to why I think they have been so reluctant on this cost of living statement to date. As I say, this is something they could have done in last year's budget or the budget before. They could have done it without any legislation. It is good that we have been able to force some sort of movement from the government, but let us look at why they have been so reluctant to talk about the cost of living and to give meaningful figures to the community on the cost of living, because their record on the cost of living has been an absolute shocker.

We can go through a whole range of areas where that is true. We know about the feed-in tariff scheme that will add hundreds of dollars a year to the cost of electricity courtesy of the Labor-Greens alliance. We know of the unit tax which will add over \$50,000 in tax, in many cases, to the cost of building and buying a unit. That is a cost of living impost which will add to rents, add to the cost of buying a unit, and make it more difficult for Canberra families, not to mention affect one of our most important sectors, the property sector.

We know that the massive blow-out in costs at the Cotter Dam is increasing water bills already. We are all paying more, Canberrans are all paying more, for their water because of this government—first their failure to plan and then their failure to manage the Cotter Dam project. Canberrans are going to pay hundreds of dollars a year extra for their water, courtesy of ACT Labor.

The list goes on and on. Unfortunately, this has not been an issue that rates highly on the government's agenda. In fact most of their policy decisions have sought to increase the cost of living for Canberra families.

Let us have a look. We know that we have some of the most expensive houses in the country, and amongst the most expensive rents. We have seen electricity prices go up by 75 per cent, and they will go up more as a result—

*Mr Barr interjecting—*

**MR SESELJA:** We hear the interjections from Mr Barr. It is a bit like when Mr Stanhope used to tell us how good we had it on housing affordability. Mr Barr has repeated that many times: "That is okay because incomes have gone up." But incomes have not gone up as fast as costs, and many of those costs have been either directly imposed by this government or significantly contributed to by this government.

Mr Barr is trying to take some credit on electricity. We know that the only thing they have done for electricity prices is to push them up through the feed-in tariff. Let us look at water. Water prices for Canberrans have tripled. We did not hear Mr Barr talking about the fact that we are paying the highest water rates in the country and that they have tripled under ACT Labor. That is a massive increase in the cost of an absolute essential for life coming from the ACT government through its agencies. We know why they have gone up. It is because they have not been able to manage costs. They have not been able to manage costs at places like Cotter Dam. We have seen the result.

That gets us to something that the government directly controls: taxation and rates. That has an impact on the cost of living. We have seen real growth in taxation, over and above inflation, of 50 per cent in 10 years. Taxation per capita has increased since ACT Labor was first elected—an increase of \$1,696 per person in taxes and charges by the ACT government. We have seen massive increases in rates—in the rates on property, in rates on residential properties.

Let us look at a sample. What about the poor old people of Banks? It is 152 per cent in 10 years. Spence is 148 per cent; Charnwood is 158 per cent; Chisholm is 130 per cent. And the list goes on. The good people of Gordon—99 per cent. And that is just 2011-12. We have seen 111 per cent for people in Calwell. Holder is 98 per cent; Evatt 136 per cent; Dunlop 137 per cent; Amaroo 96 per cent; Ngunnawal 108 per cent; and Mawson 101 per cent. What have these people done to the government to deserve such a massive rate increase?

The list goes on and on. Tuggeranong residents have been particularly hard hit in recent years, and a number of the suburbs that I mentioned are Tuggeranong suburbs. We saw the second year in a row that Tuggeranong had the highest average rate increase. Rates went up by an average of 6.57 per cent last year. Why is it so? It is so because this government has not controlled its spending and it looks for more and more ways to tax the community and to slug the community.

The cost of living is a major issue right around the country. The complacency of ACT Labor and the Greens has been to say, "It is not an issue here in Canberra." It might be an issue in Queensland, where they wiped out a Labor government based on cost of living issues. It might be an issue in New South Wales, where they wiped out a Labor government based on corruption and cost of living issues. But apparently, according to this government, it is not an issue here in Canberra. Well, it is. It is, and if you go to these suburbs you will see that people have seen their rates go up by these extraordinary amounts. They have seen their water go up threefold. We have seen all sorts of other taxes and charges, including the high rents that affect people significantly and the high cost of parking, which affects particularly working families and particularly young mothers who have no option but to be driving their cars.

This government, ACT Labor, with their Greens alliance partners, have sought to impose more pressures. They have said, “Canberrans can bear it because their incomes are higher than the national average.” Their incomes may be higher, but the costs are also much higher. Canberra families can only bear so much. And there are many families whose incomes are not that much higher, whose incomes are very modest indeed. There are tens of thousands of families who live on very modest incomes in Canberra. And even those who are on relatively good incomes are being forced. If they have bought a house in the last few years, the mortgage is likely to be \$350,000 to \$400,000 plus. That is a lot of repayments. When the electricity price keeps going up and you add another \$200 to that, and when the water goes up, you feel that more than you may have if your mortgage was half that amount.

All of these things are linked. We have seen, unfortunately, a government that do not care about these issues. They think that the people of Canberra can just bear it. We take a different view. We believe that all of their policies should go towards making things more affordable. There should be always a consideration: who will pay for this? How much will it cost? How can we deliver it more efficiently so that we reduce those costs? How can we govern more efficiently so that instead of constantly jacking up taxes and charges we can occasionally lower those or even keep them steady for a period of time so that in real terms people are better off?

This is what a good government would have been doing. But for the last decade ACT Labor have just been imposing cost burden upon cost burden for Canberra families. At the same time, they are taking so much more in tax. They are now taking more than double the revenue that they took when they first came in. They have not delivered on local services. On the one hand, people are paying more; on the other hand, they are getting less. Whether it is in relation to our hospitals, our roads network, the delivery of infrastructure or land development, people are getting less of a service from the ACT Labor government.

This bill is important. It will not in and of itself fix these issues, but it will be a very important accountability measure saying that a government should have to put it all on the table. The government should have to put on the table what their policies and their budget mean to Canberra families.

I commend Mr Smyth on this. Mr Smyth, along with his Liberal Party colleagues, has taken this issue seriously. He has not just come in in an election year, like Labor has, and said that we should start caring a bit, or pretending to care, about cost of living pressures. Cost of living pressures are there, and people understand that Labor inherently puts them up—Labor’s inability to control its budget and Labor’s fetish for policies which cost large amounts with little benefit, as we have seen with many schemes right across the country. It is becoming part of the Labor Party’s DNA—at a state level, at a territory level, at a federal level—to put costs up. It always raises taxes. It always mismanages programs.

It is families right across the nation, in this case here in Canberra, who pay for that. We have seen that right across the country. That is a large part of the reason why so many Labor governments are being punished—because they just do not get it. They

listen only to the elites. They do not have an understanding of what goes on in the suburbs, in the outer suburbs in particular. They do not have an understanding of the cost pressures that are placed on families, and they are dismissive of them.

We have heard that from Andrew Barr. We have heard it from Katy Gallagher when she suggested that maybe one way of fixing cost of living pressures is to cancel the Foxtel for a while. Those kinds of statements demonstrate the disdain that Katy Gallagher and Andrew Barr have for families in the suburbs. If anyone was in any doubt, they would only have to look at the pattern of Labor governments right around the country. They put cost pressures up and they do not deliver programs well. That is what people are waking up to right around the country.

In conclusion, I again commend Mr Smyth for this bill. I think it is important. It is important that we hold governments to account for their programs. It is particularly important that we hold governments to account for what kinds of burdens they are placing on family budgets. We look forward to the successful passage of this bill.

**MS HUNTER** (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Leader, ACT Greens) (11.53): Before I turn to the substance of the matter before us I would like to make a comment about the process. I only found out that the Liberal Party wanted to debate this bill today when I saw a copy of the Liberals' media release at about lunchtime yesterday.

There has been a longstanding convention that if anyone wants to debate a bill they make that known in the government business meeting the Wednesday before, so that we can all be prepared and we can get on with debating the bill. It gives us an opportunity to make sure that we are ready and also that opportunity to fully evaluate whether or not it is an appropriate change in the law. We are going to be adjourning debate today to allow that to happen.

We want the opportunity to think about whether or not this is the most appropriate way to help those in need of assistance. As I said, we were not given that opportunity to have a briefing from the Liberals beforehand, which would have been very useful. We could have got on with this today if we had had that. It also would have allowed us that time to look at other models.

Mr Barr pointed out in his speech earlier a model in Western Australia that is in use and that the government were having a look at. We will look at that, as well as have a look around to see what other models might be put in place.

Turning to the substance of the bill, the Greens will support the bill in principle today because we agree that the government can do more to understand and evaluate the impacts government decisions are having or will have on the community. However, we are not convinced that this proposal is necessarily the best way to assist those who are in need of support and assistance. There are many substantive ways to ensure that the impacts of government decision making are properly evaluated and understood.

As everyone knows, for years the Greens have been talking, and have talked at great length, about the importance of a triple bottom line analysis and reporting. We see this as the best way to properly consider all the impacts of proposals and to evaluate

impacts once initiatives have been implemented. This includes things like a poverty impact analysis, which is a much more substantive evaluation of impacts than appears to be proposed in Mr Smyth's bill.

I would like to say that we are very pleased with the progress that the government is making in developing a comprehensive triple bottom line framework, and of course that triple bottom line includes the economic impacts, the social impacts and the environmental impacts.

It appears as though Mr Smyth's bill proposes to present much of the information set out in budget paper 3 and put it into a neat little statement or a table. I do recognise that some additional items have been included in the explanatory statement and that Mr Smyth did make a point in his speech that he expected the statement to evolve over time as capabilities and expectations changed.

I strongly support initiatives to assist those who are struggling in our community and to address the long-term cost pressures that we will inevitably face. The Greens are very concerned that we need to take action now to have a look at how we might be able to tackle those challenges and the increasing prices that we know we will have in the future. Rather than focusing, for instance, on artificially deflating the cost of things like electricity in the short term, we believe that the far better way to deal with the issue is to assist people to make their homes more energy efficient so that they do not need to pay for electricity in the first place; so that their bills are cut back because they do not need to use as much electricity. This is going to be a real issue for the future. We need to look at those sorts of programs as well. I also note the report that came out today about the cost of electricity compared to other jurisdictions.

We have also spoken extensively about providing an improved public transport system, for instance, so that people have a choice and are not forced to pay the high costs of car travel, so that families have a real choice about whether they purchase that second car or not. In some cases short-term costs represent a good investment that will ultimately lead to much greater long-term benefits, and we need to consider how these issues should be balanced in any budget statement.

I would like to point out that there is a group that we really do need to be focusing on at the moment. They are the group that just sit above the concession card holders. They are in need of assistance, they do need particular attention, and we really would like to look at the sorts of programs, concessions and so forth that could assist those individuals and those families. I note that the Chief Minister does have a group looking at those issues at the moment, and I look forward to seeing the outcomes of their work, because we know that averages can be misleading in Canberra. That is where I note that Mr Barr was talking about the Western Australian model, which would take, for instance, a family and the characteristics of a particular group. We would need to look at what would be put in place here in the ACT. That has been part of the issue around the affordable housing debate—this idea that there is an average income and therefore it makes housing in the ACT affordable for everyone. It can be misleading and we need to avoid that.

So we need to look at who is being impacted and we need to ensure that we do not just have a superficial statement in the budget. If this is intended just to be a table up the front that says, "The costs of certain taxes and charges have gone up by CPI," or WPI, so that others can say, "That is not okay," I think that is a little bit superficial in its approach. We need to look at something a little more substantive, something that truly assesses the impacts on a range of households, a range of individuals, and also looks at what assistance already is being provided or where we might be able to enhance that assistance.

One of the things I would put down there is that we know that in the last budget we got a considerable, significant, increase in the energy concessions for many Canberrans. Part of the issue there was that it had not been indexed over the years and had fallen way behind where it needed to be. That gap was filled and that concession scheme is now being indexed. They are the sorts of things we need to be looking at—not just the increase that might happen, because increases will happen. No government can deliver services, deliver programs, deliver supports, without getting in income, and that income will be derived from taxes and charges. And I would defy any party in this place to say that we can deliver all of those in the way and to the quality that most Canberrans expect, without getting income, and that income, as I said, from taxes and charges.

The Greens will support an adjournment after the in-principle debate so that we have time to really look at these issues, at how we could put in place something that is meaningful, something that really does give us an accurate picture of the impacts of budgetary decisions on different types of households and different individuals across our community.

It is no good gathering just a bunch of figures from budget paper 3 plus a couple of others, putting them in a table and thinking that that is a proper analysis. It is not. We need to look at something that really gets to the heart of the issues that I think Mr Smyth has put on the table, and that is: how do budget decisions that might be around increases in certain taxes and charges impact? As I said, we need to look at the other side of the ledger, which is what assistance is being provided to these households as well, so that we can make a thorough and a proper analysis.

As I said, the Greens will be supporting this bill in principle and we look forward to the discussions that will happen in the next few weeks to see how we might amend the bill before us so that we end up with a meaningful measure in the budget papers.

**MR SMYTH** (Brindabella) (12.02), in reply: I thank members for their in-principle support for the bill today. I would just like to go to a few of the issues that were raised. It is interesting what a long time it is from 22 June last year when everybody but the Liberal Party was against this notion of having a cost of living statement. So I welcome the sea change that is occurring among the Greens and the Labor Party on this issue, because it is important that we understand what it is that we do to households.

Mr Barr has said that he would like to examine the detail of the bill and that he needs more time for it. But the detail in the bill is 20 words, and I will read the 20 words: “a statement giving an analysis of the impact of the proposed budget on the cost of living of ACT residents”.

That is the detail—and I have deliberately made it that way because the way we legislate in the modern context is not to put the details into the acts; we leave flexibility where things might be required to be done through the regulations. But I do believe the government have a right to present this in accordance with how they present their papers and under their decisions.

The explanatory memorandum uses the example of the average effect on average households. As I said in the speech, I actually do expect this to evolve over time. The WA model has evolved over time; other models have evolved over time. If the government wants to put more than just an average in, that would be welcome. If the government wants to give a selection of households, that would be great. Ideally perhaps the government will also put in the effect on the business community, because we do know that they segregate the revenue streams into what comes from commercial and what comes from residential, for instance, in matters of taxation.

As I said when I tabled this bill, I do believe that this will be an evolving document. I welcome Mr Barr’s assurance that the statement will appear in this year’s budget. I think I heard him say that. Yes, he nods, so thank you, Treasurer. I think it is important when times are tight—and for a lot of people times are tough—that government have a direct understanding of what the implications of their policy settings are and that they explain in reasonable terms what those impacts will be on the community that they tax and provide concessions or assistance to.

So it really has been left at those brief 20 words to enable the government of the day to make sure that they put in as much information as they want. This is really the minimum that we want. We want an analysis of the impact of the proposed budget on the cost of living of ACT residents. If you want to do more, I would welcome that. You have said on a number of occasions, and you said in your speech last year, that the government already does this analysis. If you do this analysis, it should not be too hard to put it together and put it in the budget papers. It would be worth having it.

We have heard the claim this morning that we have got the cheapest electricity in Australia. It might be cheap—cheaper than other jurisdictions—but what is the energy usage? The unit cost might be cheap, but do we use more? That would be an interesting question, because the overall bill here may be higher than in other jurisdictions because of climatic effects. Canberra is one of those few places where you probably need heating and cooling. I suspect there are not too many heaters built in homes in Far North Queensland, for instance, or in parts of WA. But Canberra is unique. Its position in the Southern Highlands, at the entrance to the Australian Alps, does have an impact on the way we build our homes and the way we heat and cool them. I think it is important that government is given flexibility. What this bill sets is the minimum standard of what we expect.

There are various ways that you present things. The ABS, for instance, uses the per capita model in a large number of things. The Institute of Public Affairs when it does its analysis of taxation tends to break it down to per capita as well. If you have got a better way of doing it, I am happy to see that. If you want to do it across a range of a wealthy home versus an average home versus a home at or below the poverty line, I am happy for that diversification. If you want to add in what concessions the government adds, go for your life. That is up to government, and that is why it has been left this way. It was deliberately left without a prescription because ultimately the government of the day will present its budget papers in the way that it wants.

I thank members for their agreement in principle. I look forward to the bill being passed in May. I thank the Treasurer for his assurance that it will appear in this year's budget, and I look forward to its evolution over time. We are here to serve the people of the ACT. We should not be slaves to the budget; we should be slaves to good intentions for making life better for the people of the ACT, to improving their financial wellbeing but also their social wellbeing. I note that around the world a number of jurisdictions are looking beyond in some ways the simple analysis of the numbers to working out the far more complex impacts of government policies and budgeting on the wellbeing of their citizens. Perhaps this is a step in that direction today.

I thank members for their in-principle support. I look forward to the bill being passed in May and I look forward to reading the statement in June.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

### **Detail stage**

Clause 1.

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

## **University of Canberra and Canberra Institute of Technology**

**MS HUNTER** (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Leader, ACT Greens) (12.08): I seek leave to amend my motion as circulated.

Leave granted.

**MS HUNTER:** I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:



- (a) that on 3 August 2011, Minister Barr released a report by Professor Bradley AC on options for the future of the University of Canberra and the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT);
  - (b) that on 7 December 2011, the federal government announced a grant of \$25.9 million had been awarded to the University of Canberra;
  - (c) that on 16 December 2011, Minister Bourke announced the creation of a collaborative venture between the University of Canberra and the CIT, and that this decision was based on public consultations, stakeholders' views including CIT and unions, and the views of a Government Steering Group; and
  - (d) that a media release from the University of Canberra dated 16 December 2011 states that the University of Canberra Institute of Technology is an entirely new third institution, and would begin operations in 2013, and will have its headquarters in Bruce; and
- (2) calls on the ACT government to:
- (a) make public and provide to the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs all relevant material used in the formulation of a collaborative venture between the University of Canberra and the CIT by 1 May 2012; and
  - (b) provide the membership details of, and the terms of reference for, the Project Implementation Group to the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs by 1 May 2012; and
  - (c) make public the details of the proposed model, including the anticipated governance structures and the student enrolment processes of the collaborative venture between the University of Canberra and the CIT by 1 May 2012.

The motion I present today is about clarity, transparency and open government. It is also about the teachers, staff and students of two of our finest local education providers—the University of Canberra and the Canberra Institute of Technology. It is with some frustration that I rise today to call on the ACT government to provide the people of the ACT with somewhat more information than is currently being provided on a decision taken by cabinet in December last year to set up another educational institution in a collaborative venture with the CIT and the University of Canberra, a plan that will potentially affect hundreds of jobs, not to mention the study plans of possibly thousands of local, national and international students.

The government and Minister Bourke's office have had ample opportunity to respond to the inquiries and concerns I have raised. To the minister's credit, his staff arranged for a briefing to be held earlier in the year, for which I am grateful. However, it was very disappointing to be presented with little more than a previously circulated media release. There was simply very little information made available to me that I had not already seen or read in the local media, and it left me with more questions than answers.

I then saw similar media from the University of Canberra that seemed to suggest that the processes of creating a collaborative venture between the CIT and the University of Canberra were, perhaps from the university's point of view, more advanced than the government's. It is exactly this kind of mixed message that is creating undue stress and anxiety in the local education sector and leads me to move this motion this morning.

The University of Canberra says that it and the ACT government are to establish an entirely new third institution. The ACT government, on the other hand, in their response to a question on notice which I received on Monday of this week, says:

The intention has never been to create a third tertiary education institution.

The ACT government says there is little in the way of a concrete model and that much work is yet to be done between all parties, including the commonwealth. They also stated in writing on 26 March:

The concept of further collaboration between UC and CIT is the product of significant and ongoing work.

The University of Canberra again appear to be more advanced in their thinking, as they are talking openly about a 2013 start date. The UC have also apparently found a home for their "University of Canberra Institute of Technology", and, according to their website, the new UCIT will have its headquarters on the UC campus in Bruce. There are other examples of mixed or confusing messages, and I urge anyone here interested to do quick comparisons of all the available information—basically, that is the existing media releases.

Minister Bourke should not be surprised to see this motion today, as I and my office have repeatedly asked both formal and informal questions and passed on constituent concerns to his office. Despite our sincere desire to work in good faith with the government on this issue, we have not to date had satisfactory answers to the questions we have raised.

The Australian Education Union and the National Tertiary Education Union have both publicly raised concerns and I am given to understand that they have had similar experiences—that is, they have had unsatisfactory briefings that have just been focused on a media release. There have been public statements about a new model for delivering AQF5 and 6, which equates to diplomas, advanced diplomas and associate degrees. This model bears very little relationship to any of the three recommendations from Professor Denise Bradley in her report entitled *Report on options for future collaborations of Canberra Institute of Technology and University of Canberra*.

If, in fact, upon consideration of all the many complex factors and in line with messages received from stakeholders during consultations, the government discovered that Professor Bradley's recommendations were not appropriate, I can understand why a new way was chosen. What I am struggling to understand, however, is how the ACT government can come to a point of view in December 2011 and yet fail to explain to

me or to the Assembly or to the people of Canberra what motivated that change or what this new model is, how it will operate or where it will be based.

There are so many questions that need answering and concerns that need to be put to bed. Let me read just a few of the issues raised by the NTEU, the AEU and CIT staff—some of the very stakeholders consulted by the government's steering group who were investigating the Bradley report recommendations:

Why has the report of the public service working party that responded to Denise Bradley's report on the future of UC and CIT never been released for public scrutiny and debate?

Another quote:

Has the ACT government assessed the ongoing viability of CIT to offer its important trades and vocational programs without its current suite of diplomas and advanced diplomas which make up nearly 50 per cent of what CIT offers (and what will be the effect on its ability to attract students in the future without these)?

Lastly:

The ACT government appears to be making no moves to permit public scrutiny of the UCIT proposal but is hastily initiating an UCIT implementation committee to implement the yet-to-be scrutinised recommendations.

I am also concerned about the impact the lack of information on what could be a change to the way the AQF5 and 6 courses are delivered is having on current and prospective students. Clarifying what is proposed and having the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs conduct an inquiry are essential.

As I stated in my speech to the Assembly on 20 October last year on a motion referring these issues to the standing committee, it was my expectation that we would be looking at late November or early December 2011 for that referral and, therefore, the start of that inquiry. I further said that if this did not occur, we could come back to this place and take action, and that is what I am doing today.

This lack of concrete information has predictably created a lot of speculation, and I believe the government has had ample opportunity to set out some time frames, offer some explanation of the rationale behind this decision and release the details of the new proposed model. But the lack of constructive community engagement has been disappointing.

If the questions raised above, based as they may be on speculation, are affecting prospective local students, I wonder what impact this may be having on prospective students interstate or even overseas. We all know Canberra has a longstanding and proud tradition as the education capital, and we very much want to promote this as a centre for excellence in education. We all recognise that education is a vital component of our economy and, indeed, our identity. This is a reputation we cannot afford to lose; this is a sector that deserves more respect.

I am again disappointed that the ACT government appears to be unaware of the potential negative impacts for the territory if this major structural change is not handled well and does not have the proper scrutiny to go along with it. It is for these reasons and more that I today call on the ACT government to inject some transparency and openness into this whole matter. We are dealing with the careers and workplaces of many. We are dealing with the learning goals and aspirations of many Canberrans and also of those interstate and overseas as well as the reputation of our city as a place where they can come and get a world-class education. Many people come to the ACT to get an associate diploma and advanced diploma, many of the qualifications that are provided by both the University of Canberra with their degree courses and also the CIT.

As I said, we had this debate last year when Mr Doszpot brought it in to say we should have a referral to the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs. As I have already noted earlier in my speech, there was an expectation that this would have all been revealed and information put out there publicly by the end of last year. I gave some time to the government, and as soon as everybody was back from the summer break I requested a briefing. As I said, it was very disappointing that all that could be pointed to was a media release the government had put out at the end of the previous year. I had expected we would have more information to work from.

I am becoming increasingly concerned about the impact, as I said, this is having particularly on the workforces but also on the institutions themselves. We have to remember that this process, in a sense, has been going on for more than 15 months when there was a decision to look at how the University of Canberra and the CIT could investigate ways to collaborate. We then had the Bradley review. We then had this working party going off to look at the various recommendations she put forward to see where it might proceed.

During all this time, yes, there have been some consultations and engagement with those who will be impacted—the students and those who work at these institutions. But it has been a time when it is a little bit hard to get any planning done, when there is no certainty in this space. We need to provide that certainty, and the first step for that is actually getting the information out into the public arena on what it is we are actually talking about here. Nobody seems to know, and I am concerned that not even the ACT government knows. That is why I have put a date on this. I have said we need to put it out there. My understanding is that there are some negotiations with the commonwealth. Well, we need to get a move on.

I also have some queries about what we are talking about with this model in regard to governance. It appears as though money has been granted to the University of Canberra, so does that mean that we are going to have a truly equal sort of partnership, or this is actually a model where the University of Canberra is the lead agency, if you like, and the CIT has a lesser or secondary role? These are really critical questions and issues. The representations from stakeholders—individuals but also the unions and other stakeholders—are becoming more and more frequent and they are becoming more and more concerned.

It is past time where, really, we should have had far more information out in the public arena, and that is why I have put forward this motion today. I understand the government will be making an amendment but that they are supporting the motion. Mr Doszpot will also be making an amendment and supporting the motion. I truly hope that will ensure that the information gets out sooner rather than later. Although there is a date of 1 May, I urge the government to get this information out as soon as possible. I would hope you have an announcement ready for the next couple of weeks so that it can go on to the standing committee for that investigation.

I asked a series of questions recently, and I referred to one earlier. Another one I asked was whether the new model will be referred to the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs for further inquiry. The response from Dr Bourke was that there is already a reference before the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs. I read that to mean that this model is already captured by that previous referral to the standing committee. Just to make sure, I have put that into my motion, and that is why you have a revised motion in front of you. I have added in there:

... make public the details of the proposed model, including the anticipated governance structures and the student enrolment processes of the collaborative venture between the University of Canberra and the CIT by 1 May 2012.

