



Debates

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Wednesday, 10 April 2013

MADAM SPEAKER (Mrs Dunne) 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.

Health—autism

MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (10.02): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) April is Autism Awareness Month and 2 April was World Autism Awareness Day;
- (b) that the Canberra Liberals' 2012 election policy for an autism specific school had widespread community and corporate sector support; and
- (c) currently, only nine hours of therapy support per week is provided directly through the Autism Intervention Unit when experts recommend a minimum of 20 hours; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) develop more effective autism specific diagnostic and support services;
- (b) provide more support for non-government organisations that deliver guidance and support for families dealing with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosed children; and
- (c) provide more targeted education support through the establishment of a school specifically for children diagnosed with ASD, in line with the Canberra Liberals' 2012 election policy.

I believe it is important in this Autism Awareness Month that this particular vexing developmental disability is highlighted by the Legislative Assembly. Autism, or more correctly autism spectrum disorder or ASD, is a unique developmental disability, and sadly it is not rare. In recent years there has been a rising awareness of ASD, with many more children being diagnosed at an early age. Only six years ago the first major Australian study on the prevalence of ASD reported that one in every 160 children aged between six and 12 years has an ASD. Today that figure is closer to one in 100.

In Canberra, Autism Asperger ACT, the not-for-profit association that provides support for families dealing with ASD, has over 1,000 members, the majority of whom are people with ASD and members of their families or carers. While many developmental disorders are not well understood by the general community, ASD probably is at the top of the misunderstood list, because there is no one common descriptor of a person with ASD.

The Autism Asperger ACT association puts out a wonderful booklet called *What do we do now?—information booklet for families*. It is designed to help those families facing a diagnosis of ASD. Among other useful pieces of information there is a list of myths and facts about ASD. It says, for example, that the notion that ASD is an emotional disturbance is a myth. It is a neuro-developmental disorder. It is a myth that people will be cured or grow out of it. They do not. But with early intervention and good educational programs, progress may be significantly enhanced.

It tells us that people with ASD do not behave in the same way, that not all people with ASD have special savant or genius-like skills. And more importantly, all children with ASD should not be taught in the same way. There is not one single treatment that is appropriate for all children with an ASD at all times. Individually tailored programs using a range of teaching strategies are necessary to assist children in reaching their full potential.

All children who have ASD do have significant difficulties in communicating, and with social and emotional understanding. Their lack of flexibility in thinking and behaviour impacts on their understanding of the world. They face sensory processing challenges, speech or language delays and impairments, social interaction skills and self-esteem issues.

The effects of autism on learning and daily functioning may range from mild to severe and they last a lifetime. In the ACT, by comparison with other states, children with ASD are not particularly well served, especially in their preschool and post-school years. There is no argument that dealing with children who have a disability of any kind is a traumatic experience for a family. But for those caring for a family member with ASD there are a few more challenges, not the least of which is lack of understanding by society that here is a child who may look perfectly normal and is perhaps just being naughty or the product of poor parenting.

While neither the causes of or cures for ASD are known, as I have mentioned, it is clear that early intervention can significantly improve the lives of many children with ASD. Effective intervention can make a huge difference to children, families and their carers. It is important that governments appreciate that people with ASD have distinct needs that generic disability services do not adequately meet.

So what faces a parent who suspects their young child is perhaps not developing quite as normally as others in the family? If you talk to parents in this situation they tell you that they embark on a journey of monumental exhaustion, going from one queue to another, eliminating one by one what it is their child does not have.

ASD is a diagnosis of exclusion. The frustration for parents is that they are told funding is available, that help is available, but it all hinges on the words, “Eligible children must have a confirmed ASD diagnosis,” and this is made by or through a range of different diagnosticians. A typical diagnostic evaluation involves a multidisciplinary team of doctors, including a paediatrician, psychologist, speech and language pathologist and occupational therapist. You have a number of tests: hearing impairment, developmental testing and many others, some of which might not be easily available and certainly none that are available immediately.

You go from getting to the top of one queue, finding out that it is not what ails your child, to then join the end of another queue. Physicians use what is called the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* (DSM) to determine whether a person has an autism spectrum disorder. Recently they have moved from DSM-IV to DSM-V, which will now alter the framework.

Within the ASD community, there is concern that some who currently have an autism diagnosis might now not qualify; so there is further uncertainty for those parents. That is just another issue for parents to grapple with. If you reasonably suspect your child has ASD and you know that early intervention is the key to better outcomes, you get more and more depressed and distressed as the testing process drags on.

By the time you have worked your way through the eligibility for federal and/or state or territory funding, your child can be a few years older and you are at your wits end. The Autism Asperger ACT association have, for several years, lodged pre-budget submissions. Each year they have highlighted a need to deliver current services more efficiently. While they seem reluctant to criticise too strongly what is on offer, presumably for fear of retribution, they do support the establishment of a centralised diagnostic team where all children who are displaying delays in development are assessed by the one team of doctors, therapy staff and psychologists.

They have suggested that the current system, where children are seen by the autism team at Therapy ACT, is not satisfactory. They suggest that an estimated 40 per cent of children assessed by that team do not receive an autism diagnosis. So the parents are left to start again elsewhere. The waiting time for the autism team can be months.

To date they have never received an acknowledgement or response to this suggestion. But if they are surprised by this, those of us on this side of the chamber are not. So our motion today supports Autism Asperger ACT's calls for streamlined diagnostic services. But getting a diagnosis is only the first part of the long journey for parents. Getting access to appropriate therapy and intervention is quite another. We need to do better for our ASD families.

The motion refers to the autism intervention unit. This unit provides an early intervention program for children who have a diagnosis of ASD. Children can attend two 4½-hour sessions a week. All the units operate with a maximum of four children in a group with two staff members, which allows for close interaction.

In theory, children can also access a local preschool program for four hours a week and support for this is provided by staff from early childhood education. Families may apply to access an additional four to eight hours per week in a local preschool program, and local preschools may apply for support through the support-at-preschool process for additional support. That sounds all well and good and no doubt this government thinks that is enough, but when you talk to families and to those involved in support for families, you learn that schools that run the preschool program need to find 50 per cent of the cost of employing the additional support, and that is not easy.

The preschool involved also has to be willing to have the program at their schools and, again, for any number of reasons, that is not always possible. I understand that a new early learning centre has been opened in Bonython, but what of the need for families at both ends of the ACT—in Gungahlin and the far south of Tuggeranong? I am told that even older suburbs are under pressure for these services and none are forthcoming. We heard yesterday of the list of proposed new early childcare centres in various suburbs, the claims of sites being allocated and plans submitted. But unfortunately we know that the rhetoric of this government rarely matches the reality of delivery.

The learning support unit teachers in primary and high schools do not necessarily have specific training in special education. There is no requirement for them to do so and certainly there is no requirement to have specialist training in ASD. With any available support programs it is a case of knowing where to look. Parents have to be their own best advocate, lobbyist and detective for many of the support services they may be eligible to access. It is a complicated and convoluted process of assistance. The Therapy ACT autism team offers a program to families of children up to the age of 12 years who have received a diagnosis of ASD. This service comprises a series of six by three-hour workshops that aim to equip parents with a variety of skills and strategies.

ACT department of education has also in the past organised two-day workshops and information sessions as part of a positive partnerships initiative. There have also been additional funds directed to the therapy assistants in schools program. Happily, in the screening phases of this project some children who had not been previously diagnosed as having ASD were identified. But therapy assistants in schools is a “one size fits all” solution and it is not targeted at ASD. Of course, when it gets to the other end of the school cycle, the end of year 12 or year 10, there is even less support. We have token programs under a catch-all umbrella of post-school options. But in truth the options are few and none are specifically targeted to students with ASD.

We believe that families in the ACT need at least the equivalent of what is on offer in other states, and we currently do not. We need the sort of best practice services that were proposed by the Australian government’s 2004 report that reviewed the most effective models of practice in early intervention therapies. Reports are all very well, but we need more than the tired old glossy brochure trick and endless strategy sessions. People are wanting action. They are wanting real support. The government cannot, like it has with so many other programs, sit back and believe it needs to do no more because the federal government is picking up the slack.

That is not good enough. So often in debates in recent months it has been suggested that it will be a matter for the NDIS. We are led to believe that the NDIS will cover all this. As far as we can see, the NDIS is just another opt-out and cop-out at this stage. I draw Mr Rattenbury’s attention to that and seek support from him.

Ms Burch: That is your view on NDIS—a cop-out?

MR DOSZPOT: Our view on NDIS is that it is used as an excuse by your government in order not to be as active as you should be. Ms Burch, do not try and change my words. Our motion also proposes support for organisations, such as

Autism Asperger ACT. Like so many other support groups, they operate on the smell of an oily rag, while trying to deliver support, information and advice to over a thousand families.

Over the past four years they have needed to expand enormously to meet the needs of their growing client base. In last year's submission they said:

Operating from premises at the Chifley Health and Wellbeing Hub, the association conducts or facilitates a wide range of activities with the help of volunteers or a small number of paid staff. Funding of staff is, however, transitory.

Autism ACT have also acknowledged that they cannot incorporate as a company because they simply do not have the funds to meet compliance costs. That makes it more difficult for them to manage risk and harder to follow good governance practice. They have repeatedly asked for funding to provide for more than just a family support officer and they deserve to be heard and their work recognised. This government repeatedly calls for submissions to the budget consultation process and at least in the case of Autism Asperger ACT requests are repeatedly ignored.

The government have also ignored the chance for a specialist autism school. Proponents came to them, I believe, last year but what the private service provider was offering apparently did not fit the ACT government's model. Presumably, the Liberal's policy for such a school also does not fit the model. Interestingly, that same model is working effectively in other states, Ms Burch—in fact, all states other than the ACT and the Northern Territory. It was introduced in Queensland at the time of the state Labor government, and the Queensland state Labor government and other state Labor governments have supported such schools.

We did not believe families in the ACT should be denied quality intervention education. That is why we included it in our election policy. It was well researched and well received. My colleague Mr Hanson will elaborate more fully on this. It is an old adage that a good idea has many fathers. On this side of the chamber, we are not precious about offering good policy and our policy is a good one. It is certainly better than no policy option currently offered by this government. I commend the motion standing in my name. *(Time expired.)*

An incident having occurred in the gallery—

MADAM SPEAKER: The Assembly welcomes the attendance of members of the public in the gallery, but it is considered disorderly to applaud or in other ways participate in the debate. We appreciate that this is a matter of some significance to members of the public but could you refrain from applauding.

MS BURCH (Brindabella—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Disability, Children and Young People, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Women, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Racing and Gaming) (10.17): Autism Awareness Month is an opportunity for all of us to think about autism and its

impact on individuals and their families, and I welcome the opportunity to talk about autism spectrum disorder. However, the government does not support the motion as it is, and I move the amendment that has been circulated in my name:

Omit all words after “That this Assembly”, substitute:

“(1) notes:

- (a) that April is Autism Awareness Month and 2 April was World Autism Awareness Day;
- (b) the significant support already provided by the ACT Government to people with autism, together with the Government’s recent commitments to disability support; and
- (c) the potential impact that important national reforms in disability and education may have on support for people with autism; and

(2) calls on the Government to report to the Assembly by the last sitting day of May 2013 on support provided for autism diagnosis and services and the potential for further reforms resulting from the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the National Plan for School Improvement.”.

The government provides children with autism with a suite of services and programs, both in and out of school, which supports their development and education, and I will go into more detail shortly.

I am surprised that the Canberra Liberals have sought to draw attention in this motion to their own neglect of disability services during the 2012 election campaign. Mr Doszpot has included in his motion the only disability policy that they took to the election. His motion failed to mention that their policy was also grossly underfunded. The policy was costed by Treasury at \$9.3 million, almost double the amount claimed by the Canberra Liberals.

Mr Doszpot interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Doszpot!

MS BURCH: That was based on a school with capacity for 20 children, yet the Liberals promised a school for 40. You would think, Madam Speaker, that with just one disability policy, they could have got it right. What is more, this policy that they put forward involved significant costs for parents. So while the model does have some merit as it might be an option for some families, it is not the solution for all children with autism.

Mr Doszpot interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Doszpot! You were heard in silence.

MS BURCH: As I think I have indicated before in a public comment, AEIOU proponents did put a proposal through to me to discuss it, and we remain open to

considering how the government could support their expansion into the ACT. You would think that after more than a decade in opposition the Canberra Liberals would have come up with something more substantial.

The community was promised more. In fact members may recall that Carers ACT did ask the three political parties to provide a one-page summary of their election commitments for carers, which was to be reproduced in a document entitled “What carers want”. With Mrs Dunne as the spokesperson then, the Canberra Liberals’ statement to carers said in its opening lines:

We have been working hard over many years to talk with carers and the community sector to understand their needs, and where services to them can be improved. We will release details of our community services policy soon.

“We will release details of our community services policy soon.” We are still waiting, Madam Speaker. In fact the community is still waiting for those policies to come forward.

In contrast, the ACT government took to the election a comprehensive set of policies to support carers and people with disability that responded to areas of need identified in conversations with stakeholders.

Mr Seselja: A point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Burch, there is a point of order. Would you take your seat. Mr Seselja.

Mr Seselja: It goes to relevance, Madam Speaker. The motion from Mr Doszpot is specifically about autism and dealing with issues around autism. Ms Burch is talking about all sorts of other important issues but she is not addressing the motion that is before the Assembly today, and I would ask you to ask her to be relevant to the subject.

MS BURCH: On the point of order, if I may—

MADAM SPEAKER: On the point of order.

MS BURCH: the motion does cover the 2012 Canberra Liberals’ election commitments. I am making reference to our election commitments.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms Burch. On the point of order, the standing orders do require members to be relevant, and the motion does refer to a 2012 policy in a particular area. There is some leeway for context, but there have been about three minutes—sorry, could you stop the clock, please. There have been some three to five minutes of context, and I would ask you to come to the subject of the amendment, which is autism month, the significant support provided by the government and your commitment to reporting by May 2013 on these issues. You are addressing the amendment, Ms Burch.

MS BURCH: Thank you. I will go to the amendment and make reference to commitments we have made to support people with autism, together with our recent commitments to disability support. Those commitments include an additional \$5,000 per person for an extra half-day of support per week for young people with a disability who have graduated from school—an additional \$5,000 per person. I refer to payroll tax concessions for businesses that employ school leavers with a disability. That would include autism. Also there is the continuation of the successful therapy assistants in schools program that tailors programs for each and every student. It is not a cookie-cutter approach but a program for each individual student. We will provide additional funding to Carers ACT. We will commit more than \$10 million in support for people with a disability and respite accommodation. We will be trialling a mobile attendance care and evening service to provide “drop-in” support for people with a disability. I think it is quite appalling that the Canberra Liberals consider the NDIS to be a cop-out. I think that is simply appalling.

In the ACT we already have a suite of services providing assistance and support for people with autism, particularly children. It is estimated that between one in 100 and one in 160 children has autism, making it more common than any other childhood condition. Early diagnosis followed by early intervention provides the best opportunity for helping children with autism.

In the ACT we have many pathways for parents to seek advice on their child’s development. Referral can be made from a GP to a paediatrician or a psychologist, and an autism assessment can be undertaken either privately or through multidisciplinary services at Therapy ACT. Seeking a diagnosis is the first step in providing support for children with autism to fulfil their potential.

Therapy ACT’s autism service provides multidisciplinary assessment and intervention services to children under the age of eight. Twelve professional staff provide services to approximately 240 clients across speech pathology, occupational therapy, psychology and social work.

For children over the age of eight, Therapy ACT is able to provide various models of assessment and intervention through their regional teams, which often involves working closely with the school. Therapy ACT provides a family-focused approach which considers the needs of the whole family, rather than focusing early intervention on the child alone.

As well as the work carried out by Therapy ACT, the Education and Training Directorate cater for the needs of children and young people with autism. They provide options for students to access support in schools, either through autism-specific classes or through mainstream classes with support. This includes programs such as the communication and social awareness playgroup, autism intervention unit preschools, learning support units in primary and high schools, and support for post-school options.

In collaboration with the Education and Training Directorate, Therapy ACT provides a range of professional learning to educators in the ACT. These education programs assist teachers to support children with autism in the classroom and employ best practice strategies. The Education and Training Directorate has developed a range of interactive online modules which can be accessed by teachers to increase their understanding of autism interventions in the classroom. Staff of Therapy ACT's autism service have also partnered with Education and Training Directorate staff and a non-government consortium to provide parent and teacher training through the federal government positive partnership initiative.

In addition to ACT government services, there are a range of private and non-government organisations which provide services for children and young people with autism. If the child is under six years old, they may be eligible for funding through the federal government's helping children with autism package. Funding of up to \$12,000 can be accessed until the child's seventh birthday. This funding gives parents a choice in the intervention or therapy that best suits their child, whether that is speech pathology, occupational therapy, behavioural interventions or some other form of support.

Young children with autism in the ACT are also able to access specialised playgroups. Play Connect playgroups help families with children with ASD, or with ASD-like symptoms. Children up to six years old can attend and siblings are welcome. The groups are free. The ACT government contributed to the placement of a play therapist in the child and family centres to facilitate these groups.

The ACT government allocated \$400,000 in the 2011-12 budget for new after-school and vacation programs for children and young people with complex needs associated with disability, including autism. These commenced in February last year.

Northcott Disability Services provide after-school and vacation care from Black Mountain School to meet the needs of young people with high and complex needs, including those with autism. Belconnen Community Service provide after-school and vacation programs for teenagers at the Belconnen Community Centre. Communities@Work delivers an integrated vacation care program for children under 12 based at Malkara School. Belconnen Community Service deliver a similar service at Cranleigh School. These respite programs, delivered by non-government agencies, have been well received by parents of children with autism and other complex disabilities.

We have also provided funding of \$425,000 over four years to Autism Asperger ACT to fund a family support worker. I am delighted that next week I will be a guest of Autism Asperger ACT at an autism awareness breakfast. The breakfast is an opportunity for Autism Asperger ACT to continue their work of raising awareness of autism and providing support and advocacy for affected families. As a government we are committed to providing support for people with autism where and when they need it.

There is much that this government is doing to help people with autism, and with the important national reforms in disability and in education there is much underway. I would accept that whilst we deliver a substantive range of programs, some individuals and some family members want more. I can appreciate that, and I have always had very open communication with anyone who has come to my office about how we can continue to improve services for people with a disability, including those with autism.

That is why I was very pleased, as I indicated in my comments on the motion, to take to the community quite a substantive package of additional work, which included \$5,000 per person for an extra half-day of support for young people with a disability as they graduate from school. I recognise that that transition time is difficult for any young person, and for any family, but for those with the additional challenges of autism, hopefully that will be a well-received additional support. The individuals and families can make the decisions about where and how they access support services through that additional \$5,000.

I think that the payroll tax concessions for businesses to employ school leavers with a disability is very much a step in the right direction. It is about going into the private sector and providing opportunities for young people with autism to have a connection and to have opportunities for employment in the longer term. I reflect on an Autism ACT event a couple of years ago where they were giving out awards. I had the pleasure of meeting a young woman who had some sort of disability who was looking to establish a playgroup, an after-school care group. I was pleased to be able to make a connection for her into the Gungahlin Child and Family Centre. As I understand it, that program continues to grow and be supported at Gungahlin Child and Family Centre. That young mother has provided a great service to others in the community.

I am very pleased also to provide additional funding to Carers ACT to help carers to maintain their personal wellbeing. Carers do tremendous work in our community—the unsung heroes, in many ways, of our community. There is that little bit of assistance through Carers ACT to go to the carers, because it is important that we do not take our eye off providing that care to the carers, who face daily challenges, and more often than many of us would appreciate.

I am pleased that my amendment also calls on the government to provide a report to the Assembly on the last sitting day of May 2013 on support provided for autism diagnosis and services and the potential for other reforms. Whilst I have outlined a significant suite of packages, it is important that I outline for all members of this place and more broadly across the community what government, not only through Therapy ACT and the Community Services Directorate but as a whole, currently does, as we move through the next month. The disability insurance scheme and the national plan for school improvement will have progressed even further along the line and we can bring additional information to bear for members at that point.

Visitor

MADAM SPEAKER: Before we proceed, I note the presence in the gallery of former Deputy Chief Minister Mr David Lamont. Welcome to the Assembly.

Health—autism

Debate resumed.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (10.33): I thank Mr Doszpot for bringing this motion on today. I say up-front that I will not be able to support the motion in its current form, but I want to be clear that this is not because I or the Greens do not agree with Mr Doszpot that understanding autism spectrum disorder and providing adequate and specific services for children diagnosed with autism is not important. Rather, it is because of the scale of the policy within the motion and the large cost associated with such a policy. I, for one, think such a shift in the provision of services should be investigated more fully.

I am also loath to support it because I understand the ACT government provides autism-specific assessment and support, and I do not know that this motion clearly articulates the gaps that might exist in that service or explores the different ways in which it might be improved. I am especially mindful that supporting a motion that expands the services for people with autism in such a definitive way would occur in the context of the implementation of the national disability insurance scheme. I, for one, would prefer to have more information about how the NDIS might impact on this before we move to change or build on or add to services for children with autism.

Autism spectrum disorder, or ASD as it is often called, is primarily a disorder of social communication that is generally identified in young children from around two years of age. There are three primary areas in which children on the autism spectrum have difficulties: social interaction, communication and associated behaviours such as rituals, obsessions and sensory issues. ASD is a development disorder, and I understand many children who are diagnosed make considerable improvements as their language improves and sensory issues diminish.

There are currently no firm conclusions that can be drawn about the cause of ASD and there is no cure as such, but evidence certainly indicates that specific early intervention can bring improvements. There is increasing evidence that the rate of autism is increasing—autism now affects around one in 160 people, with a higher prevalence amongst boys than girls.

ASD or autism is one of those disabilities that we all think we know a little about; it has featured in several movies and people often throw around stereotypical caricatures of those who have autism. I hope that Autism Awareness Week is working to build understanding of those with ASD and how they experience the world. For a young child with ASD the world is a very confusing place—verbal language understanding is poor; the capacity to express oneself is limited and often reduced to lots of tantrums; changes to routines are challenging; noisy environments can be disturbing; and social engagement with other children often just does not happen.

When language emerges it is often in a form that parrots other people's language but does not quite suit the social context. Language can be understood in a very literal way, and people with this kind of language disorder can miss the nuances, double meanings and colloquialisms that we so frequently use in conversation. Reading emotions in others is something that can continue to be difficult, as can be reading the social cues or context in any situation.

Children with autism often also present with challenging behaviours for parents to manage—repetitive behaviours, rituals that must be followed, poor play skills, obsession about specific objects or routines and limited food choices and aversions to particular textures or tastes. And perhaps what can be the most heartbreaking concern early on is that children with autism often find it difficult to engage warmly and share smiles and laughs and hugs with those who love them the most.

Of course, all of these behaviours can and do improve, but it is their unique patterns that have driven the development of autism-specific intervention, intervention that acknowledges and works with the characteristic strengths and weaknesses often found in children with autism. Disability services have had to adjust and adapt to ensure that they can respond appropriately to an increased number of children being diagnosed over the past decade. Here in the ACT there were not really any ASD-specific preschool and school-based education units 15 years ago. Now there are both, and they have grown in number.

The federal government's funding, through the helping children with autism announced in 2008, acknowledged this growing need in the community for support to access early intervention, providing up to \$12,000 per child once a diagnosis has been made. There are more community advocacy and support groups and, hopefully, a growing community awareness.

While acknowledging the uniqueness of ASD and the requirement for specific intervention, the problem with supporting Mr Dozspot's motion is twofold. Firstly, as I indicated earlier, it is an expensive policy to put on the table in a motion. Indeed, implementation of the Liberal's election policy is, according to Treasury, a lot more expensive than the Liberals put forward in their election campaign—indeed, almost double. Treasury costed the proposal for a new autism-specific school for 40 students at around \$9.3 million compared to the costing put forward by the Liberal Party of around \$4.7 million. That is obviously one issue of concern.