We need the full details of this model. We need to be able to have that public debate. This may mean quite a change in the way courses are delivered. It may mean quite a change to the way students are going to experience that delivery of courses. That is why it is important that we get it out in the public, that it is inquired into by the Assembly and that people out there are able to participate.

*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 12.23 to 2 pm.**

## **Questions without notice**

### **Planning—Throsby**

**MR SESELJA:** My question is to the Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development. Minister, how long has the government been planning housing for the suburb of Throsby, when did this planning begin and how many blocks were planned for the suburb originally?

**MR CORBELL:** I would have to take on notice the exact time frame for the planning of Throsby. As Mr Seselja should be aware, whole-of-Gungahlin planning has been in process for an extended period of time as you build a whole new town centre. In relation to the specific detail Mr Seselja is seeking, I would need to seek some advice, including advice from the Economic Development Directorate, who are responsible for land release.

**MR SPEAKER:** Supplementary, Mr Seselja.

**MR SESELJA:** Minister, when will blocks be available in the suburb of Throsby and how many blocks will be released in total?

**MR BARR:** As this is a land release matter, we are, of course, awaiting clearance under the EPBC Act. So I am not in a position to advise the Assembly at this stage. When I am, I will.

**MR SPEAKER:** A supplementary, Mr Doszpot.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Minister, why has this process taken so long, and to what extent has it been reduced in size?

**MR BARR:** There is of course a requirement to comply with commonwealth legislation. I do note that the EPBC Act was one enacted by the Howard government, so I am sure it has the fulsome support of those opposite.

**Mr Seselja:** They have said so publicly.

**MR BARR:** Good to hear, Mr Speaker. So there are requirements and assessments that have to be undertaken. Some of those are seasonal. That requires that environmental assessments be undertaken at certain times of the year. This can mean that there are delays whilst those assessments are undertaken. Nevertheless it is the government's desire to see housing in Throsby, and we will be working collaboratively with the commonwealth and the stakeholders to ensure that that occurs.

**MR SPEAKER:** A supplementary, Mr Doszpot.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Minister, what has been the cost to the community so far in planning development for the suburb of Throsby?

**MR BARR:** That will be a difficult question to answer as it would of course involve an assessment of the hours and minutes spent by officials over a period of time. Of course the initial planning for the Gungahlin district as a whole goes back to the mid-90s or earlier, as I understand it. So it would be difficult and perhaps not a particularly useful exercise of the time of the bureaucracy to go back to the 90s to attempt to estimate the hours and minutes spent by officials through the process of developing Throsby and other parts of Gungahlin. I certainly do not intend to be wasting the bureaucracy's time on that matter. I think the most productive thing we can do is to continue our efforts on land release across multiple fronts in the city.

### **Construction industry—work safety**

**MS HUNTER:** My question is to the Attorney-General and concerns contracting and safety at work sites. Minister, two separate construction sites operated by Kenoss Contractors were recently closed due to work safety concerns. The ACT government has often contracted Kenoss for major projects in Canberra. The CFMEU reportedly

responded to the matter by saying, “The only thing the government is interested in is price—as long as you’re cheap, you get the job.” Attorney-General, given the Work Safety Commissioner reportedly said it was Kenoss Contractors’ “systems of work that are not working more than specific hazards”, what due diligence did the government undertake before employing Kenoss, particularly regarding its safety systems and culture?

**MR CORBELL:** I am not responsible for procurement decisions in relation to that contract, so I think Ms Hunter has asked the wrong minister. But what I would say is that the government does not simply select tenders on the basis of price.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Hunter, a supplementary question.

**MS HUNTER:** Minister, how much weight does the government give to the safety and employment practices of contractors before contracting them on government projects, and how much is given to price?

**MR BARR:** I have responsibility for procurement through the Shared Services Procurement agency. There are of course a number of criteria that are applied in relation to selecting successful tenderers. It is worth noting that there is a prequalification process as well so as to ensure that those who are on panels and who are bidding for works meet certain standards. Safety is not something that should be compromised on and it is important that there is an efficient regulatory regime in place. I think what we have seen in relation to these incidents is that regime working effectively.

In relation to procurement in the future it is important to note that the track record of organisations is indeed part of both the prequalification process and assessments in relation to future winning bids.

**MS BRESNAN:** A supplementary.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, Ms Bresnan.

**MS BRESNAN:** To the responsible minister, can you table a list of the recent large construction tenders, noting which of the winning companies were also the companies offering the cheapest price?

**MR BARR:** Some of that information would be available publicly on the procurement website. As to elements that are not available publicly, I will seek advice as to whether I am able to table them.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Supplementary.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, Ms Le Couteur.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Again to the relevant minister: on how many sites in Canberra does the government currently contract Kenoss Contractors, and have all these sites been recently inspected?

**MR BARR:** In relation to inspections, the responsibility lies with the Office of Regulatory Services, so Mr Corbell will provide that information. In relation to the number of contracts that are currently out there, I will need to seek some advice from Shared Services Procurement in relation to that matter.

### **Schools—Throsby**

**MR DOSZPOT:** My question is to the minister for education. Minister, will you confirm for the Assembly that a school planned for the suburb of Throsby is now not going ahead and is in fact being moved to the suburb of Nicholls? If this is correct, why has this occurred?

**DR BOURKE:** I thank the member for his question. As questions around development of any further Catholic school site at Nicholls are in the hands of the Treasurer, I refer the question to him. However, I would like to say that I will continue to work closely with the Catholic Education Office to ensure that any future school is up and running as soon as legislation allows. It is important that the education choices made by Canberra parents continue to be supported by our government.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Doszpot, a supplementary question.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Minister, when was the Catholic Education Office first advised that a Catholic school could be built in Throsby—what year and what month?

**MR SPEAKER:** Minister Barr. There is a theme developing today.

**MR BARR:** This is one of those days where other members are having difficulty knowing—

**Mr Seselja:** The education minister doesn't know? He doesn't deal with CEO?

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Seselja.

**MR BARR:** As the Leader of the Opposition should know, because he has been around long enough, there are two issues here. The first is the approval of a new non-government school by the education minister. It so happens that I was the education minister at the time and approved a new Catholic high school in—

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**MR BARR:** There is then a secondary issue. That is around the availability of land. If Mr Hanson was not such a smart Alec, he might have waited to hear the rest of the answer before providing another inane interjection.

*Opposition members interjecting—*



**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, members. Supplementaries are in a moment.

**MR BARR:** When it comes to engagement with the Catholic Education Office on the issue of registration of new non-government schools, it is the education minister. In relation to this particular matter that was, of course, me at the time. When it comes to the question of land and land release for new schools, that is a matter for the Minister for Economic Development.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Order, members!

**MR BARR:** The Catholic Education Office put in an application, I believe in about 2004, let that application lapse, and put in a new application in 2010.

**MR SPEAKER:** A supplementary, Mr Hanson.

**MR HANSON:** A supplementary to whichever minister wants to answer the question: how much money has been spent on the planning for the Throsby school so far?

**MR BARR:** By whom, Mr Speaker?

**MR HANSON:** Given it is a question to the minister, by the ACT government.

**MR BARR:** By the ACT government in relation to the Throsby school. The government is not building a school in Throsby, Mr Speaker.

*Members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, members. Are there any other supplementary questions? Mr Hanson.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, has the ACT government apologised to the Catholic Education Office and/or the broader community because of the poor management of this process?

**MR BARR:** The ACT government has worked very closely with the Catholic Education Office both through the registration process for a new school and in putting forward a number of sites for such a school to be located. I am very pleased that we have been able to find an alternative site for the Catholic Education Office in Nicholls, adjacent to other schools that we are progressing and working very closely with the CEO to ensure that they are able to deliver an important new education asset for Gungahlin. We certainly note the level of community interest in enrolling in the new school and we look forward to its establishment on a site adjacent to the Holy Spirit school and the Gold Creek school.

**Water—Cotter Dam**

**MR SMYTH:** My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, reflective of the continuing budget blow-outs of the enlarged Cotter Dam project, the annual capital recovery surcharge that Canberra households will have to pay has increased from \$100 to \$220 per household per year to enable Actew to recover the cost of the project. It is now clear that the cost will be at least \$400 million, and you claimed yesterday that the net economic benefit of the dam is \$200 million. Treasurer, with the dam now costing at least \$400 million, or 10 per cent more than budget, and counting, will the capital recovery surcharge on Canberra households now be at least 10 per cent higher, and counting? If yes, when will you tell the Assembly how much extra Canberra households will have to pay?

**MR BARR:** We await further advice from Actew and the Bulk Water Alliance in relation to the completion of the dam following the most recent significant flood event. Mr Sullivan indicated yesterday in his press conference that that information would be some weeks away. I am pleased to advise the Assembly that the initial work in terms of assessing damage and removing logs and other debris in the construction zone has been efficient and effective, and they will continue that work. My expectation and the expectation of the Actew board is that they will be in a position to provide further advice in the near future.

Mr Sullivan also indicated yesterday that significant savings have been made in other projects that the Bulk Water Alliance are delivering in relation to the water security measures that the government has supported—for example, on the Murrumbidgee to Googong transfer and other work associated with water security projects. Significant savings, in the tens of millions of dollars, have been achieved in those projects. That certainly goes to offset some of the additional costs associated with the flood event and the significant rain that has occurred during the construction of the Cotter Dam.

In relation to future impacts, we will await advice from Actew. The board and the shareholders have indicated a very strong preference for those costs to be absorbed by Actew.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Smyth, a supplementary question.

**MR SMYTH:** Treasurer, for how long will Canberra households have to pay the annual capital recovery surcharge for the enlarged Cotter Dam?

**MR BARR:** If Mr Smyth had listened to my previous answer he would be aware that we are currently awaiting further information from Actew and the Bulk Water Alliance partners. I should have also mentioned in my previous answer that of course the risks associated with the project are indeed shared—so Actew will not bear the full cost of the additional expense that goes with completing the dam as a result of the recent flood event; the Bulk Water Alliance partners also share in that risk—and that there are a significant number of insurance matters that will need to be resolved. Equally there are some other tax and research concessions that Actew and the Bulk Water Alliance will pursue.

We will know the full impact of the additional costs offset by the savings, the insurance, the split of those additional costs amongst the alliance partners, in due course. As we have indicated, and commensurate with the resolution of the Assembly, we will report those within five business days of them being made available to the shareholders.

**MRS DUNNE:** A supplementary question, Mr Speaker.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, Mrs Dunne.

**MRS DUNNE:** Treasurer, will you, by close of business today, table the net economic benefit analysis for the enlarged Cotter Dam, explain how this analysis was made and provide a detailed discussion on the conclusions of that analysis? If not, why not?

**MR BARR:** I understand that that information is publicly available and has been for some time. I cannot update that analysis until the further information is provided, but I am certainly happy to do so once that information is available. So, no, I will not be tabling it by close of business this afternoon. It will not be possible to project three or four weeks into the future and then do all of that work in 2½ hours. Mrs Dunne should know that. But I am happy at the appropriate time to provide that information. If the position that is now being put by the Canberra Liberals is that they no longer support the Cotter Dam then let them say that.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Seselja, a supplementary question.

**MR SESELJA:** Minister, are you satisfied with the way that this project has been managed, particularly in relation to controlling costs?

**MR BARR:** I am satisfied that the Bulk Water Alliance partners and the independent Actew board have conducted themselves appropriately throughout. I am satisfied that there has been rigorous independent assessment of the projections that went into the budget for the project. I do note that the ICRC had a look at this. I note that a number of reputable engineering firms have also had a look at this.

What I will not accept is that those individuals and the independent directors on the Actew board are responsible for the weather. We might have a bunch of clairvoyants over here; we might have Madam Dunne, Jerry the futurist and Zed, who knows—

**Mrs Dunne:** Point of order, Mr Speaker.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes.

**Mrs Dunne:** Standing orders require that members refer to other members by their name and their title.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Barr, I think you are well aware of that standing order.

**MR BARR:** I apologise, Mr Speaker.

*Mr Smyth interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! Let us just move on.

**MR BARR:** Those opposite might profess to be weather experts—

*Members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, members.

**MR BARR:** and if they are so confident, perhaps each of them can get up in the adjournment debate tonight and provide long-range weather forecasts so that we can put their predictions into future contingencies for capital works projects. If they are able to do that, clearly their talents are wasted in this place and they should either be employed as clairvoyants or perhaps go and work for the Bureau of Meteorology.

### **Roads—cycling accidents**

**MS LE COUTEUR:** My question is to the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services and is in relation to the recent report by the George Institute for Global Health. This report showed cyclists represent almost 15 per cent of all road casualties, that relatively few crashes were in cycle-only lanes and that on shared paths, 16 per cent of accidents involved pedestrians and 23 per cent involved other cyclists. It showed over half of all crashes were single vehicle crashes, and, in those crashes where another vehicle was involved, they were almost equally motor vehicles and other bicycles. Minister, what is the government doing to reduce the rate of cyclist accidents?

**MS GALLAGHER:** I thank Ms Le Couteur for the question and acknowledge her interest in cycling and, indeed, her use of cycling infrastructure around this city. What the government is doing is delivering on the commitments we made at the last election and, indeed, the commitments contained in the parliamentary agreement with the Greens around improving walking and cycling infrastructure around the city. I did not hear the beginning of it, but if it is the research commissioned by the NRMA Road Safety Trust—and there is other research, of course, around cycling on-road facilities—it is interesting in the sense that what I took from it was that we need to look at how we encourage sharing of shared paths and an understanding about roles and responsibilities on them.

I do not think it is feasible to believe that we can make the shared paths cycle only or pedestrian only. It would be incredibly expensive and almost impractical to implement. The issues from the research also were about speed limits, and I know it would be very vexed if we put a 20-kilometre speed limit on some of those paths given the speed at which some cyclists use those facilities.

I think there has to be a range of responses to the issue of cycling safety, but, at the moment, we are focusing on making the infrastructure changes that we are putting in place, including the city cycle loop, safe for cyclists. But we are going to have to continue to educate people about the benefits of shared paths and, indeed, the need to share the paths and minimise accidents to both pedestrians and cyclists.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** A supplementary, Mr Speaker.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, Ms Le Couteur.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Minister, given that the report did not include seriously injured cyclists because of issues of getting their informed consent, what is the government doing to get information about serious cycle accidents in the ACT?

**MS GALLAGHER:** Because of the size of our jurisdiction, I believe that information is probably well understood across the government in terms of serious cycling accidents and the impact that has on the community. I am absolutely resolute about improving cycling safety. I have lost someone on the road from dangerous driving. When I look at how the city has changed, we should acknowledge what has happened certainly in the last 15 years, and the difference that has occurred around the city to encourage cycling and make cycling safer should be acknowledged. But I think there is a lot more we can do.

I have been having discussions with people who are interested in trying to make Canberra the cycling capital of Australia, looking at alternative incentives to promote cycling. I have been looking at bike share programs. I have been looking at the rules around wearing helmets. That is, again, very vexed.

There probably is an understanding around the impact of serious cycling accidents on individuals and the community and the ongoing costs around that, and I think it informs the decisions we take around trying to improve cycling safety and pedestrian safety for everybody.

**MS BRESNAN:** Supplementary.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, Ms Bresnan.

**MS BRESNAN:** What increased maintenance is being undertaken in regard to keeping cycle lanes free of gravel and other potential hazards?

**MR SPEAKER:** Chief Minister, did you catch the question?

**MS GALLAGHER:** Yes, thank you. I think the question was: what maintenance is being done to keep on-road cycling lanes safe?

**Ms Bresnan:** Cycle lanes free of gravel, yes.

**MS GALLAGHER:** That is part of the routine work of Territory and Municipal Services in terms of keeping the roads clean. I do acknowledge that I get the odd complaint from time to time about rubbish—essentially glass really—in the cycle ways. As soon as we hear about those we do respond to them. So it is part of the routine maintenance of the city to keep those areas safe for all cyclists to use. But if there are particular problems, particularly in particular areas, I would welcome feedback from members and would be very happy to follow that up.

**MR COE:** A supplementary.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, Mr Coe.

**MR COE:** Chief Minister, does the government have any plans whatsoever to construct on-road segregated bike paths?

**MS GALLAGHER:** Not at this point in time, although some thought is going into this in relation to Majura parkway.

### **Water—Cotter Dam**

**MRS DUNNE:** My question is to the Chief Minister in her capacity as a shareholder of Actew Corporation, holding shares on behalf of the people of the ACT. Minister, when were you first informed that there was a risk that the cost of construction of the enlarged Cotter Dam would exceed the budgeted \$363 million?

**MS GALLAGHER:** I thank Mrs Dunne for the question. In my role as shareholder of Actew I have had a number of briefings about the water security project over a number of months. I was aware, certainly by the end of last year, that there was pressure on the budget, although we were not given a specific figure. I think both shareholders were informed that the board had commissioned work to look at some of the cost pressures and that that work would be provided to us at the end of February.

At the end of February, obviously, there was a very significant rain event. I think the shareholders met with the managing director of Actew and the chair of the board in the first week of March.

**MRS DUNNE:** A supplementary, Mr Speaker.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, Mrs Dunne.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, what action did you take in response to the advice you received that the budget was under pressure?

**MS GALLAGHER:** We sought meetings with the managing director of Actew. I took briefings from the Treasury around what some of the cost pressures were. I sought assurances. Indeed—I think I speak on behalf of both shareholders here—we sought advice from Actew about what independent analysis had been done of the cost pressures, to analyse the origins of the cost pressures and whether they were

reasonable in the circumstances, considering the extreme amounts of rain and, indeed, the geological fault that had been identified that had not been identified previously. That was no small matter. As I understand it, it was a fault line that went down 80 metres that had to be followed and dealt with, otherwise the dam could not have been safely completed.

They were the issues that were brought to our attention. We were not given a figure. As I said, we had a discussion I think in the first week of March. I asked that we be provided with a full analysis post the expectation around the costs of the second major rainfall event. That work has not been completed at this point in time.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Seselja, a supplementary.

**MR SESELJA:** Minister, in the spirit of your claimed open government policy, why didn't you inform the community and the Assembly when you first became aware of the risk of a budget blow-out?

**MS GALLAGHER:** I do not think it was any secret. Has it just dawned on those opposite? Mr Sullivan was out and had been interviewed, making comment around this, saying that the budget was under pressure and that they were having a look at that. So I do not think anything has been hidden from the community. In terms of responsibility about provision of information to the community—indeed we have provided some of that already—I, in my discussions with Mark Sullivan, wanted a complete picture of the nature of the budget over-runs post the second rain event. That work still has not been completed. When it is, it will be provided for the community.

**MR SPEAKER:** A supplementary, Mr Seselja.

**MR SESELJA:** What proportion of the budget blow-out will be borne by Actew and what proportion will be borne by the alliance partners?

**MS GALLAGHER:** What proportion? It is equally shared over the initial \$10 million, I believe, under the Bulk Water Alliance agreement. But of course as the final figure has not been determined I cannot answer that question in its entirety.

### **Fitters Workshop**

**MR COE:** My question is to the Minister for Community Services. Minister, on 27 October last year, you said in this place in relation to the relocation of the Fitters Workshop:

... to delay the government's decision regarding the relocation of Megalo to the Fitters Workshop in mid 2012.

Minister, during the inquiry into the Fitters Workshop by the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs, it became apparent that the construction work would take 18 months and this would be delayed a further six months due to the need to assess underground tanks on the site. Given that the development application was approved on 28 November 2011, that would put Megalo into the Fitters Workshop no

earlier than November 2013, almost 18 months after your claim of mid-2012. Minister, have you misled the Assembly? If yes, will you now correct the record? If no, on what basis do you claim to have not misled the Assembly?

**MS BURCH:** I do thank Mr Coe for his question. I think he is referring to some comments to the inquiry. I think the staffer from LDA also made it very clear that he is not responsible for the project. If Mr Coe wants to take advice from somebody who is not responsible for the project then that is a matter for his determination. I would also point out to members here that in December we provided a submission to the inquiry and in that submission the matter of the tanks was identified. So it is not news. We stand committed that, should we have had allowance to proceed, we had an accelerated work plan that had the treatment of those tanks within it and we were on plan. But it is the Canberra Liberals that are delaying the move of Megalo.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Coe, a supplementary question.

**MR COE:** Minister, have you informed Megalo that they would not be relocated to Kingston before November 2013? If yes, when did you give them that advice? If no, why do they not deserve that courtesy?

**MS BURCH:** I think Megalo is well and truly informed that they are not moving in a hurry courtesy of the Canberra Liberals and the ACT Greens. The delay in moving Megalo rests over there, and now a member of the committee is trying to put it on us. Let us be very clear: in December, in the submission to the inquiry, we identified the tanks. We said that we would do this work. CSD, the arts portfolio, took ownership of that project in about August last year. We went straight in to an accelerated program. We put the DA and it came in with a number of comments. Our plan would have seen Megalo within that site at the end of this calendar year, but it is the Canberra Liberals and the ACT Greens that have ripped the heart out of Megalo and their program.

**MRS DUNNE:** Supplementary question.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, Mrs Dunne.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, are you maintaining that your department could have built the Megalo facility in less than 18 months, which was the time that was advised to the committee and the time that it was advised to the bus depot markets that it would take to build?

**MS BURCH:** As I have said, CSD, through artsACT, got transfer in the middle of last year. We prepared an accelerated program that would have seen that work completed in a little over 12 months. That is all the advice. Now, courtesy of the Canberra Liberals, and Mrs Dunne and her friend Helen Moore, we have seen this project hijacked—

**Mrs Dunne:** Point of order, Mr Speaker.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order, members! Stop the clocks, thank you.



*Members interjecting—*

**Mrs Dunne:** Standing order—

*Members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Order, members! I cannot hear Mrs Dunne.

**Mrs Dunne:** The standing orders require that the minister answer the question directly and not debate the issue. The question was: was her department able to build in less than 18 months? She should not be debating the issue about what the Canberra Liberals may do or dissing members of the public.

**MR SPEAKER:** Minister, the question was quite specific. I invite you to answer it directly, thank you.

**MS BURCH:** I have. I have said that when the directorate took carriage of this we put in an accelerated plan, that the advice to me was that would have had them in the Fitters Workshop at the end of 2012. Now, it is very clear—

**Mrs Dunne:** You told us mid-2012.

**MS BURCH:** I have just said 2012, Mrs Dunne. It is very clear that the single thing that is holding up the relocation—we have been directed, through Mrs Dunne's motion, to cease all work on the Fitters Workshop, all work towards the relocation of Megalo. You cannot have it both ways, Mrs Dunne. Either we get on with the work and allow this work to proceed or we stop.

**MS HUNTER:** Supplementary.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, Ms Hunter.

**MS HUNTER:** Minister, have these underground tanks been inspected and do you have a clear plan of work about taking these tanks out, and remediation that will need to be undertaken? Do you clearly understand what is involved, and what is the time frame on that?

**MS BURCH:** I will take the opportunity again to say that we have been directed by this Assembly to see some work. But—

**Mrs Dunne:** Point of order, Mr Speaker.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes. One moment, Minister Burch. Stop the clock, thank you. Mrs Dunne.

**Mrs Dunne:** The minister was asked a direct question. She cannot take the opportunity—to quote her—to talk about anything else that she likes. There was a direct question about the remediation of the tanks. The minister should answer it directly.

**MR SPEAKER:** Minister, you particularly made it overt that you were not answering the question. It would be helpful if you could directly answer the question, thank you. Let us just have the answer to the question.

**MS BURCH:** The question is around time lines and the tanks. I have said that the government submission noted. All the members of the committee and those that have an interest in that should have read that in the submission. But the development application identified within its notice of decision that the site must be independently audited in accordance with the environmental protection agency and that the LDA has advised that this process is underway and could be completed within five or six weeks.

The DA approval has been appealed to the ACAT by the National Trust, and I understand that this matter is listed and expected to be resolved shortly.

### **Construction industry—sham contracting**

**MS BRESNAN:** My question is to the Minister for Industrial Relations and concerns sham contracting. Minister, last year the government promised to introduce a tougher compliance certificate covering contractors on government construction sites as a measure to reduce sham contracting. Minister, what steps have you taken to ensure that this new level of compliance also applies to the private sector in the ACT, as is done at the federal level?

**DR BOURKE:** I thank the member for her question and I will take it on notice.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Bresnan, a supplementary question.

**MS BRESNAN:** Minister, if the federal government does not support your recent submission to amend the Fair Work Act, what actions will you take to make it easier to prosecute sham contractors in the ACT?

**DR BOURKE:** I thank the member for her question. The issue of sham contracting is one which is of particular interest to the member, as well as to me.

*Mrs Dunne interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! Let us move on, thank you.

*Mr Coe interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! Mr Coe, thank you.

**DR BOURKE:** The submission to the federal government has been made. We need to await their response and then we can consider our position further at that point.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** A supplementary, Mr Speaker.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Le Couteur has the floor for a question.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Minister, in order to minimise casualisation and non-secure work at ACT government projects, will the government ensure that the contract to construct Majura parkway goes to a company that employs full-time workers and has a high standard of employment practices?

**DR BOURKE:** Mr Speaker, I think that is not for my portfolio; that is for the Treasurer.

**MR SPEAKER:** Treasurer, would you like to add anything?

**MR BARR:** The procurement processes for that project will take into account the pre-qualification requirements and the past performance of those who seek to bid for the work. Of course, the nature of the construction packages that will go out to the marketplace will clearly influence which companies are, in fact, able to bid for the work. It is a significant project and one that you would anticipate being undertaken by a large national company.

**MS HUNTER:** A supplementary, Mr Speaker.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, Ms Hunter.

**MS HUNTER:** Minister, what is the estimated level of sham contracting occurring in the ACT? Which industries are primarily affected, and is it mainly occurring in the private or government sector?

**DR BOURKE:** I thank the member for her question. According to the advice that I have received, it is predominantly in the building and construction industry and is of the order of 10 to 20 per cent.

### **Crime—domestic violence**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, in the 2010-11 annual report of the victims of crime support program, it was stated at page 13:

The capacity of the Victims of Crime Commissioner to adequately perform the role of Domestic Violence Project Coordinator will be a challenge for 2011-12.

In a question on notice, No 1994, you were asked:

Why will it be difficult for the Commissioner to perform adequately the functions of the Domestic Violence Project Co-ordinator in 2011-12?

Attorney, in your answer you stated that the commissioner:

... has not indicated to me that he does not have capacity to perform the role of the Domestic Violence Project Coordinator.

Attorney, to what extent should you consider a statement by the commissioner, made in the annual report, to be an indication of his capacity to adequately perform the role of the domestic violence project coordinator?

**MR CORBELL:** I do not think the commissioner, in the annual report, asked for any additional resources.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson, a supplementary.

**MR HANSON:** Attorney, in light of the revelation in the commissioner's comments in the annual report, will you now discuss with the commissioner the capacity challenges he faces in the delivery of the functions of the domestic violence project coordinator?

**MR CORBELL:** I meet regularly with the commissioner and he is always able to raise any issues of concern that he has about resources with me.

**MRS DUNNE:** A supplementary question, Mr Speaker.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, Mrs Dunne.

**MRS DUNNE:** Attorney-General, did you actually read the report by the victims of crime support program? If so, what other indications did you glean from the report and what did you do in response? If you have not read the report, why not?

**MR CORBELL:** Yes, I did read the report, and the insights I gained were many and varied.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mrs Dunne, a supplementary.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, would you like to elaborate on the insights that you received from reading the victims of crime support program's annual report?

**MR CORBELL:** Not really, Mr Speaker.

### **Economy—health**

**MS PORTER:** Mr Speaker, my question, through you, is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, can you provide an update to the Assembly on the overall health of the ACT economy?

**MR BARR:** I thank Ms Porter for the question. I am very pleased to report to the Assembly and to the broader community that the ACT economy is indeed performing very strongly. As I have indicated previously in this place, it is certainly worth spending some time focusing on the fundamentals of the territory economy.

We have the lowest unemployment rate in the nation. We have the highest labour participation rate in the nation, duelling with Western Australia at around 72 per cent. This is well above the national average of 65 per cent. A point to note here is that the national participation rate, particularly on the eastern seaboard, has in fact been falling recently and the ACT has defied that trend.

We have the highest average weekly earnings—15 per cent higher than the national average. Western Australia is also receiving a significant boost as a result of the mining boom, but the fact that the ACT is still performing so strongly is a very clear recognition of the strength of the local economy and the importance of the partnership between the public and private sectors.

The ACT economy has performed very well in recent years. This has been against the backdrop of a very challenging global economic and financial environment. In the 2010-11 fiscal year we recorded strong economic growth, solid employment growth and robust population growth. Our gross state product grew by 2.8 per cent in real terms, outstripping the national gross domestic product growth of 2.1 per cent. In per capita terms the ACT GSP increased by 0.9 of one per cent, compared to 0.6 of one per cent nationally. The ACT continued to record the highest household disposable income per capita of \$65,971. This is 63.5 per cent higher than the national average of \$40,360.

The ACT has benefited from strong investment growth due to the ACT government's record capital works program, very strong commonwealth investment and, most significantly, robust private sector investment. These were all important contributors to state final demand growth in the year.

The year-on-year growth in state final demand to the December quarter 2011 was 2.8 per cent in original terms. Population growth increased by 1.9 per cent in the 2010-11 fiscal year, reflecting an increase in all components of population growth; namely, natural growth, interstate migration and overseas migration.

Despite the higher interest rates that prevailed in the 2010-11 fiscal year and at the start of 2011-12, and reduced grants to first home buyers, the local housing market continues to perform well compared to other jurisdictions. In recognition of this, Standard & Poor's credit rating agency reaffirmed the ACT's AAA long-term credit rating and our A-1-plus short-term local currency credit ratings on 7 December 2011. Indeed I remind those opposite that this is the highest rating possible assigned by the ratings agency.

In their press release, Standard & Poor's said that the ACT economy is strong with very high per capita incomes. They said the commonwealth government's presence was a strength because it supports a young and well-educated population that contributes to strong workforce participation. Standard & Poor's stated:

... we believe that the ACT's long-term growth prospects are steady and note that average incomes are considerably higher than the national average.

They also noted the ACT's strong financial management.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Porter, a supplementary question.

**MS PORTER:** Treasurer, can you outline any long-term challenges facing the economy and are you aware of alternative economic analysis?

**MR BARR:** Indeed, there are significant global challenges that face the world economy that impact on Australia and therefore impact on the ACT. China has recently announced a lower growth target, and the ongoing repercussions of the global financial crisis, including the European sovereign debt crisis, are having effects on national and subnational economies.

Since the GFC there is no doubt that households are managing their balance sheets more conservatively, and that is reflected in a higher domestic savings ratio. This has had impacts on the ACT retail trade sector, although, importantly, these impacts have been offset by two recent RBA interest rate cuts in the latter part of 2011. Weaker household consumption is impacting on the GST pool, reducing the total funding available in the pool, although I do note that our recent Grants Commission assessment has seen the ACT's relativity in the GST pool increase, something that the shadow treasurer did not believe would happen. He made a whole series of rash statements on that basis.

The higher exchange rate that the country is experiencing at the moment is impacting on a number of sectors important to the ACT economy; namely, education and tourism. There are additional structural changes in the national revenue base which are impacting on the commonwealth government's taxation receipts, and we understand that there will be further consolidation of commonwealth government expenditure.

However, the greatest long-term risk is the election of a federal Liberal government, with 12,000 jobs being cut from the ACT by Tony Abbott and by Joe Hockey, who goes on every national program to repeat his claim. He beats his chest louder and it gets bigger and bigger every time he talks. He talks about 12,000 as a starting point.

**MR SMYTH:** Supplementary, Mr Speaker.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, Mr Smyth.

**MR SMYTH:** Treasurer, if the economy is doing so well, why is the budget doing so poorly? Why has the deficit blown out by 400 per cent?

**MR BARR:** As I indicated in my response to Ms Porter's question, there are a number of factors that are impacting on government revenues. You see that in every state and territory in Australia and you see it impacting at a commonwealth level. Mr Smyth probably lives in a world of his own, but we are part of a national economy and a global economy.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, members!

**MR BARR:** So we are impacted by those trends. As I have indicated, what is happening in the Australian economy is that there has been a shift—

*Mr Smyth interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Smyth.

**MR BARR:** from households into increasing their savings to pay down debt—

*Mr Smyth interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Smyth, thank you.

**MR BARR:** and that is impacting on the GST pool, which is in turn impacting—

*Mr Smyth interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Smyth, I have asked you twice.

**MR BARR:** on revenues available to state and territory governments. That is occurring for every jurisdiction—not just in the ACT; across the board. However, the impacts of that are offset somewhat by the Grants Commission's recent determination in relation to GST relativities which will partially offset some of the losses in the total GST pool.

There are, of course, a number of other factors at play in relation to finances and revenues coming into the territory. But what is interesting is that in the last quarterly report on government finances, government expenditure was spot-on what was projected. What we are seeing, though, is some reduction in some revenue lines.

However, we are confident that in longer term, with the prudent financial management measures that the government have put in place in relation to our own budgeting and in relation to tax policy settings for the future, we will see not only a continuation of strong growth but an improvement in our budget situation. (*Time expired.*)

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Seselja, a supplementary.

**MR SESELJA:** Given that you have pointed to falling revenues, how does revenue in this financial year compare to revenue when Labor first came to office? If you like, you can compare it to pre-GFC levels.

**MR BARR:** Projections for revenues have had to be adjusted significantly as a result of the global financial crisis. That is the case across all state and territory budgets and indeed across the commonwealth budget. What we have seen of course is a significant increase in the total size of the territory budget—as we have seen a significant increase in the total population of the territory and we have seen an increase in the costs of running government services. We know every year that—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Order, members! Let's hear from the minister, thank you.

**MR BARR:** approximately half of the territory budget is expended on salaries, wages, superannuation expenses and the like for the territory's workforce.

**Mr Seselja:** Point of order, Mr Speaker.

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you. One moment, Mr Barr. Stop the clocks, thank you.

**Mr Seselja:** It goes to direct relevance. The question was very specific, about whether revenue had gone up or down from when the government came to office and from pre-GFC levels. I would ask you to ask the minister to be directly relevant to that question.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, minister. Whilst I think there is room for you to set some context, I think we are getting towards the end of your time and it would be good to answer that question, thank you.

**MR BARR:** The standing orders do provide me with two minutes to answer a question and I believe I have that right to utilise those two minutes.

**Mr Seselja:** You have to be directly relevant.

**Mrs Dunne:** Yes; otherwise you will be sat down.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order, members. Let us just proceed. Mr Barr.

**MR BARR:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thank you for the advice, Madam Dunne. What we are looking for as we move into this budget cycle is a continuation of strong economic growth. We are looking for the capacity to deliver more services to the ACT community and to target those services into areas of great need. Revenue is required to deliver those services. The government receives more revenue each year. Revenue increases with the growth of the economy.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR BARR:** It does every year. But we also make projections about the rate of growth in revenue. *(Time expired.)*

**Ms Gallagher:** I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

### **Supplementary answers to questions without notice Kids Under Cover program**

**MS BURCH:** Yesterday I took a number of questions from the crossbench about Kids Under Cover. In response to those questions, I can inform the Assembly that two studios were funded by the ACT government in 2010 for families supported by Barnardos and Inanna Inc. Kids Under Cover have confirmed that the studios remain



in the original locations and are being occupied by the original occupants. The studios are, however, fully transportable and can be moved to another site if required, including a Housing ACT property.

### **University of Canberra and Canberra Institute of Technology**

**DR BOURKE:** On 27 March I was asked by Mrs Dunne a question in relation to UC and CIT. The question was about whether officials have met with Professor Bradley to discuss the variation to the original proposals. The answer to the member's question is as follows: no.

### **Planning and Development (Public Notification) Amendment Bill 2012**

#### **Statement by Speaker**

**MR SPEAKER:** Earlier today Ms Le Couteur presented the Planning and Development (Public Notification) Amendment Bill 2012. Standing order 169 requires that the long title of a bill must agree with the notice of intention to present it and standing order 170 requires all bills not prepared in accordance with the standing orders to be removed from the notice paper.

It has been drawn to my attention that Ms Le Couteur's bill does not comply with the requirements of standing order 169. The difference is minor—the omission of the word “and” from the long title—and could be considered clerical in nature. Rather than order the removal of the bill from the notice paper, if the Assembly is willing to grant leave for the bill to remain on the notice paper, I will allow that to occur.

Leave granted.

### **Official Visitor Bill 2012**

#### **Statement by Speaker**

**MR SPEAKER:** Also this morning Ms Bresnan presented the Official Visitor Bill 2012. The long title of this bill too did not match its notice of presentation. However, in this case the difference is more substantive and I accordingly rule that this bill does not comply with standing order 169. Therefore, unless the Assembly feels otherwise, I will order its withdrawal from the notice paper.

**MR CORBELL** (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development): This matter has not been previously drawn to my attention. I think the government would like to take the matter under advisement and seek some further advice on the issue before reaching a position on it. Can I suggest that the Assembly hold this matter over until a later hour this day to allow those particular circumstances to be looked into?

**MR SPEAKER:** Certainly, Mr Corbell, if the Assembly is agreeable to that. Thank you, members.

## University of Canberra and Canberra Institute of Technology

Debate resumed.

**DR BOURKE** (Ginninderra—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Corrections) (2.57): I would like to thank Ms Hunter for her interest in the future of the University of Canberra and the Canberra Institute of Technology. The ACT government is committed to the reform of tertiary education in the territory and I am glad to see there are others who share our objectives. I seek leave to move the amendments circulated in my name together.

Leave granted.

**DR BOURKE:** I move the amendments circulated in my name:

(1) Insert new subparagraph (1)(e):

“(e) that the \$1.75 billion National Partnership on Skills Reform will be discussed at COAG on 13 April; and”.

(2) Add new subparagraphs (2)(d) and (e):

“(d) not proceed any further with the collaborative venture until after COAG meets in April; and

(e) report back to the Assembly following this meeting.”.

The policy context of tertiary education is complex and changes rapidly. The stakes are high for industry, business, students and the community—and, of course, for UC, CIT and the government. Mr Speaker, there is no doubt that the tertiary education landscape nationally is changing. It is being driven by the changing needs of students and of industry.

The tertiary education sector includes vocational education and training and higher education. Supporting higher level education and skills and workforce development will be crucial as the Australian economy undergoes a major economic transformation. This support is vital as we contend with the mining boom, new technologies, clean energy, infrastructure investments, and the transition to a knowledge and service-based economy, as well as demographic change.

High quality education and training will help workers and businesses take up new opportunities emerging in the economy. The commonwealth and the ACT government recognise that they have a mutual interest in providing high quality and better higher education outcomes for students, business and industry, and that we need to work together to achieve those outcomes.

There are major changes occurring. Commonwealth funding for universities is no longer based on a certain number of student places per discipline. This is opening up

the higher education market and impacting not only on the University of Canberra but on other education providers such as the CIT.

At the same time, new vocational education and training funding arrangements are being negotiated under the revised national agreement on skills and workforce development and a new partnership on schools reform. Funding will increasingly depend on jurisdiction and VET reform in the areas of quality, transparency, efficiency and equity.

Key reforms under this national partnership include a national entitlement to training at a minimum of the first certificate III qualification, wider access to student loans, increased availability of information about courses, support for quality teaching and assessment, support for a strong public training provider network and incentives to achieve improved completion of full qualifications to deliver the qualified workers needed by business.

Another significant driver of reform is the Australian government funding for territory education under such programs as the education investment fund and the structural adjustment fund. These programs are increasingly seeking to promote collaborations between institutions, including higher education and VET providers, to ensure pathways between educational sectors as a means of helping to achieve COAG targets.

In 2008 COAG agreed to ambitious targets for assisting Australians to increase their marketable skills base including doubling the number of diploma and advanced diploma levels attained and halving the proportion of Australians aged 20 to 64 without a qualification to the certificate III level or higher by 2020.

In addition to an agreement on skills funding with the states and territories worth \$7.2 billion, the Australian government has committed a further \$1.75 billion over five years to support deep and lasting reforms to Australia's national training system. This will be discussed at the COAG meeting to be held on 13 April. To achieve these reforms the Australian government is negotiating with the states and territories for a national partnership agreement on skills reform with a view to providing a national training system that is flexible and responsive to the needs of businesses and individuals.

As UC and CIT are the only tertiary education providers created under ACT legislation, the factors I mentioned above must be fully considered by the ACT government as we consider the future of tertiary education in the ACT. In 2009 the ACT government set out the need for bold ideas to make the most of the opportunities and challenges that lay ahead in the area of tertiary education. In the face of the national reforms being driven by the Australian government and the changing needs of employers and students, we needed to examine the whole tertiary education sector in the ACT.

Therefore, in May 2010 the then Minister for Education and Training, Minister Andrew Barr, formed the ACT Tertiary Taskforce to consult with stakeholders to develop a vision for the future of tertiary education in the ACT. The Tertiary

Taskforce report *Learning capital: an integrated tertiary education system for the ACT* included 12 recommendations, one of which recommended that UC and CIT investigate new ways to collaborate.

Following the release of the Tertiary Taskforce report, the ACT government engaged Emeritus Professor Denise Bradley, chair of the 2008 review of Australian higher education, to provide independent advice on the future collaborative relationship between CIT and UC. On 3 August 2011 the then Minister for Education and Training, Andrew Barr, released a report by Professor Bradley on options for the future of the University of Canberra and the Canberra Institute of Technology. Professor Bradley's report advised that the status quo was not an option for CIT and UC as both will need to change and to develop to reflect reforms in tertiary education nationally and in the globally competitive market.

Professor Bradley recommended that the ACT either amalgamate the two institutions into one dual-sector institution or alternatively establish the CIT as a body with greater autonomy to allow it to better compete in the emerging tertiary market. The government considered the options recommended by Professor Bradley and formed a steering group to advise government options arising from the Bradley report and in the process consulted with key stakeholders, including unions.

The steering group sought advice from government agencies and tertiary institutions in other jurisdictions. Public submissions were also invited by the ACT government's Education and Training Directorate website. The government formed the initial view that although CIT and UC amalgamation had been advised by Professor Bradley based on the experience of some other dual-sector institutions, there remained fundamental issues even after many years of operation.

Whilst the government recognised the opportunity of greater amalgamation between UC and CIT, it wanted to explore these issues in greater detail, including differing regulatory regimes, funding sources and reporting requirements as well as problems with cultural difference, pedagogy and communication between VET and higher education.

It is worth noting that the proposed merger between the Central Queensland University and the Central Queensland Institute of TAFE is anticipated to take up to at least two years to implement. The complexity around developing tertiary education policy has increased due to the rapid changes to the tertiary landscape between the time Professor Bradley finished her report and the government's consideration of it.

For example, the commonwealth government has announced that courses offered by universities leading to qualifications below bachelor degree level will be subject to annual allocations agreed between the government and each university. Minister Evans, the commonwealth minister for tertiary education, stressed that this change reflected the commonwealth government's desire for universities and vocational educational training providers to complement each other in the delivery of courses.

He reassured VET providers who have expressed concerns about their ability to maintain market share that it was not the federal government's intention to see universities offering higher education in courses below bachelor degree level to the detriment of the VET sector.

Further, the government has recently established the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, Australia's regulatory and quality agency for higher education. As a regulatory agency that was only established on 1 January 2012, the agency is developing operational parameters around where responsibility lies regarding regulation and issue of qualifications.

Because of these complexities, the government proposed initially to explore the middle ground on announcing the collaborative venture between UC and CIT, referred to as UCIT. This proposed collaborative direction could provide a vehicle to take this forward, including to full amalgamation.

On 7 December 2011 the Australian government announced that under the structural adjustment fund initiative it would invest \$377 million in state-of-the-art teaching and learning facilities at universities across the nation. Accompanied by funding from states, territories and successful universities, this investment would deliver an \$873 million upgrade for higher education institutions in regional and outer metropolitan areas.

As part of this initiative the University of Canberra announced it would potentially receive \$25.9 million in funding, the goal of which would be to make significant structural changes that would ensure its financial sustainability and the high quality of its teaching and learning.

The ACT government is continuing to work with both the CIT and UC to determine the way forward in the light of the commonwealth initiatives in both the VET and higher education sectors. The outcome of these reforms will be a demand-driven, contestable and performance-based funding environment. This new market-driven tertiary education environment will require both institutions to be more agile and responsive in meeting these challenges. The ACT government looks forward to the forthcoming discussion at COAG in April on these issues.

**MR DOSZPOT** (Brindabella) (3.08): I must say I am very disappointed in Dr Bourke's response to Ms Hunter's motion here this afternoon. It hardly touches on the issues that Ms Hunter has brought before us. We are talking about the issues we are looking at, open government consultation, accountability, and it was basically what we expected—Dr Bourke reading background material when there should have been a fair bit of response to what Ms Hunter had already brought before us earlier today.

On the matter of Professor Denise Bradley, we asked Dr Bourke just yesterday in question time, "Have you even met with Professor Bradley?" The best we got out of him was: "I will have to take that on notice." I do not think we have got the answer here this afternoon as to whether he has met with Professor Bradley. Certainly his departmental officials have. We got that much out of him.

But getting to Ms Hunter's motion, I was very pleased to hear Ms Hunter start by talking about a sense of frustration at having to raise this motion because of the length of time it has taken to get to where we are at the moment. Ms Hunter will probably understand my sense of frustration as well when she considers that I brought before this Assembly on 23 August last year a lot of the points in this motion, that a lot of these answers should have been given to the education committee a long time ago and that a lot of these answers should have been sought a lot earlier. Unfortunately the original motion was watered down to such a level that none of that was possible. But I am glad that Ms Hunter has brought this motion before us here today, and we will be supporting her motion.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the Assembly today on this matter that has all the hallmarks of poor planning, poor consultation, poor strategic direction and even worse community and stakeholder engagement. If this minister had not already lost his boots in a quicksand of errors in the Assembly last week, he certainly gave every indication yesterday that he was about to step into the bog once again in dealing with this issue.

In fairness to the minister, the issue of whether the CIT and the University of Canberra should merge precedes his elevation to the job. As members recall, I moved a motion in this chamber in August last year highlighting the fact that the government, under the then minister for education, now the Treasurer, had overseen three reviews in 12 months that had made recommendations for tertiary education, none of which had examined the financial implications of any mergers; that the latest review undertaken by Professor Bradley had been, in consultant speak, a quick and dirty analysis that was intended to, and did, deliver a finding to government that met their needs but failed the scrutiny test.

I was concerned at the time that there had been no financial scrutiny of the merits of any merger and that there had been no critical and objective examination of current CIT articulations, whether they were viable and whether they met a demonstrated industry need, and the consequences of the suggested changes. Regrettably, at the time the Greens sided with the government, after listening to the presumed promises of accountability and communication, and watered down my original motion so that it held the government to account for nothing. And that is exactly what the government has done in respect of reporting and informing this Assembly and the wider Canberra community—nothing.

They have said nothing, not one word to this parliament and, in fact worse, even the education minister appears to have not been briefed appropriately. If we are to believe the minister's answers yesterday he does not know who was on the steering group, he does not know whether he or others have met Professor Bradley, he does not know the status of any financial modelling, he does not know what the polytechnic is and its current status. And he does not realise that the previous minister had already announced that the \$25.9 million that the federal government provided, which he was at pains to point out yesterday was from the federal SAF, structural adjustment fund, had already been earmarked.

To quote an entry on 31 December on Mr Barr's website:

The University of Canberra received a \$26 million Commonwealth grant for structural adjustment. First project: create the University of Canberra Institute of Technology.

It would seem that while Minister Barr has moved from the education portfolio he is still calling the shots but just forgot to tell his replacement.

Our objections to this process have all along been about accountability and transparency. We asked in August last year for the minister to inform the Assembly what was going on. Minister Barr said then:

Education and government experts have looked and continue to look at proposals in detail. They will report back to the government soon and the group's findings will be made public by the government.

I guess if writing a commentary in an end-of-year media release is technically making it public then Mr Barr has made it public. Mr Barr also told the Assembly:

The government has always been happy to release the final modelling done by the working group when it is completed. This will include a detailed financial analysis of all of Professor Bradley's recommendations.

Seven months later and we are still waiting.

As legislators in this place, we should all be worried by this process of events. If we review the recent history of this issue, there are a number of interesting and perhaps disturbing elements. In February 2010, the Hawke review of the ACT public service suggested there should be a formal merger between the University of Canberra and the Canberra Institute of Technology. Minister Barr agreed.

In June last year, University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor Stephen Parker set out a list of 15 principles under which such a merger should proceed, including CIT becoming a division of the university and subject to the university's enlarged academic board. He said that under such an arrangement, the CIT chief executive would report to Professor Parker. Not surprisingly, CIT had somewhat differing views.

In August, we had Professor Bradley bringing down her report that offered three recommendations, one of which was that the two institutions should merge. She said, *inter alia*: "You can't justify two large tertiary institutions in a place like Canberra. It just does not have the economies of scale." In August, the minister for education said a steering group would look at the report and all the options, that they would consult and that all details would be made public. The same month, University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor Stephen Parker was quoted as saying he wanted to pursue plans to create a teaching-only polytechnic as part of his strategy to make University of Canberra into an omniversity. He said:

If CIT is to become a part of us, then the polytechnic is that space where the overlap between the two institutions is filled.

Indeed, the University of Canberra has steamed ahead in deciding the Parker polytechnic will be the new UC-CIT. But have they put the cart before the horse? The University of Canberra has a polytechnic website. That website was saying in February and was still saying late last week:

The recently announced University of Canberra Polytechnic will now develop into a significantly strengthened educational institution called the University of Canberra Institute of Technology.

Collaboration between the ACT Government and the Canberra Institute of Technology has led to an agreement to strengthen the ideas underpinning the polytechnic.

The UC CIT will be located on the University's Bruce Campus. Foundation courses for the UC CIT will be offered through the University of Canberra College in 2012.

That was what the website was saying last week. I think Ms Hunter touched upon this as well.

But try to look at the website today. It appears to have suddenly become password protected and unavailable. Are they not being a little premature, particularly in light of the comments made by the current education minister in the Assembly yesterday? Minister Bourke said the polytechnic was a matter for the University of Canberra, but the University of Canberra says the polytechnic is the new UC-CIT.

Minister Bourke says the new institution is subject to discussion between the University of Canberra, CIT and the federal government. He says financial modelling was the subject of questions last year and we should look at those. But the last minister did not answer any questions on financial modelling. And that was our concern then. Professor Bradley had done no financial modelling and we wanted to know who had. We still do not know and we need to be concerned if the current minister does not know either, or even if he knows whether he has met with Professor Bradley, which seems such a simple question to answer. But that was required to be taken on notice. I am absolutely astounded that we still cannot get an answer as to whether he has met with Professor Bradley.

Minister Bourke seems to think it is a matter for the two institutions and the federal government, not the ACT government. That is interesting. Does anyone else get the impression that not only those on the crossbenches and the opposition benches are not sufficiently informed but, glaringly and even alarmingly, the ACT education minister seems to have even less information at his disposal?

We have had no formal advice, as promised by the former education minister, and we have seen no financial modelling. And yet we have the University of Canberra obviously believing it has the money, the plan and the approval for a new institution



in a city that Professor Bradley suggests in her report is of insufficient size to have two institutions, much less a third institution.