But my major objection is that while a motion such as this is a good way to get a conversation started, it is not a good way to decide the best service delivery for a particular constituency. While Mr Doszpot puts in his motion that the policy for a new school has widespread support from the community, I would want to see more evidence that this is what the parents of children with autism want for their children. It may well be that some parents want an autism-specific school—I am sure there are some and I have no doubt Mr Doszpot has spoken with them—but other parents might prefer that their child is in an autism intervention unit with an integration day at their local preschool. It may be that this delivers just as good an intervention and occurs closer to the child's home, allowing less disruption to the whole family. Some parents are passionate about ensuring children are integrated, with support, into a mainstream environment and would not wish for their child to attend a special needs school. I believe further consultation with families of children with autism would be a positive thing.

The policy also assumes a particular service delivery model for the children of the ACT without presenting any evidence that this is the service delivery model that is

best practice and will deliver the best outcomes. While there are attractions to establishing an autism-specific learning environment, with all of the communication supports in place, some families may well prefer their child to spend more time in a mainstream environment. There is no doubt that the AEIOU website is very professional, and I do not doubt the commitment they bring to early education services for children with autism, but the models of intervention are not clearly outlined.

It is also unclear as to how children at the school would access therapeutic services that they might require. Is it expected that the ACT government would deliver services to a privately run school or would other methods be put in place? Certainly, the Liberal costing of the policy does not include the provision of therapeutic services. Given that the Liberal Party are effectively asking the government to fund a private service provider to deliver early intervention services, I believe some kind of in-depth discussion about the service delivery model would need to be undertaken with government before taking further steps.

It is true that having a single education facility that provides services to the bulk of children with autism has its attractions. Firstly, there would hopefully be a single uniform curriculum that was developed and tweaked to suit over time. Secondly, an institution dedicated to the provision of educational services for children with autism would certainly foster a centre-of-excellence environment where teachers and ancillary staff would be likely to build and maintain a high level of skill and expertise in the area of ASD.

Currently, early education services for children with autism are provided by the education department, with children eligible for nine hours a week at the autism intervention units. They can also supplement this with time at the mainstream preschool. Therapeutic and diagnosis services are provided by a specialist team at Therapy ACT. It would be useful to see how the government fosters the development of expertise not so much in the Therapy ACT team—which presumably has the chance to build expertise and engage in best practice—but in the autism intervention units and the learning support units where staff can come and go and often do not have specific background in ASD.

It can be difficult for parents who enrol their children in a unit such as the AIU to see that a new teacher may have no or little experience in working with children with ASD, especially if there is not a great deal of professional development support for those staff put in that position.

Mr Doszpot's motion at paragraph (2)(a) calls for the government to develop more effective autism-specific diagnostic services, and he discussed this in his speech. My understanding is that Therapy ACT have an autism-specific diagnostic process that is multidisciplinary and involves home and school visits with specific follow-up to develop programs and support for children who are diagnosed. It requires hearing and cognitive assessments to be undertaken prior to children being referred, and that seems appropriate. One of the things that might improve the assessment process is having a paediatrician or doctor on the team, and the Health Directorate could probably contribute to the team in that way. That is something the government might wish to give further consideration to.

Finally, I want to discuss the challenges in planning a model such as this in a policy environment that is about to shift considerably. As we all know, the ACT has signed up to early implementation of the NDIS, and on 1 July 2014 we will begin to transition. It is unclear to me how services are going to be provided to children with autism full stop at the moment—will it continue through the education system, and how will therapeutic services be accessed? It just does not seem that now is a good time to commit to funding a new and expensive project when we are on the cusp of radically changing funding models for people with disabilities.

I do not see this as an excuse, and Mr Doszpot sought to describe it in various other terms. It is not an excuse not to look at ways to improve or expand existing services, but I am cautious about establishing such a project right now, particularly as one of the funding mechanisms for the AEIOU funding model—the model being proposed—is a pooling of government assistance, assistance that is highly likely to change shape not only with the introduction of the NDIS but also as international diagnostic tools used to determine a diagnosis of autism are updated.

In summary, I will not be supporting this motion for the following reasons: firstly, I believe the proposal is significantly more expensive when costed by Treasury than announced by the Liberal Party; secondly, there has not been enough consultation with either the families of children with autism or the government about the desirability or efficacy of the service delivery model for the ACT; and, thirdly, the policy context of the NDIS means it is unclear how funding for services will continue, meaning that it is not a good time to establish new services with government support.

Ms Burch has moved an amendment, and I accept that the government have to do further investigation as to the implications of the NDIS and also other reforms to education, generally known as the Gonski reforms. I certainly agree it would be useful for the government to come back to the Assembly and give not just a detailed report of services for ASD currently provided but also the efficacy of those programs, whether or not they are meeting the needs of families and an indication of what future plans they might have for improving services if that is required. I would personally also appreciate some sense from the government of what families—not just some families but all families—think about these various service delivery models—it is unclear whether there has been any recent consultation with families, but I think it would be helpful to know what families want—acknowledging that there might be a diversity of views.

Finally, I again thank Mr Doszpot for putting this issue up for debate in the chamber to highlight the needs of children with autism spectrum disorder and to bring the issue of service delivery for these children to the front of our minds. Particularly in the context of Autism Awareness Week, it is very important that we are having this discussion in the Assembly. I look forward to the report and response from the government in May where we can continue this discussion so that we may learn even more about this issue that affects families in our community.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (10.46): At the outset I congratulate Mr Doszpot on bringing this motion before the Assembly and I

commend him for the work that he has done with regard to this issue over the last few years. It is a great policy. The autism school is a great policy. It would have been implemented if we had won government, and it is disappointing today that the government is not going to follow through on it.

The response from the minister, the sort of sneering that took up about 10 minutes of her 15-minute speech, which is all politically motivated smear and attack on the Canberra Liberals, really exposes the lack of concern that she has for this as an issue and what motivates her, which seems to be cheap politics and attack rather than actually taking this issue on its substance. Some of the criticisms levelled at this policy are inaccurate. Concerns over the cost are disputed. There is a different view in terms of the establishment of the cost of this model.

But ultimately, politics is about priorities. It is about working out where is your priority to spend money. I welcome members of the community here today who have come to listen to the speech and I think if we were to ask them or ask their families, ask their friends, ask many members of the community where they think that money should be invested by government, they will give you an answer.

The question is: should it be about an autism school to provide services to some of the more disadvantaged in our community, provide the essential early intervention services we need, or a look at some of the government priorities? This is the government that squandered about \$5 million on the office block that they had to build, did a bunch of planning and then shelved it. That would have funded this and some. This is a government that have already spent \$1 million on light rail for naught. We have seen nothing on it. And this government have said that, despite the \$600 million-plus price tag, light rail would be built at whatever cost.

This is the Chief Minister saying she must have eight more MLAs. I do not know what the cost of that is. Is it \$8 million or \$16 million in terms of capital, and then what is it? What is the full cost of that?

Go out into the community and ask whether they want a bunch of planning on an office building that was never built, whether they want to see light rail built at any cost, whether they want to see eight more MLAs—because they are the government's priorities. I am not making this stuff up; they are the government's priorities, and any number of other things. You can delve into public art or any number of other misguided priorities. Or do they want something that delivers for the most vulnerable in our community—things like an autism school? I am sure if we were to ask members of the community—and they have been advised not to answer by Madam Speaker; I do not want to get them into trouble—and to ask the vast bulk of people in the community, they would tell us what they want, and that is better services for people with autism.

Research shows that about one child in every 100 children has autism and currently there are almost 230,000 Australians diagnosed. A recent study conducted by Synergies Economic Consulting found that autism costs the Australian community up to \$10 billion a year. It also found that if a child accesses two years of best practice early intervention, up to \$2 million can be saved over the lifetime of that child. Early

intervention and ongoing family support can make a huge difference to the quality of life of a child with autism. Many young children who participate in early intervention demonstrate gains in the areas of communication, social skills, behaviour and IQ.

In the ACT there is currently a hole in early intervention services. The ACT is only one of two jurisdictions in Australia that does not have a specific early learning centre for autistic children. The federal government, as part of their helping children with autism program, has built six autism-specific early learning and care centres around Australia. The roles of these centres are to provide early learning programs and specific support for children aged zero to six, with autism spectrum disorder, or ASD, in a long day care setting, provide parents with support in the care of their children and give them the opportunity to participate more fully in the community. And through their affiliations with universities or hospitals, the centres have a research and a workforce training component which will help achieve a better understanding of ASD and increase workforce capacity.

For some reason, federal Labor did not decide or did not think that the ACT is worthy of this service. I am not sure what the full reason for that is. Maybe it is because they consider it a couple of safe seats. But the ACT and the Northern Territory were the only jurisdictions to miss out. We do not share that view that people in the ACT should miss out. We believe that all autistic children deserve the best support and opportunities to reach their full potential. We believe children living in the ACT should not be disadvantaged compared to children in New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia or Victoria. And that is why the Canberra Liberals promised at the 2012 election to build the ACT's first intervention centre for children diagnosed with autism.

Key elements of the proposal include government funding support of \$24,000 a child and a high staff ratio of one to two. Children would be supported by a dedicated team comprising skilled learning facilitators, including speech pathology, occupational therapy, child psychology and early childhood teaching—some of the concerns that obviously Mr Rattenbury did not quite understand in our policy—a strong focus on school readiness and transitioned support through an individual learning program, and provision of before and after school care designed for children with ASD.

The centre, as promised, would be operated by the AEIOU Foundation, which currently operates 10 successful centres throughout Queensland. The AEIOU model offers an intensive, personalised program for children with autism. The program employs a variety of effective teaching strategies, coupled with a supported learning environment to help encourage and nurture those children. The program also offers consistency of staffing and programming, opportunities for children to interact socially with each other, full-day and part-day structured programming and individual teaching instruction that is tailored to each child's individual needs.

On the AEIOU website, there are stories, personal stories, related by parents of children with autism who have attended these schools in other jurisdictions, and I would recommend people do go to that website and read some of those stories. They are very moving. Josh's story is very moving, as is Lachlan's story and Zane's story.

They help to remind us that this is not just about dollars and cents, this is not just about a theoretical argument, but this is about humans. It is about people and it is about a change that we in this Assembly can make for a relatively small amount of money that will have a huge impact on people's lives, a massive impact on people's lives, and the lives of people that we as members of this Assembly should be caring about the most. But it seems so often in this place when we are debating technical and regulatory amendments, we talk about the money without understanding the impact of it. I do recommend to members that they go to that website and that they read some of those stories.

I am disappointed that the government are not going to engage. It is disappointing that this government seem to have discounted this proposal because they do not like the politics of it, perhaps, but when they do consider the schools, the centres that have been set up in other jurisdictions, that have been set up by federal Labor, perhaps they could look to take the politics out of this. I am sure that if they were to take this model and make changes, we would work with them, with the government, in a truly bipartisan sense to make sure that it is not about political squabbling in this place, it is not about the sort of smear that we saw when Joy Burch was just trying to take political opportunism. It is about making sure that we work together in this place to provide an outcome for the community, in this case some of the most needy people in our community.

The amendment by Ms Burch is not one that we would support because it steps well away from what Mr Doszpot is calling for, and that is some real action. What we are seeing again is another piece of fluff from the government. We actually need to see some action. I do not think autism is new. I do not think it is a new debate. We have had this debate for a long time in our community, and now is the time to act. And I commend Mr Doszpot for the work he has done in this area.

This is something that is tangible. It is a great policy. There is probably some work that the government can do to improve it, and I would welcome that. But let us get on with it and let us get rid of the political argy-bargy. Let us stop trying to come up with excuses and let us actually start in this place with this government delivering for people with ASD in this community.

MR SESELJA (Brindabella) (10.56): I commend Mr Doszpot, and I want to lend my whole-hearted support to this motion and to the policies that are outlined in Mr Doszpot's motion. This is good policy that makes a real difference and is making a real difference to people right now. Right now kids with autism are being given support that is quite extraordinary. Anyone who wants to speak on this should go and visit one of these schools and see the difference that it makes to these kids and see the difference that it makes to the parents of these children as they see real early intervention that works. This is a model that works. I defy anyone to suggest that it does not, and I defy anyone to suggest that it is a waste of taxpayers' money or a bad model. It is working around the country. It is working in places like Queensland, right across Queensland, and it is a model that can and should work here in the ACT.

April is Autism Awareness Month, and it gives us the opportunity to increase understanding and knowledge of this disorder but also to advocate on behalf of people

living with autism, including their families. And there have been many great initiatives so far this month that have raised awareness, and I congratulate the many community groups that have been involved in forums and the go blue campaigns.

But what we also need as part of this debate is real commitment from government. Raising awareness is a great thing, but in the end what we need are the dollars, the strategies and the policies that improve the lives of people living with autism and their families. At the very basic level, we need to ensure that we are providing the right level of support and funding for people with autism so that they can grasp all the opportunities out there.

Mr Doszpot's motion notes that only nine hours of therapy support per week is currently provided directly through the autism intervention unit, despite experts recommending a minimum of 20 hours. This is simply not good enough. One of the difficulties for educators in mainstream schools is that there is not one single treatment that is appropriate for all children with autism spectrum disorder. Individually tailored programs using a range of teaching strategies are required. It is also widely accepted that the earlier special intervention programs can start for a child, the greater the chance that child has of reaching their full educational and social potential.

We know that Autism Asperger ACT have made numerous and successive budget submissions calling for more funding, but they have had little or no success. I am aware that some parents have moved interstate to gain better resources and facilities for their children.

In December last year, I was fortunate enough to visit one of these facilities run by the AEIOU Foundation. The AEIOU Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation, and one of Queensland's leading providers of full-time early education for children with autism who are aged between 2½ and six years. Each AEIOU centre is staffed with full-time specialist early childhood teachers and skilled learning facilitators, with support from speech pathologists, occupational and music therapists. The AEIOU Foundation was established in 2005. It has since grown to currently operate 10 centres across Queensland. The foundation currently has 200 students enrolled.

The evidence of the success of these centres is compelling. The AEIOU Foundation states that 90 per cent of children that complete the program can communicate functionally and 75 per cent of children that complete the program successfully transition into mainstream schools—75 per cent. This is an extraordinary outcome and is the sort of outcome that parents are crying out for.

Early intervention is the absolute key and if you do not buy it from the argument of how it transforms people's lives then buy it from the economic argument. If you have the early intervention and you spend the money early, how much less will the government have to spend and families have to spend in the future as these kids are able to transition into mainstream schools? It makes sense at a human level. It makes sense at an economic level as well. We should not forget that this investment in two years of early intervention, this two-year intensive program, is a fantastic investment.

I need to address some of the falsehoods that have been put out there by the Labor Party about the policy and that have been perpetuated, I think, by the *Canberra Times*. They are simply wrong. They are wrong. They have not read the policy. They do not understand the funding model and they have overstated the potential costs to families in quite an irresponsible way, a grossly irresponsible way. I do not know whether it was the *Canberra Times* egging on the Labor Party or the Labor Party egging on the *Canberra Times*. Either way, they got it wrong.

Let us have a look at what they said on 26 September. They claimed that it was based on a model that charges families fees in excess of \$20,000 a year. That is wrong. That is wrong, because it does not take into account the numerous rebates that actually come back to families. That is what the model is based on. It does not take into account childcare rebates, childcare benefits allowance, helping children with autism funding, carers allowance and carers bonus payments to minimise out-of-pocket expenses. It does not take into account any of that, which significantly brings down the costs to families.

Furthermore, when they were looking at the ACT model it did not take into account that there was an extra \$13,000 per annum per child funding in our model, an extra \$13,000 per student, per child, per year. They ignored that part of it and somehow suggested that there would be high costs. The costs on this model would be from zero for low and middle-income families who are eligible for various rebates, up to a maximum of around \$7,000 per year for higher income families.

Let us compare that to childcare costs. This is full-time care. We are talking about full-time care for some of our most vulnerable kids, for some of our most vulnerable families. \$7,000 for high-income earners who are not eligible for all of the rebates is less than \$30 per day. How does that compare to child care in the ACT? This is more than child care. This is respite care for families. This is early intervention. This is intensive support for children and families that is simply not available in other forums. The Labor Party and the Greens want to suggest that that is not value for money—where we can deliver a product, where there is an investment from government, an investment in this case of \$1 million recurrent funding per annum, with out-of-pocket expenses, with the commonwealth contributing and with individual families paying either nothing or up to \$7,000 where they have the means to do so—but that, to me, seems like a good model.

In addition, we have groups like the Ricky Stuart Foundation who have committed hundreds of thousands of dollars that they will raise here in the ACT to further support such a model, whether that is capital funding or whether that is recurrent funding. And the good thing about this model is that it engages the community. We do get the business community getting behind it, because they know that it is a partnership between government and the community sector and it is an independent school. Fundamentally I think there is an ideological objection on the other side, the fact that these are independent schools. They are independent schools that are supported by government, supported by business, supported by parents as they see their kids getting that type of early intervention.

The only dispute on the costings was in relation to the capital up-front cost. We are talking about the Canberra Liberals' costings, which were based on what it actually cost to build them in Queensland and what Treasury had to say. So we are talking about \$3 million difference on the capital. Mr Rattenbury got up and cited that as one of the reasons not to support it. Yet we have got a debate about light rail where the government do not know how much it will cost. It might cost \$600 million, it might cost \$800 million, it might cost a billion dollars and they have basically said they will deliver it, whatever the cost. Let us just put that into context—Mr Hanson put it into context well—in terms of some of the priorities that are being pursued.

This is far too important to see the kind of political posturing and dishonest approach to numbers that we have seen. These are the facts. It works in other states. The policy that was put forward by the Canberra Liberals would give additional support to what the Queensland government gives, making it even more affordable for parents. The model draws on commonwealth funding for those who most need it. This is a model that works. It is early intervention, and we know what all of the experts say. Have the early intervention. Seventy-five per cent of these kids will go into mainstream schools. Surely that is something we can agree on. The model has been tried and tested. It works. It should be supported here in the ACT. We should put aside the politics and in the next few years, regardless of who is in government, it should be delivered. (*Time expired.*)

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (11.06): The ACT government welcomes the opportunity to raise awareness of autism during Autism Awareness Month.

Early intervention, as we have heard, for children with autism is most effective and provides the best possible outcomes for children when provided as early as possible after diagnosis. Early intervention services should be tailored to the individual needs of the child and their family. These services provide families with the knowledge, skills and support to meet the needs of their child. They optimise a child's development and increase their ability to participate in family and community life.

Therapy ACT recognises the importance of working in partnership with families. Professionals spend time with families working on goals that can be incorporated into family routines and play activities so that learning is incorporated into activities that take place every day and give children with autism the best chance of learning.

The ACT government continues to provide innovative models of service for children with special needs. More than 250 Canberra students with a disability were supported by the ACT government's therapy assistants in schools program in its first 12 months. The therapy assistants program was piloted in 2011-12; then \$1.31 million was allocated in the 2012-13 budget to continue it for a further two years. The government has pledged a further \$1.67 million to fund the program until 2016-17. The program supports up to five mainstream schools and two specialist schools each year, giving students with autism and other disabilities an opportunity to receive regular therapy sessions in their classroom.

The ACT government recognises the need for families to have a choice in the services they access for their child with a disability. In order to better support families in the

ACT, we have agreed to the NDIS launch from July 2014. The ACT is the only jurisdiction where the NDIS launch covers the whole jurisdiction. This means reform of the whole of the ACT support services sector. The commonwealth and ACT governments will work together to build and strengthen the capacity of people with disability, the community sector and the community generally to prepare for the NDIS.

In preparation for the NDIS launch in the ACT, \$7.8 million will be allocated through grants directly to people with a disability, including those with psychosocial disability. People will have two opportunities to apply for a grant through the enhanced service offer. The first round will be in July 2013 and the second in about September 2013.

To assist people to prepare for the national reform, applicants will be encouraged to think about their whole-of-life goals, and the supports and services, both formal and informal, that they will need to achieve those. Applicants will be supported to think differently about how they might use or manage the resources that are available to them to achieve those goals.

The enhanced service offer will give people a tangible opportunity to experience control and choice with a small allocation of funds. The enhanced service offer is not intended to respond to all unmet need in the ACT. It is, however, expected to reach a very large number of people with diverse needs and provide them with additional resources to step towards a good life prior to their transition to the NDIS. Families will have a choice in the services they access, and in future their choices will drive the development of therapy and intervention services in the ACT, including private sector and non-government services.

I find it incredible that in this debate this morning the opposition has described the NDIS as a cop-out. I will just quote from the NDIS documents:

The Prime Minister released the Productivity Commission's report on 10 August 2011 and all governments agreed with the recommendation to establish a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

An NDIS will turn the way we currently provide disability services on its head. Rather than funding based on historical budget allocations, a funding pool will be based on actuarial assessment of need.

It will recognise that disability is for a lifetime, and so it will take a lifelong approach to providing care and support. This means that assessment will look beyond the immediate need, and across the course of a person's life. For example, home modifications might be expensive up front, but if they afford a person with significant disability the opportunity of greater independence, or if they mean that a parent carer can continue to care for their loved one, it's a good investment.

Taking a lifelong approach also means focusing on intensive early intervention, particularly for people where there is good evidence that it will substantially improve functioning or delay or lessen a decline in functioning.

Importantly, an NDIS will support choice for people with disability, their families and carers, and put people in control of the care and support they receive, based on need. Of course, there will also be safeguards in place to

support people in exercising this choice and control, and to help them make informed choices.

An NDIS will ensure people are no longer “shut out” from opportunities and from independence by providing the appropriate and necessary supports that allow people with disability to reach their full potential.

It will nurture and sustain the support of families, carers and friendship groups—the very communities of support that are critical to improving the lives of people with disability.

And it will include a comprehensive information and referral service, to help people with a disability who need access to mainstream, disability and community supports.

A National Disability Insurance Scheme will give all Australians the peace of mind to know that if they have or acquire a disability that leaves them needing daily assistance with everyday life, or if they care for someone who has a disability, that they will be supported.

I would go also to Mr Hanson’s debate comments earlier today. Mr Hanson suggests that politics are about priority. If politics are about priority, we could go and have a look at the Liberal Party website—the Canberra Liberals website. The first priority there is to donate money. The second priority there in their story is about running on empty over petrol stations. They then talk about ACTEW. But I am very pleased to see that Mr Doszpot’s motion does get—

Mr Doszpot: How is this relevant to the motion?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Stop the clock, please. Sit down, Mr Gentleman.

Mr Hanson: On a point of order on relevance, the Speaker has ruled that there is a broad-ranging debate occurring here, Madam Deputy Speaker, but an analysis of the Liberal Party’s website has very little to do with the establishment of a specific autism school in the ACT. I ask that you bring the member to order and make him be relevant to the debate.

MR GENTLEMAN: On the point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: I was just about to get to the discussion on the debate today on the Liberal Party’s website. It is discussed there. I was just about to say that the priority that is in place—

Mr Smyth interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Smyth.

Mr Smyth: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The minister—the member admits he is out of order. Sorry, you will never be a minister; I had forgotten about that. The member admits he has been out of order for almost three-quarters of his

allotted speaking time. He has just used the words, “I am about to get to the motion.” You might like to do your job and call him to order.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, thank you for your advice.

Members interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members! I do not believe that Mr Gentleman has been off the subject for three-quarters of his time. He has just—

Mr Smyth interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Smyth! He has only just gone to the issue of the website in response to what Mr Hanson was saying about Labor Party policy—wider policy. He was discussing the Liberal Party’s wider policy. But I would now ask you to go to the matter in hand, Mr Gentleman.