Our requests are simple. What is the current status of the Bradley report and the Hawke report recommendations in respect of changes to the operating structure of both the University of Canberra and the Canberra Institute of Technology? What are the financial implications of any changes? What is the anticipated cost of these changes? When will this new institution start? What impact will it have on current courses and operating arrangements for both the University of Canberra and the CIT? What communications strategy will be developed to inform potential future students as to what is available?

Minister, if you do not know, I call on you, for the sake of education in this city, to make it your business to find out. The Assembly has the appropriate structures, through the standing committee on education, to examine these matters and provide assurances to the wider education community that the new arrangements are in the best interests of the sector and that they are sustainable.

I thank Ms Hunter for bringing this motion before us. I support this motion. I also wish to move the amendment which was circulated in my name. Talking briefly about Dr Bourke's amendments, if I may—

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Ms Le Couteur): One moment. I understand Dr Bourke has already moved his amendments, although it was not noted here. So you cannot move yours until Dr Bourke's have been disposed of.

**MR DOSZPOT**: Can I seek leave to move my amendment now?

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER**: No. That is exactly what I just said.

**MR DOSZPOT**: Thank you.

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER**: Later.

**MR BARR** (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation) (3.20): I thank Ms Hunter for raising the matter today and Dr Bourke and Mr Doszpot for their contributions. It goes without saying that this is a complex and fast-changing environment in tertiary and higher education in Australia at the moment. The core principles for the ACT government's approach to reform in this area is to ensure a quality, agile and responsive training system and higher education system that meets the needs of industry and students with a particular emphasis on ensuring that those from disadvantaged backgrounds are able to access further education and that there is a provision for pathways into and removal of barriers between education sectors and employment.

Central to achieving reforms in both the vocational education and training sector and the higher education sector is the development and implementation of strategies that

increase collaboration between key training education providers. In this period of change, there is an increasing focus on capability and, in particular, on the ability of tertiary education providers to adapt to change.

The ACT government and, indeed, the Canberra community have a substantial public investment in the CIT and the University of Canberra through public funding, through grants, through endowments and via student contributions. The UC and CIT are the only tertiary education providers created under ACT legislation and the facts mentioned by the education minister must be fully considered by the ACT government as we consider the future of tertiary education in the territory.

Undoubtedly, a key issue that needs to be considered in both higher education and TAFE is the substantial structural adjustment funding and reform funding that has been put on the table by the commonwealth government. The University of Canberra and the ACT government saw opportunities for the UC to apply for structural adjustment funding to be used to facilitate the development of UCIT. However, clarification about the use of the structural adjustment fund for this purpose is required from the commonwealth. In the event that this funding is unable to be applied to UCIT, the government may need to rethink its options.

The discussions between the commonwealth and UC around the allocation of SAF are ongoing. It is important that there is clarity from the UC and from the commonwealth about the appropriation of the commonwealth's SAF to UC and its possible application to the recently announced collaboration. The outcomes of discussions between UC and the commonwealth will need to be considered as they provide further guidance for us moving forward. The government is seeking to clarify these matters with a view to developing a collaborative approach to tertiary education in the ACT.

It is worth noting that in a speech on 19 March—so only in the last week or so—the commonwealth government put on the table \$1.75 billion for the states and territories for TAFE reform. This national partnership on skills will be discussed at the COAG meeting on 13 April. I think it is important to look at what the Prime Minister has said and what will be discussed by heads of government on 13 April.

The starting point for this is the key point that nothing is more important to Australia's economic future and our future economic success than skills development. The federal government have been very clear about this. Their policies in relation to higher education have seen a move to a demand-driven system that has resulted in 150,000 extra university places. There is a national goal to achieve 40 per cent of people aged between 25 and 34 holding a bachelor degree or higher by 2025. The commonwealth have indicated that the next wave of reform is in the area of skills.

There are a number of national skills targets that have been in place since 2008. They include doubling the number of qualification completions at diploma and advanced diploma levels, halving the proportion of Australians of working age without certificate III level qualifications by 2020 and increasing the proportion of young Australians aged between 20 and 24 attaining a year 12 or certificate II to 90 per cent by 2015. What this requires is more flexibility and innovation in the delivery of

training. But there is recognition of the central place that TAFE plays in our training system and the need for TAFE to continue at the centre of delivery of VET training. TAFE is present across the country and collectively delivers 80 per cent of VET training. The commonwealth government's proposals encompass TAFE and, indeed, all of vocational education and start with a very simple proposition—that is, skills are no longer an optional extra but a necessity.

The commonwealth have announced an education and training entitlement. There is now a taxpayer-funded training place up to certificate III level for every Australian. It is a national training entitlement for every Australian. They have also announced the establishment of a HECS-type scheme for VET. This changes the equation significantly. VET diploma students will now have the same rights as university students: no up-front fees, access to interest-free loans to pay for their study and only having to pay back the loans when their incomes reach a certain level.

The commonwealth have been very clear that they cannot pour in extra money and provide extra places into a patchy and inflexible system. There has been a significant amount of work at the COAG level and through the various ministerial councils to establish the National Skills Standards Council and the Australian Skills Quality Authority, and there is work to ensure that the qualifications delivered by the VET sector are independently assessed over the next two years.

What the Prime Minister has been very clear in saying is that the commonwealth government will:

... require the States and Territories to set out a plan for navigating their TAFE systems through these reforms so that the important role of public providers is maintained.

That is a very critical point and clearly the subject of the considerations at COAG next month. The Prime Minister went on to say:

... the truth is the States and Territories remain the majority funder for VET training and share a profound interest in delivering quality outcomes. So these are reforms requiring the support and endorsement of the whole Federation.

Accordingly, she will be presenting her proposals to the first ministers at a COAG meeting on 13 April. On behalf of the commonwealth she will offer the states and territories \$7.2 billion over five years to underpin Australia's training system, and she has put another \$1.75 billion on the table to support and drive these reforms.

This was a significant announcement from the Prime Minister made on 19 March, so only very recently. Combined with all of the other work, including unique student identifiers and a seamless transition between vocational education and training and higher education, it is a game changer and must be responded to.

News reports in the *Financial Review* indicate that the ACT is in line to receive something like \$145 million as part of this package. That is a significant amount of funding. When you consider also the money that is on the table for structural adjustment, in my view it is common sense for the ACT government to work through these processes at COAG.

We are unsure how the conservative states will respond. Some have indicated in-principle support for the commonwealth government reforms; others are still reserving their position. Of course, the new Queensland government will have only just taken office and so will clearly need some time to consider their position. So it is uncertain what will emerge out of the COAG process.

I understand from news reports that South Australia has already signed up to this, and the ACT would need to give very serious consideration to it given the amount of money that is on the table and the principles that have been put in place by the commonwealth. It is for those reasons that it is appropriate that we consider what happens at COAG in a few weeks time before making further decisions on structural reform in the ACT. That is the sensible approach to adopt.

**MS HUNTER** (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Leader, ACT Greens) (3.31): I will speak briefly to support Dr Bourke’s amendments. Obviously there were some discussions between Dr Bourke’s office and my office, and it was felt that this added to the motion by acknowledging that there is this COAG meeting Mr Barr has just spoken about on 13 April, when a number of reforms and dollars will be spoken about.

Dr Bourke has also put a second amendment around not proceeding any further with the collaborative venture until after COAG meets in April and then reporting back to the Assembly, which will basically fit in with that 1 May time line in my motion. We have no problem with supporting Dr Bourke’s amendments.

I will say that I found that quite a useful speech given by Mr Barr. There was a lot of information in there, and I find it quite interesting that Mr Barr had more information in his speech about what is going on at the moment than the education minister did. That is a very interesting thing that is going on. But we will be supporting Dr Bourke’s amendments.

**MR DOSZPOT** (Brindabella) (3.33), by leave: We do not have a major issue with Dr Bourke’s amendments. I can understand that the Treasurer might like to discuss funding of education at COAG. But the amendments are basically not a lot more than a red herring. They do not excuse the total lack of accountability that this government has shown in this particular matter. It was not originally and nor is it now just a matter for COAG. My concern was and still is financial accountability. The government had three reviews, none of which addressed the cost of any changes, and seven months later, having made various announcements, now pleads the need to consult at COAG.

The Labor government has a poor track record in managing projects—the Cotter Dam and the GDE come to mind—and this is just another in a very long line. In fact, “poor track record” is too light—“a track record of incompetence” is closer to the mark. The latest debacle has all the hallmarks of another government financial stuff-up. To throw COAG in is nothing more than a red herring. But we can play along with that, if that is what you wish to do. We will support your amendments. After all, COAG will meet before the 1 May deadline, so we hope the government will not escape the need to report back to this Assembly and to the standing committee on education.

Amendments agreed to.

**MR DOSZPOT** (Brindabella) (3.34), by leave: I move:

In subparagraph (2)(a), after “CIT”, insert the following words: “including, but not limited to:

“(i) the financial implications of all options for both institutions; and

(ii) the financial implications of all options for both the ACT Government and potential students of both institutions;”.

These amendments add to the motion that Ms Hunter already has before us.

**MR BARR** (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation) (3.35): I think there are some practical challenges in relation to the way this amendment is worded—“all options for potential students of both institutions” does then mean, Mr Doszpot, the need to model the announcements that have been made by the Prime Minister in relation to VET diploma students having the same rights as university students in relation to a HECS-style scheme.

We need to be clear about what is expected. Treasury will be undertaking obviously some detailed financial modelling in relation to those issues that impact on the ACT government. As to the “potential students of both institutions”, there are questions about the context. For example, the entitlement to certificate III level training is an entitlement financed by the federal government. Obviously some courses provided by CIT would qualify for that level of support. There is then the question of the varying ways that students would then be able to undertake their studies and whether in fact they would access this new commonwealth funding scheme—that is, the extension of HECS into the VET sector. There could be myriad different financial implications for students. I think it is a very tricky one to require Treasury to report on on 1 May given that COAG will be meeting on 13 April.

The question then is, of course, what the commonwealth do if some jurisdictions do not agree at COAG on the 13th. I know they have made some comments to the effect that they will just redistribute the funding to those jurisdictions that do agree, so that will be a fairly strong incentive for jurisdictions to sign up. But we do not know that, so we will not know the implications necessarily on 13 April. I imagine there will not be any jurisdictions that will walk away from the COAG table on that day, saying, “No, we won’t be part of this.” It will take some time before—

**Mr Doszpot:** We’re talking about 1 May, Mr Barr.

**MR BARR:** So you are going to guarantee to me that within two weeks the New South Wales government, the Victorian government, the Queensland government and the Western Australian government will give a clear position on whether they are in or out, even though they have not yet given that position in four or five years of discussion. Victoria and Western Australia have refused to be part of the national accreditation process in relation to VET regulation. That occurred when there were state Labor governments and has continued with state conservative governments.

As much as I think the Prime Minister is putting forward a positive agenda and jurisdictions should sign up, subject to seeing the detail of what is proposed on the 13th, to date at least two have not even signed up to the other sensible reforms. So there is a serious question about what these financial implications will be for the territory government, and they may not be clear by 1 May. Again, there is the question, really, of what information is being sought on that date and what will be possible for Treasury to model.

In relation to financial implications on both institutions, I think, as Dr Bourke indicated in his contribution and I alluded to in mine, the question of the allocation of SAF to the University of Canberra is clearly a significant implication for that institution. But, again, that matter may not be resolved by 1 May.

It will be my agency that will be required to undertake the bulk of this modelling—and I note there is a little confab going on over in the corner here, but I do not think either of them are listening—and what would be useful for the government so as to be able to provide the information—

**Mr Smyth:** You would be used to people not listening to you, Andrew.

**MR BARR:** Boom, boom, Mr Smyth. What would be useful for the government would be some sense of the sorts of information required so we can give a sensible response to that on what will be possible, given the shifting environment. I think there is some movement on this. I am getting a nod from Ms Hunter.

So those are my concerns as Treasurer. Clearly, as my agency will have responsibility for undertaking the bulk of the financial modelling that I suspect will be requested, I need some clarity over exactly what is being sought and then I can provide you with a frank answer as to whether that will be possible to be undertaken, given that the time frame between 13 April and 1 May is not significant. I remind members that there is also the other matter of the territory budget that needs to be prepared in this time. We just need to be cognisant of all those factors.

I understand and appreciate the desire for more information, but I think what I have ascertained from the contributions of other members is that what the Prime Minister announced on 19 March further complicates matters and needs to be taken into account. If we were to just plough ahead and ignore all of that, I think we would find ourselves in a difficult position, and people, particularly in the TAFE sector, would rightly ask, “Well, why are you not responding to this agenda that the commonwealth have announced?” which is, frankly, a significant potential new investment in skills in this country.

Some of the important benchmarks that have been set by the commonwealth government in terms of what they are seeking to achieve through this reform package deserve detailed and significant deliberation by jurisdictions. There is a lot at stake. We need to take our time to ensure we are responding to these changed circumstances. The government is of the view that new information has come to us; we will need to assess that and analyse it and we will then have the opportunity for a fulsome debate in this place.

I think I may nearly be able to stop talking now because it appears they might have reached a conclusion. What we all now recognise is that there is a significant amount riding on the outcome of the COAG meeting on 13 April, and we will be in a better position to assess where to from here once that information is available. Certainly, the Chief Minister and senior officials will be present at that COAG meeting, and we very much look forward to the discussion that will ensue and the possibilities that presents for vocational education and training and higher education in the ACT.

**MR DOSZPOT** (Brindabella) (3.43): I seek leave to withdraw my current amendment.

Leave granted.

Amendment withdrawn.

**MR DOSZPOT**: I seek leave to move a new amendment.

Leave granted.

**MR DOSZPOT**: I move:

In subparagraph (2)(a), after “CIT”, insert the following words: “including, but not limited to, the financial implications of all options for both institutions and the ACT Government”.

The new amendment is as per the previous one except that point (i) now reads “the financial implications of all options for both institutions and the ACT government” and point (ii) is deleted.

**MS HUNTER** (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Leader, ACT Greens) (3.44): We did a bit of quick work on our feet to sort through it and to do a bit of an amendment there. What Mr Doszpot has put forward is this. He has been concerned about the financial implications of all of this since, as he said, way back in August last year. In the original motion, I think, that was one of the reasons why I did some amendments to broaden it out. But yes; the financial implications for both of the institutions and any financial implications for the ACT government of course are important, and we need to be very clear about what those are.

I had also broadened it out to be, yes, financial, but also about the quality of the education that we are providing to students. The quality is obviously going to dictate how many students we have and also very much is tied into building that reputation as a centre for excellence in education. There is also the impact on staff. That is very much where a lot of the angst is coming from at the moment: what does this all mean for those who work for the University of Canberra and the CIT?

We will be supporting Mr Doszpot’s amendment. I thank him for amending his amendment. Just to add a little bit more clarity, let me talk about what Mr Doszpot has here. Part of this motion, part of the information provided, is about the financial

implications of all options. We are talking about all options and we are talking about the option that the government is pursuing at this time. It has been confusing. It has been confusing because we had Denise Bradley talk about three options, and one of those was merger. We had the government, through its public service group, go away and do a lot of work on that. Then, around December, things suddenly changed. It appears that it would have been in relation to the structural adjustment funding. And suddenly we were talking about yet another model. This new model—this collaborative way forward, this collaborative venture, which we do not have detail of—seems to be the latest that we are looking at.

I take on board Mr Barr's comments that it is a fast-changing environment, with the Prime Minister making the announcement on 19 March about further dollars. But what Mr Doszpot is clearly trying to get at here is that he does want to see that the economic case stacks up. He wants to see that that work has been undertaken to ensure that both institutions are clear about what financial implications they may be facing and also that the ACT government has clearly looked at what sort of impact it may be having on the ACT budget.

We will be supporting Mr Doszpot's amendment.

**MR BARR** (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation) (3.48): I would like to clarify this understanding. Mr Doszpot might confirm it, or not, in his contribution; he has not yet spoken on his amendment. I take “all options” to mean (1) no change, which was one of Bradley's options; (2) CIT autonomy; (3) a full merger; (4) UCIT. Is a fifth option UC polytechnic? Again, I just want to be clear exactly what the Assembly is requiring of the government. I do not want officials doing unnecessary work; they do have other things to do as well in this time.

Can we take it that at least those four are what you are looking for, and then the impact on both institutions and the ACT government of each of those? I am getting some nods of agreement from across the chamber. Yes? Okay. If Mr Doszpot can verbally confirm that in his contribution, that would be very helpful for the government.

**MR DOSZPOT** (Brindabella) (3.49), by leave: Mr Barr, we are not trying to play games here; we are simply trying to get the answers—the financial answers that we have been asking for for over seven months. I do not think there is anything ambiguous about what we are asking for. We have been asking for this for seven long months. What we are getting to now is this. We want the four options that you have outlined to be included, as in the financial implications for both institutions and also for the ACT government. If there is a fifth implication that you are referring to, it would be useful to have some idea of what it is you are referring to there, but certainly the four are the ones that we are looking for information on.

Basically it is information we have been asking for for a long time. We would not have had to get to this point had the information been provided to us in the first place.

**Mr Barr:** You have an amendment that says “all options”. That is so open.



**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Ms Le Couteur ): Mr Barr, this is not a conversation.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Mr Barr, we are playing with semantics. I would be very pleased if we can get the answers to what we are talking about, which is covered in enough detail in the motion that has been presented to you.

Amendment agreed to.

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** The question is that the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

**MS HUNTER** (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Leader, ACT Greens) (3.51): I stand to close the debate. Thank you to all the members who participated today. This is an incredibly important issue for so many right across our community. As we know, here in the ACT we pride ourselves on our educational institutions, our tertiary sector, and we want to maintain that reputation. Part of that is going to be surviving in the new world that has been presented to the various educational sectors in the coming years. That is the uncapping of places and some major reforms going on. This is what Bradley was pointing out—that it is going to be a changing environment; there will be a number of challenges; and, across the country, institutions are going to have to look at how they can best thrive in this new environment.

We had the Bradley report, as Mr Barr has said. There was the “don’t do anything” option. There was the full-on merger between UC and the CIT. There was also the option of giving more autonomy to the CIT. We know that a lot of work was done around those. They are the recommendations that the steering group or the working party went off to have a look at. So as far as this motion goes, that information should be readily available. And, as I said, along the way came this structural adjustment funding, the announcement from UC, and suddenly an announcement from government that there could be another option, this fourth option, which is around this collaborative approach.

I picked up from the minister’s speech that he seemed to be making a statement in there around UCIT so that this new vehicle would be set up as a collaborative venture, even though we do not have details around that, and that that could be the vehicle to take it forward, including a full-on merger. Again, more questions are raised around all of this. It is time that we did get more information out there into the public space. There are many people who are calling for that information.

I understand that these other processes have come over the top with COAG, with the federal government announcing a substantial amount of money for the vocational education sector, and that these things do need to be taken into account. I do understand that. But at the same time, we need to include in this process and in this conversation the people who are impacted directly by decisions that will be made in the coming several months—that is, the workforce. They are the leaders of these institutions; they are the students; and they are other stakeholders who play important roles in this area and who also should be part of that conversation.

I am very pleased that we have had support here today. This has dragged on longer than I would have liked it to, but I think we have come to a good point here today where we have finally got agreement from the government that they will be coming back and they will be letting people know, on 1 May, exactly what we are talking about and how they are going to engage and include people in decisions that are made. That is very important. As I said, I do not think we can allow the speculation, the angst and the anxiety to continue. And it has been growing; it has been growing by the week.

I look forward to seeing the outcomes of the COAG discussion on 13 April. The minister has put into his amendments that they will not proceed any further with the collaborative venture until after that meeting. In my understanding, that includes setting up the implementation group. I think the feeling is that it is no use proceeding and setting anything up if the 13 April meeting does not produce funding or any outcomes that are going to be able to help progress any collaborative venture.

Again, I say thank you to members. I look forward to seeing this information. My expectation is that this will be a thorough and an inclusive conversation and engagement process with the community before any final decisions are made.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

## **Canberra centenary**

Debate resumed.

**MR SMYTH** (Brindabella) (3.57): Given the outbreak of a spirit of collaboration to support this motion, I seek leave to withdraw my original amendments and then move the revised set of amendments circulated in my name.

Leave granted.

Amendments withdrawn.

**MR SMYTH**: I seek leave to move the amendments circulated in my name together.

Leave granted.

**MR SMYTH**: I move:

(1) Omit subparagraph (1)(f) and insert after “notes”:

“(aa) the national significance of celebrating the foundation of the centenary of Australia’s capital city;”.

(2) Insert new subparagraphs (1)(g), (h) and (i):

- “(g) the \$6 million commitment from the Federal Government for programs planned for the Centenary celebrations in 2013;
  - (h) the Federal Government’s commitment of \$20 million in capital funding for the Arboretum; and
  - (i) the \$24 million commitment from the ACT Government since 2006-2007 for programs planned for the Centenary celebrations in 2013;”.
- (3) Insert new subparagraphs (2)(c), (d) and (e):
- “(c) the Federal Government to continue to at least match on a dollar-for-dollar basis the funds committed by the ACT Government to programs planned for the Centenary celebrations in 2013;
  - (d) the Federal Government to ensure adequate funding to the National Capital Authority to enable this agency to contribute effectively to the Centenary celebrations in 2013; and
  - (e) all Members of the Federal Parliament to provide support for actions the Federal Government undertakes to achieve (2)(c) and (d);”.
- (4) In paragraph (3), omit the word “all”.
- (5) Add new paragraph (4):
- “(4) calls on the Speaker to write to the leaders of all political parties and to all independents in the Federal Parliament advising them of the terms of this motion.”.

I am pleased that officials from all of our offices were able to get together by email and by a brief meeting after question time. What these amendments will now do is elevate the motion to say that the centenary of Canberra next year is a national event. It is an event of national significance. It concerns the “founding of the centenary of Australia’s capital city” and those words would now come in after the word “notes”.

The first of my amendments is to omit subparagraph 1(f), to take out some gratuitous comments that we always get from the minister about who supports which bit of which budget over time, and then insert as a new way the words “national significance of celebrating the foundation of the centenary of Australia’s capital city”. That will then necessitate the existing subparagraphs (a) through (e) becoming (b) through (f), and it will add three new subparagraphs (g), (h), and (i). New subparagraph 1(g) will note the \$6 million commitment from the federal government for programs planned for the centenary celebrations in 2013, 1(h) the federal government’s commitment of \$20 million in capital funding for the arboretum and 1(i) the \$24 million commitment from the ACT government since 2006-07 for programs planned for the centenary celebrations in 2013.

In the existing paragraph 2 of the motion there are two subparagraphs (a) and (b) that call on the ACT government to do something, to which we seek to add another three.

They are very important subparagraphs, particularly 2(c) which calls on the federal government to at least match on a dollar for dollar basis the funding for programs next year. This is a national event. It is agreed by the federal government as a national event in their memorandum with the ACT government. Indeed in the Prime Minister's speech on Canberra Day she said it is a national event and that we are celebrating "the nation's capital". So I think it is only appropriate; you would almost have to say that the federal government should outspend the ACT government on this as this is about the nation's capital.

Our proposed subparagraph 2(d) calls for adequate funding for the NCA—no-one in this place believes that the NCA are getting adequate funding—particularly for their ability to contribute effectively to the centenary celebrations. And in 2(e) we call on all members of the federal government to provide support for actions the federal government takes to achieve 2(c) and 2(d).

Our amendment would also remove the word "all" in paragraph 3; it was very sly of the government to put in the motion that this Assembly supports "all" budget measures that make this happen. Then we are seeking to add a new paragraph 4 which will ask the Speaker to write to a slightly broadened group of political parties—in fact, all of them—in the federal parliament, and all of the independents in the parliament, advising them of the terms of this motion.

What our amendments would do is take the original motion as brought forward by Ms Porter to a different level. It is about holding the federal government accountable. It is about calling on the federal government to ensure that they are not just a player in the centenary celebrations in some words, in a glib speech by the Prime Minister, but that they put in a very strong commitment in terms of making the programs happen and that they happen effectively.

The only other thing I want to say on the motion is a few words in response to what Mr Rattenbury said about bringing on a curfew for the airport. I think we need to look at what the Canberra International Airport represents to the ACT and the potential that it brings us. If you look at the last decade or so, if the airport had not been there, if the airport had not done the building program it has undertaken, if it had not taken the risk and made the investment, I suspect federal government departments would have left the ACT, simply because the current government and the ACT planning system were not releasing land, in Civic in particular, fast enough to ensure that there was adequate space for the growth of the Australian public service, particularly in the Howard years when it did grow in response to initiatives like the GST, and the war against terror; certainly Customs grew at that time.

Vital to the future of all cities are their airports. They are no longer being called airports. There is a new term, aerotropolises; they are cities in their own right. To be viable, airports need more than just the runways and the landing fees, and I think we need to take account of that. If you look strategically at the east coast, the Canberra Airport is now virtually the only airport on the east coast that does not have a curfew.

**Mr Barr:** Melbourne?

**MR SMYTH:** No, on the east coast, not the southern. It is unfortunate that we are not looking to the future in this regard. I think Mr Rattenbury's comments are unfortunate about the way you protect the amenity of residents. Zed Seselja as leader of the Canberra Liberals has said very clearly, "Let's legislate to make sure that the planes fly the courses that they submit and that they do not end up taking shortcuts and flying over the community." Particularly for the people of Tuggeranong, noise is of big interest.

So we are very much supportive of the airport and welcome the task force. Certainly time, and I think the size of the city, will ensure that we do get international flights. But let us certainly keep the options open into the future and not let the sentiments of the Greens be the death knell of something special on the eastern seaboard in our centenary year.

That said, I think the motion as amended and agreed to by all parties is now a very solid motion. I look forward to the responses that the Speaker will get from the political leaders on the hill and the independents; I am sure we will all read them with great interest. It is great that the Assembly stand up for Canberra; that we get the federal government to share a fair burden for what is a national event, in the Prime Minister's own words. I commend the amendments to the Assembly.