Mr Hanson: Madam Deputy Speaker, on the point of order, he was not talking about Liberal Party policy; he was talking about the Liberal Party website and going through what is on the Liberal Party website—that it calls for donations, it calls for this, it calls for that. It was not anything about policy; it was about the Liberal Party website. He was completely out of order.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sorry, Mr Hanson. I misunderstood. I thought that the Liberal Party had policy on the website and that was what he was going to. I apologise for that. I was waiting for the policy comment from Mr Gentleman, and Mr Gentleman was going to go to the policy on this particular subject, I believe. Mr Gentleman, would you go to that and not refer to anything else on the website, please. You can start the clock.

MR GENTLEMAN: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am pleased, of course, that Mr Doszpot’s motion today does get some priority over the plastic bag ban on the Liberal Party’s website.

In closing, the ACT government looks forward to a positive future for families and individuals with a disability, including autism spectrum disorders, as the NDIS provides them with the means to fulfil their potential and reach their goals.

MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (11.16): Madam Deputy Speaker, I have to say that I am very disappointed at the various attitudes and the responses that we have heard. The motion that is before this Assembly is a very simple and direct motion. I will repeat it for the record. The motion calls on the government to:

- (a) develop more effective autism specific diagnostic and support services;
- (b) provide more support for non-government organisations that deliver guidance and support for families dealing with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosed children; and
- (c) provide more targeted education support through the establishment of a school specifically for children diagnosed with ASD, in line with the Canberra Liberals’ 2012 election policy.

Ms Burch: Not political at all.

MR DOSZPOT: Not political, Ms Burch—not political at all, because what we are saying is that our election policy is one that we are wanting to share with you. We are wanting to share—

Ms Burch interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Ms Burch! Stop the clock, please. Sit down, Mr Doszpot. Mr Doszpot, resume your seat, please. I have stopped the clock. Ms Burch, will you please not interject across the chamber. Mr Doszpot has the floor. Mr Doszpot, if the interjections occur, please do not respond to them across the chamber. Address your remarks through me.

MR DOSZPOT: It is hard not to when they are so inane.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I understand that. That is why I am asking you to address your remarks through me. I will call members who are interjecting and ask them not to. Mr Doszpot, you have the floor.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I was pointing out, the Liberal Party policy of 2012, the election policy about an autism school, is one of the main reasons we are here—not to politicise it, but to bring it to the attention of this government, to have a look at it in a far more holistic way than the ideological approach that they have applied to it. That is what we are trying to do here.

As Mr Seselja rightly pointed out, this appears to be more of an ideological debate. But the strange thing there is that if it is ideological that this Labor Party will not accept the premise that an autism school can be run through a private organisation, that makes this ACT Labor government unique amongst all Labor governments around the country. In all other states this system is working. These autism early education areas are in place. They are funded through the various Labor governments—or the Labor governments that were in place.

The point is that the ACT, along with the Northern Territory, was the only jurisdiction to have missed out on this. The Canberra Liberals do not share the view that we should miss out on this. We believe autistic children deserve the best support and opportunities to reach their full potential. We believe children living in the ACT should not be at a disadvantage compared to children in New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria. That is why we promise to build the autism school that we have been talking about.

And that is what we are challenging you to do, Ms Burch, as minister for disability—to have a look at the policy and take the politics out of it. We are saying to you that if we were wanting to make an impact with it, you make an impact with it. Show us how you can do something for our community that is based on priority, that is based on children getting the attention they deserve—not a million dollars spent on a feasibility study on light rail, in this instance, or a feasibility study on two-lane highways heading into Belconnen, a pilot study that never occurred but on which \$2 million was

spent. We have got these priorities where it is okay to spend lots of money on things that are ideologically driven. It is time that your ideology embraced some of the needs of our community. I think that needed to be said.

I must pay due respect to Mr Seselja's initial involvement in and support of this whole autism school. This is not something that is my own issue; this is something that is embraced by all of the Liberal Party. Mr Hanson, in his new role as the new leader of the Liberals, has taken on the very same passion that Mr Seselja shared with us in this. We are very keen on making sure that this happens. If it does not happen under our watch as government, which we wanted to happen, we would be very pleased if it happened under yours, Ms Burch.

That is what we are here about. Your amendment came to us halfway through my speech. Quite frankly, I find it offensive that you are not paying attention to the very simple exercise that we are trying to introduce into this Assembly, and I will just close with my last remarks on this, to:

... provide more targeted education support through the establishment of a school specifically for children diagnosed with ASD ...

I must thank Mr Rattenbury. I believe Mr Rattenbury has given some very interesting insights into his collaboration and the reasons why he could not support the motion. I do not believe that I accept some of it, but I do accept Mr Rattenbury's honest approach to it. He stuck to the point and wanted to make sure that at least we were concentrating on the issue at hand, the children and the community. But when it comes down to the priorities, as Mr Hanson mentioned, the priorities seem to be a long way from what we are trying to introduce here.

We will not be supporting the amendment. I ask members of this Assembly to support the motion that is in my name.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 8

Mr Barr	Ms Gallagher	Mr Coe	Mr Seselja
Ms Berry	Mr Gentleman	Mr Dospot	Mr Smyth
Dr Bourke	Ms Porter	Mrs Dunne	Mr Wall
Ms Burch	Mr Rattenbury	Mr Hanson	
Mr Corbell		Mrs Jones	

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Planning—Canberra

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (11.27): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that it is vital to the future of our city that we ensure there is an integrated, imaginative and clear blueprint for our city, our suburbs and our town centres;
- (b) that we must engage and consult with our community on what it identifies as its priorities, what role the community wants our city centre to have and how it can become a more dynamic, vibrant and sustainable place;
- (c) that it is essential to creating the city of the future that we integrate public transport, walking and cycling, the needs of our residents and our community facilities in a way which creates and sustains an environmentally responsible city; and
- (d) that we continue to set clear priorities for investing in our infrastructure to ensure we have quality schools, health facilities, public housing, sporting and convention facilities and transport infrastructure; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) incorporate community feedback into the city plan to determine a comprehensive approach for the city's future as an economically vibrant and attractive centre;
- (b) ensure that information about the major elements of the proposed City to the Lake project, including changes to Parkes Way, West Basin and the interface with Lake Burley Griffin, is provided to the community;
- (c) continue to ensure that the transport needs of our community, including Capital Metro, are integrated into the city plan;
- (d) continue to consult closely with the community on master plans for our town and group centres, and ensure our local shopping centres upgrade programs maintain the attractiveness, community well-being and viability of these centres; and
- (e) continue to ensure that there is an effective and efficient roll out of investment in essential infrastructure such as schools, community health facilities, hospitals, sporting facilities and public housing.

I am pleased to bring this motion before the Assembly today. The future planning for our city is something that this government believes is a critical factor for the future of Canberra. The centenary year is a good time to reflect on where we have come from and where we want to go. As you know, on 26 March this government announced the

commencement of consultation for the proposed city plan. The city plan project will deliver a coordinated and cohesive strategic plan that provides a spatial and policy framework to guide future planning, design and development of the city centre.

The city plan will provide the first integrated plan for the city centre and fill the gaps between other plans and studies, and provide a framework guiding all development and change in the city. As the minister said yesterday in this place, it is not starting from scratch but will build on policies and principles contained within existing policy and approved projects such as the ACT planning strategy, transport for Canberra, the city action plan and the Griffin legacy. The city plan will help us decide the overall direction of central Canberra over the next few years, including pedestrian facilities, traffic and personal and public transport. The comprehensive plan will make the city more cosmopolitan. It will help determine the city's future development and growth and ensure projects and infrastructure are delivered efficiently and effectively.

As the minister said yesterday, the basis for the first phase of the community consultation in developing the draft city plan is framed around five themes important to the future of the city. These are: the role of the city—what facilities and infrastructure should be in the city, where and what quantum; growth in the city—a sustainable mix of land use in appropriate locations to stimulate and direct growth; transport and movement—providing multiple modes, supporting sustainable growth and improving access and movement; public realm and design—a clear hierarchy of streets, spaces and quality and consistent design; and implementing change—identifying key projects and initiatives and a program for these with community buy-in.

Community involvement is important to the government. Comments are invited in writing, online and through an open house in Garema Place this month, as the Chief Minister said yesterday. These comments will feed into a draft plan which will also include the findings of all background studies and other research. This draft plan will also be released for public comment around June. The city plan is expected to be completed for consideration by the ACT government in September and delivered to the Australian government by October 2013. The city plan will establish a framework to guide and coordinate government priorities, infrastructure development, land release and incentives for redevelopment in the city.

The city is a point in the parliamentary triangle and a key part of the nation's capital. The city to lake project is an exciting proposal for the lake side of the city and for connecting the current city centre to the lake. The waterfront areas of the city provide opportunities for future waterfront development for residential, civic and recreation and optimising this area is important for growth and change in the city centre. Currently there are barriers to movement and growth in parts of the city and the city to the lake project explores opportunities for maximising use of our beautiful waterfront and also connecting the city centre to the lake area.

As the minister mentioned yesterday in this place, there are plans for boardwalks linking the entire waterfront and an urban beach. The plan also includes sites for a city stadium, regional aquatic centre and enhanced convention facilities. To link areas of the lake, including residential areas, there will be ferries and water taxis.

The key to connecting the city to the lake is how we treat Parkes Way. It plays a vital role as a major traffic artery, although in its present form it is a major barrier; it isolates and disconnects the city from its waterfront and its main city parks. To overcome this barrier while retaining good traffic flow it is proposed to construct Parkes Way as a smart boulevard. It will be split level, allowing free-flowing traffic at the lower level and introducing local city streets at the surface.

Parkes Way will be transformed with traffic calming measures on Vernon Circuit and London Circuit. The new street development will improve access to West Basin residential and community areas and there will be strategically located multi-use car parks for events and commuter car parking. In addition, and critical to the linkage of the city and the lake, there will be a central interchange point for capital metro light rail and a new ferry terminal. Capital metro will complement, and integrate with, the work being undertaken on the city plan. Capital metro is an important project that can stimulate opportunity for growth and change and will also enable the development envisioned by the city to the lake project.

The proposed capital metro will be transformative for Canberra, providing a great opportunity to deliver sustainable rapid transport options and improving movement into and through the city. The project is the first stage of Canberra's light rail network and will be the backbone of Canberra's public transport network, combined with the frequent network of buses. As we have heard, the capital metro light rail will link the Gungahlin town centre to the city, along Flemington Road and Northbourne Avenue. The terminus for this line will be located on Northbourne Avenue between Alinga and Bunda streets.

Both the national capital plan and the territory plan have identified Northbourne Avenue as part of the intertown public transport network. The capital metro project as outlined continues this vision. In line with a commitment to consider a future Canberra-wide rail network, future stages will connect through the city. The city plan provides the opportunity to establish how capital metro will enter and pass through the city in consideration of other changes that may occur. It will also identify areas of development potential along the light rail corridor to maximise the government's investment and increase people's access to the service. The city plan provides an opportunity to consider these options in a broader transport and land use perspective, as the plan will serve the whole city in ways more than simply a transport opportunity.

Capital metro provides an opportunity to influence the development pattern of a planned corridor from what is essentially a transport route between Gungahlin and the city, with little activity in between. Our vision is to make the corridor a vibrant and active boulevard and to create along Northbourne Avenue an approach route worthy of the nation's capital. The redevelopment of this corridor will transform the territory by integrating land use planning with existing or planned infrastructure to create revitalised centres. It will also provide greater access to public transport, generate a range of housing and commercial opportunities and optimise land and infrastructure use. Intensifying residential and commercial development along the corridor is a critical factor to the success of this project. However, the release of land along the corridor will be staged to enable the responsible release of other land sites within the territory.

The government, whilst working on major projects like the city plan and capital metro, will also continue to work hard to ensure the overall amenity of our city and suburbs. As part of this, the ACT government manages and maintains approximately 90 shopping centres and in 1995 embarked on a rolling program of capital upgrades to improve shopping centres. Over 13 years of operation, funding has steadily increased in line with changing needs.

From 2001 to 2010, \$11.5 million was provided towards the upgrade of 12 shopping centres—that is, over a nine-year period. In 2009-10, the government spent approximately a further \$8 million to upgrade the public-owned spaces around 13 local shopping centres to improve safety and accessibility and to provide new lighting, street furniture and landscaping over the four to five-year period in which it will be expended. As you can see, this is a significant increase in funding.

As we spend this money, priorities for shopping centre upgrades are planned and considered. A comprehensive audit program was developed and completed most recently in 2012 to determine what works were required at local shopping centres. This audit considered furniture including seats, tables, bins, toilets, the state of shrub beds and drinking fountains. I know that members think this may be small bickies, but it is important for people in the suburbs, when they visit their local shopping centre, that these upgrades are undertaken. Shopping centres to be upgraded in my electorate over the next four years that are examples of this work are Evatt, Florey, Kaleen, Fraser, Spence and Macquarie. This work will continue and we will progressively ensure that we maintain our local centres; they are an integral part of the Canberra lifestyle.

This brings me to our overall investment in infrastructure. This government has invested heavily in infrastructure. We consider it an important part of ensuring that our infrastructure meets the needs of a growing Canberra community. Every year we are investing record levels of funding in building a stronger local health system, investing in better schools and teachers, maintaining a strong local economy and creating more jobs than ever before.

ACT Labor has been building up our health services right across the ACT, with new services, new buildings, including community health centres, more doctors and nurses. Right now ACT Labor invests more than \$1 billion each year to make our health system even stronger and deliver health care where and when it is needed. ACT Labor is committed to building the health system we need for the future.

The health infrastructure program is a 10-year, \$1 billion-plus infrastructure program designed to completely overhaul our health system and deliver new and exciting health facilities, new services and new ways of providing care for patients. It involves designing and constructing contemporary, state-of-the-art health facilities that will serve the Canberra community well into the future.

The work to inform this program began in 2007 when the ACT Labor government undertook an exhaustive investigation into the expected future health services needed for the ACT. This investigation identified a combination of a growing, ageing and

ailing population, technological change and community preferences driving strong growth in demand for health services over the decade.

During the 2012 election we committed to finalise and complete a range of projects already funded. For example, in my electorate there is the Belconnen community health centre, the Canberra regional cancer centre, which obviously is very much welcomed by my electorate, and the emergency department expansion at both Canberra Hospital and the Calvary Public Hospital.

In addition, we committed \$250 million to deliver ACT Labor's priorities—for example, \$850,000 for a birth centre at Calvary Public Hospital; \$5 million to expand the nurse-led walk-in centres in Tuggeranong and Belconnen as we go out into the suburbs with that model; progressing the University of Canberra public hospital; approximately \$20 million to fit out new wards and facilities to house additional beds and services at Calvary hospital and additional in-patient beds at Canberra Hospital. Our commitment to build on significant investments that ACT Labor has already made in health facilities over the past four years is obvious. A critical success factor for each one of these is the opportunity for our nurses and doctors to work in high-class facilities which will meet the needs of patients over the coming years.

ACT Labor has also delivered record levels of funding for schools infrastructure. We have provided \$162 million worth of school capital works upgrades and new facilities through the school renewal program to make sure students are getting the very best education wherever they live. This is on top of general capital works and maintenance worth \$13.2 million annually.

I could go on to list what we have done in various schools, but just as an example, we have built new schools in new suburbs worth around \$250 million. Kingsford Smith School, of course, has been built in my electorate. We have seen the establishment of the CIT Learning Centre. These have been opened in the last three years. New schools at Bonner and Franklin will also open for students in the 2013 year.

The ACT government also recognises the importance of public housing. I have been very pleased to see the establishment of a number of aged persons units in my electorate in particular. As we know, these are very central as our population ages.

Considerable work is being undertaken in the ACT generally to make sure the city continues to meet the needs of all Canberrans. To achieve this, we need an integrated, imaginative and clear blueprint for our city, our suburbs and our town centres.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (11.42): I welcome this opportunity to discuss issues of planning, consultation and investment in infrastructure in the city centre and across the whole of Canberra. This motion notes the importance of an integrated, imaginative and clear blueprint for our city, our suburbs and our town centres. What does this mean? There is no doubt that planning is important, particularly as Canberra goes into the future—our second century. However, planning involves more than just glossy brochures and artist's impressions. The Canberra Liberals look forward to hearing more details from the government about how it plans to improve the city centre. We

look forward to hearing the tangibles and the things that will actually turn into reality as opposed to simply remaining a glossy brochure in the library. We hope government will be forthcoming with details, including realistic costings of any proposed projects.

This motion also recognises the importance of community engagement and consultation. The Canberra Liberals believe community consultation should be an important part of any major planning project. That is why we are concerned when the government makes claims about community consultation when it has a history of not undertaking adequate consultation. This government often claims its plans were designed after extensive consultation. This is wrong. It often turns out that the government did not, in fact, consult with any of the key stakeholders or they consulted and did not take action following the consultation.

Who can forget the debacle of the Hawker village draft master plan which had to be abandoned after the community was so unimpressed with it? What about the draft master plan for Erindale which included plans for units on land which did not belong to the government and, in fact, were on a 100-year flood plain. This government has a terrible record when it comes to consultation, and the Canberra community should be sceptical of any claim that this government is taking their priorities into consideration.

Consultation and community engagement should include genuine information sharing. The community should have access to more than just broad plans and concepts. Taxpayers want to know how their money will be spent and how much will be spent on any given project. They also want to know if there are any cheaper or more expensive options which could be weighed up. Whilst it is not possible to please everyone, the community should expect that, if consultation is undertaken, that consultation will bear some impact on the final project.

Ms Porter's motion mentions the transport needs of our community, and I too am concerned about that, especially the inadequacy of our parking and public transport system. For a long time I have spoken in this place about the need for improvements to parking and public transport. There is no doubt that ACTION serves some people reasonably. However, I believe the vast majority of Canberrans are not served well by the public transport system. And we all know what this government's strategy is with regard to parking—fewer spots and more expensive. We have seen it across the city; we have seen it across the town centres; we have often seen it in some of the smaller centres as well.

The motion today also mentions capital metro—again, a buzz term with nothing to show for it as yet, other than the expenditure of a million dollars. I am concerned this government has not been able to provide details of the project and, in fact, refused to provide those details when I asked for them earlier in the year. This is a project which Mr Barr stated would proceed at any cost. Yet the government is unable to provide a detailed estimate of how much Canberra taxpayers will have to pay for it.

While the Canberra Liberals are pleased to see that the government has started thinking about the best use of our city centre, we are concerned about this government's track record with major infrastructure delivery. This government has a shocking track record when it comes to the delivery of major projects. I do not need to

remind members of the GDE, the Cotter Dam, the prison, the ESA headquarters, Barry Drive roadworks, Tharwa bridge and many others across the ACT over the course of this government. All these projects are examples of the way this government deals with major infrastructure projects.

The Canberra Liberals recognise the importance of improving infrastructure in our city. That is why we took to the last election the infrastructure Canberra policy. It would ensure there was a long-term strategic plan for infrastructure to ensure that projects are delivered on time and on budget, unlike this government, of course, for which “on time” and “on budget” are simply aspirational terms that never actually have to be achieved.

The government’s proposed city to lake project is another example of a grandiose scheme. Whilst there may be merits in it, the government have to clearly articulate how it is going to be possible. How are they going to fund it? What is going to be the liability to taxpayers? What is going to be delivered? When is it going to be delivered? Every time the government talk about a new project, every time they publish another report, every time they have another glossy set of artist’s impressions that do not get fulfilled, scepticism grows in the community.

When the government says, “We’re going to have light rail at any cost,” and when they have already spent a million dollars with almost nothing to show for it, scepticism begins to set in. If the government is serious about this plan, the government needs to say how this plan relates to all the other plans we have. There has been no shortage of plans over the course of this government. There may well be a shortage of vision, but there is no shortage of actual plans. But nobody seems to know how these plans interrelate? What is the status of past plans? Are they all now redundant? Or do those plans feed into this current plan? Are those plans going to be updated? Is the community going to be involved in this?

It would be very useful if the government provided a hierarchy of how all these plans actually interrelate; how these plans affect one another, which ones are current and which ones can be discarded? There are so many vagaries in all these documents that the government owes it to the community and to any potential investors to say what plans are current, what plans are redundant and what the genuine plan is for making some of these things a reality.

Whilst the subject of the motion may be interesting, I am concerned that there is pretty much no call to action. It does not give anybody any clear guidance. It is, in effect, a matter of public importance—or a matter of marginal public importance—and an opportunity to say some things in the chamber, but I do not see how it is a clear direction from this Assembly to the government or to the community about anything at all. It is an opportunity for us to soapbox but not much else.

I seek to use this speech to request that the government provide a hierarchy of plans, articulate which plans are in, which plans are out and provide some confidence to the business sector in particular but also to the broader community about what we can expect from the government over the next five, 10 or 20 years.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (11.50): I thank Ms Porter for raising this issue today, and I will be supporting the motion. The Greens have consistently advocated a long-term vision for our city—an environmentally sustainable vision that maps out our future as a city that is liveable, well connected and well prepared for future challenges such as climate change, population growth and peak oil.

The proposed city to lake project is an important piece of the planning picture, and we welcome the opportunity for the Canberra community to engage in the public debate on how this part of our city should evolve. There are aspects in the draft plan we clearly support—changes to Parkes Way, for example, to break the physical barrier between Civic and the waterfront to bring the life of the city down to the shores of Lake Burley Griffin as intended in the original Griffin plan. I think most planners in the ACT agree that one of the key things that ruined the full implementation of the Griffin vision was the fact that Parkes Way cut off the city from the lake. This is what the city to lake project aims to correct. Unfortunately, it is a very expensive issue to correct and it shows that it is, of course, always better to get planning as right as possible in the first instance.

The idea of the lakeside swimming area is an interesting one and has gained quite a range of responses from the public. I will be interested to see how the community responds to this idea through the course of community consultation. There is, of course, absolutely no point in creating a beach at Lake Burley Griffin if the water quality is so poor that we cannot actually swim in it. As members know, water quality in the lake is something the Greens have actively campaigned on, and we are looking forward to the implementation of the lake care item outlined in the Labor-Greens parliamentary agreement over the next four years so that we can see some tangible improvements in water quality in our lakes and waterways and Canberrans can enjoy swimming in our beautiful Lake Burley Griffin more consistently than they currently can.

We believe it is important that the plan for this part of the city brings light rail into the picture. Stage 1 of light rail will travel from Gungahlin to Civic, but it is important that we also complete the light rail master plan for the whole city and to determine how this key transport infrastructure will be extended from Civic and further south. We also need to ensure that pedestrian and cycle access is considered thoughtfully so that new paths link to existing path networks and people can continue to access the waterfront and get in and out of the city to where they live.

This plan will also need to include a practical solution to road access through Civic to Commonwealth Avenue as well as to local user points in the area and ensure that good public transport options are included. This is an area where we expect residential dwellings to significantly increase over time. One of the opportunities it presents is the option of planning for public transport priority right from the start. This is something we are starting to do better in new areas such as the Molonglo suburbs, but Canberra has a history of designing new infrastructure and estates in a way that locks out quality public transport in the future.

Our city's planning must integrate the city, suburbs and town centres in a coherent way. The ACT Greens have advocated for local area planning for group and town centres so that these facilities retain their vibrancy and viability and continue to meet the needs of their local communities as they grow and change. The 2008 Labor-Greens parliamentary agreement put neighbourhood planning on the agenda, and we are pleased this has led to master plans for Erindale, Pialligo, Tharwa, Hall and Oaks Estate amongst others being developed.

Of course, over the last Assembly we also worked with the government to ensure that a system of prioritisation for master planning was developed so that areas which will be impacted on by significant local change will undertake a master planning process to manage that growth in a practical and productive way in consultation with the local community. It is important that the community is engaged and involved in this planning process in a genuine way.

I welcome the community consultation on the city to the lake project that has just been launched and encourage all Canberrans to learn more about the plans and have their say. It is very important that the community understands that the proposed city to the lake project is not one that will happen in the short term and is not something being thrust upon the community; rather, it is time for us to bring the community into a broader discussion about the future needs of our city. It will also give us the opportunity to look into rectifying planning problems created in the past before we continue to grow our city, perhaps in a trajectory that is not actually where we want to go.