**MR BARR** (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation) (4.05): I thank Mr Smyth, Mr Rattenbury and the staff from their respective offices for working together on what I think is an important motion for the Assembly to support this afternoon. It is amazing what can be achieved when there is a little collaboration.

I do note, though, that the important element of the motion is to recognise that for this to be a truly successful national event it will require the support of all parties at a federal level as well. Whilst I understand and acknowledge the political point that Mr Smyth will want to make about the commonwealth government, it clearly requires the support of other parties to see appropriation bills passed in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. It is a fairly unique set of circumstances that we face in our national governance. So there are opportunities for other political parties to put their position on the record, noting that that will be more than just a symbolic position; it will be something that has the potential to actually deliver tangible outcomes for the city of Canberra.

It is worth acknowledging the commitments that the federal government have already made. They are welcome, and I think the people of Canberra greatly appreciate them, but we will always welcome further announcements. I know from my conversations with my federal counterparts that they are certainly keenly aware of the issues that the territory government are pursuing around the centenary, and they have been supportive to date, particularly in relation to the application of ongoing program budget funding that may be able to be made available for events in the ACT or indeed to support centenary activities.

It is also important to acknowledge—I have not had the opportunity to do this since his resignation from the Senate—former federal sports minister Senator Mark Arbib. He has been very supportive in facilitating discussions with national sporting organisations in relation to the centenary program and I thank Mark for that. And I note with great delight that our own ACT Senator Kate Lundy has assumed the federal sports portfolio. Regardless of where you sit in politics, everyone would acknowledge Senator Lundy's deep commitment to sport and the fact that she is an active participant in and patron of many sports and sporting organisations in the ACT. So I know we have an ally in relation to the national sporting program for 2013, and a particularly strong ally to ensure that the program around women's sport in particular is very strong.

With these amendments I think what we have is a very constructive motion, one that reflects a shared view in the Assembly around the significance of our centenary in 2013. I welcome the support of the shadow minister in relation to the international flights, and the qualified support of Mr Rattenbury. I suspect that the Greens will continue their campaign in relation to airport curfews. Regardless of the merits of that, there is one sort of practical factor and that is that it is not determined in this place; it is a matter of federal jurisdiction. That is rightly so and I cannot see a circumstance where that will change. So I think it is worth observing from—

**Mr Smyth:** It has changed before.

**MR BARR:** I do not think it is going to change again. I think it is worth observing that the Greens should be clear, when they make these statements, that the Assembly has no power in this area; to suggest otherwise is not true. It is important when bringing these issues into this place that that is acknowledged and that we do not see some sort of campaign run that this place can make that decision. That would not be true. I know the passion with which the Greens seek to pursue issues of truth and honesty in politics, and I am sure that that will continue in their acknowledgement that the Assembly has no capacity to place a curfew on the airport at Canberra. I think it is appropriately regulated at the federal level.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (4.10): I really had not intended to speak but I have been given the invitation. I actually support all of Mr Smyth's amendments. I think they pick up points that all of the parties were working around this morning. I think we managed to find a set of words that accommodates the various perspectives and particularly puts the national perspective on it as well. Whilst all members may be looking forward to it, I think we also want to make sure, as I said earlier, that this is not just a celebration for the residents of Canberra.

I reassure Mr Barr that I have never understood that the Assembly has the technical power to change those laws regarding a curfew.

*Mr Barr interjecting—*

**MR RATTENBURY:** I have always understood that. If anybody else has taken it the other way, that only points to their ignorance of the law. But what Mr Barr would

know as a former student politician and therefore with some knowledge of campaigning is that certainly this Assembly can influence the outcome. If we were to come together in another moment of collaboration and agree that all the parties in this place thought that this was a good outcome for the residents of Canberra—and I hear Mr Smyth's comments that he does not—and we were to pass a motion in this place asking the federal government to do it, I am sure that would cut some sway. So I am not prepared to sit back and look entirely powerless in this situation. That was my observation. In fact, I do not think I made an observation about the Assembly's ability to do it. I think Mr Barr has had a lend there. Nonetheless, I will at least clarify my understanding of the situation.

Amendments agreed to.

**MS PORTER** (Ginninderra) (4.12: I thank members for their contributions to the debate and their general support of the motion. I am also pleased that we were all able to work together to reach agreement in relation to the various amendments that we saw before us earlier in the day and to reach the point we arrived at.

I agree with Mr Rattenbury in his remarks this morning that the centenary is not only an opportunity to look back on our history and an opportunity to celebrate Canberra as it is now—a thriving, vital, national capital and home to many thousands of Australians. It is also a time for looking forward to what this city will become, what it will look like, who will live here and how it will meet the challenges of the future as well as capitalise on the many opportunities.

One of our opportunities as well as one of our challenges is how, as other speakers have said this morning, to increase the visitation of people who live outside their capital city. We know that once they have visited and spent time in appreciating the capital they realise it is one of the best-kept secrets of the nation.

The centenary will serve to showcase the whole of Canberra—not just the parliamentary triangle, not just the wonderful national attractions, but its wonderful environment, its many cultures, its wonderful historic places, its sporting prowess, its art and theatre—and the list goes on.

Congratulations to Robyn Archer and all her team. I look forward to the release of the whole program in September and to a wonderfully successful 2013, and I thank members for their support.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

## **Childcare—Holder**

**MRS DUNNE** (Ginninderra) (4.15): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes the Government has:

- (a) identified land on Dixon Drive in Holder for development of a childcare centre catering for up to 125 children;
  - (b) allocated \$7.5 million for development of the centre;
  - (c) budgeted \$463 000 per year for depreciation and recurrent expenditure from 2013-2014;
  - (d) forgone the revenue opportunity for the potential sale of the land;
  - (e) made a development application; and
  - (f) on 23 February 2012, called for public comment on the proposed centre; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) reconsider the decision to develop the facility for retention as an asset of the Government;
  - (b) examine the feasibility of releasing the land for development as a childcare centre either by a private developer, a not-for-profit community-based organisation or through a community-commercial collaboration arrangement; and
  - (c) report to the Assembly by 1 May 2012.

I want to make it perfectly clear—and it is a shame that the minister is not here so that she will not be in any way confused—that the Canberra Liberals are strongly in support of the need for more childcare places in the ACT, and we strongly support the proposal to build a childcare centre on the block on Dixon Drive in Holder, as proposed by the government. My colleague Mr Hanson, the very able member for Weston Creek, in particular will speak further on this, but I want to make it perfectly clear from the outset that this is not a motion to say, “Do not build a childcare centre.” This is a motion that says, “We do not believe that it is in the best interests of ACT taxpayers that the ACT government build that childcare centre.”

In the last 3½ years of this Assembly, it has become increasingly obvious that this ACT Labor government has no real vision or strategy for the delivery of childcare in the ACT. This seems to extend to childcare infrastructure. You would recall, Madam Deputy Speaker, that in 2008 ACT Labor promised to build two new childcare centres, at a cost of \$4 million. Neither has been built. Instead, Labor spent \$4 million to refurbish one end of Flynn primary school to provide a net gain of 10 new childcare places. It is not a new childcare centre; so it does not qualify as a delivery on the 2008 election promise.

In 2010, when this proposal was first put forward, I specifically asked the minister whether this was part of their 2008 commitment, and she told me it was not. This childcare centre is a refurbishment that brings together two existing childcare service providers, creating only 10 additional places for west Belconnen families.



Now Labor wants to spend \$7½ million on one childcare centre in Dixon Drive, Holder, creating up to 125 places. So 3½ years later, Labor, in typical style, will deliver one childcare centre at almost twice the promised budget allocated for two childcare centres. No wonder they could only deliver on half their promises.

On top of that, Labor is budgeting almost half a million dollars a year in depreciation and recurrent expenditure costs. Then, of course, there is the opportunity cost of the lost revenue in terms of the potential sale of the land.

I think we should contrast it with the new childcare centre built in Harrison by Northside Community Service, at a cost of around \$3 million, which created 108 childcare places. And a bit of simple arithmetic will tell you that \$7½ million on 125 places equals \$60,000 per place, and \$3 million on 108 places equals just under \$28,000 per place. This is a substantial difference and one of the issues of greatest concern to me about the government's proposal.

We also need to compare the \$400,000 per new place at Flynn. We have to remember that this was not a building, this was a refurb of an existing building. We also have to remember that when the government refurbished part of the old Spence primary school to create extra places for the Baringa Childcare Centre, they spent about \$30,000 per place for the infant centre when they already had a building. That, again, was a refurbishment. So the government are not actually very good at creating childcare places in a cost-effective manner.

The community sector has once again demonstrated that it can do things better than this government. In this case, it can deliver a childcare centre at less than half the cost per place than the government proposes to deliver. Perhaps the government should just give the capital works money to the community sector and ask it to deliver its 2008 promise of two new childcare centres. It probably could have done it. My motion does not seek to do much more than draw attention to this fact. Clearly this government is unable to deliver on infrastructure projects.

There are real problems with the delivery of this project at Weston Creek. My advice, as recently as last week, is that although there has been a lot of development work done and there is, in fact, a development application being put out, a lot of the development work has to go back to taws because of some problems with the planning. They have created such a problem with the car access to the battleaxe block behind the childcare centre on Dixon Drive, which is notionally going to be provided to Communities@Work for some service provision that they want to do on that site, and with parking on the childcare site that all the planning has gone back to the drawing board and the whole thing has to start from taws.

It is my understanding that there is in excess of six months work backwards and forwards between the minister's directorate, who have been dealing with some planning issues in this area, and the recipient of the battleaxe block. And it was only when senior officials of Communities@Work directly approached the minister and the chief executive that they realised that they do have a problem, that there are significant problems in relation to the battleaxe block, and it all has to go back to taws.

So I am expecting that the minister will stand up and say, “We are too far down the track to pull back from this now.” That is actually not the case. As of last week, all bets were off on the planning and they have to go back to taws to plan both the block where the childcare centre is, directly on Dixon Drive, and the battleaxe block behind it. So while we are in this process we should look very carefully at whether this is the best way of doing it.

Clearly, as I have said, this government is unable to deliver on infrastructure projects. This is an infrastructure project. This is an infrastructure project which has been mishandled by this minister’s directorate. We have seen it likewise with the GDE, the prison, the arboretum, the enlarged Cotter Dam, the hospital car park and a number of other projects.

Perhaps this government should recognise that it is unable to deliver and it should let others who are capable of delivering on behalf of the people of the ACT deliver it for them. I think that these are very important issues. But this is a simple motion. It calls on the government to re-evaluate—it does not tell it what to do—the wisdom of developing the Dixon Drive childcare centre itself.

The fundamental question is: why should the government be developing it at all when there are non-government organisations willing to take on the project? I have spoken to a number of private sector developers, people who are in the childcare system, who would welcome the opportunity to buy the block of land and develop it, and other people who would be willing to develop it in concert with community sector organisations. Former Prime Minister John Howard used to say, “If it is in the Yellow Pages, why should government be doing that job?” Provision of childcare and more particularly the building of buildings wherein childcare is provided are, clearly, things that can be done by the non-government sector.

When you answer this question, it raises a number of other questions for the government. The government could look at how it might alternatively develop this site. Should the project be undertaken by a private developer alone, a community-based organisation or through some collaborative joint venture between the two sectors? In doing so, it should look at the approach it should take in the divestment of the land allocated for the project. Should it be given as a grant or should it be auctioned or disposed of via a direct sale? Should the government assist the developer, particularly if it is a community-based organisation, with a capital grant? The benefit, of course, to the government of handing the development over to the non-government sector is that the capital works budget and the ongoing depreciation and recurrent costs can be saved for more pressing government projects.

Perhaps unlike this government, I have spoken to a number of people in the non-government sector about the kinds of approaches that this motion suggests. There is support for non-government development of facilities like this. And that is it. It is a simple motion that asks the government to do what it perhaps should have done in the first place, hand over to the non-government sector, to an organisation who is capable of doing this on behalf of the community to the benefit of the community and not as a drain on taxpayers. I look forward to hearing about the outcomes of the government’s fresh consideration of this matter and I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MS BURCH** (Brindabella—Minister for Community Services, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Women and Minister for Gaming and Racing) (4.26): I heard at the beginning Mrs Dunne, on behalf of the Canberra Liberals, make comment that this government or I have no vision about childcare. What you have had from this government is release of land, building of services, scholarships for the workforce and, indeed, over the last 12 months, an increase of about 500 places across Canberra. Compare that with Mrs Dunne, who wants to have a centralised waiting list which nobody in this place wants and certainly none of the providers and parents that I have spoken to want. Today she comes forward with a motion to actually stop us providing a facility for a community provider to operate.

The government does not support this motion. Mrs Dunne has made a habit of coming into this place and attacking the government on the issue of childcare. The attacks are based on creative but absolutely inaccurate conclusions that she has drawn. I am sure that she knows they are wrong. Today's motion only serves to highlight how out of touch Mrs Dunne is on the issue and on the needs of Canberra families.

**Mrs Dunne:** On a point of order—

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Stop the clock, thank you. On a point of order, Mrs Dunne.

**Mrs Dunne:** Ms Burch said that I came in here and made erroneous statements which I knew to be wrong, which is an implication that I intentionally misled the Assembly. I would ask you to ask Ms Burch to withdraw the assertion.

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I invite you to withdraw the assertion.

**MS BURCH:** She is providing—

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Unreservedly, Ms Burch.

**MS BURCH:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker; I will withdraw. I am not quite sure what I am withdrawing, but I will withdraw. Today's motion only serves to highlight how out of touch Mrs Dunne is on the issue and on the needs of Canberra families. The motion today is really just another attempt by Mrs Dunne and the Canberra Liberals to hide the fact they have no positive agenda in this area. Yesterday Mrs Dunne wrongly asserted that we had failed to partner with the community sector, and yet today she seeks to attack a proposal that will further strengthen our partnership with the community sector. This hypocrisy and inconsistency from the Canberra Liberals really should not surprise me, but every day there are more surprises of this nature.

Today's motion seeks to attack the government for our multimillion dollar investment into a childcare centre to support the families of Weston Creek. This was part of the childcare package that we funded in 2011-12 and represents the biggest investment in childcare by an ACT government since self-government. The construction of the

Holder centre is an important investment that will not only boost childcare places but also support local community organisations to run high quality childcare that Canberrans can expect.

Contrast this with the policy vacuum from Mrs Dunne and the Canberra Liberals. Indeed, we saw how clueless Mrs Dunne was on childcare when she was interviewed by Ross Solly in February this year. When asked by Solly: “So what should the government do then, Vicki Dunne, to try and get costs down? It’s really out of their hands, isn’t it?” Mrs Dunne responded: “No, look, it isn’t entirely out of their hands. We need to be looking at diversification of the modes of childcare. Family care in the ACT is somewhat in decline.”

We hear that classic cop-out line from the Liberals every time they are asked what their policy is: “We need to diversify.” Just as Brendan Smyth is the great diversifier for the economy, Mrs Dunne wants to be that for childcare. Of course, we have Mrs Dunne’s only other childcare policy—the centralised waiting list that no-one wants. Now, we can forgive Mrs Dunne for not having any sound policies. Indeed, she is not alone in the Canberra Liberals on that one. Let me reiterate that I think even the Canberra Liberals are trying to bury their centralised waiting list policy.

We know that the Canberra Liberals are not opposed to having the government build childcare centres. We know this because on the eve of the 2008 election they stole our policy of building two new childcare centres, one in the north and one in the south, because they had not come up with any policies themselves. The Canberra Liberals, in the 11th hour, are trying to stop the Labor government delivering on that policy. What absolute hypocrisy, but, again, it is no surprise.

I ask Mrs Dunne and the Liberals: where do you stand? Do you support the community sector or not? Do you want to do something about childcare or just take petty swipes from the side? Mrs Dunne’s motion would see more than \$7 million taken from support for childcare in the ACT. What would that do for the cost of childcare, Madam Deputy Speaker? What are her plans for that \$7 million? Perhaps it can go into her centralised waiting list. The fact is that the opposition is just not prepared to consider how we support our community.

The government has a strong and proven commitment to increasing childcare places and equipping parents with a greater choice about where they send their children. We have, over a long period of time, built capacity in both the private and community education and care sectors. This mix of providers allows a diverse range of services and programs to be offered to children here in the ACT. The range of private and not-for-profit providers is a strength of the ACT’s childcare sector that also provides parents and carers with choices and helps the sector in the ACT to be robust in times of external change in the individual sectors. This mix of childcare providers has been delivering to Canberra families the best quality education and care services in the country, according to the 2012 ROGS.

The achievement also reflects the significant investment that the ACT government has made in recent years. Our investment includes capital upgrades to expand existing centres, such as the Baringa Childcare Centre in Spence. Further upgrades are planned

at other childcare centres, such as Black Mountain, Campbell Cottage and Cooina Cottage childcare at Charnwood. This work will assist the centres in their transition to the new national quality framework to provide better quality services and extra childcare places for Canberra families.

There is also the \$4 million spent by the government to refurbish the former Flynn primary school to establish the Flynn early childhood education centre. I am pleased to say that since it has opened its doors in January the 115-place childcare centre has been very successful. I would invite Mrs Dunne or anyone from the Canberra Liberals to actually visit that centre and see the delight on the staff and children's faces as they go about their day in that centre.

Sites have also been released in McKellar and Giralang for childcare use. The sites were sold through an open and competitive process, with the purchasers being a community organisation and a private company. Other sites in Macarthur, Gungahlin and Holt will also shortly be released through a similar process, again allowing private and non-profit providers the opportunity to bid for the land.

The site in Holt is located next to the west Belconnen child and family centre, which provides an opportunity to develop close linkages between the two facilities. This is in addition to land in Fyshwick and Conder which I understand will be developed for childcare centres. The land was sold to private developers by the LDA through a competitive process.

As part of the \$60 million package which I announced in April last year, I identified that the government will be constructing two childcare centres, one as part of the Franklin early childhood school and the other in Holder. The site at the Franklin early childhood school will continue the practice of leasing spaces in some education and care premises which are utilised by both private and community-managed providers, which encourages diversity of services in the region.

The site in Holder was identified following a review into childcare places in Weston Creek. The study took into account the existing projected number of children in the birth to four years group in the area and the demand for long-day care and parents' preferences for home-based or work-based childcare.

In addition to meeting unmet need in Weston Creek, the site is also conveniently located close to Molonglo and will be able to meet the childcare needs of families that start to move into the new suburbs of Coombs and Wright. Clearly, as the population of the Molonglo valley grows, we will see an increasing need for services there, but in the beginning the Holder childcare centre will play an important role.

The childcare centre has been designed to accommodate 125 places. A development application has been lodged and is being assessed by the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate. The government will undertake a procurement process for the provider for the Holder childcare site over the coming months and the procurement will be open to interested community providers. The ACT government has acted strongly to increase the availability and the affordability of childcare places across the ACT, a commitment that is costed, that is comprehensive. The development of the Holder childcare centre continues on that commitment.

There were other comments made by Mrs Dunne. She made reference to pricing. She has priced a centre recently built by, I think, Northside Community Service at Harrison. She compares that in very simple terms. She clearly has a cost. She has been given a cost of the construction at the site of Harrison. She has looked at the budget allocation, she has done some simple numbers by division and she has come up with a price. There is no understanding about what is actually included in that price. Did the original price include design work and environmental preparation work? It is like comparing apples and oranges. Mrs Dunne knows that, but she is quite happy to come in and give blunt calculations and misinformation about—

**Mrs Dunne:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**MS BURCH:** Can you stop the clock, please?

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Stop the clock, please.

**Mrs Dunne:** This is the second time the minister has said that I have come in here and given misinformation. The first time she said I deliberately gave misinformation. You asked her to withdraw before and I would ask you to ask her to withdraw again.

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Mrs Dunne, I do not think that what Ms Burch has just said is a clear indication that you have misled. I think she is debating a point. She is just indicating that she believes the information you have given is misleading. That, I think, is a debating point and I think Ms Burch can continue.

**MS BURCH:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was just making the point that if someone comes in with a very blunt mathematical application of figures then they should be able to provide the depth and the analysis that sits underneath that. In some ways we agree that the children's services environment and the sector here in Canberra benefit from private and non-private services alike, where choice is offered to parents and families and different providers seek to have different models of care. There are excellent community providers and there are excellent private providers. As I have just outlined, we are supportive of both.

Mrs Dunne seeks to upturn a decision that has long been made. The DA application has closed. There was just one comment received. I understand it is for determination by early April. So by mid-April we will understand that. Mrs Dunne has also made comment about the site at Holder and a battleaxe block. A battleaxe block was looking to be purchased or provided to Communities@Work. They saw that as a great opportunity and they showed great interest in that. I had a conversation recently with Communities@Work. I have seen the plans and I understand the conversation. If Communities@Work choose not to be party to a shared car parking space, that is their decision. If at the end of the day they are going to put a stake in the ground and say, "We do not want to enter into those arrangements; we share car parking facilities on the entry point to the battleaxe block," that is for that board to determine.

I have not heard the final determination or the final decision from the chief executive of Communities@Work. If they choose to do that, we will simply put the parking on

our site. There is existing parking on the entrance to the battleaxe block; there is existing parking in that first quarter of the battleaxe block. We were simply seeking to utilise what is already there. If the board of Communities@Work feel that that is not the right decision, that is a decision for them to make, and we will simply put the parking on the Holder site.

As I have said, the government has acted very strongly to support the community organisations, the community providers, plus the private providers in this town to make sure Canberra families have the choice that they so rightly deserve. We will not be supporting this motion. It will simply delay the release of land for children's services. It will simply delay an increase in the provision of services for Canberra families, which goes absolutely against everything that I have been working for over the last number of years on behalf of Canberra families.

**MS HUNTER** (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Leader, ACT Greens) (4.42): The Greens will not be supporting this motion today. It does raise a number of issues about childcare and government assets more generally, and I will go through these. The first point to make, however, is that I was surprised when I read Mrs Dunne's motion. It very much seems to be about holding up the delivery of childcare places. That, of course, did cause me to be quite alarmed. As I understand it, the development application is with ACTPLA. The public consultation period has now closed. We can expect a decision from ACTPLA next Thursday, 5 April. That decision is only a week away.

The motion seems to be suggesting that the government should now scrap that work and think about doing it differently. I understand that Mrs Dunne has a concern about the cost. But I must say that I did think she also had that concern about providing more childcare places and that she recognised there is currently a shortage. It is difficult for parents to find places, particularly for the babies and younger infants. Why she would want to delay the 125 new places and think that would be a good outcome, I could not quite understand.

The Greens will not support the motion, for a number of reasons. Firstly, as I said, the process is now well underway and we believe that we should be trying to ensure that childcare places are delivered in a timely way. Secondly, the Greens believe that childcare centres should be run by not-for-profit community organisations. We think that having the government own the facility and the community organisation running it is a good model that delivers good outcomes for the children who attend such facilities.

On the issue of costs, I do understand that Mrs Dunne believes that private operators can build the centre for less, and this may well be the case. It may not be the case also, depending on the nature, type and quality of the particular centre. Ms Burch has gone through a few of those issues.

Mrs Dunne has used the example of the Harrison Early Childhood Centre. It is run by Northside Community Services. Mr Rattenbury and I visited this centre last year and we congratulated Mr Simon Rosenberg, who is the CEO of Northside Community Services, on the building and also on the quality of childcare that the staff out there were providing.

As Ms Burch has raised, we do not know whether that \$3½ million included the design, what sort of onsite works had to be done beforehand, whether it was part of the design of another facility such as Harrison school and so forth. So there are many factors as to why there might be differences in the cost. We need to get down to the detail of that, of course, to see what they are, and it is like comparing apples and oranges, to a degree.

The other one that has been mentioned is Flynn primary. I am very pleased that I did go out to the former school site, to the new childcare centre, and I was incredibly impressed with it. At the time I know that there were a few raised eyebrows about the over \$4 million that was allocated. What I can say is that it is incredibly impressive what has been done to the building. I can see where some of that money went. Number one, it had to bring a 1970s or late 60s-70s facility up to the standards that are required of a childcare centre in 2012. There had to be many modifications made.

The other important part though was the heritage aspect, working with the architect, Mr Taglietti, to ensure that those important architectural aspects of the building were maintained. They have incorporated them in quite an innovative and excellent way. For instance, a new toilet area has been built. There used to be a well-loved mural that was in one of the side courtyards. That has now been incorporated into an inside space into the toilet area so that the kids can actually sit there and enjoy the mural.

They have been quite innovative in their approach. I would encourage people to approach the minister to see whether they can go out and have a look at that childcare centre. The people who have worked on it, I think, have done an excellent job.

We have had many debates in this place about the provision and cost of childcare. I do not propose to re-litigate those issues today but I would like to make a couple of points. Firstly, the primary objective for childcare should be to deliver high-quality education and development outcomes so that children that attend childcare have the best possible start to their lives.

In Canberra, about 80 per cent of our childcare providers are not-for-profits. The Greens see this as a real strength. I would also make the point that the Greens believe very strongly that those who work in the childcare sector do deserve to be fairly remunerated for their work. Of course, this also goes to that issue of the overall cost of childcare. Some of the most substantial parts of the budget are going to be workers' wages. We need to make sure that we do properly remunerate those workers and recognise the value of the work that they do.

The motion notes that we have forgone revenue in not selling the land. Whilst, of course, that is true, we still have an asset at the end of the day. We have not lost anything. We will still own the land. As far as the depreciation goes, certainly assets and particularly large new assets such as the proposed Holder centre will depreciate and will require maintenance and upkeep over time. This is a reality for all assets. In and of itself, as I said earlier, the fact that the government is making a public investment in childcare is, the Greens believe, entirely appropriate.



Investing in young Canberrans' development is good public investment. Further, ensuring that the childcare operators who are going to be running the centre are not-for-profit organisations, we believe, is a good thing. These organisations deliver better-quality outcomes for the children who attend their centres. Of course, we also have many great providers in the private sector across town as well. I also congratulate them on the delivery that they do every day. But the not-for-profits, as I said, do make up 80 per cent of our market.

We do not believe that the government should be reconsidering the current decision to develop the centre. I do not know whether this should or could be characterised as a principle debate about government-owned assets, but for the record I will say that the Greens do support the public ownership of assets. We believe that it is in the long-term community's interest to do it.

We also believe that there is no issue at the end of the day about government developing these sorts of assets and owning these sorts of assets. We may be talking about a clear and philosophical position that parties are taking up here this afternoon. But there are examples where the government has been able to build, deliver and own, and that has all gone very well.

Another example of that would be the community hubs around the ACT. These are former school sites that have been redeveloped and refurbished. They continue to be owned by government and have been highly successful. They have been very much appreciated by the many, many community organisations who have moved in and been able to access quality and affordable accommodation.

I have visited many of those hubs. I know from those organisations that they are incredibly appreciative of having quality space to either run their offices or to deliver programs and services. These are very diverse types of organisations as well. A while ago I attended the opening of the SIDS office. I have also been to the opening of the Warehouse Circus that opened up in one of these hubs as well. All of them are appreciative. The government have been able to deliver on those former school sites. I really do not see why they cannot build and deliver on a childcare centre in this case.

As I said, the Greens will be opposing the motion today because we cannot support a motion that asks the government to look at changing a decision that provides for a community organisation to run the centre and for the childcare to be delivered in a timely way. This is a really critical issue. Mrs Dunne has raised some issues around car parking and whether this has really taken the whole project back to the drawing board. There seems to be disagreement about whether that is the case.

My information is that the DA is out and we will know a decision by next week about where that is up to. Ms Burch has said that there was one issue that was raised. That does not seem to be indicating that there is a major problem there. We will see after next Tuesday whether it is the case but still we believe that we are a long way down the line on this project and we do need to make sure that we are meeting the needs of so many Canberra families.

Those of us who have had children will recall the difficulty we had in accessing childcare over the years, particularly when you first have children. I remember with my first child that it was very difficult. He ended up in two childcare centres, which was incredibly stressful. I would not like other families to have to go through that. You really want to be able to confirm your childcare, be able to get to know the organisation that is delivering it, build that rapport and relationship, because you are entrusting to them the care of your baby, your infant or your toddler. Therefore, it is important that we meet the demand out there in the community for quality childcare, whether that be short day care or long day care.

In this case, my understanding is that these 125 childcare places will be provided for a mixture of those. Many people would be having their children in the long day care. It is important to know that you have got the certainty, that it is going to be there from the day that you need it and that, as I said, you have time to be able to build that relationship with those who will be looking after your children for a number of days during the working week.

They are the reasons why we will not be supporting Mrs Dunne's motion. We do want government projects to be at a minimum cost possible, and certainly we do expect economy and efficiency when government is building infrastructure. In the context of building childcare centres, I do note that there is an enormous range of factors, as I said, that go into building a contemporary childcare centre.

The Greens very much support the construction of high-quality childcare facilities. We think that the public investment in childcare is appropriate. I would make the point that the community and all governments across Australia support that public investment.

I think I have clearly outlined where we stand on this issue. I am still a little unclear about why Mrs Dunne has brought this on for debate today. I note that she has raised concerns around the delivery of other infrastructure projects or other projects throughout the ACT. But there have been others that have been delivered and there has been a quality product that has been delivered at the end, and I have touched on some of those. They include the community hubs and also that refurbishment of the Flynn site. It is an excellent childcare centre and they have done a great job.

I do think we need to get on with this. There are families out there today who are concerned about whether or not they are going to have childcare when they need it. We know that the demand is there. We know that we need to up the supply of places. Therefore, the Greens are loath to stop this project from delivering childcare in a timely manner.

**MR HANSON** (Molonglo) (4.56): I rise today in support of Mrs Dunne's motion calling on the government to reconsider the need to develop a childcare centre in Holder as a government asset. I make it very clear that this is not, as Ms Burch has tried to spin it, a motion that is against providing childcare services. I thought her speech was pretty appalling, to be honest, in terms of its vindictive attack on Mrs Dunne. It is a motion calling on the government to investigate whether this service should be provided by a non-profit organisation or by a commercial entity.

As the father of two boys living in Weston Creek, I understand the need for childcare services in that area. My son Robbie was in childcare in Weston Creek for about three or four years. I can sympathise with those families struggling to get their children into a centre and struggling to meet the high cost of placing them there. There is no doubt that more childcare options are needed in the Weston Creek area. I have spoken frequently in this Assembly about the growing pressure on Weston Creek services. The Canberra Liberals successfully called for a master plan for Weston Creek, a sign that we are listening to constituents in that area and to their concerns.

The new developments in the Molonglo valley will increase the demand for existing community services. The need for childcare options in the area will only get worse as more families move into the development. However, this community need should be viewed as an opportunity, not as a black hole to throw ACT taxpayers' money into.

The ACT Labor childcare centre model as funded in the 2011-12 budget is a potentially inefficient use of taxpayers' money. Based on their record, it is unlikely to be completed for a long time into the future.

*Ms Burch interjecting—*

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Ms Burch!

*Ms Burch interjecting—*

**MR HANSON:** Again, we see more snide comments coming across the floor from the minister. Even though she has been warned by you, Madam Deputy Speaker, she continues to interject.

If we look at ACT Labor's other infrastructure projects, we can predict how this centre is likely to go. If it is anything like the Canberra Hospital car park, we can expect the cost of the centre to blow out to over \$10 million and be delivered some time in 2015. If it is anything like the secure mental health facility, we can expect the cost of the centre to blow out to over \$20 million and never be delivered. You could use any number of examples to extrapolate what the cost of this centre would be—the Cotter Dam, the GDE or the ACT prison, perhaps. It is clear that the ACT Labor government cannot be trusted to deliver infrastructure projects either on time or on budget. It is unlikely that the Holder childcare centre will be any different.

The government has allocated \$7.5 million to the development of this centre, which will have up to 125 places. Recently the Harrison childcare centre was completed by a not-for-profit with 108 places. This centre cost \$3.5 million to build. There is clearly a large disparity between the value for money the government's centre will provide and the value for money the Harrison centre provides. The \$7.5 million is also on top of the fact that the land on Dixon Drive, Holder is a valuable asset in itself. If the government had sold the land, ACT taxpayers would have gained much needed revenue from this.

We already know that childcare costs in Canberra are the highest in the country. The Productivity Commission *Report on government services 2012* confirmed what we already knew—that ACT families pay \$75 more per week than the average cost of childcare in Australia. This is a significant amount of money and a significant imposition on families trying to build a future in Canberra.

The Minister for Community Services has no understanding of this struggle. It was only in December last year that she was forced to admit that the cost of childcare would increase by five times her original estimate under Labor childcare reforms.

*Ms Burch interjecting—*

**MR HANSON:** If you believe that I am misleading the Assembly, move a substantive motion, Ms Burch, and stop continually interjecting. Ms Burch originally said that the increase in childcare costs could be likened to a cup of coffee. She was then forced to admit that Canberra families with two children in day care would be stung with at least an extra \$30 hit to their wallet. However, Ms Burch is contradicted by the Productivity Commission, which estimates that the cost of childcare would increase by 15 per cent, which translates, in the ACT, to over \$60 a week. That is very expensive coffee.

**Ms Burch:** Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I ask that Mr Hanson table any information where I have said that Canberra families will be up for an extra \$60 a week.

**MR HANSON:** Madam Deputy Speaker, on the point of order, I cannot see what point of order the minister is raising here. Perhaps you would invite her to explain what point of order she is making—what number standing order it is and what her point is. It is simply interjecting into a debate with a fictitious point of order to try and make a debate of it. It is inappropriate and I ask you to ask her to explain what point of order she is actually making.

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Ms Burch, there is no point of order.

**MR HANSON:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker; clearly there is no point of order. Why wouldn't the minister be touchy about this? This is a minister who said that it is going to cost about a cup of coffee for a Canberra family. It turns out that it is going to be a 15 per cent increase, which is about \$60 a week, for Canberra families with a couple of kids. No wonder the minister interjects. No wonder she raises these fictitious points of order. And no wonder she leaves her chair, leaving the government benches entirely unattended. I would imagine that they could only be ashamed by the contradictory positions that they have been taking.

I commend my colleague Mrs Dunne on the open approach of this motion. Mrs Dunne is not purporting to suggest that the government should have no role in the development. There is clearly a need in the community, and assistance may be needed to allow for a not-for-profit or commercial entity to begin work on the project. It

should, however, be clear that this government has just thrown taxpayers' money at this project without considering whether a more efficient and effective way of establishing childcare centres could be found.

The Canberra Liberals understand that small businesses are the backbone of the Canberra economy, and we are committed to supporting their potential to succeed. There is clearly a market for childcare services in Weston Creek and we should be supporting a community group or business to get into this market, not pushing them out by building an expensive government centre. I am sure that there are a number of businesses that would appreciate the development opportunity to establish a centre in Holder. In fact, I was approached by one such business when I was in Woden late last year. They raised exactly this point.

Mrs Dunne's motion today holds the government to account by forcing them to be open and transparent about this process. The motion calls on the government to report to the Assembly by 1 May 2012 on whether it is feasible for there to be other means of fulfilling the childcare needs in the community. Mrs Dunne's motion calls for the Labor government to undertake a process that should have been considered before funding was allocated. I commend Mrs Dunne for holding the government to account on childcare in the ACT.

**MRS DUNNE** (Ginninderra) (5.05), in reply: This has turned out somewhat predictably. You could expect that the minister would come in here late, all guns blazing, not having listened to what had been said, and present her prepared text without reference to what people may have said in the debate. It would be useful if her staff could get a bit more organised and perhaps anticipate what people might say in the debate so that she can make a meaningful contribution.

This minister just does not get it. This is all about the government and how they cannot get things done. Let us look at the promise. At the last election Stanhope Labor, now Gallagher Labor, promised to build two childcare centres, one north and one south, for \$4 million. We are most of the way through the term; we are about to approach the last budget before the next election. What they have so far allocated is money for one childcare centre, at \$7.5 million. This is pretty simple arithmetic. They promised two for four and we are getting one for 7½—if they ever manage to build it. They cannot get it done.

Minister Burch glossed over the issues about parking, the battleaxe block and the driveway to the battleaxe block. She said, "If Communities@Work does not want the battleaxe block, so be it or we will shift the parking onto the site." Madam Deputy Speaker, have a look at the development application—the development application which is supposedly going to be signed off next week—and see where on the site, if they have to come back and do a variation, they will fit the necessary parking spaces on the Dixon Drive block. It is not possible, if you look at the development application and the plans for the layout of the block, to fit parking spaces on it.

That is why they have tried to do it on the battleaxe block, which has created problems for the potential lessee of the battleaxe block behind it. And that is why, according to Communities@Work last week, the executive director of the Community

Services Directorate eventually said: “Yes, you do have a problem. Yes, this is an issue. We will go back to taws and look at this.” I do not know whether the minister is completely on board, but this was the intelligence that was relayed to me late last week. And if the minister chooses to have any further intelligence on that, we would welcome it.

This is the point that I made to Ms Hunter. I understand the position that Ms Hunter is in. Ms Hunter sees, as we all do, that there are critical shortages of childcare places, particularly for the under-twos. They are across Canberra. There are shortages in Weston Creek, as Mr Hanson has paid testament to. It is not acceptable, as Ms Hunter has described, for people to have children in more than one childcare centre where they have to juggle between centres on different days. It is bad for the families and it is particularly bad for the children involved, because it makes it harder for them to settle, to feel comfortable and to get the quality care that everyone says is so important.

But having regard to the fact that the planning for this has already been held up by the department and they have now said that they need to go back to taws and address the issue of parking and the battleaxe block, this is the opportunity for us to get it right for the whole community so that the community of the ACT is not paying \$7½ million for a gold-plated childcare centre.

When I have talked to people in the sector, both in the community sector and in the private sector, I have not yet found anyone who can say to me, hand on heart, that \$7½ million for a 125-place childcare centre is good value for money. No-one who works in the sector, who knows what is going on in the sector, believes that this is good value for money for the ACT taxpayer. There is not anyone who thinks that we should not perhaps build on that site a childcare centre. Everyone encourages and welcomes the site, but they have grave reservations about \$7½ million plus another \$463,000 a year in recurrent costs—for goodness knows what. Some of that is depreciation but I have not yet had a reasonable explanation of what the remainder of that is. This is an extraordinary amount of money for this minister to mismanage.

What we are actually seeing is that the government have really flustered around. In April last year they put out with great fanfare their plan to build this childcare centre. We are nine months—more—into the financial year when they were supposed to spend most of this money, and they are not in a position to turn a sod. As of Thursday or Friday last week, they had agreed that they really need to go back to taws on the planning on the site—not so much the planning for the childcare centre but the planning for how you interact between the two blocks of land.

These are significant planning issues which have been attempted to be brushed under the carpet by the minister’s directorate and have only come to light when Communities@Work have gone to the highest echelons in the department. There is now an admission that there is a problem. Communities@Work have been begging CSD to solve this problem for months. They have been very patient and tolerant with this minister, but they have run out of patience.

Quite frankly, Madam Deputy Speaker, organisations like Communities@Work should not be treated in the way they have been treated by this minister over this issue.

They should not have to put so much effort into getting the government to get it right. They are a volunteer organisation; they have a volunteer board; and the board and the paid staff have been unnecessarily distracted from the work that they should be doing, trying to fix up the government's mess over here.

I agree with Ms Hunter that the Flynn childcare centre is an impressive piece of work. I have not actually had an opportunity to visit it since it has opened, but I made a couple of site visits over the last year. Ms Hunter said that it is incredibly impressive, but there are some issues there. The budget did not extend to proper insulation of the ceiling, and I have real problems in relation to how energy efficient the building is and how difficult it will be for community organisations to run it. When I asked about insulation, they said, "This is a 1972 building and we just do not have the capacity to do that." They had \$4 million to refurbish half a building which was an existing building, which is a substantial building, and they cannot get it right. Yes, it does look good. It is impressive. There were heritage issues there. But it is \$4 million for about 10 new places. I do not think that that is good value for money for the people of west Belconnen.

The other issue that is a constant that needs to be touched on with a couple of remarks is the quality of maintenance at CSD-owned childcare centres. There is constant complaint to me by centre managers that they cannot get CSD in to do things. They have to rely on parents or get things done themselves—things that are often emergencies. When the plumbing breaks, they have to get someone in themselves because it takes weeks to get CSD.

I have spoken at length here about the quality of maintenance at Totom in Kaleen. They have been begging CSD to come and fix up the leaks in their roof for some time. I have not had an opportunity to visit them since the last rain, but I suspect it was a disaster for them.

There are ongoing problems with maintenance across this town in CSD-owned facilities which are managed by mainly community organisations. They cannot get it done. Why do you expect that Minister Burch is going to be able to get this \$7½ million childcare centre done without blowing the budget and doing it on time? This is why we should support this motion here today.

Question put:

That **Mrs Dunne's** motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 4

Mr Doszpot                      Mr Smyth  
Mrs Dunne  
Mr Seselja

Noes 9

Mr Barr                      Ms Hunter  
Dr Bourke                      Ms Le Couteur  
Ms Bresnan                      Ms Porter  
Ms Burch                      Mr Rattenbury  
Ms Gallagher

Question so resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

## **Supplementary Capital Works Program 2001-02 Paper and statement by minister**

**MS BURCH** (Brindabella—Minister for Community Services, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Women and Minister for Gaming and Racing): I present the following paper:

2001-02 Supplementary Capital Works Program.

I seek leave to make a very short statement.

Leave granted.

**MS BURCH:** I table this in response to Mrs Dunne's making claims that the government cannot deliver on a capital works project. I have seen a government cabinet submission from Gary Humphries, then Treasurer, for the 2001-02 capital works program. It tells us that, despite only having a meagre program of just over \$100 million, the government could not deliver on its program. It said that there were underspends due to "delays with tender planning, design and consultation that would lead to a significant backlog in major projects". Madam Deputy Speaker, the adviser to Mr Humphries at the time is in this chamber as we speak.

**MRS DUNNE** (Ginninderra), by leave: This is an abuse of the standing orders because Minister Burch cannot get her act together. She was not down here ready to debate this issue. She was not briefed on what the issues might have been. There was a flurry of staff in here afterwards with alternative words for her to come up with, but she did not have the opportunity to speak. She abused the standing orders significantly during Mr Hanson's contribution to the debate.

This is another example to show that this minister cannot get it done, and she is sensitive to the fact that we are now most of the way through the financial year and she has not turned a sod on this childcare centre. The government are now worried that they will not be able to get it done, and the only thing Minister Burch can do is revert to ancient history. We are now 11 years down the track, and the only thing she can do is revert to ancient history. That is the only thing she has got. The record we should be talking about is this government's record on the delivery of capital works and this—

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mrs Dunne. We have already had that debate.

**MRS DUNNE:** No. I have leave to make a statement in response to the minister's statement. We have on the record the fact that this government committed to delivery in the term of this Assembly of two childcare centres—one north, one south—for the cost of \$4 million, and so far they have appropriated the money for one childcare centre at the princely sum of \$7.5 million, plus \$463,000 a year ongoing for recurrent costs. That is the record we have to keep in mind.



## Suicide—reduction

**MS BRESNAN** (Brindabella) (5.22): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that suicide is the leading cause of death for men under the age of 44 and women under the age of 34 in Australia;
- (b) the number of suicides is likely to be under reported;
- (c) suicide is a mostly preventable cause of death;
- (d) it is important to break down stigma associated with suicide in the community, without sensationalising or normalising it; and
- (e) recommendations from the Senate Community Affairs References Committee report *The Hidden Toll: Suicide in Australia* of June 2010 included that:
  - (i) the commonwealth government as part of a national strategy with state, territory and local governments for suicide prevention set an aspirational target for the reduction of suicide by the year 2020; and
  - (ii) national figures on suicide should be released to the Australian public, at a minimum, biannually, in an effort to raise community awareness about suicide, and should be provided together with information about available services and support; and

(2) calls on the Minister for Health to:

- (a) set a target for the reduction of suicide in the ACT by the year 2020; and
- (b) make a statement to the Assembly biannually until the end of 2020 on the ACT figures on suicide, progress against the target, and information about available services and support.

Today I wish to draw the Assembly's attention to an issue where there have been calls for far greater attention and community discussion—that being the number of people in the ACT who lose their lives to suicide. In 2009 the Senate community affairs committee conducted an inquiry into suicide in Australia and released a report, *The hidden toll: suicide in Australia*. The title of that report captures the essence of how we as a society ineffectively respond to issues around suicide as we hide from it, we avoid it and we are scared to talk about it. Such an approach does little to help those people who desperately need the support of the community as they confront the issue.

Not addressing the issue publicly or allowing the community to talk about it openly does nothing to address the stigma that is associated with suicide. This also makes it

harder and much less likely that people will ask for help. We are also, I believe, failing to recognise and respond to what is the leading cause of death amongst young people. The motion I am moving today seeks to have the ACT Legislative Assembly recognise the depth of this problem and assist in addressing the stigma and silence around suicide.

The first paragraph in my motion asks the Assembly to recognise that suicide is the leading cause of death in Australia for men under the age of 44 and women under the age of 34, a fact often reported by organisations such as Lifeline. The Salvation Army submission to the Senate committee inquiry outlined the results of a Roy Morgan survey commissioned to examine the level of community awareness about suicide and to gauge knowledge levels in the community regarding how to help a person who may be contemplating suicide.

While 80 per cent of the survey respondents were not aware of the level of suicide in Australia, over 64 per cent stated they had known someone who had died by suicide. Around 24 per cent did not know any service or organisations in the community that provide support for people who are suicidal. The Salvation Army went on to comment:

The results of the survey confirm our belief that there is still a sense of ignorance about the full extent of suicide in Australia. We know that more people die by suicide in a single year than through road trauma and yet the awareness levels of the issues surrounding these two social issues in Australia is vastly different. We are constantly reminded through public awareness campaigns about the extent of the road toll and how we can remain safe on our roads and yet the issue of suicide remains shrouded in mystery and seems to be seen as an individual issue and not fully recognised as the public health issue that it is.

According to the 2010 causes of death report released last week by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, while suicide only accounts for 1.6 per cent of all deaths in Australia it is the highest recorded cause of death for all people aged between 15 and 45 and is the cause of 24 per cent of deaths of males aged between 15 and 24. Looking at the statistics for the ACT specifically, the ABS states 35 people died as a result of intention to self-harm, and all were under the age of 55. Three were boys aged 15 to 24; five men and five women aged 25 to 34; 13 men aged 35 to 44; and eight men and one woman aged 45 to 54.

The second paragraph of my motion asks the Assembly to recognise that the number of suicides and attempted suicides that occur are underreported, and the figures are likely to be higher. Some cases involve coronial processes and are not included in time for government reporting. There are also cases where people do not want a death to be recorded or reported as a suicide, to save the family or the deceased from “social embarrassment”.

According to the Senate report, the underreporting of suicide deaths is seen as masking the extent of the problem and harming efforts to assess the effectiveness of suicide prevention programs and activities. Professor Ian Hickie, in his submission to the committee inquiry, described the lack of accurate suicide figures as a national catastrophe.

A joint submission to the Senate inquiry from Lifeline Australia, Suicide Prevention Australia, the Inspire Foundation, OzHelp Foundation, Salvation Army, Mental Health Council of Australia, and Brain and Mind Research Institute of the University of Sydney entitled "Suicide is preventable" discusses the issue of underreporting. The submission argues that the first requirement for effective suicide prevention action is a sound baseline for measuring overall progress and the effectiveness of preventative measures. It notes that studies put the number of suicides in Australia for 2007 at around 2,500, which is around 30 to 40 per cent above ABS data figures, and that the real number of suicides in the country may be approaching 3,000 deaths per annum, or over eight deaths every day.

The submission states that the reasons for the significant underreporting of suicide are complex, but include stigma, religious beliefs and practices, the burden of proof for coroners, a lack of expert investigations and different reporting protocols across states and territories. A recent factor appears to be a decline in the coronial reporting of deaths by suicide over the past decade. Family and relatives also often fear that reporting a death as suicide will jeopardise life insurance or other forms of financial compensation.

The submission notes that the underreporting of suicides presents two major problems for policymakers. First, it means we have no way of monitoring with any confidence that policy and program initiatives are having the intended effect. Second, it is highly unlikely that underreporting is really an issue across all population subgroups. This means we may be directing the already meagre resources for suicide prevention away from high risk groups in the community.

In response to the Senate committee report, I understand the commonwealth has undertaken to improve recording and data collection and will pursue the matter with state and territory attorneys-general. I hope the ACT Attorney-General might be able to advise what the ACT government is doing to assist in meeting the objectives at some time.

Paragraph 1(c) of my motion asks the Assembly to note that suicide is a mostly preventable cause of death. The issue of being able to openly discuss suicide provides an environment where people feel they are able to come forward and ask for help. In many cases people are able to receive the right help early on and be assisted in their recovery.

I have already referred to the joint submission to the Senate inquiry from Lifeline Australia, Suicide Prevention Australia, Inspire Foundation, OzHelp Foundation, Salvation Army, Mental Health Council of Australia, and the Brain and Mind Institute entitled "Suicide is preventable". The parties to this submission hold a strong belief that suicide is preventable. It states that this is supported by a strong evidence base that access to crisis support, intervention and education through social marketing and direct programs contribute significantly to preventing suicide. This research demonstrates that one-quarter of the population are poorly informed and that there is room for improvement with the use of community-wide education around suicide, and suicide awareness campaigns.

The submission quotes Newspan research conducted by Lifeline in 2009, which showed that a low proportion of respondents—23 per cent—believed those who were suicidal would tell someone about it. Some 70 per cent of respondents generally doubted that a person who had considered suicide would tell someone else about it. This finding was consistent across most demographic groups.

The submission notes that this shows the investment that needs to be made in suicide awareness education and campaigns. A significant segment of the community is unable to talk about suicide. It could also be argued that many respondents are not empowered to read the signs of someone who is suicidal and trying to communicate their sense of hopelessness.

In discussing this motion today and addressing the issues of stigma, it is important to acknowledge that we do not want to sensationalise or normalise intentions of self-harm. It is also acknowledged that, in reporting on suicide, there are sensitivities and the need to avoid details such as method and location. However, we must not be so scared about discussing the issue as to avoid public discussion on the matter altogether.

Mindframe have developed guidelines on how the matter should be discussed in the media. For example, there are guidelines for elected representatives such as us, which I will refer to in my speech. The guidelines advise that, in order to avoid presenting suicide as a desired outcome or glamorising a suicide attempt, members of parliament should use the terms “non-fatal” or “made an attempt on his or her life” rather than the term “unsuccessful suicide”. And instead of “committed” or “commit” suicide we should say “died by suicide.”

Mindframe is best known for its journalist guidelines, which advise the media to avoid discussing the method and location of suicide so that vulnerable people will not copy the act. Mindframe does, however, maintain that it is important to talk about suicide. It is an important issue of community concern, and in general having a conversation with someone does not increase suicidal behaviour.

Subparagraph (1)(e) and paragraph (2) of my motion ask the Assembly to note two important recommendations from the Senate committee report and call on the ACT Minister for Health to implement these key recommendations. These recommendations are: the commonwealth government as part of a national strategy with state, territory and local governments for suicide prevention set an aspirational target for the reduction of suicide by the year 2020; and that national figures on suicide be released to the Australian public biannually, at a minimum, in an effort to raise community awareness about suicide and should be provided together with information about available services and support.

One of the main proponents for the idea of suicide reporting has been 2010 Australian of the Year, Professor Patrick McGorry. He has argued for the number of deaths from suicide to be widely reported, just like the road toll, to raise awareness of the extent of the issue. He says:

People aren't aware of these facts and figures because of this shroud of silence over this issue.