In relation to the last part of Ms Porter's motion—government expenditure on essential infrastructure—the Greens could not agree more. We need to ensure that the needs of our community are being met with appropriate infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, roads and paths, public transport, public housing and so on. We also need to ensure the government is able to fund people to operate the right programs and services for these key pieces of infrastructure.

We are, of course, going to have to think about the likely impacts on the ACT budget if the federal government changes and our economy slows off the back of that. That will raise serious questions about our capability to invest in some of these sorts of services. We also need to ensure the infrastructure we build is efficient. It needs to be efficient to maintain as well as being environmentally efficient. It needs to be infrastructure we know will still be useful over the long term. Infrastructure that will not use too much energy to run long into the future is what this city needs. We know the technology exists and that the knowledge and expertise is there. Now is the time to start building this kind of infrastructure. And the infrastructure needs to make sense within the context in which it is located; it needs to improve the city as a whole.

That is why we support the community debate around the proposed city to the lake project. We want sustainable infrastructure that enhances our city. That is why, for example, we are pushing ahead with the commitment to building light rail, despite the commentary Mr Coe just gave. There is much recognition that this is the sort of infrastructure that will be for the benefit of the city for the longer term, will provide

transformation for our city and will invigorate a whole lot of private sector development as well. All of these factors are taken into account. The comments about, “A bunch of money has been spent but we haven’t seen tracks yet,” are just laughable. Of course the money must be spent on the development process. The latest one is, “We’ve spent \$1 million and we don’t have any tracks.” Well, of course we do not.

I have spoken previously in this chamber about the fact that the Liberal Party in Western Australia is developing light rail. The Liberal government in Western Australia is undertaking a very similar process where there is an amount of time where you have to spend money on development and design of these projects. That is perfectly normal with this kind of project development. It is also perfectly normal not to have an absolutely locked down cost at this point. The report that came out in September last year—which is publicly available as we have discussed in this place before—gives the current best estimate, so we have an indication. Now further development needs to be done.

Whilst giving the best impression of a kid at Christmas who cannot wait to open his presents, Mr Coe will come to realise that further work is to be done as this information becomes more and more available. As we discussed in response to his motion in February, I think it was, on the private members’ day when he sought a series of documents, quite a lot of the information is already publicly available and there is a commitment from government to be transparent. As more of this information becomes available it will be made available to the public. It is a matter of simply acknowledging that these things take some time.

In conclusion, I thank Ms Porter for bringing this motion forward today. As I said at the outset, I am happy to support it as I think it notes a series of issues that many in the community would agree with—that is, it is important to have this long-term vision; it is important to engage with the community; and we need to keep moving forward as this city grows and changes.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Health and Minister for Higher Education) (11.58): This week I announced the naming of Marion Mahony Griffin view from Mount Ainslie in honour of the exceptional vision and talent of a woman who gave so much to our beautiful city, a woman whose talent and foresight created an outstanding rendering of her partner Walter’s plan for our new city.

Walter Burley Griffin’s plan for Canberra gave life to the vision of the fathers of Federation for a beautiful new city that encapsulated the ideals of a young, democratic and egalitarian nation. One hundred years later, we have the opportunity to revisit the role of the city and shape our future.

In laying out this plan for consultation, we want to inspire, we want to challenge and we want to lead. We want to be ambitious for our city’s future. We want to stimulate new ideas, new possibilities and new directions.

Our city is exceptional. Under the government I lead, we intend to ensure that we continue to build and create an exceptional city—something unique, forward-looking and an ongoing source of inspiration to other cities around the country and the world.

But what do we need? How do we connect with one another? How do we build on the natural beauty, the landscape and the bones of the past? These are all things that we know Canberrans hold very dear to them. How do we make our city centre better, more active? How do we enrich our lives and our community by making our city centre more liveable, more accessible and a better place to do business in, to work in and to visit?

The new plan will shape the way we live, work and enjoy the city into the future. The city's broad place is defined within the national capital plan and the territory plan. There is no detailed plan that provides a cohesive direction for the development of the city centre. The city plan will provide a spatial and policy framework for the whole city centre, to 2030 and beyond. Funding to support the development of this plan comes from the Australian government's liveable cities grant. The plan will be a blueprint for future infrastructure development and land release and an incentive for redevelopment right across the city. It will guide our decision making on what facilities and infrastructure are needed, where these should be located and what should be the appropriate mix of land use.

As I said yesterday, there are opportunities for the community to make comment on the city plan. The first of these is currently underway, with comments invited on a series of discussion papers. The second will be in June, when the draft city plan is released for comment. Again, as I have urged since the launch of the discussion paper and the specific project of city to the lake, we are encouraging Canberrans to get involved in shaping the future of the city—to comment online or come along to one of the open house sessions in Garema Place. There will be planners there for people to talk to, maps will be available for review and there will be opportunity to make comment either individually or as part of a number of discussion groups.

If we look at the city to the lake project, it again provides a development framework for an urban extension of the city centre towards the lake, with a new public waterfront which would unite Commonwealth Park and City Hill with enhanced public access. There will be boardwalks linking the entire waterfront, with an urban beach, cafes and restaurants. These are the ideas that we have put forward. It also preserves the elements that we all currently enjoy—places to picnic, sailing boats, canoes and bike hire. Parkes Way would be reworked as part of this plan so that the central parklands surrounding the lake can have a grand new frontage. There would be enhanced pedestrian access, more facilities around the lake and transport links between the city and the various parts of the lake.

I think anyone who has taken part in some of the celebrations of the Canberra centenary can acknowledge that Canberrans love Lake Burley Griffin. They will come to the lake. They will be drawn to the lake as a place of recreation and fun. I think anyone who goes down there at the weekend, whether you ride your bike, take the kids or go for a jog, knows that more and more the lake is becoming a place people are attracted to as a place for recreation and entertainment.

There is acknowledgement that the side of the lake that goes from the paddle boats up to the National Museum has not kept pace with the improvements on the other side of

the lake. I think the only exciting thing that happens around that part of the lake at times is getting chased by the ducks during nesting season! I think we can do better, and I think Canberrans want us to do better. Part of the discussion about the city to the lake project has to be about what people think of it, whether they would like to see this part of their city connected from the city to the lake, and whether they would like to see those types of facilities on that part of Lake Burley Griffin. This is the feedback that we have been getting. I have to say that it has been largely positive. People have come and said that they would like to see these things and we should just get on and do it. Of course, there are other views, particularly in opinion pieces that have appeared in the paper by people who would like to keep things as they are now.

Let me look at the capital metro project. This is an important public transport network. The government has examined the opportunities of bus rapid transit and light rail, and we have taken a decision to support light rail in a way that we believe can transform the city and connect the city. We want to see a modern, efficient and integrated public transport system where the bus network works alongside and complements the light rail service once it is operational.

It is a decision that we have taken with confidence about the future of our city. It is something that we have not had before. We acknowledge Mr Coe's preparedness to talk down the project, and his claim that nothing has happened for a million dollars. Well, a lot has happened.

Mr Coe interjecting—

MS GALLAGHER: A lot has happened, and we have a lot of hardworking staff that are working on the next stage of the light rail project. The comments made by Mr Coe diminish that work. A lot of planning and a lot of studies will be done prior to the track being laid. Probably even Mr Coe, in his more rational moments, would understand that that will be a part of this project.

The light rail project will gather momentum. We are considering it as part of the budget deliberations, and we are committed to the project. But we are also committed to being prudent with the project in making sure that every step along the way has been supported with evidence and with information to the cabinet in taking those next decisions.

If we look more broadly across the city, we have a range of other programs that operate. It is not just about the city centre, even though that is an important debate to be happening. We also need to keep a focus on how we keep our local centres a great place for people to use, whether it be for meeting, shopping or whatever people choose to do. Again we hear from Canberrans who like and acknowledge the importance of those local centres, the group centres, and I think that is where programs like the shopping centre upgrade program have been so successful.

We have done a number of shops in recent years, and there are a number that we have flagged as part of our commitment in the election campaign. We have got construction work at Waramanga, Farrer and Red Hill shops. We have got design studies for upgrades at Chapman, Evatt, Florey and Hughes. And we have forward

design studies for minor upgrades to nine shops at Charnwood, Cook, Griffith, Lyneham, Theodore, Banks, Torrens, the Mannheim Street centre in Kambah and Rivett. Again, this goes to the point that whilst we will be having a debate around the role of the city and the importance of that planning work, at the same time we are making sure that we maintain our focus on those local centres people live around and how we connect those up to the rest of the city. The public transport discussion is an important one there.

This is an exciting time for the city. As much as the opposition will like to talk it down, it is an exciting time for ideas to come forward, for people to dream. Yes, at the right time decisions will need to be taken about what is possible, not just what everyone would like to see happen. There will be discussions about the staging of that work.

I totally reject Mr Coe's claim that we never consult with people. I also heard the interjections yesterday about how now is not the time to talk, it is time to just get on and do things. So it depends on what argument you are pushing on a particular day. But we spend—

Mr Coe: You do not take action following the consultation. That is the problem.

MS GALLAGHER: Consultation is not necessarily about just agreeing with every person who has participated in the consultation. You used the example of Hawker shops. Many people supported redevelopment at Hawker shops. Mr Coe, you chose a particular group to side with in that, and that is fair enough, but I do not think you can in all conscience come in here and say that we did not consult and that there were not mixed views on that consultation process. As you find in most consultation processes, there will be a range of views. The job of the government is to work through those and see what is reasonable and what is possible, acknowledging that at times leaders might have to do things that not everybody agrees with.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra) (12.09): I rise to support Ms Porter's motion. As I have found in my short time so far in the Assembly, the challenge to keep Canberra the liveable and modern city that it is is an evolving one. Our city is unique in Australia, centred on the national institutions in the parliamentary triangle and surrounded by mountain ranges and forest.

We have developed over time a great suburban lifestyle that is almost unmatched in the rest of Australia. It is the challenge of maintaining this great suburban lifestyle that poses one of the greater planning and development challenges for government. Living and growing up in west Belconnen, I know how important each of our suburbs is to the residents. Indeed, the suburbs of west Belconnen are one of the more diverse communities in the ACT. From Spence to Flynn and Fraser, out to Charnwood, Dunlop and Macgregor, and down to Holt, Latham and Higgins, these suburbs are the home of the working foundations of our city. It is important that we continue, as this government has, to ensure that our local shopping centres and community infrastructure are able to retain their important role in supporting community wellbeing and social inclusion.

This Labor government has a proud record of delivering important upgrades to suburban shopping centres. In the past few years we have invested \$13.8 million in our suburban shopping centres to make sure that they remain viable and are improved across the ACT. In recent years we have delivered upgrades to shops including those at Higgins, Holt, Scullin and Melba. In 2012 this government invested \$3 million in upgrades to Waramanga, Red Hill and Farrer, and design is underway for upgrades to one of my local shopping centres, Charnwood, as well as Cook, Evatt and Florey. As I have already said, the continued viability of our local shops is important to all Canberrans and every suburban community. Not only do our local shops support community wellbeing and social inclusion; they deliver convenient local services and are home to hundreds of small businesses which create thousands of local jobs.

But our investment in our local communities does not begin and end at shopping centres. This Labor government has invested heavily in our local community infrastructure such as sport fields and amenities, because we know that they play an incredibly important role in bringing our community together.

Recent upgrades to Kippax enclosed oval and Charnwood oval are great examples of what this government is doing to make sure that our suburban parks and sporting amenities remain accessible for our community. In the 2010-11 budget, the government provided \$2 million to support the redevelopment of Kippax enclosed oval. The Kippax oval project was a partnership between the ACT government, Belconnen Magpies football and sports club, AFL NSW/ACT and Ginninderra Cricket Club. These organisations and members of the community also pitched in to raise an extra \$1 million for the project, which enabled the upgrade to expand the benefits that it was going to bring to the community. The upgraded facility was officially opened by Minister Barr in March this year.

Whether it is to play sport or to introduce children to playing sports, to provide a safe space to bring our dogs to or to enable our people to grow their own vegies, our suburban parks, ovals and fields are cherished by the residents of Canberra.

Ensuring that an active government can continue to deliver important suburban infrastructure for our local communities requires a significant amount of high level planning, including the ongoing development of master plans. Master plans provide an opportunity to review and direct change in our centres. They identify what is important for the continued enhancement and protection of the existing character and quality of our town centres. They provide a framework for other important government planning guides such as the territory plan.

Master planning in town centres examines options for residential and retail community needs in those areas and how the centres relate to surrounding neighbourhoods and transport links. The planning of centres needs to be an ongoing conversation and we need to review areas to ensure we continue to influence and respond to change. The ongoing master plan program delivers the direction for changes to town and group centres, setting out principles, outcomes and actions to manage growth and development over time. Community and stakeholder input are

critical to gaining an understanding of the needs of all sectors of our community, from individual residents to businesses, community and sporting organisations, and environmental and conservation organisations.

I understand that we will be reviewing the Belconnen and Woden master plans over the next couple of years. I look forward to playing a role, along with my community, in the review of the Belconnen plan when it begins.

I am supporting Ms Porter's motion because, unlike those opposite, I believe that you cannot talk about consultation with the community and then in the next breath demand to know the time frame and costs without having that conversation first. It is either one or the other. The motion says that "we must engage and consult with our community on what it identifies as the priorities"—not the priorities of the Liberal Party, but the priorities of the community and all of the city's stakeholders.

My colleagues are all outlining the good things that this government is doing to bring Canberra more into the 21st century. It is a good thing. Canberrans want progress. Canberrans want an active government that always keeps one eye on the future growth of our city whilst keeping the other eye on making sure that Canberra remains the liveable community centre place that it is. That is what this Labor government is doing.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (12.15): It is interesting that the government has now joined the debate about the future of the city after almost 12 years of neglect of that issue. I think that is the problem that we on the side of the chamber have with much of what the government does. There are video presentations; there is faux consultation; there are documents; and there are flow-through videos. There are all the bells and whistles but it never happens.

You only have to look at the Kingston foreshore project that commenced back in 2001. It is still not completed. You only have to look at Mr Corbell's promise—"On time, on budget for GDE". It took double the time and probably quadruple the budget. You only have to look at these projects to know that this is fanciful.

I would like to direct members' attention to an article by Jenny Stewart after the Civic to the lake proposal was revamped. I will read the first two paragraphs:

It's hard to know what to make of Chief Minister Katy Gallagher's recently announced City to the Lake project. Stripped of its more fanciful components, it seems to be a repackaged version of some familiar ideas. In fact, key parts of the project—to integrate City Hill with Civic and to develop the West Basin of the lake—originated in the National Capital Authority's widely critiqued Griffin Legacy plan of 2006. The National Capital Plan has already been amended to accommodate these changes, so the forthcoming "consultation" period is clearly about endorsement rather than debate.

So there we are. That is the leading edge; that is the vision. That is the—what is it?—transformational approach that the government has taken. A Liberal government under John Howard did the work seven years ago. It is a Labor government under Kevin Rudd that ripped the money for the Griffin legacy out of the budget. So it is a case of too little, too late and being totally unaware of yourself.

People should read the article by Jenny Stewart in the *Canberra Times* on 6 April 2013. I think the last paragraph is also fine. She says:

In launching her plan, the Chief Minister managed to use the words “vibrant”, “dynamic” and “sustainable”—

I do not think we had come up with “transformational” at that stage—

all in the one sentence, which is pretty good going. But what Canberra City really needs in its 100th year is good, competent planning that is fiscally realistic and respects the open spaces and parklands around the lake. It would be a terrible irony if, in connecting the city to the lake, an important part of the lake itself were to be put out of reach of many Canberra residents.

That is not a bad summary. But let us face it: this government has form on the delivery of capital works and it has neglected the city centre for 12 years. Let us face it: great cities have great city centres. I remind members that much of this work has already been done. In 1998 we started a consultation process. It was called “Our city—a vital, accessible and sustainable Civic”. In 1999 we had “Creating our city, an implementation strategy”, and in 2001, “Building our city, the strategy to implement it”.

Of course, that work was neglected and forgotten by the government. We know that when Mr Corbell was our planning minister he did not actually have a plan for Civic. Mr Seselja, when he was the planning spokesman, actually tabled a bill to set up a Capital Hill planning authority because the government seemed incapable of doing it.

I understand that Terry Snow on his own put \$100,000 in to promote debate about this in 2006-07. He came up with “Living city Canberra” with Colin Stewart. They did some fabulous work. But, again, that has lain dormant for almost seven years because this government does not deliver. It is great that we are actually having a discussion about the city. Great cities should have great city hearts.

One of the limiting factors, I think, on Canberra and the constant criticism about Canberra city is that there is not a location; there is not a heart of it. That is what we should be creating. It may come out of this process. But I suspect that given this government’s ability not to deliver, to consistently not deliver, whether it be on the prison, whether it be on the GDE, whether it be on secure mental health facilities, whether it be on Tharwa Bridge—never to deliver on time, on budget, on scope—one can only assume this is a PR exercise of enormous magnitude, because this government never follows through.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Sport and Recreation, Minister for Tourism and Events and Minister for Community Services) (12.20): I thank Ms Porter for moving the motion. It is always a pleasure to speak after Mr Smyth, particularly when he has just engaged in another classic exercise of walking both sides of the street. Of all the people to have quoted in relation to the Griffin legacy, the work of the NCA and then this project, he drew out Jenny Stewart.

Having read the article, she is pretty clearly opposed to that Griffin legacy work and opposed to the proposals that have been put forward. He presented her as the key person to quote in relation to this matter. He then went on to laud the work that was done. Yet your key advocate opposes the work that you think is terrific. So which side of the debate are you on, Mr Smyth? Do you believe the NCA work was good?

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Barr could you address the chair and not Mr Smyth.

MR BARR: Madam Speaker, the question that Mr Smyth will need to answer in due course, and so will Mr Hanson and the Liberal Party, is: do they support this work or not? Do they support this vision or not? Do they want to see this come to fruition? If so, I think there is a constructive role the opposition can play. Or they can choose to sit and snipe on the sidelines and walk both sides of the street. That is what we just saw from Brendan Smyth. It was a case of trotting out someone in support of his argument—

Mr Smyth interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Smyth!

Mr Smyth interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Smyth! Mr Smyth, you were heard in silence.

MR BARR: who was opposed to the key elements that you then said should have happened earlier. So Jenny Stewart is not a supporter of the things that you say you support.

MADAM SPEAKER: Address the chair, please, Mr Barr.

MR BARR: Madam Speaker—

Mr Smyth interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, would you be quiet, please. You were heard in silence.

MR SMYTH: I am sorry, Madam Speaker, but you know he argues when he has got nothing of substance.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Smyth! Mr Smyth, no time for comeback. I asked you to be quiet.

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So that little Mr Smyth contribution aside, I think it is worth acknowledging the journey that our city has taken in its first 100 years and I acknowledge and put on the public record that we are one of the world's great planned capitals, that we have evolved to develop a unique identity with

wonderful parks, gardens, nature reserves and tree-lined streets. However, our city is more than this as it matures to become a truly great city, an exemplar of progressive, inclusive and vibrant planning with something to offer people from all walks of life.

But there is no doubt, Madam Speaker, that this transformational change will not happen on its own. It will only happen if the government, working in collaboration with the community and with the business sector, takes proactive steps to guide and encourage this transformational development. This is exactly what the government is seeking to do through the city to the lake project, the city plan project and the capital metro project.

Our city offers fantastic services, entertainment, hospitality and amenities for a rapidly growing local and regional community. Our growth rates in recent years have been well above the national average. I think it is fair to observe that Canberra is a place where people from many, many different backgrounds live, work and play in great harmony. One of the keys to building this city is the opportunity to realise the great potential of our city centre and of Lake Burley Griffin. Linking the city to the lake must be seen as fundamental to the transformation of Civic. For it to be more than just a drive-through city, it needs to become a place where Canberrans visit more often, linger longer and where more of us live.

In ambition and scope, linking the city to the lake can be compared with other major waterfront projects in other Australian cities such as Barangaroo at Darling Harbour in Sydney, the Docklands projects in Melbourne, Southbank in Brisbane and the Perth waterfront.

Importantly, we are starting a strategic public initiative to create a robust and memorable public domain and waterfront in line with the Griffin legacy. I think here we can learn from progressive cities that are reversing their motorway domination such as San Francisco, Boston, Barcelona, Seoul and Toronto. These cities have either demolished or moved underground their inner city motorways. This has allowed much improved access to their waterfronts.

Rather than turning our back on the lake and on Commonwealth Park, our city should embrace these wonderful natural and cultural assets and thus ensure they are not remote and not segregated but in fact unified with the centre of the city. West Basin will provide a fantastic new waterfront public area and expand the identity of the city to encompass this important lakeside element as well as providing a wide variety of new commercial, residential and retail opportunities.

It will be anchored by that much sought after urban beach for our city, an aquatic centre that signifies that this is a place for all Canberrans and a place where the daily life of the city can engage with the lake. Madam Speaker, it is worth observing that capital metro is a key plank in this vision. The capital metro project will completely change the way people engage with our city centre.

Light rail would move large numbers of people into the city quickly and efficiently. Through the city plan, the government is ensuring we can accommodate the future

needs of this most important project. The city centre needs also to accommodate major recreation and cultural facilities and we need to plan for and reserve future sites to futureproof our city.

For example, in doing so we can provide a new CBD stadium in the city, one that is close to other attractions, is accessible to all and, importantly, is supported by enhanced public transport. After considerable investigation and analysis, the city pool site is a preferred location for a new stadium. It would certainly anchor one end of City Walk, bringing to life an area that is currently lacking.

It could also be serviced by nearby light rail stops, overlook Commonwealth Park and the lake and have sweeping views across the parliamentary triangle to Parliament House. It would make it a unique and memorable urban stadium. Similarly, the government recognises the need to cater for new convention facilities, to make provision for the possible expansion and improvement of the existing convention centre and to reserve a site for the building of a new facility when the time is right.

There is no doubt that a key piece in this puzzle of connecting the city to the lake is the treatment of Parkes Way. There is no question that it is a vital traffic artery, but it is also the major barrier that isolates and disconnects the city from its waterfront and from our main city parks. To overcome this barrier it is proposed to construct Parkes Way as a smart boulevard. By this we mean split level, allowing for the free flowing of traffic at the lower level and the introduction of city streets—local city streets—at the surface level.

There are a number of other features that form part of the city to the lake project. This is something that certainly has captured the public imagination and there have been a lot of questions asked in relation to lake water quality. One of the key elements of the project is capturing and treating stormwater through a series of water gardens to improve water quality before it enters the lake.

The opportunity to access the lake for transit is another key element, with ferries and water taxis delivering people to the city at a new ferry terminal connecting with the Kingston harbour. It provides for restaurants, cafes and places for people to meet, to promenade, or simply to sit and relax. Critically, it provides continuous public access to ensure that cyclists and pedestrians can experience the waterfront safely on generous separated paths.

Linking our city to the lake is about unlocking the potential of our city centre through providing quality public domain and facilities so that our CBD can evolve into a place which is more attractive to residents and visitors and a place where people will want to stay longer. It will be more active, safer and accessible with diverse activities occurring during the day and the night.

Public consultation is now open. We certainly encourage people to spread the word and encourage local residents, business and organisations to have their say. Our city is poised to further cement its identity as a great capital and a city that celebrates its waterfront.

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

Sitting suspended from 12.30 to 2.30 pm.

**Questions without notice
Canberra Hospital—complaints**

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Health and it relates to the *Canberra Times* story today about the discharge of two babies and their mother from hospital. Minister, it was reported that one baby had lost two kilograms, displayed symptoms of hypothermia and was not feeding. It was promised to the mother that both babies would be transferred to Calvary, but one was actually discharged. Minister, how can it happen that a baby with hypothermia and significant weight loss would be discharged?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. The Health Directorate has received a complaint along the lines that Mr Hanson has just spoken of in the chamber. That complaint is being investigated. It is difficult for me; I am not a doctor but it does appear that there is a difference of clinical opinion in relation to the decisions that were taken about individual patients at the hospital. I think we have to work through those, and the Health Directorate will be working with the family.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Minister, why did medical staff provide a full examination of one baby but not another, resulting in one being transferred to Calvary via ambulance and the other being discharged?