The Mental Health Council of Australia in their submission to the Senate inquiry recommended that investment be made to enable the independent, transparent capture of data to inform decision makers and the general community about progress in addressing suicide. Key data elements would combine as part of a suicide accountability framework that involves regular public reporting and that enables increased public understanding and diminishes stigma.

By implementing the two recommendations I am referring to today, I would hope to see several impacts: firstly, an increased understanding in the community about the extent to which suicide is occurring; secondly, a decrease in the level of stigma associated with suicide so that people are more likely to pick up and act on warning signs and so those who are bereaved do not have to hide; and, thirdly, pressure on government, current and future, to provide adequate funding to suicide prevention services.

I do not think Ms Gallagher is going to move amendments, so I seek leave to move the amendment to my motion circulated in my name.

Leave granted.

**MS BRESNAN:** I move:

Omit subparagraphs (2)(a) and (b), substitute:

- “(a) consult the Ministerial Advisory Council on Mental Health and other relevant stakeholders about what ACT suicide reduction target is appropriate for 2020 and outline that target to the ACT Legislative Assembly by the end of 2012; and
- (b) make a statement to the Assembly biannually until the end of 2020 on the ACT figures on suicide progress against the target, and information about available services and support.”.

There has been some discussion between the three offices, and I thank the minister and also Mr Hanson for cooperating on this motion. I think it is something we all agree should be addressed, which is good to see. Basically the amendment amends paragraph (2)(a) to consult with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Mental Health and other relevant stakeholders on the target to be set and to report that target to the Assembly by the end of this year.

Again, this was something we discussed with the minister's office, and I think it is good to add this in so that we consult with the community and the sorts of groups like Lifeline, for example, which have an in-depth understanding of this issue and would be able to provide good information on the target we should be setting. That is the main amendment to the motion. Again, I thank all offices for the cooperation on this, and I hope these amendments will be agreed to.

I think Mr Hanson has an amendment. I do not know if it has been circulated, but—

**Mr Hanson:** I have a revised version coming.

**MS BRESNAN:** I will address that when that revised version comes around.

**MS GALLAGHER** (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Health and Minister for Territory and Municipal Services) (5.35): I thank Ms Bresnan for raising the important issue of suicide, the stigma attached to the open discussion of suicide and the importance of prevention across the community. The government will be supporting the motion, the amendment and, I can flag, the amendment that will be moved by Mr Hanson.

In 1992 there were 31 deaths by suicide recorded in the ACT. In 2009 there were 32 deaths recorded, although the population had grown by 50,000 people during that time. Suicide rates in the ACT over the last 10 years have regularly been lower than the national average, although, tragically, in the ACT in 1997, 1999, 2001 and, recently, 2010 more than 40 people died from suicide in each of those years.

Local and national statistics indicate a long-term trend of gradual improvement in the suicide rate. While there has been a long-term trend of a reduction in the suicide rate, there is always more that can be done at all levels of government and the community to address the underlying causes of suicide.

Some of the common risk factors associated with completed suicide are serious mental illness, relationship breakdown or difficulties, alcohol, job loss or job stress, financial or legal problems, chronic or terminal physical illness, experience of bullying or harassment and social isolation. As you can see from this, the factors influencing the risk of suicide are broad, and many of the levers that affect the suicide rate lie beyond the direct influence of health ministers and, indeed, public mental health services.

Suicide is a tragedy not only for the individual; it leaves profound emotional, social and economic effects on families and communities. It is estimated that between seven and 10 other people are directly affected by a completed suicide. This is an enormous ripple effect within the community, with approximately 450 Canberrans bereaved by suicide in 2010. We know that many of the people who complete suicide have been in contact with primary mental health, such as their general practitioner or the public mental health provider.

The government now spends over \$90 million per year on mental health services. Last year I had the privilege, along with Ms Bresnan and Mr Hanson, of being at the opening of the adult mental health unit at the Canberra Hospital. The government has also provided the mental health assessment unit in the emergency department to intervene in those most urgent emergencies. These recent investments do provide additional resources for people at risk of suicide because of mental illness, for their carers and for their families. In addition, we are already well down the track of planning a new adolescent and young person mental health unit.

The government also provides support to a range of community-based mental health services, both through the government and the community sectors. In particular, we have provided funding, along with the commonwealth in some instances, for subacute step-up, step-down services, both residential and outreach support for adult and adolescent mental health consumers who require periods of more intensive support. Tenders for the two new step-up, step-down residential services for older people and young people aged 18 to 25 actually close tomorrow.

I support Ms Bresnan's call that this Assembly notes that it is important to break down stigma associated with suicide in the community without sensationalising or normalising it. This debate in the Assembly itself will help achieve that objective. Over the last two years we have intentionally increased the exposure of the ACT community to information about suicide and suicide prevention through the "let's talk" media campaign. The suicide prevention implementation working group is currently preparing the campaign for 2012. The theme of the campaign through the print, radio and TV media is that it is all right to talk about suicide and help is available.

In addition, the government acknowledges that people bereaved by suicide often have particular support needs. Over the last two years we have funded the Australian Centre for Grief and Loss to provide counsellors across Canberra with free specialist bereavement training. This training has been broadly taken up by more than 60 counsellors, including mental health clinicians, other health counsellors, counsellors from the education sector and counsellors from diverse areas of the community sector.

Mental health programs and other broader initiatives and programs of government help address some of the underlying factors influencing the suicide rate. These include family services, social inclusion programs, school counsellors, education, job training to increase financial independence, alcohol and drug programs, workplace programs to address bullying, relationship counselling and financial counselling.

Ms Bresnan's amendment to her motion asks for the Assembly to call on the Minister for Health to consult with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Mental Health and other relevant stakeholders about what ACT suicide reduction target is appropriate for 2020 and to outline that target to the Assembly by the end of 2012. My preference would have been that we consulted on whether we should have a jurisdictional target, but I understand that I do not have the numbers on that. I would like to see this work progress, which is why I will support the amendment. The amendment seeks advice on what the target should be rather than whether there should be a target.

I would just say that in a place like the ACT I would expect that within a six or 12-month period—and I have no problem about reporting the numbers of suicides; indeed they are already publicly reported—those numbers will, depending on circumstances, move around a little. I imagine the target we would set for a place like the ACT ultimately would be quite low. However, I acknowledge the interest in the Assembly in seeing what a target should be.

I note that the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs report *The hidden toll: suicide in Australia* recommends that, as part of a national strategy with state and territory and local governments for suicide prevention, the commonwealth set an aspirational target for the reduction of suicide, and this is not necessarily in line with setting a specific jurisdictional target for a place as small as the ACT.

However, I will take the advice of the Ministerial Advisory Council on Mental Health. I chair those meetings, I think, every two months. It might be three months. It is between two and three months. I think there is one due within the next six weeks or so. I am very happy to discuss the target, whether it should be aspirational, what target should be put in, what they feel about the target, how we report against that target and some of the issues about timing there. I am very happy to consult with them and come back to the Assembly on that by the end of 2012. Indeed, I will be able to update and include information about available services and support in that.

I have outlined my view on it. I think we should have consulted about whether or not a target for the ACT was the right thing, but we will move forward on that. The government will be happy to support Mr Hanson's revised amendment, which he will move shortly. I think it is worth acknowledging the important role that local community groups and mental health workers play in suicide prevention in the ACT. It is a very difficult job, often a very traumatic job. Certainly all the people that I know that work in this area are first-rate people doing a first-rate job.

**MR HANSON** (Molonglo) (5.44): I rise today in support of Ms Bresnan's motion and echo the sentiments and the comments of the Chief Minister. It is somewhat unusual that a motion in this place receives such unanimous support. It is very encouraging, I think, and shows that this is a very important issue that each of us strives to address.

The only thing I would say is that I have invited a couple of guests in to observe the chamber today. I have promised that it is very combative, that we are always at each other's throats. So they are probably sitting there a little surprised and not dismayed, I am sure. I would like to beg the Assembly's indulgence to note the presence of Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Herbert and Warrant Officer Class 1 Tom Byrne, both of whom served with me in Iraq. It is good that they can come in here and see us working together on an issue and they will just have to forgo the combative stuff that normally happens. They will need to come to question time for that.

Getting back to this motion, it is indeed a serious motion. One of the most concerning things I discovered today when I undertook research on the internet is that, when I typed in the word "suicide" on Google, that search engine automatically brought up the most common search terms and disturbingly the most common search term in relation to suicide was methods—not prevention, not reduction, but methods.

This is just another example of why it is important that we discuss this motion today in the Assembly. We need to raise awareness about suicide and its devastating effects. We need to raise awareness of where people can seek help and we need to reduce the



stigma attached to suicide. We lose approximately six Australians every day to suicide. The cost on the individual and their family, their friends, the wider community is too great to comprehend.

Whilst this is a difficult topic to address, the community is changing in the way we discuss the topic. In August last year, the Press Council moved to new guidelines on the way to report suicides. They acknowledged that, due to social media and a greater understanding in the community, it was appropriate at times to now report that a death was the result of suicide, and this move reflects the community's changing attitude to suicide and acknowledges that the stigma attached is slowly changing.

It is important that we continue to work to reduce the stigma attached to suicide. Making suicide a taboo topic damages social relationships, removes avenues of assistance to people who are too embarrassed to seek help and inflicts ongoing suffering on those people who have lived with the experience of suicide. By speaking openly, we can open channels of dialogue, encourage people to seek help, and acknowledge that we are feeling this way.

Suicide is a complex issue and its causes are unique to every individual. Suicide is usually the tragic end point of various possible pathways influenced by mental ill health and psychological, socioeconomic, familial, interpersonal and genetic factors.

The link between mental illness and suicide is not necessarily direct. Not all people that have suicidal thoughts have a mental illness, and most certainly not everyone with a mental illness has suicidal thoughts. Therefore, we cannot rely merely on the traditional mental health government agencies and community groups to address this issue. We need national and local action. We need to target specific population groups. We need, as a whole, to form a community approach and we need people to be aware of how their peers are feeling and how to address this.

Suicide prevention is not, therefore, solely the concern of mental health services. Some two-thirds of all people who commit suicide have not received specialist psychiatric care in the year before their death. A focus on suicide is directly relevant to mental health strategies in primary care, especially improved detection and treatment of depression, even if general practitioners rarely experience suicide in one of their patients.

This motion notes that the Senate Community Affairs References Committee released a report in June 2010 called *The hidden toll: suicide in Australia*. The committee undertook widespread consultation and research on the issue of suicide and how best to reduce the incidence of suicide. An important place to start, they recommended, was better data collection and reporting of suicide.

The ABS has begun a process to revise the way the suicide data is collected. The Senate committee also called for the National Committee for Standardisation of Reporting on Suicide to be extended for this purpose. The biannual reporting of the number of suicides in the ACT will help raise awareness and help remove the stigma attached to suicide. By providing more information around the incidence of suicide, we can start to better understand how to address it.

We must be realistic about the issue. Although it might make us more comfortable to not have to discuss suicide and its painful effects, accurate reporting will facilitate those who need help to receive it. There is no doubt the resources in the health arena are scarce, but when people can see where the resources are being spent and where there is improvement they are more likely to support additional resources being given.

We must treat suicide like other issues in our community. We must understand the extent of the problem, understand the causes, and take appropriate measures to address it. Hiding the problem away will not address the issue. Reporting of statistics does not just assist the government in addressing the issue; it also assists community groups. I have spoken with many local community groups involved in suicide prevention. For them, information is a very powerful tool. They need accurate data so that they can focus their limited resources in the best way. I do place the caveat that merely reporting the number of deaths caused by suicide does not represent the whole picture of the problem. For instance, the number of people suffering a major depressive episode also highlights the seriousness of this problem in the community.

This motion also calls for an aspirational reduction target to be set for 2020. I understand that there are concerns in the community about doing so, and I acknowledge the comments that the minister has made. Setting a target is a blunt instrument in itself. However, as a means of ensuring that reporting and data collection are improved, it has the potential to be a powerful tool. By setting an aspirational target, we are not saying that there is an okay number, that there are a certain number of deaths by suicide that we can allow to happen in the community. There is no such number. One suicide is one suicide too many.

By calling for a target, we are not reducing a person to a number. We are in fact highlighting that their death was one too many, just like we do with the road toll. The number of motor vehicle deaths does not take away from the loss of those individuals but in fact establishes a platform from which the community begins to understand the loss.

Setting a target is not a new concept. The Senate committee report, which I detailed earlier, recommended that the commonwealth government work with state and territory governments to establish targets. The commonwealth government's response to the recommendation was that they agreed in principle. However, it does not come as a surprise to me that the federal Labor government have failed to act in this important area.

As far back as 1998, a UK green paper titled "Our Healthier Nation" called for a target and in fact set a target to reduce the number of suicides by one-sixth by 2010. The US Department of Health and Human Services in 2007 set a target for 2020. Their target was to reduce the rate of deaths due to suicide to 10.2 per 100,000 people. They also went as far as to set a separate youth rate.

Suicide is an issue that we need to highlight in the community, and today's motion provides some means of doing so. I foreshadow the Canberra Liberals will be supporting this motion. We will also be supporting the Greens' amendment, and I

foreshadow that, when we have dealt with Ms Bresnan's amendment, I will be moving an amendment of my own that echoes, I think, the sentiment of the Assembly in support of mental health workers across our community within the Health Directorate, within Calvary and within the many community groups who work so hard in this area of suicide prevention.

Amendment agreed to.

**MR HANSON** (Molonglo) (5.53), by leave: I move:

Insert new subparagraph (1)(f):

“(f) the important role that mental health workers and local community groups play in suicide prevention in the ACT; and”.

My amendment today reflects the importance and value the Canberra Liberals place on the many mental health workers across our community, within the Health Directorate, within Calvary hospital and in the many local community organisations, working in the area of suicide prevention. Reducing the number of deaths caused by suicide is not merely the job of government; as I have stated, it is a job for the whole community.

We are privileged in the ACT to have passionate workers within the public health system but also paid and unpaid individuals across community organisations working to reduce the number of deaths. I cannot list them all here but I do wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge the large number of organisations that do work in our community beyond the Health Directorate and Calvary and public health workers. They include the ACT Mental Health Consumer Network; the Health Care Consumers Association ACT; Headspace ACT; Lifeline Canberra; the Mental Health Community Coalition ACT; the Mental Health Foundation; OzHelp; Picking up the Peaces; and the Youth Coalition of the ACT.

Some of these organisations receive government funding and some do not. Many do not receive as much as they probably need to address their clients' needs and so they rely on their dedicated staff and volunteers.

With this amendment today—and I am very glad to see the support of both the health minister and Ms Bresnan—we are sending a very clear message that we do acknowledge the hard work of all in the community, both within the public sector and in community organisations, who strive and work in the very difficult area of suicide prevention.

Amendment agreed to.

**MS BRESNAN** (Brindabella) (5.55): I will just speak very briefly to thank all members for their support of this motion. As Mr Hanson said, it is, unfortunately, rare that we do have everyone agreeing, but this is something that there is not any disagreement on. It is good that we can all agree on how important it is to report on this issue, to address the stigma around suicide and also, by openly discussing the issue, we can make it easier for people to seek help.

In closing I would like to just refer to an article that was in the *Adelaide Advertiser* on 27 March which discussed a call from suicide prevention advocates for a national suicide toll. This call is headed by the group called Minimisation of Suicide Harm, who want authorities to publish regular updates on victims of suicide and who say that the extent of the issue has been hidden from view. The chair of the group, Jill Chapman, lost her son to suicide and she has said that far more lives could be saved through regular reports of details, leading to greater awareness and help.

It is important to listen, as we all have to date, to the organisations who deal with this issue every day and to the people who have lost loved ones through suicide and who have called for quite some time for this reporting to occur. As I have already said, and as other speakers have said today, we as a community can address the issue of suicide openly, and without stigma, and work to save lives. It is good to see that we can all agree on that today.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

*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.*

## **Interactive entertainment industry**

**MR SESELJA** (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (5.58): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the importance of the education sector to Canberra's economy;
- (b) the opportunities in the interactive entertainment sector as a result of innovative use new technologies;
- (c) that Canberra's Academy of Interactive Entertainment (AIE) is a world-class interactive media school well suited to take advantage of new industry opportunities;
- (d) that the interactive media sector is growing, and the continued success of organisations like the AIE will have positive multiplier effects on our local economy; and
- (e) that without a critical mass of talent in the ACT, this sector will not be able to grow and benefit from new trends in this sector; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) provide continued support to the AIE's Canberra-based operations; and
- (b) support local organisations by developing an industry strategy for the interactive entertainment sector.

On 15 March I had the pleasure of visiting the Academy of Interactive Entertainment at the Canberra Technology Park in Watson. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the CEO, Mr John De Margheriti, and head of school, Ms Leanne Michael, for their invitation and warm hospitality during my visit. The AIE is a great example of what a successful local Canberra organisation can achieve.

For those of you who may not know, the AIE Canberra campus was established in 1996 as the second oldest games school in the world. Here is a perfect example of a local organisation that has leveraged on our technology expertise, identified a niche market and has grown this into a success—not just locally but also in Sydney and Melbourne and, as of early last year, in the United States. Yet, in spite of this growth and entrance into overseas markets, what impressed me about Mr De Margheriti was his focus on Canberra.

As of October last year the AIE in Canberra could boast the first games business incubator in the world. The 12-month program includes a vocational certificate in entrepreneurship, a \$4,000 games conference scholarship and a \$6,000 business development scholarship. In addition to this, successful applicants will have access to equipment, software and serviced office space, providing them with all the necessities of a typical start-up company, including mentoring from industry practitioners.

What I found most inspiring about this program is that the wealth and intellectual property generated from student venture projects sits with the graduates. That is a very important point. I think this is a testimony to the academy and to Mr De Margheriti's commitment to make Canberra our nation's innovative capital. Those individuals who get to keep that intellectual property could well do very well out of that gesture.

With such initiatives in our city the AIE also gives back to the community and in a big way. Most of you in this chamber will recall that in December last year the academy donated \$1.4 million to the public school system. This was one of the largest private donations to public education in the ACT's history and we certainly welcome that. We welcome that kind of commitment from private individuals here in Canberra, putting money back into our education system and into the good of our community. That is something we should all commend. That is a wonderful thing for Canberra and certainly something we would like to see more of. As co-founder Steve Wang noted:

We decided that we really wanted to put something substantial back into the public education system, so that we can encourage the kids coming through now to be able to tackle their own impossibly wonderful projects and turn them into their future careers.

If even one student, or group of students, start up a micro business that grows into something more, then our investment will have been worth every cent.

In relation to business and innovation, the point needs to be made that the games industry is a very real opportunity for our local economy. It brings together many of the inherent strengths that make our city what it is today—nimble small businesses, world-class research institutions, ICT expertise and creative talent.

In the ACT we have successful games companies like BigWorld, one of the world's leading developers of massively multiplayer online games; Micro Forte, a veteran games development studio with collaborations with games publishers such as Ripcord, Electronic Arts, Interplay, THQ, Universal Interactive and Microsoft; 2k Marin in Canberra, one of only two publisher-owned console studios remaining in Australia; Panther Games; Sunrise Games; AIE, which I have already mentioned, one of the world's major schools for games development; and not forgetting the ANU's Centre for New Media Arts. In turn, what we have is a natural games cluster ready for further industry development.

If games titles like *SWAT*, *Bioshock*, *Freedom Force*, *Fallout Tactics*, *Enemy Infestation* and *Epoch* sound remotely familiar, they are games with a Canberra pedigree. From regular computer games to the latest app on our mobile phones, Canberra is poised to take advantage of this opportunity. According to a PWC report, by 2015 this industry will be worth \$2.5 billion in Australia alone with a compound annual growth of 9.5 per cent, and globally \$90.1 billion with a compound growth of 8.2 per cent.

This technology is mainstream. There is a hidden revolution happening with the games industry and that is because it is going mainstream. It is no longer just a teenage boy pastime. Computer games are found in almost every household and are part of a family's mix of entertainment.

Take the following as an example. According to a study conducted by Bond University for the Interactive Games and Entertainment Association, in the seven years since 2005 the proportion of female gamers has grown from 38 per cent to 47 per cent, with parity with male gamers expected to happen soon; 95 per cent of Australian households with children under 18 years old have at least one device for playing computer games; family games accounted for 19 per cent of game sales, ahead of shooting, action, racing and sports games; 50 per cent of parents said that games were an enjoyable way to spend time with their children; 40 per cent of children asked their parents to play computer games with them; 83 per cent of parents with children under 18 years old are regular computer game players, up from 70 per cent in 2008; 75 per cent of people over 18 years old are gamers, whilst 94 per cent aged six to 15 are gamers. And, more interestingly, 43 per cent of people aged 51 or older are gamers—debunking the myth that only young people play computer games.

The point to be emphasised here is that Canberra has the talent and knowhow to be part of this new wave of mainstream games acceptance and to capitalise on this trend. Yet for this to happen organisations like the AIE and other ACT games companies need government leadership and support to further grow this sector in Canberra.

It is worth noting that in the government's March 2008 innovation report entitled *Innovation, creativity and leadership: report of a study of the ACT innovation system*, a recommendation put forward stated the following:

In view of the potential for the creative sector to make a stronger contribution to economic development, the ACT government give consideration to making further investments to build capability. In particular, initiatives to accelerate the bridging of the creative and technology sectors should be examined.

Continued support of organisations like the AIE by the government and an industry strategy for the Canberra game industry are warranted. This is an innovative sector and the ACT is capable of being an important player. Mr De Margheriti and the AIE understand this; hence their investments in seeding microbusinesses and scholarships. We should not let this opportunity slip past, and I commend this motion to the Assembly.

**DR BOURKE** (Ginninderra—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Corrections) (6.06): I thank Mr Seselja for moving this motion because the intersection between entrepreneurship, innovation and education in Canberra is a keen interest of mine. How innovation gets going, how people come together to pool skills, ideas and resources to invent and eventually commercialise technology is completely fascinating.

A new opportunity opens from an idea, excitement builds around the potential of a new application, a collective forms to push it forward, capital is injected and the idea becomes a commercial reality. Firms and companies appear to seize the opportunities offered to apply new technology for profit. As an industry builds up around the technology and uptake in society approaches saturation, the entrepreneurs and innovators move off to find and develop the next big thing.

Currently there is perhaps nowhere else that this process is more central and more important than in the software development industry. Whereas innovation in hardware technology used to be the focus, now, with the proliferation of cheap processors and the ubiquity of smart devices, it is increasingly software sired applications that are the cutting edge when it comes to modern computing.

Again, I am thankful that Mr Seselja has given us the opportunity to speak about a modern sector of our community that continues to build under this Labor government. In Canberra we have literally dozens of companies, including training organisations like AIE, which are heavily involved in software design and development. They are all an integral part of Canberra's burgeoning ICT sector.

In fact, Canberra stands out as the city with the greatest intensity of ICT-related employment in Australia, with a large section of our workforce—12,000 people, in fact—working in the sector. It is well known that Canberra boasts a number of internationally renowned ICT research organisations, multinational companies and many ICT small to medium enterprises with very strong research and innovation capabilities.

We are home to some of the country's largest ICT research and development organisations, including our universities, CSIRO, and the Canberra Research Laboratory of NICTA, the National ICT Centre of Excellence. Being physically within a geographic centre of excellence such as Canberra with its educated professional population, youthful population immersed in modern computing, this enables a training firm like AIE to increase their absorptive capacity, giving them ready access to the knowledge and skills of some of the best talents worldwide.

Canberra firms have a competitive edge in being able to work closely with major Australian and multinational companies and public and private research arms in servicing the needs of the Australian government. This government is playing its part in ensuring that we build on our knowledge base, positioning us as providers of solutions to the technology questions of tomorrow.

Recently the ACT government entered into a new four-year \$12 million funding package for NICTA, commencing on 1 July this year. This is a direct investment in the ACT's economic future which builds on and extends the ACT government's previous support for NICTA. NICTA's Canberra staff, 55 full-time researchers and 50 PhD students, is working with our universities, government agencies and Canberra-based businesses to develop the technologies that will meet the current and future needs of the ACT as well as the nation.

We are excited about the potential that some of NICTA's research has to directly benefit the people of Canberra. We are proud of Canberra's ICT sector and we recognise that it is a key element of our clever, innovative and creative city.

Mr Speaker, this government is always looking to the future. A key priority for this government is to support private sector development that leads to a more diversified local economy. That commitment is coming together in the form of a new business development strategy shortly to be released towards the end of April 2012. Strengthening Canberra's revenue base to deliver infrastructure and services to a growing and ageing community is important.

We also need to do this so our economy is more capable of absorbing the negative impact of volatile movements in commonwealth government spending and to lessen our exposure to land and construction-related economic activity. Our current approach is based on sound strategy and tested approaches developed through the 2003 economic white paper, the 2008 innovation system audit of the ACT and the 2008 paper "Capital development—towards our second century".

This is a solid foundation and we will continue to do those things that are working well, such as focusing on innovation strategy, supporting a commercialisation pathway and supporting ACT firms to export. Recognising the vital role of small business in our economy, we remain committed to strong fiscal management and ensuring a business-friendly environment. Our economic base lies in the service, research and knowledge industries. The task at hand is to build on these foundations and focus our efforts where there is competitive advantage, critical mass and ability to leverage industry partnerships.

The business development strategy will facilitate growth, diversification and new job opportunities in the economy in areas where we have critical mass and emerging capability, such as education services, specialist services to government, digital enterprise, clean technology and creative sectors. This is not just the realm of quick returns. We will not be implementing schemes to attract big business nor developing detailed sector plans across the board. But the fact remains that our existing business program environment, which is non-sector aligned, is well conceived and working extremely well.