MS GALLAGHER: I do not think you can presume that a medical assessment was only undertaken on one of the babies, but it is currently under investigation by the Health Directorate, as is appropriate when these matters are brought to the attention of the Health Directorate. I will be advised on the outcome of that investigation.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, what procedures are in place for discharging newborns, particularly those with medical conditions? What are the procedures for discharge and transfer of multiple-birth children and is the discharge of babies the responsibility of doctors or other staff on the unit?

MS GALLAGHER: The decisions around discharge are made by the clinical team, led by the doctor. In relation to discharge practices, each patient who comes to the hospital should have a discharge plan that is put in place. One aspect of the complaint that is being investigated is that the discharge planning clearly was not what the mother in this instance should have expected. If there are issues that come out of the investigation that need to inform changes to policies and practice at the hospital then

that will be what occurs. I have to say that I think the health system does a very good job, when problems are identified, of reforming, updating and changing policies to make sure it does not happen—

Mr Hanson: Have you apologised?

MS GALLAGHER: I would also say that it is a human-based service, Mr Hanson. It is not unusual in any hospital—

Mr Hanson: It is human to apologise then?

MS GALLAGHER: Indeed. It is not unusual in any hospital in the country or in the world that they will get complaints from patients who feel that the care that they have been provided, either them or a family member, is not up to standard. When that is proven to be the case then it is the responsibility of the health system to change and make sure that the chances of it occurring again are reduced. That is what I expect the Health Directorate to do. The investigation is currently underway. When it reaches the conclusions, I will be briefed on the matter. Any changes, and indeed any apology—I think apologies have already been given in this case—that are appropriate will be implemented.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, are there special support systems in place for parents who have had multiple births or mothers who have had a traumatic experience during and after labour, and is it a failure of these systems in this instance?

MS GALLAGHER: Yes, there are support systems in place. We have just, in fact, changed the model of care for the neonatal intensive care unit and the special care unit. Very much part of the planning that was done around that was looking at how we support parents of multiple births, because, in many cases, multiple births spend some time in the special care parts of the women and children's hospital. A lot of effort has gone into that, but that is not to say that the system is perfect and that there will not be times when parents complain about the care that they have received or, indeed, as I have had since the Centenary hospital opened, many compliments that are given as well about the standard of care that is provided by the clinical staff in the new environment in the Centenary hospital.

Support services are provided as is appropriate to the patient's need. In this case, it looks like that fell short of expectations and, where that happens, as I have said, we have to learn from it, apologise and if there are gaps in the way that we manage particularly discharge planning in this case, then we need to fix it and make sure it does not happen again.

ACTEW Corporation Ltd—hospitality

MR SESELJA: My question is to the Chief Minister. Yesterday, you stated in response to a question from Mr Coe that:

In relation to issues of corporate hospitality, the shareholders have sought advice and review on the extent of the hospitality and an assurance that that hospitality is in line with industry benchmarks and industry practice.

You added that this review has not yet been completed. Minister, what issues led to the shareholders asking for a review of ACTEW's corporate hospitality?

MS GALLAGHER: I asked that it be done to assure the shareholders. There was not any particular issue that led to it. There was not any evidence before me or any complaint before me that led to my asking that that review occur. But in a discussion with the chair I asked that the board do it. I had not seen that work done before. The shareholders wanted to make sure that it was all in order and the chair agreed. Indeed, the review is underway. But in terms of any formal complaint or evidence for me to question the practice, it certainly was not instigated by that.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Seselja.

MR SESELJA: Will this review be ready before the special general meeting next week? If not, when will this review be completed?

MS GALLAGHER: My understanding is that it will be complete in May.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot, a supplementary question.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, will you or the Treasurer table the review?

MS GALLAGHER: It is not a review that I own in that sense. The shareholders cannot, and we looked at this in terms of what we can and can't—

Mr Hanson: They are going to give it to you, aren't they?

MS GALLAGHER: If you just let me finish, this is work that the shareholders asked to occur in December, before all of you over there got excited about ACTEW. This is some work that we asked to be done. We have led it. But we have also been mindful that ACTEW operates under the Corporations Act and that there are certain limited powers for shareholders to get involved in the day-to-day running of the business. The review had to be commissioned by the board. The board have commissioned that review. In that sense ACTEW will own that review. We would expect that they would share that review with shareholders, but we would also have to take some advice, I imagine, about whether or not we are in a position to release it. I do not see any reason why we would not share that information publicly. I think we have been pretty up-front and open about some of the concerns that we have had and the steps that we have taken, and I think there is a level of public interest in this. So I use that as my guiding principles, but I do acknowledge that it is not the government's review to release.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Chief Minister, what is the government's policy on hospitality offered by territory-owned corporations, and is that policy being followed at ACTEW and ActewAGL?

MS GALLAGHER: We have got no reason to believe that it is not, Mr Doszpot. I think there is also a difference, and I do not think there is a clear understanding of the difference, between ACTEW in relation to corporate support and hospitality and ActewAGL, and therefore, I guess, the reasonable requests that the shareholders can make as shareholders of ACTEW as opposed to ActewAGL. There is nothing to lead me to believe that anything is happening that is not in accordance with the guidelines that those companies operate under, but we thought it was prudent and responsible to get up-to-date and refreshed information from the board to reassure us that everything is appropriate and in line with the expectations of the government.

Crime—criminal assets

DR BOURKE: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, last week you called for community groups to come forward to apply for government grants based on the confiscation of criminal assets trust fund. What are these grants for?

MR CORBELL: I thank Dr Bourke for his question. Last week I called for community groups to express their interest in receiving grants through the confiscation of criminal assets trust fund. This fund is established by the Confiscation of Criminal Assets Act and provides for conviction-based recovery of the proceeds of crime and for the assets to be restrained where no charges were laid through civil recovery and application of penalty orders. The act deprives offenders of the benefits of their criminal acts and provides deterrence by removing the profit motive.

As a result of this, we have seen a significant amount of funds accumulate. The funds have been acquired through the proceeds of confiscation proceedings which have been undertaken either by the police or by the Director of Public Prosecutions. I have decided to use these funds to make grants available for community and not-for-profit organisations to deliver projects that boost crime prevention and reduce the incidence of crime. I think this is a very good use of funds confiscated from criminal assets because it means the proceeds of crime are being used to prevent crime into the future.

Grants of up to \$10,000 will be made available to community-based organisations. In the past we have seen a broad range of community organisations take advantage of these schemes to put in place measures such as improved security and other steps like that. But this is fundamentally about making sure that those who have benefited from their criminal activities do not see those benefits, that they are seized and put to a good public use, and I am confident that, again, we will see a high level of interest from community and not-for-profit organisations who want to take advantage of the grants program funded by the proceeds of crime to help improve the security of their premises or operations and, therefore, reduce crime into the future.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, how have these grants benefited the community in the past?

MR CORBELL: I thank Dr Bourke for the supplementary. In the past couple of years—indeed, last year I approved the distribution of \$190,000 from the confiscated assets trust fund. This was to support 10 projects in the ACT. It includes such important organisations as the White Ribbon Foundation, who received \$20,000, the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre, who received \$15,000, the Domestic Violence Prevention Council, who received \$10,000, and the Women’s Centre for Health Matters, who also received \$10,000.

All of these funds were in recognition that violence against women in the community is an important priority for this Labor government. The additional funding assists those not-for-profit organisations to improve services and programs that promote awareness and help prevent or tackle the issues arising from violence against women and children in our community.

In particular, it is worth highlighting that the funding to the White Ribbon Foundation was for the coordination of White Ribbon Day activities, including awareness campaigns and prevention programs within ACT schools and workplaces. The \$15,000 to the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre was to raise awareness of the importance of respectful relationships and promote their crisis and other support programs. The \$10,000 to the Domestic Violence Prevention Council allowed the council to undertake new activities, increasing community involvement in the prevention of domestic violence within the ACT. The \$10,000 to the Women’s Centre for Health Matters assisted them in coordinating their annual reclaim the night event and the summer of respect campaign which, again, is about raising awareness and vigilance when it comes to violence against women and children.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Minister, why is it important to reuse COCA money for this purpose?

MR CORBELL: Thank you, Ms Berry, for the supplementary. The COCA money, as it is known, or compensation of criminal assets money, is a very useful fund because it sends a very clear message that people will not benefit from the proceeds of crime. Instead those assets will be seized where a conviction has been recorded and they will be used to benefit the community as a whole. Reallocating this money to positive initiatives like the ones I outlined earlier is a start to making wrongs right. Indeed it turns a criminal act into a beneficial act for our community. By reinvesting the proceeds of criminal activity into programs like this, we are actually making a positive difference.

I am looking forward to hearing from those community organisations that are keen to access these funds into the future. In particular, I am keen to see applications from a broad range of community-based organisations. In addition to the grants that I outlined earlier, we have also seen the money used for a range of other things, such as

improving security at scout halls. For district and local sporting groups who have clubhouses and other facilities, they have strengthened their facilities—better lighting, better security and a range of other measures that will assist them in preventing vandalism, property damage, break-ins and so on. So it is a very important and useful program and I encourage all members to draw to the attention of their constituents the fact that this grants program is running and encourage them to make submissions so that they can potentially benefit from the fund.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Attorney, what are the effects on the victims of crime of this policy?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms Porter for the question. Victims of crime obviously get to see restitution through this process, restitution to the broader community. Victims of crime can benefit. Obviously, groups like the Women's Centre for Health Matters, the Domestic Violence Crisis Service and so on directly help some of the most vulnerable in our community. If there is funding available to those organisations to better promote their programs, more people become aware of them and are potentially able to access them. Equally, improvements in service delivery can be underpinned by improved awareness and improved profile around the delivery of programs.

White Ribbon is a campaign that I am very pleased, I know with a number of other members in this place, to be an ambassador for. It is a campaign that highlights the ongoing and devastating impacts of violence against women and children in our community. By supporting that campaign, we help to raise awareness, particularly amongst men, of the importance of saying no to violence, of telling our peers that violence against women and children is unacceptable. The more support we have for campaigns like that, the more we are able to have an impact on the devastating impact that that type of behaviour can have on our community.

ACTEW Corporation Ltd—management

MR COE: I have a question for the Chief Minister as a shareholder of ACTEW. Chief Minister, in response to a question, you stated that there would be a special general meeting of ACTEW next week. What issues will be discussed, and will you table the agenda in the Assembly?

MS GALLAGHER: The shareholders have requested a special general meeting be held to discuss the issues around the errors in the ACTEW annual report and matters around the managing director's remuneration. I have not seen an agenda myself, but I am more than happy to provide that. I cannot see any reason why not.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Chief Minister, will an interim report by PwC be available by the time of the special general meeting and will you table in the Assembly the terms of reference of that report?

MS GALLAGHER: As I have said, it is not the government's report. The board of ACTEW has commissioned a review that is being conducted by PwC's Sydney office. My understanding is that that review—I have not seen anything in writing—will be complete in May.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Seselja, a supplementary question.

MR SESELJA: Have there been other special general meetings of ACTEW during your time as a shareholder? If so, what topics were on the agenda and what was the outcome?

MS GALLAGHER: I would have to take that on notice. We had a meeting recently where we changed the constitution to allow another person to be appointed to the ACTEW board. I believe that was a special general meeting, but I will take some further advice, Mr Seselja, from my time as a shareholder.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Seselja.

MR SESELJA: Minister, why is the formality of a special general meeting necessary when you claim you meet regularly with board members on a less formal basis to receive other updates?

MS GALLAGHER: The shareholders meet primarily with the chair of the board and with the managing director. We also receive updates from the managing director on the outcomes of board meetings that are held. We also receive the agenda for those meetings. But it is not standard practice to meet with the board. We do that through the annual general meeting. This is the opportunity for the shareholders to meet with the board as the board and members on the board sit as members of the remuneration committee.

Cotter Dam—cost

MR WALL: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, on 4 June 2012, on the Open Government website, a number of documents were published under the subject of "Cotter Dam Extension". Those documents outline, amongst other things, the development of cracks in the wall of the new Cotter Dam which could seriously compromise the integrity of the wall. Yesterday, in the Assembly, Mr Barr tabled a paper prepared in his and your name entitled "ACTEW voting shareholder information—statement on the enlarged Cotter Dam". The paper indicated a possible cost increase and delivery delay. Chief Minister, why did the shareholders' information statement fail to mention the development of these cracks in the wall?

MS GALLAGHER: There are two reasons. The issue that we had to update the Assembly on was as a result of a resolution of the previous Assembly, which resolved that shareholders, if they are advised of a change to the budget on the enlarged Cotter Dam or the date of completion, should advise the Assembly within a certain period of time. So we were following that resolution. I do not believe it is a continuing resolution, but because of the interest of the Assembly in matters around the enlarged Cotter Dam, we provided that information.

In relation to issues around cracks in the dam wall which I think you said could challenge the integrity of the dam wall, those have been assessed as appropriate, indeed, I believe by ESDD late last year. I think those matters have been well understood by all. There is no link to that and the issues that we were reporting an update to the Assembly on yesterday.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Chief Minister, what proportion of the possible cost increase and delivery delay is attributed to the cost of the repairs of the cracks? If none, what did the repairs cost?

MS GALLAGHER: In relation to the specific question, I will have to take some advice if there is a dollar figure that can be put on that. In relation to the issues of the possible change to the budget, the shareholders have been advised that there is no change to the budget of the enlarged Cotter Dam, but we have been told that by the time the project is complete there is a chance—

Mr Seselja: No change to the budget, but it's going to cost more.

MS GALLAGHER: No, well, let's just listen and accept what we have been told. We were in the meeting. We have been told that the final dam cost will come within one per cent of the budget—that is either one per cent above \$404 million or one per cent below \$404 million. But there has been no change to the budget as agreed and understood by all in this place.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Chief Minister, what have you done as a shareholder to satisfy yourself personally that there is no risk to the integrity of the dam wall as a result of these cracks?

MS GALLAGHER: I have done my job.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Chief Minister, when did the shareholders first become aware of these reported cracks in the wall and what did they do in response?

MS GALLAGHER: I would have to check my notes in relation to that.

Disability services—funding

MR DOSZPOT: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Children and Young People. Minister, the opposition have recently received correspondence from a constituent who attended an information session on 27 March attended by Disability ACT. At that session, the constituent was advised by senior staff that there was a real possibility, and I quote, “that the current service arrangements provided by Disability

ACT would cease as a result of the introduction of the NDIS”. Minister, will you guarantee that no current service will be cut or reduced when the NDIS is introduced?

MS BURCH: I do thank Mr Doszpot for his question. The NDIS would certainly make significant changes to the disability sector here in the ACT and to those organisations, both government and non-government, that are providing services. What I have heard very loudly from the broader community, and particularly the disability community, is the want for information about how the NDIS is progressing.

So we have been very clear, not only in standing up a government task force, setting up an expert panel, an advisory group, that is being co-chaired by Ms Sue Salthouse but also having public information sessions, town hall workshops, call them what you like, so that we can share with the community all the advice as it comes in. And I hope that all in this place understand that this is a very quick moving and, in many ways, changing dynamic about the information that is coming forward.

Certainly we are aware that there needs to be a conversation about government as a service provider, as there will be conversations within the non-government providers about what is their role and what would be their service provision offers come 2014 when the NDIS starts here in the ACT. If that means that some of the specialist services that are currently provided by the government change, that may be it.

But I am certainly aware—and I have been contacted by a number of families who are in receipt of government services, and rightly so—that they have expressed a level of wanting information. I will use the word “concern”, because clearly this is about their family and their children. I absolutely appreciate that. So we need to be as open and as clear as we can with them. As we move through these services and decisions, we share that with the community.

Will any service be changed? I would say yes. Not just government but the non-government providers will certainly change some aspects of the service that they deliver. But I will not stand here and say that we will reduce our support to families. It may change, but it is not about us stepping away from our responsibility to do all we can to support these families.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, how can people with a disability in the community have confidence and feel secure when they are being told by senior staff that their support services will cease?

MS BURCH: In many ways I am going to have to dispute the premise of saying that senior staff are saying as a definite that services will cease. I have indicated that not only government but also non-government services will change. I think Mr Hanson explored some of this through the annual reports hearings when they had staff and the executive from Community Services and Disability ACT go through some of the thinking, processes and understanding that the provision of services in the ACT will change, as it will change in the other states when the NDIS comes in.

For areas in New South Wales, the NDIS changes will take effect from July this year. In the ACT, our changes will take effect from July next year. So we do have a bit over 12 months to work with the community, to work with these families and to work with the providers to understand the impact of these changes and to make sure that there is indeed an enhanced service offer; there is more choice for individuals and families with a disability here in the ACT, because that is the premise of the NDIS.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Minister, how is your answer—indeed, the statement by Disability ACT staff—consistent with the stated principle on the NDIS website that:

If an individual currently receives care and support, these arrangements will continue.

MS BURCH: I think the premise of that is that if someone is receiving a service, whether it is a respite service or a care in the home service, that service is deemed to be necessary for that person to participate in society. Whether it is provided through the government or whether it is provided through a non-government provider, in many ways the service is still required. Through the NDIS, where this amount of money will be provided to the individual or to their families who are caring for them, they will have the choice of where they provide or purchase that service from. In many ways an existing service provider may not be the provider of preference for some people come July of next year. That is some of the change—and it is significant change; I make no bones about it—and that is the work that we have to go through, not only with the providers but with the families who, for the first time, will be empowered to make those significant decisions.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Minister, how does this actually represent choice if the preferred choice of the person with a disability is actually to get that service through Disability ACT?

MS BURCH: That is part of the narrative and the conversation that we need to go with. Equally, there are many service providers and families in town that do question the ACT's role of being a government service provider, particularly in our group homes where we are the landlord and the service provider. There are many that understand or believe that tenancy support should be quite separate from service provision support.

So there are a number of policy questions that need to be within this. Part of that, rightly so, is a narrative that as a government we will have internally, but in partnership with the community, about our role in specialist services and what we offer, and if we do offer services, what would those services look like. But as I said, the NDIS will change the look and the existing arrangements from July of next year.

Education—teachers

MS PORTER: My question, through you, Madam Speaker, is to the Minister for Education and Training. Minister, I refer to the ACT government's commitment to pay its best teachers six-figure salaries. Could you update the Assembly on this important initiative?

MS BURCH: I thank Ms Porter for the question and the opportunity to report on this good, transformative initiative. The government has consistently taken the view that we have a moral and social responsibility to give children and young people in the ACT the best possible education. That has meant massive investment in building and upgrading school infrastructure and technologies for learning in the 21st century. It has meant employing extra teachers, ensuring that students learn and thrive in the classroom and a more strategic and targeted approach to school improvement. It has meant upgrading administrative staff in schools to ensure teachers are better supported and can concentrate on their key role—educating students. And it continues to mean a long-term focus on teacher quality.

All the research evidence clearly points to the quality of the teacher in the classroom as the most influential factor in student engagement, learning and achievement. Improving teacher capacity through in-class coaching and support is the most effective way to improve student performance. This vision was included in the commitment to pay our best classroom teachers a salary of more than \$100,000 and to provide agreed paths and incentives to keep our best teachers in the classroom where they are needed most.'

This concept was fleshed out in the current enterprise agreement, providing positions with a focus on exemplary classroom teaching and capacity building in teaching practice. The government is now implementing these leadership positions, known as executive teacher (professional practice), in schools. This new leadership position has the classroom as its major focus. The intention is to build capacity in teaching practice with improved student outcomes as a result.

The role of professional practice teachers includes modelling exemplary classroom teaching, coaching and mentoring teachers and student teachers and leading professional learning programs. Twenty-one centrally funded positions have been identified in schools for this year, with further positions being identified next year.

A merit selection process commenced in term 4 of last year when 10 teachers were selected. The selection process is continuing this year, and applications close, as I understand, this week. Successful applicants will be matched to positions in schools and the appointment is likely to start from term 3, as I understand. Another selection process will take place later in the year to fill the positions for next year. This rigorous process ensures that our very best classroom teachers are recognised, and it will ensure that they are placed in schools where they will continue to do an exemplary job in the classroom as well as help build the capacity of their colleagues to do otherwise.

These positions will ensure that the ACT government schools continue to provide the very best education to every member of the ACT community and will deliver upon this government's commitment to the constant improvement in teacher quality and practice.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, in which school will these teachers be placed?

MS BURCH: Again I thank the member for her question. The locations of these teacher positions for 2013 were identified through a consultative process through principals and the school network leaders. Twenty-one schools will employ the executive teacher (professional practice). The 10 primary schools are Ainslie, Bonython, Evatt, Garran, Kaleen, Macquarie, Mawson, Theodore and Yarralumla. The five high schools are Belconnen high, Calwell high, Canberra high, Lanyon high and Melrose high. The three preschool to year 10 schools are Amaroo, Harrison and Kingsford Smith. Gungahlin and Narrabundah colleges will receive these two teachers, as will Malkara.

These schools were selected based on how the position can add value to the outcomes of the students at the school. The positions will build capacity for quality teaching through modelling exemplary teaching practice and coaching and mentoring other teachers at the school. Further executive teacher (professional practice) positions will be identified for filling, as I have said, in 2014. As this network of teachers grows to include more and more schools, we will see a profound impact on teacher quality across the public education system. This, in turn, will ensure that more students are engaged in learning and equipped with the skills that will position them for lifelong success.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, what other initiatives does the government have in place to recognise our best and brightest teachers?

MS BURCH: I thank the member for the question. As I have said previously, the importance of quality teachers and school leaders to improving student outcomes cannot be overstated. The ACT government is working to build a high-performing teaching profession. A key initiative has been the establishment of the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. The institute is now fully established and has recently completed its third annual teacher registration process. This registration process not only ensures that all teachers meet the qualification requirements; it also ensures that all teachers are engaged in continuing professional development.

Under the rewards for great teachers national partnership, teachers are accredited against the highly accomplished and/or lead levels of the standards and will be eligible for payment of \$7½ thousand or \$10,000 respectively. The national certification of teachers against the teaching standards complements the ACT initiative of executive teacher professional practice.

In 2012, the ACT Teacher Quality Institute, in partnership with the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, conducted a pilot process to be used for the certification of teachers against the highly accomplished and/or lead levels of the teaching standards. Through the pilot, 16 ACT teachers from across the three education sectors became the first teachers to be accredited against the Australian professional standards for teachers.

Further, in partnership with the University of Canberra and the Australian Catholic University, an ACT teacher mentor program was developed. Last year, almost 300 teachers from across the three sectors were funded to participate and a further 200 teachers will be funded to commence the program this year.

Through the empowering local schools initiative, the government has provided ACT government school principals with more direct involvement in the selection and development of their staff. Principals can now recruit the highest performing pre-service teachers for their schools.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, how important is it to have a commitment to teaching excellence in the ACT?

MS BURCH: I thank Mr Gentleman for his question. It is absolutely critical that we focus on teacher quality. We have strong investments in the bricks and mortar, and our capital program and our continued commitment to bring on new schools in those growing areas of Canberra are something for us as a government in Canberra to be proud of. But for the teachers, where the rubber hits the road is in the classroom, and that is around quality teachers. In many ways it is no accident that the ACT performs well in NAPLAN and other results, because again it goes back to the quality of our teachers.

Ongoing support through the executive teacher professional practice, through the Teacher Quality Institute and through our investment in supporting teachers, for example with the literacy and numeracy positions also within the school system—that goes to the teachers. Providing that ongoing coaching and mentoring of teachers does make a real difference, and the results of that are seen in the classroom, where the sons and daughters of our community get the best education on offer.