We should remember that ICT and software development are fields that really bring together a broad depth of talent. These are people with skills in graphic design, engineering, mathematical sciences and, of course, software and computer sciences. I am happy to note that many of them have gone through our local schools and universities. In the case of AIE founders, John De Margheriti and Steve Wang, they live locally. They went through Hawker college in the 1980s to become leading figures in the Australian interactive gaming and entertainment industry today.

I am happy that they have moved to fund ongoing awards for students at Hawker college and will provide scholarships at the AIE for selected ACT college students, allowing them to pursue a career in interactive entertainment. This is the type of collaboration that this government welcomes. I would also like to note that the CIT has a longstanding partnership with the AIE delivering a range of specialised courses under profile funding and collaboration. These courses build upon the CIT's strong history of skills provision in areas like animation, information technology and software development as well as professional learning in computing.

These collaborative courses include the advanced diploma of screen and media and a certificate IV in screen and media, both having a focus on 3D animation. There is also the bachelor of games and virtual worlds degree, a commercial partnership between CIT and AIE that provides a full-fee paying qualification supported by fee help. There are currently 89 students enrolled in this degree. This is a successful partnership that the government, CIT and, to my understanding, AIE are very keen to maintain. My advice is that this partnership is a leading national example of a successful public-private business relationship in tertiary education.

The government is always open to future discussions with AIE around their position. A function of the newly established Learning Capital Council which this government has set up, will be to support training organisations in Canberra like AIE by drawing on the existing expertise of institutions and individuals within the sector. Obviously, any growth in the area of software development, whether it be from a training and education perspective or from an innovation perspective, is something that is welcome in Canberra.

Mr Speaker, I seek leave to move the amendments standing in my name together:

Leave granted.

**DR BOURKE:** I move:

(1) Insert new subparagraphs (1)(f) and (g):

“(f) that the Government is developing a business development strategy that covers all business sectors in the ACT; and

(g) the business development strategy will include a strategy for the ACT to transition to a clean and sustainable economy;”.

(2) Omit subparagraph (2)(b).

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Molonglo) (6.15): I also would like to thank Mr Seselja for moving this motion. I actually think this Assembly spends far too little time on IT issues. I suppose I am showing my prejudices here as a past IT person, but it is a very important industry in the ACT. I understand that about 10 per cent of the Canberra workforce is in ICT. That is the highest anywhere in Australia. The next highest is Victoria, which has five per cent of its population working in ICT.

ICT, as I said, is my background, even to the extent of its being my father's background. As professor of physics at the ANU, he was responsible for introducing the first computer to Canberra. I had the privilege of being a student in the ANU's first computing course back in the early 1970s.

As Dr Bourke and Mr Seselja have mentioned, ICT is very important in Canberra. I think we have all mentioned NICTA as one of the outstanding institutions. ICT is important for the whole economy. It is particularly important for a clean, green future. ICT is what has been fuelling productivity gains in our economy and our workforce for a very long time, and it is particularly relevant in terms of a potentially positive green future. What we can achieve with better management of things, better control of things, which ICT can give us, is in many, many cases vastly better energy efficiency.

If you look at all the new green buildings that are being built—the commercial ones rather than the household ones—they all have at their heart a building management system which will adjust things so that they work right. If you look at how our electricity system is going to be transformed, one of the major things in that is smart grids, grids which will adapt to the energy in and out. This is a computer process. If you look at a lot of the renewable energy technology—the wind turbines, advanced solar thermal—these are all controlled by computers. A major part of a positive future is ICT, and it is going to be a major part of a positive future for Canberra.

The reason we have such a high proportion of people working in ICT in Canberra is because of the federal government which, as we all know, is headquartered here. They employ a lot of people. But they do not employ everyone and it is really nice to be talking about one of the things that is not part of the federal government—the Academy of Interactive Entertainment.

In terms of this motion before us today, the games industry is a very specific part of the ICT sector with its own idiosyncrasies. It has the entertainment software sector, which has very different economic drivers from the business software sector. The business games industry in Australia is suffering at the moment because of our very strong Australian dollar. As a result of this, many large studios are downsizing or possibly even collapsing.

The market, of course, is changing, as we all know. It is moving away from big consoles. It is moving into smaller game developments, such as those for mobile phones. This means that games developers are also now moving towards starting up smaller studios which are more adaptable and more able to move into the types of games that are in demand.

Of course, it is also interesting to look at the impact that games have on the people who are playing them. I think that we need to do a lot more work on that. One of the other areas, of course, in which games are very important is military control systems. If you look at them, you can see that the two are merging. The cutting-edge developments in both areas are joining together.

The multimedia industry is very profitable, as all IT can be. Therefore, it is a very competitive industry. It can require some careful strategic planning for local operators to compete on the global market and, of course, some good luck. Clearly the continued success of AIE is beneficial to our local economy, local students and local profile. It is really an industry which could benefit from the ACT government's transition to a cleaner, greener economy with proper strategic planning from both a government point of view and also, of course, from the point of view of the industry itself.

AIE was established in 1996. It has earned recognition as Australia's leading educator for computer games development and 3D digital industry. It has grown significantly over the past 10 years. It now has campuses in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra. I, of course, tend to think of AIE particularly from its role as a business incubator. In my previous lifetime I worked for a company called AEIL, which was for a period of time a tenant of AIE when they briefly looked after the Downer business incubator. I must admit that I found the two similar sets of initials incredibly confusing.

But they have a wide suite of offerings, as Dr Bourke and Mr Seselja have talked about. I will not go through it at great length, because I am aware we are close to the end of time for today. What I would like to talk a bit more about is one of their positive things. They are one of Canberra's most philanthropic companies. They recently donated \$1.4 million to public schooling in the ACT. This is one of the largest, if not the largest, contribution to public education in the territory's history. It is partly cash grants and partly AIE scholarships that will be split across the nine Canberra government colleges over the coming decade.

The awards are granted to students with interests in maths, information technology, entrepreneurship, digital media and graphic design. Both the previous speakers have spoken about the Canberra entrepreneurs, John De Margheriti and Steve Wang, who were the original founders of AIE. They, I believe, decided to make this donation after attending the Hawker college class of 1980 30th reunion celebrations, which is really, really great.

They graduated from the ACT public school system. They became innovators in the computer gaming and software industry and they said that they wanted to give back to the school that had helped them on the road to success. I quote what they said in the *Canberra Times*:

We decided that we really wanted to put something substantial back into the public education system so that we can encourage the kids coming through now to be able to tackle all their own impossibly wonderful projects and turn them into future careers," Mr Wang said. "If even one student or group of students starts up a micro business that grows into something more, then our investment will have been worth every cent.

I strongly commend AIE for their business. I very much thank Mr Seselja for moving this motion. I would also like to say that I thank Dr Bourke for moving his amendment, which I think is an excellent amendment that recognises the importance of the government's business development strategy. It should cover the transition to a clean and sustainable economy of which, I am sure, AIE will be a part.

**MR SESELJA** (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (6.24): I move the following amendment to Dr Bourke's proposed amendment:

Omit subparagraph (g), substitute:

“(g) the business development strategy will include a strategy for the interactive entertainment sector;”.

Whilst I do not have major dramas with Dr Bourke's amendment, my issue with it is that it takes what is a specific part of the motion and then talks in somewhat vague terms. It talks about the government developing a business development strategy that covers all business sectors. This is calling for specifics when it comes to interactive entertainment. While the second part of the amendment—where it says, “The business development strategy will include a strategy for the ACT to transition to a clean and sustainable economy”—is commendable, that is not what this motion is actually about. It is focusing on this particular sector. This amendment would actually make that clear by amending the second part of Dr Bourke's amendment. I think it is important, given all members seem to agree with the intent of this motion today, that this would replace paragraph (g) and include:

the business development strategy will include a strategy for the interactive entertainment sector ...

I think that more accurately reflects what this motion is about. Instead of talking in the broad, we are talking about a specific sector here. We should put on record our support for this kind of activity. I would, therefore, commend my amendment.

**DR BOURKE** (Ginninderra—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Corrections) (6.25): The government will not be supporting Mr Seselja's amendment to my proposed amendment.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Molonglo) (6.26): The Greens also will not be supporting this. I think we are very clear that we think the interactive entertainment sector and ICT in general must be part of this strategy. My concern is that if we start listing all the sectors that we want to support, we are not going to get them all in. It just becomes silly that if we leave out one sector in an Assembly motion it is not going to be included. We need to stress to the government that they need to get the strategy out. It is something that the Greens have been pushing the government to do. We want them to do it soon. We want them to do it well. If they are foolish enough to omit the interactive entertainment sector then I think we need to criticise them for that. But I do not think we need to go down to this level of minutiae in saying how it should be developed.

**Mr Seselja's** amendment negatived.

**Dr Bourke's** amendments agreed to.

**MR SESELJA** (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (6.27): Just briefly in closing, I thank members for their support. I think it is important that we as an Assembly and as a community work to ensure that our economy is diversified. Interactive entertainment is one very important part of that. The government have now adopted sometimes the language of saying that they want to diversify the economy; they say that from time to time. But you have to back that up with actions. This is a very important industry. It is an industry with a lot of growth potential and one where we can be offering young people a different career path right here in the ACT.

Many of these companies will hopefully grow right here in the ACT. There is no reason why they cannot be located here and why they cannot actually perform on a world stage from Canberra. That is something we should be very excited about. There are a lot of industries where that is not possible. There are a lot of major industries which Canberra, because of its location and size, just cannot be part of. Interactive entertainment is not one of those, so I think it is important that we get behind it.

This is an industry that looks after itself pretty well, but from time to time government just needs to play its part; it needs to help facilitate. That is what we are calling for here. I thank members for their support. I think it is important that we have expressed our support for a very important industry for the ACT.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

## Adjournment

Motion (by **Dr Bourke**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

### **ActewAGL Canberra area theatre awards Australian Hospitality Association awards**

**MR COE** (Ginninderra) (6.29): I rise to continue my acknowledgement of the Canberra area theatre awards, which I commenced on Thursday.

The Crowne Plaza best actress in a featured role in a play went to Judi Crane as Janette in *The Pig Iron People*. The Queanbeyan Players best actress in a featured role in a musical went to Amy Dunham from *Oklahoma*. The National Capital Motors best actor in a leading role in a play went to Greg Pringle from *A Few Good Men*. The Teatro Vivaldi best actor in a leading role in a musical went to Ben Kindon as Mickey Johnstone in *Blood Brothers*. The National Capital Motors best actress in a leading role in a play went to Liz McBarron from *Bombshells*. The Teatro Vivaldi best actress in a leading role in a musical went to Christine Forbes from *Blood Brothers*. The Richards Consulting best choreographer went to Felix Schwartz from *Le School*.

The best musical director for a school or youth musical went to Ruth Waters from *Jesus Christ Superstar*. The best director of a school or youth play went to Alanna Maclean from *Grimm Tales*. The best director of a school or youth musical went to Adam Fisher from *Grease*. The Sarah Byrne best musical director went to Sharon Tree from *Blood Brothers*. The David Spicer Productions best director of a play went to Bruce Buchanan from *A Few Good Men*. The Stage Whispers best director of a musical or variety show went to Peter Young and Scott Halls from *The Witches of Eastwick*.

The Ryleho homes best production of a school or youth musical went to *The Wizard of Oz*. The Ryleho homes best production of a school or youth play went to *Le School*. The Ryleho homes best production of a variety show went to *Opera at the Dish*. The Westpac Alpha best production of a play went to *The Pig Iron People*. The Westpac Alpha best production of a musical went to Avenue Q. The “in the spirit of the community” award went to the ACT Education and Training Directorate. And the ActewAGL gold cat award went to Jordan Kelly.

I congratulate all those winners and I wish all people in amateur theatre all the best for 2012.

I would like to place on the record my congratulations to the 2012 AHA award winners. Winners were announced on Monday, 19 March at the annual awards dinner held at the Hotel Realm. Thirty-four awards were handed out on the night to the following exceptional performers in the ACT hospitality industry.

The John Press Award, sponsored by Lion, for outstanding contribution to the industry, community and/or association by a publican or bar owner went to Sasha Trpkovski from Hippo Bar. The member of the year, sponsored by Carlton United Brewers, went to Doma Group. The best international cuisine, sponsored by PicmeBooth, was won by Italian and Sons, who also took out the best restaurant, informal, overall, which was sponsored by Carlton United Brewers.

The best prestigious restaurant, sponsored by Treasury Wine Estates, went to Sage Dining Rooms. The best modern Australian restaurant, sponsored by Schweppes, went to Pistachio Dining in Torrens. The best pub or bistro, sponsored by Carlton United Brewers, went to the George Harcourt Inn; they also took out the best wine list, which was sponsored by Treasury Wine Estates.

The best bar presentation and service, sponsored by Lion, was won by Public, with HonkyTonks highly commended. The best cocktail bar, sponsored by Coca-Cola Amatil, went to Kremlin Bar. The best local, sponsored by Lion, went to Edgar’s Inn. The best new/redeveloped venue, general division, sponsored by Coordinate, was won by Public; again, HonkyTonks was highly commended. The best late night entertainment venue, sponsored by APRA, was Academy. The best live entertainment venue, again sponsored by APRA, went to Transit. The best sporting entertainment area, sponsored by Fox Sports Venues, went to Sub-Urban.

The best deluxe accommodation, sponsored by Carlton United Brewers, went to Hotel Realm. The best superior accommodation, sponsored by Meyer Vandenberg, went to Diamant Hotel Canberra. The best first-class accommodation, sponsored by CIT, went to Quality Hotel Dickson. The best mid-range accommodation, sponsored by Capital Linen Service, went to the Statesman Hotel. The best suite/apartment hotel, sponsored by TEMPlar, went to Clifton Suites on Northbourne. The best hotel restaurant, sponsored by Lion, went to Bicioletta at the Diamant Hotel Canberra. The best marketed hotel, sponsored by Australian Capital Tourism, went to the Hyatt Hotel Canberra. The best meetings and events hotel, sponsored by the Canberra Convention Bureau, went to Hotel Realm. The best new/redeveloped venue, accommodation division, sponsored by Coordinate, went to Burbury Hotel. The best environmental practice, sponsored by ActewAGL, went to Rydges Eagle Hawk Resort. The best family restaurant, sponsored by Schweppes, went to Caph's restaurant, Manuka. The best tourist initiative, sponsored by the AHA, went to Renaissance at the National Gallery of Australia.

The following awards for outstanding hospitality employees are sponsored by Hostplus. The best front of house employee went to Erika Jurd from All Seasons Canberra. The best restaurant service employee went to Dexter Mathais. The best restaurant cookery employee went to Clement Chauvin from Sage Dining Rooms. The best apprentice chef went to Jemma Patat from Pistachio Dining. The best bar service employee went to Richard Blanchard from Mint garden bar.

Congratulations to these winners and indeed to all the nominees. Also, for the record, this evening I would like to congratulate all those involved in organising the event at the AHA, including the general manager, Gwyn Rees, for his efforts throughout the year. I understand that he is soon to be leaving the AHA and going to another industry association here in the ACT. I would like to put on the record my thanks and congratulations for all he has done in promoting his members and the industries which he represents, and also for all he has done to support Canberra as a destination around Australia.

**ActewAGL Canberra area theatre awards**  
**Charnwood community carnival**  
**St Francis Xavier college—trade training centre**  
**Canberra Mosque open day**  
**Greek National Day**

**MS PORTER** (Ginninderra) (6.34): I would also like to add my congratulations to all of the CAT award winners so eloquently listed there by Mr Coe today and the other week. I would also like to put on record my thanks to Coralie Wood, the driving force behind the CAT awards, and to the board and all those that organised that great event the other week.

I would also like to thank the organisers of the "Charny Carny", which was held on the weekend: Measa Cox from St Thomas Aquinas P&F, Linda West from Charnwood-Dunlop P&C, Daniel Jones from Mount Rogers Scouts and, of course,

Michael Pilbrow, who was there as the MC. Also I would like to mention the two school principals, Frank Dowling from Charnwood-Dunlop and John Bourke from St Thomas Aquinas, who really get behind the “Charny Carny” every year.

I was there judging the junior fashion parade in which children were challenged to use second-hand or, as we now call them, pre-loved clothes to come up with their imaginative outfits. And it was very hard to judge that but I managed to give a few of the children “highly commended” so that not all of them were totally disappointed in not coming first, second or third. And then afterwards we had the talent show. I am not sure, Mr Coe, but did you have a role in that as well? I know that you were there later but I was not quite sure that you were part of the talent show, maybe? That was a great day and very well attended. Congratulations to all. And I think the point should also be made that the people behind the “Charny Carny” are not just a one-day-a-year team; they do amazing community work throughout the year. I thank them all for that.

I went the other day to the St Francis Xavier college for the opening of the trade training centre by Dr Leigh and the blessing by Archbishop Coleridge. I congratulate all those involved, including the principal, Mr Tulley, all the staff, the students, the board and the parents and friends, the architects and builders. It is a magnificent centre and I am sure all the students there will appreciate it as years go by. And certainly the students that I talked to there on the day were very excited about that centre.

On Sunday I attended the open day at the Canberra Mosque, as I do every year if it is at all possible. I think this open day is a good opportunity to dispel myths in the community and for people to learn more about the mosque and the beliefs and way of life of the Muslim community, including its contribution to the wider community.

This visit was followed by my laying a wreath for the Greek Orthodox community at the Anzac Parade Hellenic Memorial on the occasion of the Greek National Day on 25 March and then going to the Hellenic Club to enjoy a meal with the Greek Orthodox community there at the club and with the board and other representatives of the Hellenic Club. It was a very good day indeed and lovely to celebrate with the Greek community on that particular day.

### **Ms Suzy Batkovic**

**MR SESELJA** (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (6.38): I would like to briefly pay tribute to Adelaide Lightning and Australian Opals star Suzy Batkovic, who was named the 2012 Women’s National Basketball League most valuable player this week at the Crown Palladium in Melbourne. Suzy Batkovic is a Croatian Australian but she also has a reasonably strong Canberra link, having played with the Canberra Capitals in the 2010-11 season and also having been here at the Australian Institute of Sport when she played as part of that program. Suzy Batkovic also has strong family links here in Canberra, with her brother Robert living in the region.

It is wonderful that someone with these close links to Canberra has been recognised in this way. Suzy’s time at the Capitals was interrupted by injury, which was unfortunate, but she has gone on to great success with Adelaide Lightning. The 192-centimetre



centre was the dominant player of the competition, leading the league in scoring, steals and rebounds to help her Adelaide team to a WNBL preliminary finals berth.

Suzy has also represented the Opals. She has also played in the Women's National Basketball Association in the United States with the Seattle Storm. She has been a great contributor to Australian basketball and she has been a great contributor to basketball here in Canberra. I would just like to pay tribute to what is a wonderful achievement for Suzy Batkovic. It is one that I am sure not only she is very proud of; I know members of her family are also very proud of her.

### **Riding for Cambodian Kids**

**MS BRESNAN** (Brindabella) (6.40): Yesterday Michael Milton, a world champion cyclist and winner of six Paralympic gold medals, provided support to a group of local riders who are cycling from Canberra to Melbourne to raise money to build a school in Soskan village, Cambodia. The challenge of a gruelling 660-kilometre bike ride is being taken up by a group of Canberra cyclists to bring the empowering gift of education to more than 1,000 children in the Cambodian village of Soskan.

This is the second cycle challenge to benefit these children. Last year the group rode from Canberra to Sydney, raising \$3,000 for Soskan village. This year the ride aims to raise more money to help the Cambodian Kids Foundation complete the construction of one of the largest public schools in a country where the illiteracy rate is 30 per cent. The school is scheduled for completion in May 2012 and until then local children are attending a temporary school with limited facilities.

On 17 April, the 12 Canberra riders will set out for Melbourne along the Hume Highway, including the steep inclines en route to Albury-Wodonga. The journey has been inspired by the friendship which began between Canberra student Georgia Turnbull and a young Cambodian guide when they cycled 1,000 kilometres from Bangkok to Phnom Penh and on to Ho Chi Minh City.

Along the ride Georgia discovered that her good humoured Cambodian cycling companion, Sambat Pich, supports 14 young children whose parents are unable to care for them. Sambat believes that he has the capacity to provide for these children because he was given an education. At school he learned to speak English fluently and is now able to earn a living. Sambat was determined to learn the English language because it was his passport to employment. Ultimately he wants to give Cambodian children the same opportunities through education. He hopes that by sending his 14 children to school he will make a huge difference to their lives.

Back in Canberra, inspired by Sambat's passion, Georgia contacted the Cambodian Kids Foundation, which was established by a Victorian family and is led by 22-year-old Sam Cooper. In the once impoverished Soskan village, the foundation is changing lives through its support for transformational projects led by local people. Houses have been built, a childcare centre and a health centre constructed and fresh water systems installed throughout the village. The foundation is run solely by volunteers, the majority of whom are under the age of 25. Foundation director Sam Cooper says the construction of the 1,000-student school in Soskan is by far the foundation's most ambitious project yet.

The team of Canberra riders aged between 21 and 55 will leave from Hall village showground early on 17 April, along with three support vehicles, stopping at Jugiong, Tarcutta, Holbrook, Albury, Benalla and Seymour along the way. It is expected other bike riders will join them on sections of the ride to Melbourne. To support the cyclists and the children of Soskan village, people can go to [www.everydayhero.com.au/canberramelbourne](http://www.everydayhero.com.au/canberramelbourne).

### **Canberra Grammar school—cricket**

**MR HANSON** (Molonglo) (6.43): I rise tonight to talk about the Canberra Grammar school cricket presentation night on Thursday, 22 March that occurred at the Canberra Grammar school.

Cricket plays a very important part at Canberra Grammar, as do many other sports, as you would know, Mr Speaker. It was a great night to see all the parents, the boys and the coaches there in the one place to celebrate a great year of cricket at Canberra Grammar.

The welcome was provided by Declan Norrie, who is the captain of cricket, and the special guest who spoke was Chris Cairns, who is involved heavily with the Canberra Grammar cricket program. He spoke of the value of cricket in teaching life's lessons. Also acknowledged on the night was the significant role played by many of the teachers, the coaches and the parents who spend many extra hours in supporting their young boys to play the game of cricket.

The team reports and awards were made, and from the primary school we heard from David Messina, who is the master in charge of cricket, and from the senior school we heard from Hugh Phillips, who is the vice captain of cricket. I will just read out the coaches for the junior school. The under 10 Navy coach is Mrs Cathy Johnston, the under 10 Sky coach is Mr Malcolm Stuart, the under 10 Red coach is Mr Josh Small, the under 11 Div 1 coach is Mr Justin Abrahams, the under 11 Navy coach is Mr Stephen James, the under 11 Sky coach is Mr Alex Hutchinson, the under 12 Div 1 coach is Mr David Messina and the under 12 Navy coach is Mr Cameron Suidgeest.

Moving to the senior school, the under 13A team comprised Nicholas Lowe, Fraser Baird, Dominic Behrens, James Bruer, Nicholas McCabe, John Shaw, Ryan Martin, James Deane, Alexander Bezos, Tom Smethurst, Benjamin Woinarski and Max Tranter, coached by Brad Morgan.

The under 13B team comprised Dave Badcock, Nick Badcock, Nicholas Cumming, William Hanson, Barnabe White, Daniel Hosie, Steele Butler, Mark Glanville, Ryan Harper, Matthew Royds, Dylan Elder, Hamish Gabbedy, Benjamin Castle and Daniel Barry, coached by Dom de Carvalho and Tom Brunskill.

The under 14A team comprised Edward Barker, Vinay Goel, Chris Hume, Feargas Macfarlane, Callum MacGill, Nithin Mathew, Ben McGinness, Benjamin Mynott, Sanjeev Prabakaran, Dominic Sullivan, Kristan Weeraratne and Angus Williams, coached by Peter Bailey.

The under 14B comprised Yasi Attygalle, Hugh Beith, Joshua Bernabe, Oliver Bruer, Sahil Chopra, Cameron Dunn, Dylan Earley, Cameron Hammer, Dilanga Jayawardena, Callum Phillips, Fergus Stafford and Harry Stephenson, coached by Matthew Hughes.

The under 15A team comprised Jacob Angelatos, Kean Senaratne, Neth Jayawardena, Danyon O'Rourke, Rohaan Mathew, Lachlan Bayliss, Primal De Silva, Hamish Stafford, Alistair Goggs, Harry Skacel, Christopher Fuller and Michael Gordon, coached by Corey Nix.

The under 15B team comprised Nabhan Ahmad, Nagib Ahmad, Fergus Buckley, James Cooper, George Gordon, Joseph Hall-Lomax, Daniel Hesse, Thomas McCredie, Jonathon Moore, Kevin Murphy, Benjamin Reading-Thompson and Ryan Wilshire, coached by Nihilesh Chellappah.

The under 16A team comprised Samuel Coggins, Patrick Doyle, Michael Bai, Hamish Roberts, Aran Ravishanker, Sanjay Farshid, Isaia Curtotti, Sathya Chitturi and Joshua Gould, coached by Phil Moore.

The under 18A first XI comprised Jamil Khalfan, Oliver Tridgell, Carlyle Laurie, Ashwin Devanathan, Cameron Dalzell, Declan Norrie, Avinash Devanathan, Nicholas Everett, Hugh Phillips, Alexander Fricker Lopez, Matthew Elder and Harry Tyson, coached by Matthew Bugden.

The under 18B second XI comprised Marian Emmanuel, Lachlan Fisher, Nic McGinness, Max Wallner, Eranga Punchihewa, Owen Steer, James Hancock, Brodie Ingram, Agnivesh Nambissan, Jack Stanford, Jimmy Binks and Jack Ungerer, coached by Greg Elliott.

To all of the boys who played in the teams, to the coaches across the junior and the senior school, to the cricket masters and all of the parents: congratulations on another good year of cricket at Canberra Grammar. It provides so much for the boys' education and once again I commend the school on the cricket program and all that they are doing for the boys at Canberra Grammar.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 6.48 pm.**