Hospitals—emergency departments

MR GENTLEMAN: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, can you update the Assembly on progress with expanding the emergency departments at Canberra and Calvary hospitals in terms of both capital expansion and staffing?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mr Gentleman for the question. The Calvary hospital emergency department expansion project commenced in October 2012 and was completed in December last year. This has allowed for capacity for an extra six treatment spaces, consisting of four chair areas and two consulting rooms being

created. Also, more ambulant treatment areas were created for see-and-treat processes and improved physical flow, with non-acute patients segregated from acute patients.

The Canberra hospital emergency department expansion project is linked also to the intensive care unit extension, which is underway now. The ED-ICU project involves a three-story extension to the diagnostics and treatment building at Canberra Hospital, which is known as building 12. It is located near the emergency department on the Yamba Drive side. The three-storey extension is designed to increase the capacity of the hospital's critical care facilities and will help to address continuing increase in demand for these services.

It will include an expansion of ICU on level 3, an expansion of the emergency department on level 2, and the addition of storage and plant facilities on level 1. The construction will also include alterations to the intensive care unit balcony on level 3. Services to be accommodated within the ICU include high dependency services and intensive care services. The extension project will deliver eight additional treatment spaces in the emergency management unit of the ED and seven in the intensive care unit, which will be opened incrementally as funding and demand progresses.

Staffing and other initiatives in the emergency department of Canberra Hospital include front loading, where treatment spaces are available during peak hours of the day allowing patients to be assessed and treated by an ED doctor more rapidly and expansion of the discharge lounge in August of last year from a 10-chair unit to a 12-chair three-bed unit enabling patients to leave the wards earlier thus freeing up beds for patients being admitted via the emergency department.

I mention also the expansion of the see-and-treat model, where allocated teams of doctors and nurses provide more rapid flow of the low acuity patients. Promoting referral to the walk-in centre is another initiative that continues to be a very popular choice for many people. We have also, of course, opened the short stay surgical unit and the SAPU and the MAPU to help relieve pressure on the emergency department.

We also made some commitments in the election around funding expansion of services in Canberra Hospital and also to boost staff as well, and we are working on implementing those initiatives as part of the budget process.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, can you outline for the Assembly plans for a dedicated paediatric stream for the emergency department at Canberra Hospital?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mr Gentleman for the supplementary. Approximately 25 per cent of presentations to the Canberra Hospital emergency department are now considered paediatric patients. I think there has been an acknowledgement that it is not ideal to have children and adults treated in the same treating space and also in the same waiting area. I very strongly believe that dedicated facilities for children are more appropriate, particularly when it is reaching a quarter of all presentations being paediatric patients.

We went to the election with a commitment around a dedicated service for children in the Canberra Hospital emergency department.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MS GALLAGHER: The federal government has also agreed to provide \$5 million in capital money.

Members interjecting—

MS GALLAGHER: The capital funding will allow an area adjacent to the existing ED to be refurbished to create a more suitable, family-friendly waiting, triage and treatment area.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MS GALLAGHER: Mr Hanson, you did copy that part of our election commitment, too. I was just going to say that you did not, but you did, the day after we announced it. It was such a good idea: “Damn, Katy thought of it again, ahead of time.”

MADAM SPEAKER: Chief Minister, would you address your comments through the chair.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

MS GALLAGHER: Sorry, I should not respond to the constant interjections, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Actually, there have not been constant interjections.

MS GALLAGHER: There have been.

MADAM SPEAKER: There have not been constant interjections, and you responded to the first one.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, could you cease interjecting, please.

MS GALLAGHER: Madam Speaker, I did not respond to the first one and they had been constant in relation to that part of the question. I do try not to respond to interjections.

The dedicated paediatric area within the emergency department is an important part of the redevelopment of the emergency department. Ideally, we would like to see this

work progress as soon as possible and we are currently discussing with the commonwealth opportunities to access the \$5 million funding ahead of the time that was previously agreed.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, have you had the opportunity to view how any other paediatric EDs are operating in other jurisdictions?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Ms Porter for the supplementary. Yes, I attended the Royal North Shore Hospital, which opened their new emergency department, I think, in November last year. It was an opportunity to have a look at how a brand new emergency department constructed from scratch, not built around the existing emergency department, looks in terms of patient flow. They are a very similar hospital, in a sense, to Canberra Hospital in that they see about 65,000 to 70,000 presentations through their emergency department every year, with about 25 per cent of those presentations being children.

They have a dedicated paediatric area that operates within their emergency department but is quite separate to the rest of the emergency department. An important thing I learnt on my visit is that they are very quick to remove children from the waiting area. They do not expect children to wait in the waiting area. Most of their patients are removed from the waiting area within 10 minutes of presenting to the hospital.

They also had some good advice around looking at how you manage issues like paediatric resuscitation and whether or not those services should be separated. In that case, they do not. They do not encourage that. They think that the resusc area should remain for adults and children. But they also had some very good—and they have done this through the design and the construction of the building—procedure rooms to make sure that children are not having procedures done at their bedside but the bed remains a safe place for them in the emergency department.

There was some very interesting, I think, information that I was able to take from that visit, and we will feed that into the design and ultimately the construction of the emergency department paediatric area at Canberra Hospital.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Will the new paediatrics unit have chairs with arms on them for parents who are falling asleep in ED while waiting with sick toddlers?

MS GALLAGHER: I think, Mrs Jones, we have all had experience spending more time than we would like in the emergency department, perhaps Madam Speaker more than most of us. I cannot assure you there will be chairs with arms on them. One thing we will be doing, though, is what was in the Royal North Shore Hospital where there were chairs for some children who did not require beds, comfortable armchairs, and I noticed parents sitting with their children in those armchairs. But the whole

opportunity that presents to us is to take feedback from parents like you, Mrs Jones, around things that would make stays in the emergency department easier for parents when they are caring for their children.

One of the other things I learned from some of the staff that provided me with advice on that trip is to use the parents in terms of record keeping of their children. That is something they are doing at the children's hospitals in Sydney where the parents become the owner of the record of the child's visit to hospital because they are the ones primarily who stay with the child for the whole time of their trip. We are looking at ways to involve that in the model of care to make sure that, as nurses and doctors come and go, we actually use the skills and expertise of parents to make sure that all of the information around that visit and, indeed, previous visits, is able to be at the fingertips and that we use the parents' expertise in that. That will be part of the work that is done as well.

Disability services—funding

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Children and Young People. Minister, in the pre-election budget update, the Treasury report stated in relation to the trial of the NDIS:

A provision of \$3.7 million per annum has been included in the Pre-election Budget Update estimates.

Further, in relation to the full rollout of the NDIS, it stated:

The additional cost to the ACT Government for the full roll-out of NDIS to the ACT population has an estimated annual recurrent cost of around \$40 million in 2015-16.

Minister, are these estimates still current? If not, what are the current new estimates?

MS BURCH: I thank the member for her question. The commitment we have put in for this year is in the work that we are doing in the lead-up to 2014, so it will make reference. There is also a commonwealth contribution into that. So let us be clear that, whilst we are committing, so is the commonwealth committing additional funds into the NDIS.

Our current disability budget is a bit over \$80 million, and this is on top of that funding. Also in addition to that, and I will come back to some other elements of your question, Mrs Jones, the commonwealth has committed \$12 million in transition over the next three years for the community sector to help them to change their practice and to be prepared for the quite significant fundamental changes through the NDIS.

In short, I have nothing in front of me at the moment that would indicate that any change is needed to be made to the Treasurer's midyear update. We are still going through negotiations with the commonwealth around what this means for us. As you are aware, we are starting NDIS here in the ACT in July next year. There is an expectation that between 2014 and 2016 and beyond there will move between 2½ thousand people and 5,000 people through that. There will be significant additional commonwealth dollars, and our dollars, into that.

Going back to some earlier questions, it is important that we work with the non-government providers in town in these transitions, because their practices will change. But we need to work with the individuals with disability and their families, because at the end of the day, whether you are a government provider or a non-government provider, it is those individuals and families that are in receipt of the services, and that is what is key and what it is all about.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, how much commonwealth funding will be given for the trial? Is it just the aforementioned \$12 million?

MS BURCH: No, I think there is about \$7 million coming in. I do not have the exact dollars in front of me, Mrs Jones; I do apologise. I think there is a 60-40 split being applied and that will change as we move through to the full NDIS. On top of the \$3 million, I think there is about \$7 million—because we are looking at about \$10 million in this transition—which will provide some response through the enhanced service offer which will go out in the way of grants. There will be two rounds. I think I made mention of these last sittings. There will be two rounds that will go out this year. This is quite separate to and on top of the existing supports and arrangements they will have in place with various service providers. On top of that, that will give them the capacity to buy additional services or equipment or other things that will improve their quality of life.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, how much has the commonwealth contributed to the \$40 million estimate for the rollout?

MS BURCH: I am trying to get those figures, if I do have them in front of me. As I said, there is significant funding coming in. For example, from July this year the commonwealth will provide additional money—\$10.6 million for the ACT for enhanced services. The project agreement between the ACT and the commonwealth is still being finalised. That is where we will see the end result of the dollars coming through. It is something that is being worked through by treasurers and disability ministers. I have no doubt that it will be something on the table first for ministers to talk about at COAG. Rather than give you guesstimates, I am quite happy to come back with the details of the dollars that we know about at the moment, while understanding that as we transition through the NDIS, those dollars will slightly change as we get closer to a final agreement.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, how will these additional commonwealth dollars help families support members with a disability?

MS BURCH: I thank Ms Porter for her question. I think it is very clear that any further investment in the disability sector will have improved outcomes and better

quality of life for individuals and for those families caring for those individuals. It is without doubt and well recognised that disability services from state to state differ. The Productivity Commission was very clear about the lack of system and the ad hoc nature of the approach to disability services in the states. A premise of the NDIS is to take out the lucky door prize—that is very poor language, and I apologise if people find that offensive—in regard to application and receipt of disability dollars.

It is very clear, and the Productivity Commission has recognised this, that people in different states have access to different systems and different amounts of money. What the NDIS, with significant state and commonwealth investment, will do is provide some very clear criteria about assessment of need and allocation within that assessment about a fair and reasonable resource. Also, for the first time the decisions about what services and what provider is giving those services will be in the hands of the client and the family.

Environment—conservation

MR SMYTH: My question is to the minister for the environment. Minister, when will the government introduce the bill for a new nature conservation act?

MR CORBELL: It may not require a bill.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, what consultation process has informed the government's position on whether or not it will need a bill?

MR CORBELL: Mr Smyth was referring to the Nature Conservation Act. Did I hear you correctly or not? I beg your pardon. I thought you were referring to the Nature Conservation Agency. I apologise for that. I can confirm that yes, the government does intend to introduce a new bill to amend the Nature Conservation Act, and we have undertaken a very extensive program of consultation in terms of a discussion paper that has dealt with some of the key concepts around the operation of a new nature conservation act.

The final provision of a draft bill is predicated on the completion of a number of other processes, including considerations in relation to the operation of the environment protection legislation at the commonwealth level and reforms the commonwealth have proposed to that act. That will be part of informing what our final bill will look like.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, why will you not release the PricewaterhouseCoopers report commissioned by the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate?

MR CORBELL: The final report has not yet been considered by cabinet. Once it is considered by cabinet, consideration will be given to the release of other documents that have been used in preparation of the bill, including the report that Mr Doszpot refers to.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, can you explain the delay in the implementation of the program?

MR CORBELL: I provided that answer in my previous answer to Mr Smyth.

Sport—community facilities

MS BERRY: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Could the Minister for Sport and Recreation outline what work the ACT government has been undertaking on sports facilities in Belconnen?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Berry for the question and for the interest that all Ginninderra members have in new sports facilities in Belconnen. I am very pleased to advise the Assembly that we have a large program of works underway and in the pipeline for Belconnen. Last month I was very pleased to attend the opening of the Kippax enclosed oval and the upgraded facilities there. The ACT government provided over \$2 million in support of the redevelopment of the oval. Direct financial contributions of over \$600,000 were made by key stakeholders, including the AFL and Cricket ACT, and around \$420,000 of in-kind and non-cash contributions were also provided by a diverse range of community organisations and businesses. There is no doubt that the redevelopment at Kippax is a fantastic example of the partnership between the ACT government, the Belconnen Magpies football club, the Belconnen Magpies sports club, AFL NSW/ACT, the Ginninderra Cricket Club and Cricket ACT.

The upgrade at Kippax was substantial and included the realignment and upgrade of the playing surface, a new turf cricket wicket and a new irrigation system. There are new synthetic cricket nets, a new pavilion, including a club room and recovery room, covered seating, new coaches boxes and an electronic scoreboard. The Magpies now have their own home ground, which allows them to play home games in the Belconnen region pretty much for the first time this century, and enabling them to host their north-east AFL matches at Kippax.

The upgrade also significantly improves the training and competition opportunities for the Ginninderra Cricket Club. I understand that the club is already looking forward to hosting their first game at the start of the next cricket season in October.

I can advise members that all work is now complete on the restoration of the Charnwood district playing fields, at a cost of \$1.1 million. Fields 27 and 28 have been restored, with drought-tolerant and water-efficient couch grass. This highly efficient grass and installation method has certainly enabled the playing fields to be returned to full use within eight weeks of the turf being laid. A new synthetic cricket wicket has also been installed as well as new cricket practice nets with synthetic run-ups. The Charnwood district playing fields had their irrigation turned off during the drought in 2002, when stage 3 water restrictions were introduced. Of course, with restrictions now lifted, the government has been able to fully restore this oval.

The \$900,000 refurbishment of the Kaleen enclosed oval is now complete. The upgrade of this oval was funded as part of the sport and recreation facilities improvement program. Upgrades here consisted of a new shed, the conversion of the old curator shed to public toilets, the construction of a new four-bay senior cricket practice net facility with a synthetic surface, internal drop netting and a power supply for a bowling machine, the extension to the additional change rooms which allows for the playing of two senior games at the ground at the same time and the complete refurbishment of the existing pavilion.

The government will continue to deliver high quality sports facilities for the people of Belconnen, and indeed the people of Canberra.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Minister, are there any other Belconnen community sports facilities that will be built or upgraded in the near future?

MR BARR: Yes, I am pleased to advise that there will be. I am sure that members would be aware that the 2012-13 budget announced a program of further restoration for ovals that were switched off during the drought period. Work is due to get underway on the Weetangera oval next year, with work at Bonython in the electorate of Brindabella nearing completion and Watson, in the great electorate of Molonglo, due to begin its refurbishment this year.

I can advise Ms Berry that the Weetangera upgrade will include a new irrigation system, replacement of the playing surface—again with drought tolerant grass—the installation of floodlights and the construction of a new pavilion. The primary user of this facility will be the Wests Rugby Club for their juniors and seniors. The government has also committed to restoring Spence oval and replacing the irrigation system at the Hawker district playing field. That is something I know Ms Porter has been a particularly passionate supporter of.

The new irrigation system at Hawker will ensure that water is applied in a highly efficient manner and allow for more uniform and healthy turf cover at that sportsground. This follows similar project upgrades undertaken at Dickson and Reid playing fields. I think anyone who has observed the quality of the playing surfaces will recognise the value in this work.

Finally, in the time that remains, I alert members of course to the establishment of the new sports hub at the University of Canberra at their campus in Belconnen. The hub will not only be the home to elite sporting organisations, such as the ACT Brumbies but it will also provide a fantastic new facility for community sport, including a new home for ACTSport.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, is there anything that risks high quality sports facilities being able to be delivered in the ACT?

MADAM SPEAKER: Can you repeat the question, Mr Gentleman, please?

MR GENTLEMAN: The question is to the minister: is there anything that risks high quality sports facilities being able to be delivered in the ACT?

MADAM SPEAKER: On the basis that the previous two questions were about sports facilities in Ginninderra, I think you might have to limit yourself to Ginninderra.

Mr Barr: The supplementary referred to other upgrades, and I referred to all over Canberra.

MADAM SPEAKER: The supplementary referred to other upgrades in Ginninderra.

Mr Barr: And I referred to other upgrades in other parts of Canberra.

Mr Corbell: He mentioned facilities in Molonglo, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: I know he did, and I thought that they were not directly relevant to the question. Ms Berry, could you repeat your supplementary question for me?

MS BERRY: Are there any other Belconnen community sports facilities that will be built or upgraded in the near future?

MADAM SPEAKER: I think you will have to limit yourself to answering questions about Ginninderra, Mr Barr.

MR BARR: Thank you Madam Speaker. There is no doubt that issues that would put at risk the high quality sports facilities in Belconnen would equally impact on the provision of high quality sports facilities elsewhere in the territory. The biggest risk, of course, is the withdrawal of funding for such upgrades, and this could manifest itself in many ways. It could be through seeking to reduce the amount of revenue that comes into the government for the maintenance and upgrade of sports facilities. So proposals, for example, to seek to reduce the amount of revenue that comes into the Sport and Recreation Services area in order to maintain and upgrade assets would, indeed, be a great risk.

So I am pleased to advise the Assembly, particularly those opposite who are particularly concerned and agitated by this issue, that it is the government's intention to enhance the quality of sports facilities, not just in Belconnen but more broadly, and the government's commitment is very clear—that is, all money raised through the hire of sports facilities goes back into the maintenance and upgrade of those facilities.

Equally, we also have a commitment through the lease variation charge—something that those opposite seem very keen to do away with—to put every cent that is raised by the lease variation charge into upgrading urban improvement, and upgrading sports facilities is part of our urban improvement program. I know it upsets those opposite that property developers would make a contribution to improve sports fields. Their

position is, “No, let the property developers pay no tax at all and our sports fields will suffer.”

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, could you tell us how the sports and recreation grants program, which provides capital funding to sporting clubs, could assist sporting clubs in Belconnen or, indeed, in other parts of Canberra where Belconnen people might go to play sport?

MR BARR: Thank you, Dr Bourke. That is an excellent supplementary question. I do note that every year the ACT government sports grants program receives a very healthy level of application. I do note that members take a great interest in the outcomes of the sport and recreation grant program. There are many, many worthy projects. I think in the time I have been sports minister, nearly \$15 million has been provided to community-based sport and recreation organisations to run programs and upgrade facilities across the territory. I would say they are very passionately supported in Belconnen and by Ginninderra members in this place. They are nearly as passionately supported by Brindabella members. Certainly, projects in Tuggeranong are a very important part of the sport and recreation grants program. I do have to say that undoubtedly the strongest support for sport and recreation in this—

MADAM SPEAKER: Let us be directly relevant to the question.

MR BARR: Assembly comes from members from Molonglo. All seven of us I know are very passionate supporters of sport and recreation. I know the shadow minister, for example, is always out there talking positively about the fantastic outcomes that occur in our community for sport and recreation. We have the highest level of participation in sport and recreation in the country.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR BARR: We have the best facilities in the country. Despite the constant carping of the Leader of the Opposition, who appears to set himself aside now as the one member for Molonglo who is not supporting sport and recreation in his local community—and that is very disappointing, Mr Hanson; it is a split between the Leader of the Opposition and the sport—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: They could not be further apart on the opposition frontbench. The split is there for all to see this afternoon.

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

Supplementary answer to question without notice Planning—Yarralumla

MR CORBELL: Yesterday in question time Mr Doszpot asked me “can homes with a common wall be classified as an exempt development for demolition purposes?” I

can advise Mr Doszpot that currently the exempt development provisions in the Planning and Development Regulation permit alterations and demolition of single dwellings. As the regulation stands, there are no exceptions for dwellings that have a common wall, such as duplexes. However, I can advise Mr Doszpot that, at my request, an amendment to the regulation is being prepared to restrict dwellings with common walls to no longer be exempt from significant development works.

Planning—Canberra

Debate resumed.

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (3.43): We have spoken today of ensuring that there is an integrated, imaginative and clear blueprint for our city. I recently had the opportunity, as a member of the Assembly's Standing Committee on Planning, Environment and Territory and Municipal Services, to attend the Planning Institute of Australia annual conference here in Canberra. As you would appreciate, Mr Assistant Speaker, it was a great opportunity for planners to experience the planned city of Canberra in our centenary year. However, it was also a chance for we Canberrans to reflect on the city's design and how we can take our city into the future. Minister Corbell outlined the vision for light rail and solar farms, which was well received at the conference.

I was also interested in talks about community engagement, in particular the international increase in single-person households, community engagement, food-centred regeneration of urban areas and the demographic forecasts for the larger Canberra region and the implications for our planning. I think I can say that all members of the standing committee were inspired by what they saw and heard at the conference.

I particularly want to focus today on the integrated, imaginative evolution of Belconnen as a major centre of health, education and jobs. Its importance is growing, with major new developments, and it will grow as our city and region expands.

I spoke recently about how east Belconnen around the suburb of Bruce is becoming a major centre of the knowledge capital, tying together a great diverse hub of learning, training, health and high-tech institutions. We have there the University of Canberra, the specialist high-tech CIT Bruce campus, the Calvary hospital, the Australian Institute of Sport and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

The University of Canberra public hospital is a major commitment by this government to enhance the partnership between the tertiary sector and the Health Directorate. The new hospital shows the strong, collaborative approach between the government and the university to its planning, design and function. This hospital will be a centre of excellence for rehabilitation and aged care and will include a clinical training and research base. Students of the university—students in nursing, occupational therapy and pharmacy, amongst others—will be able to experience clinical training in greater numbers and for extended periods, simply because of this co-location of the hospital within the university. It is a significant addition to Canberra and Belconnen in particular, creating local employment and educational

opportunities. The new UC hospital will work closely with the nearby Calvary hospital, as well as the Canberra Hospital, providing more beds in an integrated health service across Canberra.

Calvary hospital is undergoing a huge expansion in the areas of coronary care, intensive care and the emergency department, adding additional treatment spaces and consultation rooms. Joint planning of the Calvary hospital zone includes future car parking needs and is continuing.

The new University of Canberra sports hub announced at the last election will also add significantly to the depth of facilities serving Canberrans. It will support sporting organisations and increase the opportunities for UC students to build careers within sport. Mr Corbell recently said:

The proposed sports hub at UC will be a state-of-the-art facility that will provide a permanent home for the Brumbies, and help to ensure the long-term stability of the club, and support the further development of the sport in the ACT.

It is also a great fit with the nearby AIS, training elite sportspeople from across Australia and giving Canberrans access to some of the best sports training facilities and coaches in the world. There is also a great tie-in between these institutions and school education in Belconnen.

Last year I had the pleasure of attending the opening of the University of Canberra Lake Ginninderra college sporting hall of fame. Olympians such as Lauren Jackson featured amongst the gold medal winners who attended the college whilst training at the AIS.

The Education and Training Directorate and the University of Canberra have deeds of agreement that set out how the University of Canberra, the University of Canberra High School Kaleen and the University of Canberra Senior Secondary College Lake Ginninderra work together to enhance student learning outcomes and pathways into tertiary education through a unique and innovative education partnership.

I have also had the opportunity to see UC students working, one on one, on individual reading and maths plans with University of Canberra High School Kaleen students. It gives UC students great practical experience and helps raise the standards of the Kaleen students through this intensive work.

The deeds of agreement have a range of benefits, including improved pathways for students in territory high schools through to college and tertiary education, providing opportunities for the territory teachers' professional development and engagement with academics of the university, supporting university-led research for the development of innovative practices and providing professional learning and practice opportunities in health, youth and justice studies, speech pathology and other professional areas.

Of course, the ACT government is investing in all schools in Belconnen in a plan that will benefit all Canberrans. I was especially proud of the \$28 million commitment at

the last election to upgrade Belconnen High School. The works will be designed to provide a 21st century learning environment that incorporates state-of-the-art ICT systems and equipment, collaborative learning spaces and multi-use areas. The east Belconnen learning, health and high-tech hub is a perfect example of the leadership and transformational projects that are creating the Canberra of the future.

Further west in Belconnen, the Melba Copland High School campus has a major refurbishment of the year 10 Daintree wing, installation of a new lift and car park improvements. Other major works in west Belconnen include the extension of Macgregor Primary School, with new classrooms. There are also a range of upgrades to existing schools in Belconnen, with new roofs, toilets, car parks, sports facilities, landscaping, new shade structures, better school entrances and solar upgrades. The investment in health and education throughout Belconnen is an investment in Canberra and planning the future of our city.

Mr Coe in this debate said that taxpayers want to know how their money is being spent. And I am sure they would be surprised to hear that the former opposition leader is sitting here writing his retirement thank-you notes to his Senate pre-selectors.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations and Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development) (3.50): I thank Ms Porter for bringing this motion on today. It is an important motion because it highlights the importance and the contribution that planning makes to provide a liveable and sustainable city for all of our citizens. And the work that the government is currently undertaking to focus on a clear framework to manage the future growth and development of our city and to also meet the needs and the challenges associated with climate change, water scarcity and the growing population overall really does show that this government is investing in the measures that are needed to meet those challenges.

Today I would like to talk particularly about some of the major elements outlined in Ms Porter's motion as they deal with the work the government is undertaking in relation to the capital metro project and also the focus on and the role of Civic and our town centres. First of all, to step back, of course last year the government released its new planning strategy for the territory, and that planning strategy outlines how we accommodate growth and development in the city as we see another 50,000 to 60,000 dwellings needed in the city over the next 20 to 30 years. That is very significant growth. That is population that is heading towards half a million people, in fact achieving half a million people, in the period between about 2030 and 2040.

Then, of course, there is also, associated with that, growth in the surrounding region. Of course we will continue to see growth in the surrounding region, particularly in Queanbeyan and Jerrabomberra. And that is particularly important in the context of water supply, because the territory is not just responsible for supplying water to its own citizens but it also has a responsibility to make provision for water supply infrastructure and bulk supply for people who live in Queanbeyan and Jerrabomberra.

So the planning strategy outlines how we are going to try to manage this population growth. It focuses on a mixture of new greenfields release and also consolidation of

settlement in existing urban areas, particularly around Civic and our town centres. There are only around five or so suburbs left to be completed in the Gungahlin area, and what this means is that we need to continue to plan for future greenfields development in important and select locations. So the planning strategy outlines that areas such as west Belconnen, areas around Weston Creek and areas in parts of Tuggeranong are areas for future investigation to try to assess whether or not they are suitable for greenfields urban expansion.

Of course, the Molonglo development front has been commenced by this government, and the Molonglo development front does provide us with some capacity for new greenfields release on the south side of the city. But we do need to focus also on the potential for greenfields housing release on the northern side of the city, and the west Belconnen analysis in that respect is very important.

But greenfields expansion has its limits, both in terms of the impact on having people live further and further away from the centre of the city, and the impact that can have in terms of social isolation, and the context around how effectively or how limited the capacity of the government is to provide services and facilities into those locations, as well as the obvious environmental impacts of greenfields release and the increasing restrictions that environmental considerations are putting on our capacity for greenfields release. Therefore we must also focus very strongly on our capacity to accommodate more citizens closer to the city centre, closer to our town centres and close to already established major transport corridors. And that is why the city plan work and the city to the lake project that were released for consultation by the government last week are so important.

There is enormous capacity to accommodate a large number of people living in our city centre. At the moment, the resident population of the city centre would be fewer than 10,000 people. But it is capable, in terms of the land that is available and the future development potential that is available, of accommodating many times that number. It is certainly possible to accommodate up to 50,000 or 60,000 residents in the city centre alone, and that is where we really need to think about why it is that work like the city to the lake project and the city plan are so important, to do the strategic planning to identify how those people can potentially be accommodated and where are the best places for them.

Of course, Walter and Marion Griffin, in their plans for the national capital, saw the city centre as having an address to the lake. They did not see it cut off from the lake by freeways. They saw a city centre sitting next to the lake, with its best address being its front door to what is now Lake Burley Griffin. Living by the water or close to a water address is, of course, attractive to many people. It provides for great recreational amenity, great visual amenity and, of course, it also makes better use of land that is currently not particularly well utilised.

I saw some comments in the *Canberra Times* last week where there was criticism of this plan. The suggestion, I think from Dr Jenny Stewart, was that it would be better to leave the land as it is because it has a value. Yes, it does have a value but I would challenge anyone to suggest that the land around that part of West Basin is particularly well utilised. Yes, people will go for a run around there or cycle around there, but the great majority of the site is simply not used.

Look at the area between the ferry terminal and the National Museum; the land is grossly underutilised. There is a great opportunity to give people more opportunity to use that land, to have it as a place for cafes and restaurants, so that people can enjoy this fantastic amenity by a lakeside. It will provide opportunities for both formal and informal recreation. Informal recreation like cycling, jogging and walking can still occur. Picnics and all that sort of thing still can occur. But you can have more formal recreation, things like a swimming facility or other forms of recreation that bring people and activity down to enjoy that fantastic amenity by our lake foreshore.

What was most concerning to me about those comments, though, was the suggestion that the most valuable use of the land is as a car park. And I have to say, this is an incredibly short-sighted view of the way land like that should be utilised into the future. Car parking is important. We know Canberrans always express a view about car parking and how that should be best managed. But prime land like that should not be used as a car park.

Let me put it this way: there is an enormous opportunity cost if we are simply saying that this land should be available only for surface car parking. Go and have a look at how well those car parks are currently utilised. Go and have a look at how that land is currently utilised. The car parks are not utilised fully. Even during a working day, they are not utilised fully.

I would have to say that there is a much better use for beautiful land beside our lake than to turn it into surface car parks or to keep it as surface car parks. And if we could have more people living in that location, enjoying the amenity of that location through restaurants or cafes, boardwalks, recreational spaces, let us try to do that. It is this government that has put it on the program. Our agenda is to make this happen.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Doszpot): Mr Hanson, that is sufficient, thank you.

MR CORBELL: We also have to look at how development on the lake foreshore is consistent with the city centre as a whole and that the city has significant potential to continue to grow into the future. As part of that, we are undertaking very detailed work on the development of the capital metro project. The capital metro project will give us significant capacity to move more people in and out of the city centre. It can act as an activity hub and drive development around it, both in terms of the terminus in the city centre and how that infrastructure moves south of the lake to connect other parts of the city. This highlights a government that is getting on with the job of the long-term planning of our city, and I encourage Canberrans to have their say on this important project. *(Time expired.)*

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (4.01): I would like to thank Ms Porter for moving this important motion today. I am going to concentrate on my area, Brindabella, and speak specifically to point 2(d) in the motion, which talks about continuing to roll out consultation on master plans for our town centres.

The ACT planning strategy is the overarching government policy for a more compact, efficient city. This policy requires master plans to be undertaken for areas of change around the ACT. It is undertaken by ESDD's city planning section with close collaboration with other government agencies and, of course, the community.

My electorate of Brindabella currently has four master plans in differing stages, those being the Tuggeranong, the Tuggeranong town park, the Erindale and the Kambah master plans. These master plans have all had very high level consultation. Through my discussions with the community I have found that they are very pleased to see that this government cares about the future planning and development of Brindabella.

Master planning in town centres focuses the delivery of the best future outcomes by examining options for residential, retail and community needs in those areas and how the centres relate to surrounding neighbourhoods and their relevant transport links. The studies undertaken to inform each master plan address key issues such as residential density, public transport, traffic and parking, pedestrian and cycle movement, and land use diversity. Of course, climate change and greenhouse gas reductions, as well as taking into account community and stakeholder views, are important.

The Tuggeranong master plan was set up in September last year when the ACT government announced what has been nearly two years worth of consultation on the Tuggeranong master plan. This 75-page document will guide the transformation of Tuggeranong. The ACT government has listened to residents and will be delivering up to another 7,800 new dwellings, transforming major streets into people-friendly boulevards and boosting the amount of on and off-street parking. This plan also sets out a sustainable direction for the area. With proper planning, the town centre's street grid will establish views to the mountains, residential redevelopment that can take advantage of good solar orientation, walking and cycling links to Lake Tuggeranong and sunny, sheltered spaces for outdoor dining and relaxation.

The community consultation has been varied and comprehensive, with the use of a consultant working with ACTPLA and ESDD through the four consultation sessions to ensure the largest possible stakeholder engagement. Events such as a youth consultation roadshow, which went to local school and youth groups to have their views heard, stakeholder interviews, community drop-ins and consultation with residents at the Tuggeranong Community Council and the Tuggeranong festival, ensured that no-one missed out having their views heard.

With the plan now endorsed by the ACT government, the next step is, of course, the implementation of this plan. In that process, the key actions include the preparation of a precinct code which specifies land use, height and design details, which will encourage development and redevelopment and ensure it achieves the principles outlined in the master plan and start the territory plan variation process, the investigation of options for private-public partnership establishment and land release of territory-owned land on section 19 and land around the foreshore and the identification and preparation of capital works proposals for public realm and infrastructure improvements for consideration by government in subsequent budgets.

The community will still be able to be involved as implementation of the master plan occurs, either through notification on variations to the territory plan, such as the introduction of the precinct code, or through notification on development applications as they are lodged.

Another master plan announced in September last year—I had the pleasure of attending the announcement, along with ministers Corbell and Burch—was the Erindale master plan. This, again, has been two years in the making, with community consultation being one of the major priorities of this project. The comprehensive document that has been produced through these consultations shows what local residents have been wanting in their local area.

A full transport hub has been discovered as the key priority for Erindale, with the master plan proposing an extra 1,200 car spaces, a new bus station and better walking and cycling, as well as the construction of new roads to improve traffic flow in and out of the shopping district of Erindale to ease congestion on surrounding main roads, including the extension of Ricardo Street west to Erindale Drive with lighted intersections to provide greater access to Gartside Street and the centre. Those are just a few of the recommendations to ensure the longevity of this important town hub in servicing residents and local suburbs.

With consultation similar to that on the Tuggeranong master plans, stakeholders and residents have been consulted every step of the way. Residents, businesses and community groups have all had an opportunity to contribute and have their say. With implementation to run over the next 30 years to fully revitalise the whole town centre that is such a valued hub to its residents, consultation does not end here. Consultation will continue throughout all the stages of the implementation.

I mentioned the Tuggeranong town centre master plan. The town centre park is a popular and important area of space adjacent to the Tuggeranong town centre. It provides a range of recreational opportunities for the Tuggeranong community. Since the town park opened in 1995, the community's needs and demands have changed with the increase in residential development adjacent to the town centre. It is important to plan for the next stage of the park's life, as the demand for contemporary and well-designed recreational facilities increases.

Some of the recommendations of the draft master plan for the town park include improved pedestrian and cycle access into the park with new paths, redesign of the formal garden area to include an area for casual games such as petanque—the facilities could include a level gravel playing surface, shade pavilions, lighting and power outlets—new entries into the formal garden from Anketell and Cowlshaw streets to allow greater visual connections between the park and the town centre, a new interface to the skate park and upgrade of the facilities—in the longer term, of course—and an activities area for young people that incorporates elements like rock climbing walls and climbing poles, half-court sports areas and the like.

I had the opportunity of attending the Tuggeranong Community Council when this master plan was put up for consultation. I can say that the members there thought that

it was a very good idea. One of the exciting things that came up was that, for those people that live around the lake, the actual town park, its interface with the lake itself and the beach area is quite important to them.

The third master plan that has been released recently in Brindabella is for the Kambah shopping centre. This report was released in July 2012 and the draft variation to the territory plan has now been released for consultation. The draft variation is currently online at www.timetotalk.act.gov.au. DV 317 shows the transformational plan to a community hub that has been available for over 30 years. Key elements to this variation include: allowing an increase in building height in parts of the centre from two to three and four storeys, stepped to ensure adequate sunlight to open spaces; the provision of a new road connection to Primmer Court to improve vehicle and pedestrian circulation around the centre; relocation of the car park to make land available for additional retail and mixed use development; and retaining surface level car parking for the convenience of centre patrons.

The community has been involved throughout the development of the master plan since March 2011, providing valuable feedback at stakeholder interviews. There have been two drop-in sessions at the centre, community surveys, newsletters, emails and public meetings. The ACT government received 98 formal submissions on the draft master plan, including strong messages about protecting the village character of Kambah. It was, as you will know, Mr Assistant Speaker, the very first shopping centre in Tuggeranong.

In conclusion, the ACT Labor government has always been and will continue to be a government open to community consultation. These master plans are just another project that shows what the ACT can do in ensuring the blueprint for our town centres are clear and will provide the best possible outcomes to the community who rely on them.

MS BURCH (Brindabella—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Disability, Children and Young People, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Women, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Racing and Gaming) (4.10): It is with great pleasure that I speak in favour of this motion today, especially where it relates to ensuring that our children are educated in the very best schools that we can deliver. Providing high quality infrastructure to the community is the bread and butter of government. Indeed, making sure that we respond to the need of the community and deliver to them facilities and services that improve their lives and our communities as a whole is, I think, the very reason we all choose to enter this place.

When it comes to schools, it is the belief of the Labor Party and this Labor government that students should be given the tools to succeed no matter what their background is. This philosophy includes making sure that the built environment is not only fit for purpose but contributes to a culture of excellence in our education system. While we do not often consider it, the school environment—that is, the way a class looks and feels—has the power to change the way a student engages with the material in front of them and the experience and expectations of education. A classroom or school that looks welcoming and shows clear signs of love and care will contribute to the students who are also caring about their school and their learning.

This is why the ACT government have, throughout our term, sought to deliver the very best classrooms and schools. Indeed, the ACT government's continued investment in Canberra's schools reflects our commitment to providing families with the highest quality education opportunities. This is an ongoing program. Since becoming Minister for Education and Training late last year, I have been impressed with the level of work and attention to detail that the Education and Training Directorate does to ensure that we not only deliver quality schools and infrastructure but also deliver value for money.

I was very pleased earlier this year to be able to open the Franklin Early Childhood School. This \$30 million facility is the latest addition to the highly successful early childhood school model, offering both schooling and child care. It will cater for around 300 students from preschool to year 2 and offers a 120-place childcare centre operated by Anglicare. Franklin is the first purpose-built early childhood school in the ACT and students, parents and staff are delighted by this new state-of-the-art facility.

Going back, if I may, Mr Assistant Speaker, to the attention to detail shown by the directorate, this school is purpose built for the population it serves. Just as an example, I was struck by the mirrors and windows at the school that are in the shape of children and, most importantly, placed at the height of the students who will go to the school. This attention to detail just helps to create a school that students want to be at and that parents and carers have confidence in.

North Gungahlin families have also benefited from a second new school, the Neville Bonner Primary School, which also welcomed its first students at the commencement of this year with the opening of stage 1 of the \$48 million school. When stage 2 is completed, the enrolment capacity of the north Gungahlin region will increase to 818 student places.

I think it is important to note that these two facilities were delivered not only on time but also close to \$30 million under budget. These two new schools follow the opening of Harrison secondary school in 2012 and Gungahlin College and Namadgi School in 2011. These schools have provided their communities with 21st century facilities and will serve generations of students to come.

While building new facilities is vital, we cannot forget about our existing infrastructure. We must continue to upgrade our existing facilities to ensure they too can provide the learning environments needed in the new century. To this end, the ACT government has invested millions of dollars into projects for existing schools, projects such as the construction of the new \$10 million performing arts centre at Canberra College which opened in August last year. This follows the opening in recent years of new centres at Lyneham and Calwell high schools. There is also the \$7.6 million expansion and refurbishment of Red Hill school, which was completed in September 2012, and the \$3 million replacement for the hydrotherapy pool at Malkara School which was opened in February this year.

We have provided funds for the upgrade of classrooms at the Melba campus of Melba Copland Secondary School and funds for upgrades at Hughes and Yarralumla primary

schools. There are also funds to expand and upgrade the Macgregor Primary School, which is currently underway and due to be completed in August, and a \$4 million expansion and upgrade of the Majura Primary School, which is also currently underway and due to be completed in October.

There are also additional funds to expand the Duffy Primary School and a \$6.2 million program to expand and upgrade nine preschools in north and south Canberra. There is \$2.3 million to install artificial grass surfaces at Calwell primary, Torrens primary, Theodore primary and Weetangera primary. As a result of extreme weather and flooding, we have invested \$12 million in a project to rectify Taylor Primary School. This project is providing a best practice example in the removal of asbestos materials. Works are well advanced and are due to be completed by the end of this year.

This is an extensive but by no means exhaustive list of the works that we have completed or started in the last two years. It shows how much this government values delivering high quality infrastructure for our community. However, we are not stopping there. In addition to works recently completed and in progress, the ACT government has planned the following infrastructure facilities and improvements at ACT public schools: a new school, a budget initiative of \$44 million for Coombs primary school to service the Molonglo community. Already design work is scheduled for this project. Members will also be aware of the designs for the new Canberra College Cares facility to be integrated with the existing college facilities at the Woden campus of Canberra College.

We have also committed to a \$28 million refurbishment of Belconnen High School. This will completely upgrade the existing school to provide a 21st century learning environment that incorporates state-of-the-art ICT systems and equipment, collaborative learning areas and multi-use spaces. Further, we will construct a new centre of excellence in numeracy at the Caroline Chisholm School. This will provide a centre that represents best practice in 21st century learning for students across the Tuggeranong school network.

We have committed \$3 million to establish a Tuggeranong introductory English centre at Wanniasa Hills Primary School. There is also our commitment to build an expanded CIT presence in Tuggeranong to bring a greater vocational training presence to my own electorate and, of course, we will continue to fund upgrades to our schools with a further commitment by ACT Labor to inject \$70 million into infrastructure upgrades at our public schools over the next four years.

This comprehensive list of upgrades and infrastructure projects clearly demonstrates that this government has a strong commitment to deliver to the community the very best in facilities that we can. I thank Ms Porter for moving this motion and allowing me the opportunity to detail the level of work that this government is undertaking in education facilities.

I would also like to place on record my appreciation of the staff of the Education and Training Directorate for their diligence in delivering these projects to the community and the great work that they do. I know that the community appreciates it. I also show

my appreciation to the staff from the Community Services Directorate who had, until just recently, responsibility for childcare facilities across Canberra. They too have done great work in ensuring that those upgrades and expansions of centres were undertaken. I fully support this motion and thank Ms Porter for bringing it forward. I look forward to delivering on the tasks before us.

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (4.19), in reply: I thank all members who spoke today and made a contribution to this debate. Most of it was very constructive and positive. However, I would like to make some remarks in relation to Mr Coe's contribution, particularly his remarks about consultation and the motion not calling on the government to do anything. I note that paragraph (1)(b) says we must engage and consult with our community on what it identifies as priorities, what role the community wants our city centre to have and how it can become a more dynamic, vibrant and sustainable place. Paragraph (2) calls on the government to:

- (a) incorporate community feedback into the city plan to determine a comprehensive approach for the city's future as an economically vibrant and attractive centre;
- (b) ensure that information about the major elements of the proposed City to the Lake project, including changes to Parkes Way, West Basin and the interface with Lake Burley Griffin, is provided to the community;
- (c) continue to ensure that the transport needs of our community, including Capital Metro, are integrated into the city plan;
- (d) continue to consult closely with the community on master plans for our town and group centres, and ensure our local shopping centres upgrade programs maintain the attractiveness, community well-being and viability of these centres; and
- (e) continue to ensure that there is an effective and efficient roll out of investment in essential infrastructure such as schools, community health facilities, hospitals, sporting facilities and public housing.

In my speech earlier I outlined plans this Labor government has put in place to ensure a positive and sustainable future for this city. As I said, the city plan will consider the transport and development effects on other centres. It will consider growth in the whole of Canberra as to what is needed in the city centre specifically to encourage growth at the city core.

The city plan will provide a mechanism for government to identify and synchronise its development priorities and make critical decisions for big ideas and catalyst projects for the future of our city. The plan will look at the city as a whole to ensure it can meet our changing needs and aspirations for the premier centre of the national capital in terms of the city's role, function and design. That is why the city to lake plans and the capital metro are also very important for the future.

I now take this opportunity to mention just a few examples of some major developments that have taken or are taking place in my electorate, which enhances

this city state as a whole. I regularly talk to hundreds of people at my scheduled mobile offices as well as those who contact me every day. Many of these constituents tell me they appreciate the Labor government's continued improvement to local infrastructure and amenities.

This Labor government recognises it is through continued investment in local facilities that fast growing communities such as those in the Belconnen area continue to thrive. Not only have many large construction projects been completed, but we also have seen improvements to various playgrounds, recreational amenities, tracks, footpaths, and cycleways. Not too long ago I was honoured to turn the first sod of stage 1 of the Lake Ginninderra foreshore development, which included the new state-of-the-art skate park in the immediate public realm. We have since seen stage 2 implemented, and this stage includes improvements to the landscaping, better lighting and walkways to adjacent areas. It also takes into account replacing the pedestrian bridge across the inlet, the conversion of the inlet into a wetlands system and the completion of paving adjacent to the new Belconnen skate park. These developments have not only improved accessibility to the foreshore area but also ensure that facilities can be enjoyed in greater safety for longer hours and with greater confidence by all Belconnen residents.

There have also been major upgrades to other public spaces around Lake Ginninderra—upgrades to Emu Inlet park, John Knight Memorial Park and the western foreshore incorporate better lighting, drinking fountains, benches, new barbecues and new playground areas. These upgrades have rejuvenated these spaces and created a much more vibrant atmosphere for park users.

Sports facilities have not missed out. I did not have time to mention some of these projects earlier, but I think it is important to mention them now. The government recognises that sport plays a key part in developing stronger and healthier communities. That is why we have continued to invest greatly in sports and sporting facilities in Canberra. In my electorate, for example, we have seen the restoration of Spence oval, improvements to Hawker playing fields and Kaleen enclosed oval and, as I said, a new international standard skate park and many other projects that my Ginninderra colleagues have mentioned.

I was recently privileged to join Minister Barr at the official opening of the Kippax enclosed oval redevelopment. As Ms Berry highlighted, this project is an outstanding example of what is able to be achieved when government and community pool their resources. As the minister further outlined in question time today, the development is a joint project not only with the community and the government but also, of course, with important sponsors.

As you know, Mr Assistant Speaker, developments such as this at Kippax encourage young people to continue to play their chosen sports and aspire to play on first-class grounds such as this. I particularly thank the Belconnen Magpies football club, the Magpies sports club, AFL NSW/ACT, the Ginninderra Cricket Club and Cricket ACT for the contribution each of them made to this project.

Belconnen interchange is another example of what we are doing to make sure we are enhancing important parts of our city as a whole. As you know, Mr Assistant Speaker, the Belconnen town centre has undergone major transformation in the last few years. The 2011 government-commissioned Belconnen bus interchange has not only aesthetically transformed the town centre but it has also created a corridor connecting the eastern part of Belconnen town centre to central facilities such as the new health centre and the Westfield mall. The development has also provided commuters with improved safety and access to transport.

I could continue talking about other major projects that are scheduled or are in progress in my electorate but I would be at risk of repeating what my colleagues have touched on: the emergency services joint station at Aranda and Charnwood, and I was very fortunate to attend the turning of the sod with Minister Corbell; the new Belconnen to city transitway, which is a great improvement for everyone going to work that catches the bus into town in the morning; scheduled shopping centre upgrades that we have already talked about in Evatt, Florey, Kaleen, Fraser, Spence and Macquarie; the University of Canberra public hospital and developments at UC such as the proposed sports hub that Dr Bourke mentioned earlier; the expansion of the nurse-led walk-in clinics to Belconnen, which is an extremely important development I am very much looking forward to; the new birth centre at Calvary Public Hospital—I do not think I have any more grandchildren to be born in Canberra, but you never know; and the new health centre, which will certainly be welcomed by all in my electorate.

We have already talked about the large investment that is being made in Belconnen High School on top of the \$6 million already invested. The \$28 million over three years that Dr Bourke mentioned earlier is very welcome.

The city to lake project is not a quick fix. As I and my colleagues have highlighted, it is a long-term plan for the city and the lake areas. Canberra is poised for a new phase of growth and development to create a sustainable urban vision. As Mr Barr said earlier, it will be more than just a drive-through city; it will be a place to live, work, play, visit and linger.

Motion agreed to.

ACTEW Corporation Ltd—management

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (4.29): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

(a) the cost blowouts and time delays for construction of the Enlarged Cotter Dam;

(b) Government and community concern over the:

- (i) misreporting of the remuneration for ACTEW Corporation Ltd's managing director in the 2010-2011 annual report; and
 - (ii) quantum of the managing director's remuneration package;
 - (c) the Chief Minister's request of ACTEW Corporation Ltd for an analysis and report on "corporate largesse" in its expenditure;
 - (d) the return of water and sewerage assets and business from the joint venture to ACTEW Corporation Ltd on 1 July 2012; and
 - (e) concerns identified in Draft Report No 1 of 2013 of the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission on Regulated Water and Sewerage Services; and
- (2) directs the Speaker to write to the ACT Auditor-General, requesting a performance audit on ACTEW Corporation Ltd, reporting to the Assembly by the last sitting day in September 2013 and examining the Corporation's governance arrangements including, but not limited to:
- (a) ACTEW Corporation Ltd's management of the major water security projects, particularly the Enlarged Cotter Dam;
 - (b) the processes used to assess, determine, approve and review executive remuneration and performance;
 - (c) the "corporate largesse" of expenditure of ACTEW Corporation Ltd including, but not limited to, community engagements and sponsorships;
 - (d) the process and justification for the return of water and sewerage assets and business from the joint venture to ACTEW Corporation Ltd on 1 July 2012;
 - (e) concerns raised in the draft report referred to in part (1)(e);
 - (f) the internal control procedures and checks and balances ACTEW Corporation Ltd engages to:
 - (i) protect its interests as a joint venture partner in ActewAGL; and
 - (ii) ensure good governance within ActewAGL;
 - (g) shareholders' responsibilities and compliance requirements in relation to:
 - (i) the memorandum and articles of association of ACTEW Corporation Ltd;
 - (ii) relevant ACT law; and
 - (iii) relevant Australian corporate law; and
 - (h) any other matter.

I guess this is the moment we have been waiting for after the two hours of filibustering on the previous motion. This is an issue of significant concern to our community; I think that is well understood. It is an issue that has been pretty well litigated both in the media and in the Assembly over the past while.

There is no doubt that there is real concern about ACTEW and about matters surrounding ACTEW. The matters about the managing director's salary, and the fiasco that surrounds that, and the quantum of that as described by Mr Rattenbury as outrageous—was it “outrageous”: it was actually worse than that, wasn't it?—are a real issue. But it goes further than that. It goes back to the cost blowouts that we saw in the dam—the original estimates, about \$150 million, with the cost now at \$409 million.

We have seen the quite scathing draft report from the ICRC and the extensive comments about the management of ACTEW by the commissioner, Malcolm Gray; the concerns raised by the government about the corporate largesse; the ongoing bickering and breakdown in communication relations between the shareholders and the management of ACTEW; and concerns as to whether the shareholders have been meeting their full suite of requirements and, indeed, whether the management and board have.

It would appear that with ACTEW it is a bit like an onion: as you peel away one level, there are more concerns underneath. We have reached a point, members, where there is a full and comprehensive review required so that we can assure ourselves, as members in this place, that the shareholders and ACTEW are doing everything that they should be doing to provide effective management and oversight of that very important utility.

I think that it would be fair to say that there is no-one in this place, not even the shareholders, who could say with confidence that they know everything that is going on inside ACTEW, that they are confident with everything that is happening. Indeed, it is quite clear that it is the shareholders who are amongst those who have real concerns with what is going on and have had a breakdown in trust with the management of ACTEW.

ACTEW is an important organisation. It is the largest government-owned corporation, with \$1.4 billion worth of assets. The Chief Minister and the Treasurer are the two shareholders. We would expect that that organisation is effectively managed and we would expect that the shareholders are fulfilling their responsibilities.

I will go through some of the issues that I just introduced in some detail, but one would expect that projects like the Cotter Dam would not have been subject to the variance in cost that we have seen. There has been a litany of excuses as to why the original estimate, at \$120 million, \$150 million, has blown out to \$409 million. But whatever the excuses, it is unacceptable that a figure should have been put to the community that this is how much the dam will cost and then the final price be in an order of magnitude of hundreds of millions of dollars more than the price that was put.

It seems to be brushed aside by some people concerned as “Well, you know, that was not a real cost estimate; that was just an interim cost estimate.” It is utterly unacceptable.

Canberrans are rightly concerned about the impact of that and other matters on what is going to happen with their water bills. We are paying too much for water. It is not me saying that; that is the ICRC. What is going to happen to our water prices in this jurisdiction? Let me quote from Malcolm Gray, the Senior Commissioner of the ACT ICRC. He said:

To be frank it’s difficult to account for some of the disparities that one sees between our water prices and the water prices in other jurisdictions.

This year the ICRC released a draft determination on the price of water to be charged to Canberrans. In February this year, Malcolm Gray, when commenting, said:

... I think the responsibility for the less than optimum outcomes—

let me say that again: “the less than optimum outcomes”—

that the community has had to endure of recent years should be laid widely across those who’re responsible.

No wonder the government does not want a performance audit! He said:

It’s a systemic issue; the regulatory regime has not been as finely tuned as it ought to have been, ACTEW’s management may not have been as astute in some areas as it might have been.

He went on to say:

... the Commission is arguing that we need a much more holistic, integrated and adaptive approach to our water resource with much clearer guidance given to ACTEW on water security targets that it ought to be aiming for, rather than it groping in the dark for what the community needed.

Who was meant to set those targets for ACTEW? Certainly, the shareholders or the government. So ACTEW has been groping around, and that is what the independent regulator found. No wonder the government does not want a light shone on that.

And further, if that was not enough, there was a media interview on ABC 666. The interviewer said:

... you’ve gone back and done this root and branch research ... has there been problems with the way ACTEW has been managed over many, many years? Is that what you’re saying?

The commissioner said, “Yes.” So he is saying that there have been problems with the way ACTEW has been managed over many years. And we are seeing some of that come through in the media now, and through the Assembly and the concerns that have been raised recently in this place.

It is worth while going back to some previous Auditor-General's reports to see what the Auditor-General should be doing or what the Auditor-General could be looking at. I have gone back and seen the Auditor-General's review of another territory-owned corporation, Rhodium Asset Solutions, in September 2006. The Auditor-General set out some definitions of good corporate governance:

... a set of relationship between a company's management, its board, its shareholders and other stakeholders. Corporate governance also provides the structure through which the objectives of the company are set, and the means of attaining those objectives and monitoring performance are determined.

But what the ICRC are saying is that ACTEW are groping around in the dark for what they should be doing. By that definition, is anyone comfortable that ACTEW is complying with that? In that 2006 report, on radio, she went on to note: "The benefits of effective corporate governance enhance organisational performance; strengthen shareholder and community confidence of an entity; increase the public reputation of an entity through transparency and accountability; encourage entities to demonstrate how they are discharging their legal, shareholder and ethical obligations; provide a mechanism for benchmarking accountability; and assist in the prevention and detection of fraudulent, dishonest and other unethical behaviour."

I would have thought that that is the sort of review—a performance review on the whole organisation—that ACTEW would benefit from. There is no question that there is now a lack of public confidence in ACTEW as an organisation, and in some sections there is a lack of confidence in the shareholders—that they have been doing what they should be doing, fulfilling their responsibilities.

So why would we not want to shine that light? Why would we not want to get that outcome? What is it that we are hiding from? Or should I say: what is it that the government is hiding from? When we look at those objectives, there is some significant doubt in many areas that ACTEW is actually fulfilling some of those responsibilities to the high standards that we would necessarily expect.

Canberrans have read with disbelief about some of the corporate largesse, as described by the Chief Minister. These are her words: "corporate largesse". She has written to the management of ACTEW about it, or the board. An extraordinary step! It is an extraordinary situation where the Chief Minister has either been given information or has heard rumours about corporate largesse and feels that it is necessary to write to the board to say, "What is going on? What is being spent here?"

There are stories in the paper about the chair going to be a VIP caddie for a tournament in Queensland at the cost of \$12,500. Now, was that ACTEW or was it ActewAGL? But what responsibility is there by the ACTEW board to make sure that its investing in ActewAGL is judicious, that there is not corporate largesse in that organisation that is excessive?

How bizarre, how extraordinary, that the shareholders have reached the point where they feel it necessary to write to the board basically to say: "What the hell is going

on? There are all these rumours circulating. There are these allegations. We have heard this; we have heard that; we have got no idea what is going on. Tell us what is going on.” What a way to run an organisation!

Why is this not reported to the government? Why aren't the shareholders across this information? Do they not ask for it on an ongoing basis? Do they not get it in any reports? Why not? Indeed, what have the shareholders been doing for the past 10 years? And in relation to the review that has been conducted, I believe the terms of reference for that review were set by ACTEW themselves. The concern is about the integrity of that process and largesse. Getting the organisation itself to set the terms of reference seems like an odd way of doing it. This is why we need an Auditor-General's review.

It is similar with the managing director's salary. This has been well canvassed in this place and in the media, but this has just been extraordinary—the misreporting of that and the quantum of that. There has been outcry from just about everybody in the community about what has happened—most vocally from the Greens, from Shane Rattenbury. I will get to his divergence of public comments on what happens when he meekly comes into this place later. I do not think that anybody, including the shareholders, is satisfied with what has happened. We need to get to the bottom of it. We need to make sure that we understand the systemic issues behind it.

I think that \$855,000, by any measure, is an extraordinary amount. What happens when you do a comparative analysis with the director of ACT Health, Peggy Brown, and the responsibilities that she has got, in comparison, just in infrastructure alone? The rebuild of the tower block at Canberra Hospital was \$800 million. There is a \$1.3 billion budget. With the responsibilities that she has got, I do not think she is on half of that. These are the sorts of concerns that have been raised and that are shared broadly across the community. My understanding is that when that \$854,000 amount was first paid, ACTEW only actually had 38 people. Extraordinary!

It was, in the original articles of association, an amount that was meant to be approved by the shareholders. It says very clearly in clause 49 that the shareholders are meant to approve that. The shareholders then basically wrote that out of the constitution. There was a constitutional change in 2006 that said, “We are not going to take any responsibility for that anymore.” Now they are complaining that they do not have any oversight of that. The very shareholders, this government, are now whingeing and complaining, saying: “We did not know what was going on. This is not fair. This is intolerable.” It was this mob, Mr Assistant Speaker, that got rid of any oversight on that, when they used to approve it.

Something that does need inquiry—this is something that I would have wanted the Auditor-General to look at, but it does not look as though she will be getting to—is that when those articles of association were changed and the new constitution was established, it was done by the shareholders, but the original articles of association talk about changes being done by the Assembly, about the Assembly doing those.

Mr Barr: They were tabled in the Assembly in 2006.

MR HANSON: Tabling in the Assembly is not anything like a vote. Just tabling something that is a decision by the shareholders is not a decision of this Assembly. You do not make a decision as a shareholder, table it here and say that is a decision of the Assembly.

These are further things that need to be looked at. Again, there is a light that needs to be shone on this, but it will not be because this government is avoiding scrutiny.

What I am asking for is what the community want—some clarity about what has been occurring in ACTEW, confirmation and assurance that this is an organisation that is being managed on their behalf. They are essentially the owners. The community are the owners of this, through the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister. They want some assurance that what is going on in ACTEW is good governance, appropriate governance, and that it is an asset of \$1.4 billion that is managed properly for the people of the ACT. I would say to you that there is nobody in this place or in the community that can put their hand on their heart and say that that is the case. And we will not see it, because this government and the Greens—I will get to that later—are squibbing their responsibilities.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Sport and Recreation, Minister for Tourism and Events and Minister for Community Services) (4.44): I thank Mr Hanson for raising these issues today. I certainly agree with some of his opening remarks about how these issues have indeed been extensively canvassed in the media, in the Assembly and in, I think it was, an hour of public accounts hearings last week, where a number of questions were asked. That is good to see. As shareholders, the Chief Minister and I have obviously been asking a lot of questions in relation to the various issues. We have a number of processes in place to resolve each of the issues that have certainly caused concern to the shareholders, to the government, to the Assembly and, indeed, to the broader community. So the proposed way forward that I am suggesting today and that is contained in the amendments that I believe have been circulated to all members provides a very clear pathway to resolution of each of the issues, outlines time frames for reporting back to the Assembly and ensures that there is public disclosure in relation to the resolution of each of the issues.

I think it is certainly worth observing that whilst there are a number issues and yes, they all relate to ACTEW, they have different timelines for resolution, different levels of complexity and of course different processes of resolution, some of which may ultimately be brought back to the Assembly by way of structural reform. Others will be dealt with at the special general meeting next week.

I seek leave to move four amendments together.

Leave granted.

MR BARR: I move:

(1) Omit subparagraph (1)(a), substitute:

“(a) as reported to the Assembly on 9 April, the estimated final cost of the Enlarged Cotter Dam is in excess of the original budget, due to the unexpected geological events that occurred in March 2012;”.

(2) Omit subparagraph (1)(c), substitute:

“(c) in response to a shareholder request, the Board of ACTEW Corporation Ltd have commissioned PWC to undertake an independent review of its governance and integrity processes to ensure the business is both operating within commercial standards and within community expectations. The Government understands the report will be completed in May 2013;”.

(3) After subparagraph (1)(e), insert:

“(f) the Treasurer advised the Assembly of concerns relating to the under reporting of executive remuneration on 19 March 2013 and undertook to report back further findings in relation to the issue;

(g) that a Special General Meeting of ACTEW Corporation Ltd will be held on 15 April to discuss some of these issues as called by the shareholders;

(h) that the ACT Auditor-General has advised on its website that it has a proposal to conduct an audit on Governance and Administrative Arrangements for the Regulatory Review of Water and Sewerage Prices in the ACT;

(i) that the Government will:

(i) report back to the Assembly on the final costing of the ECD after completion;

(ii) discuss the issues relating to remuneration with the Board of ACTEW Corporation Ltd at the Special General Meeting on 15 April 2013 and report back on any resolution at the next sitting;

(iii) brief the Opposition Leader as requested on 12 April 2013;

(iv) consider the issue of governance raised by the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission in its current review on water pricing which will be informed by the outcome in the Commission’s final report;

(v) consider any recommendations made by the ACT Auditor-General in relation to her findings from her proposed Governance and Administrative Arrangement inquiry;

(vi) provide the ACT Auditor-General with documents and assistance if requested; and

(vii) report back to the Assembly by June on progress on all these issues.”.

(4) Omit paragraph (2).

So the amendments that I have circulated go to clarify a number of the known facts in relation to the issues that have been raised by the opposition leader and to outline the steps that the shareholders believe are appropriate to deal with each of those.

In relation to the first amendment, I am suggesting amending the opposition leader's motion to clarify the situation in relation to the enlarged Cotter Dam. In doing so, I clearly recognise that the community has a significant interest in the cost of the dam. I acknowledge that the dam represents a major cornerstone in the territory's water security measures to avoid the impact of prolonged drought and variable rainfall and that over time this significant investment in water security will need to be paid for by the community.

The enlarged Cotter Dam project was originally approved with a total project budget of \$363 million in August 2009. This budget has been the subject of several independent reviews—and I think Minister Rattenbury observed that in his public comments this morning—all of which confirmed that this was a reasonable price estimate. The reasons for the cost and schedule increases from that \$363 million budget have been well documented and debated in this place and in the media extensively over the last 12 or so months. But I think it is pretty well acknowledged that the reasons for those changes are the result of several abnormal events that I think even the harshest critic of the ACTEW management would suggest were well beyond the control of the project management team. In summary, these of course were the discovery of the major geological fault during the excavation for the footings of the dam wall, the record rainfalls in 2010 and 2011 and the one-in-a-hundred-years flood event in 2012.

Members would be aware that I tabled the statement in the Assembly earlier this week advising that the schedule was now revised to July 2013. The advice also indicated that the costs would be within one per cent of the \$405 million budget. ACTEW is hopeful of containing the costs within the \$405 million project budget.

I think it is worthwhile noting—and most members again acknowledge this—that the dam wall is in fact complete and that the dam is filling. There are residual works to complete the Stirling basin and site clean-up work, which is anticipated to be completed by July 2013. When the project is complete, it will form an essential part of our water security infrastructure.

In the context of the public hearings last week, I do not think I would be verballing Mr Seselja to suggest that he indicated that he supported the construction of the dam. I am presuming that no-one has changed their position on that, that there is still support for that project.

In relation to the second amendment that I am moving, I am seeking to clarify for the Assembly exactly what the shareholders have requested from the ACTEW Corporation. The review that I refer to in my amendment No 2 is underway, and I am advised it is due to be completed next month.

The third amendment continues to note facts and highlights the actions that the shareholders are taking. So the new subparagraph (1)(f) reconfirms to the Assembly

my undertaking to report back on further findings. As I advised the Assembly on 19 March, I did table at the first opportunity the error that was drawn to my attention. It was, of course, the first sitting week after receiving correspondence from the chair of the board. And at that time I undertook to investigate issues further. The Chief Minister and I have, indeed, raised a number of questions in relation to the managing director's remuneration and the process for determining this remuneration. Those issues have been, again, extensively canvassed in the media and, indeed, have been the subject of probably two dozen questions now from the opposition, as you would anticipate.

The new subparagraph (1)(g) is to inform the Assembly that we have called a special general meeting of ACTEW Corporation to raise these issues. New subparagraph (1)(h) is to highlight to the Assembly that the ACT Auditor-General is already proposing to review issues related to ACTEW. I suspect in preparing his motion, the opposition leader may not have checked with the Auditor-General or even looked on the Auditor-General's website, but I think it is useful that the Assembly notes this. The new subparagraph (1)(i) outlines how the government is dealing with these issues.

Firstly, we will report back to the Assembly on the final costings of the enlarged Cotter Dam after completion. And this, I believe, is entirely consistent with previous resolutions of the Assembly, but we think it is important today to restate that. Secondly, we will be discussing with the board at the special general meeting the issue of the managing director's remuneration. And I, again, think it is appropriate to report back to the Assembly at our sittings in May.

Thirdly, I think it is worth noting that the opposition leader has, indeed, requested a briefing about two weeks after the issue was first raised, and I am happy to advise the Assembly that, I think subject to Mr Hanson's diary, this is scheduled to occur on 12 April, later this week. The fourth point is that we certainly will be considering the issues of governance that have been raised by the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission and will be especially interested in the comments in their final report.

The amendment also confirms that the government will, of course, assist, and provide any information requested by, the ACT Auditor-General in her report into governance and administration of water prices. In addition to the individual points that I have raised there, we will, of course, report back to the Assembly regularly in terms of where we are up to with these processes.

The final amendment deletes paragraph (2). In the government's view, given all of the other processes that are in train, this is premature at this time.

This outlines the government's approach to addressing the issues. As all members would know, we are, indeed, very concerned by the events of the last couple of weeks around ACTEW and the processes around the administration of the corporation, and we are taking these issues very seriously. But I think it is also important to note that, as shareholders, we have acted appropriately and responsibly. I think it is entirely responsible and appropriate for these actions and these responses to be allowed to run

their course, with appropriate reporting back to the Assembly. So it is curious that two weeks after these issues were first raised, we have a request for a briefing, and even before that briefing occurs, the opposition leader comes in with a motion like this.

We believe the process we have outlined is sensible, is reasonable and is a considered response. We have followed up a number of factual requests with the corporation, and we are now in a position to hold a special general meeting with the board to discuss these issues. At that meeting we will be discussing ACTEW's existing governance and accountability arrangements and seeking final assurances as to how mistakes such as the annual report error will be avoided in the future. Again, it is a sensible, responsible and considered response.

We have noted the concerns on governance raised by the ICRC in their draft report on water pricing. I am certainly interested in pursuing those particular issues and talking further with the ICRC once their final report is released. Again, it is a sensible, responsible and considered approach.

But today it is unfortunate that what is clearly a media stunt, given the appearance of TV cameras and the like earlier, is trying to divert from that sensible response in order to point-score. Perhaps I could be generous and say that is the role of the opposition, but there are other ways that the opposition can play a role. In the context of the public approach of the Auditor-General in terms of listing this on her website, it was interesting that Mr Hanson did appear to be unaware that the Auditor-General had foreshadowed that she wishes to look at a number of these issues. So, for Mr Hanson's benefit, it is there at www.audit.act.gov.au, and he can find that information. And it is our intention to assist the Auditor-General in that work. Again, it is a reasonable and responsible approach.

In concluding and seeking the support of the Assembly for my amendments, we stress that we take this issue seriously, that the amendments highlight an appropriate way to respond to the issues and to reach final resolution on each of them, in turn, according to a sensible and reasonable approach to decision making. Again, a sensible and reasonable approach from the opposition would be to support this process. So I urge all members of the Assembly to get behind these amendments to ensure that we have a sensible, reasonable approach to resolving these issues.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (4.58): I welcome the fact Mr Hanson has brought this motion forward today for discussion. As I said earlier in the media today, this is a very important matter for the Assembly to be considering and I think all members in this place are concerned by the various reports that have come to light about some of the matters relating to ACTEW in recent times. When it comes down to this motion, we all agree we need to address the issues of ACTEW; the challenge is to figure out the best way to deal with the various issues.

Mr Hanson's motion essentially covers three issues: the dam, water assets and operations—which have not had so much discussion, but I am interested that this has come into the motion—and the governance of ACTEW both in light of the ICRC report and the issue of the salary of the managing director.

Let me turn to what mechanisms are in place for us to review some of these issues. Mr Hanson has sought a full performance review by the Auditor-General. The first and most important thing to stress is that the Auditor-General is already doing an inquiry that I believe will largely cover Mr Hanson's concerns. There is a notice of the performance audit on the—

Mr Hanson: Why not support the motion, then?

MR RATTENBURY: He gave me a minute and a half today before he interjected; that is a new personal best, Mr Hanson. There is a notice of performance audit on the Auditor-General's website and it outlines the scope of the audit that will be undertaken. My office contacted the Auditor-General both about the motion and to understand what the Auditor-General is doing in relation to the issue. The information I have received from the Auditor-General has assured me that the audit office is taking all the appropriate steps to respond to both the salary issue and the broader issues the motion presents. The audit office is looking into their actions and obligations in relation to the financial auditing of ACTEW and also the responsibilities of the ACTEW board in relation to the annual report.

In terms of the specific performance audit, the Auditor-General informs me and my office that the work on the audit has already begun and that she intends the audit to be completed by December this year. The audit will be focused and targeted and ensure that Canberrans are getting value for money and that water services are being delivered as efficiently as possible. The review will look at all relevant parts of water and sewerage delivery, and I am confident that if the auditor finds anything of concern along the way the matter will be comprehensively followed up and reported on in this place.

If we just reflect on that, we are looking at a situation where the Auditor-General has, as we know, broad powers. The Auditor-General is already looking into matters relating to ACTEW and already has work underway. As I have touched on, I am quite confident that if the Auditor-General finds areas of concern, no doubt she and her office will pursue those matters further. The Auditor-General is already engaged. You could take that on face value if you want to. No doubt Mr Hanson is going to have a go at my comments later. I am interested he saw the need to flag several times the fact he wants to be critical of my comments, but he was not prepared to do it in his opening remarks and is going to wait until after I have spoken. That speaks to the confidence he has in that analysis. But if you wanted to be generous you could simply say that Mr Hanson's desire for a full Auditor-General's report is, to some extent, picked up.

There are other issues in Mr Hanson's motion I will turn to. There are, as I already flagged, three separate issues. Although I note there is some overlap between the questions of the water assets and the governance issue, nevertheless, my view is that they are largely best dealt with separately but, no doubt, they will also be considered in some way as part of the existing audit, as I have already touched on.

In relation to the dam and the costs of it, we have had the ICAC report and we have comprehensively debated the issue in this place and in a range of committees. I do not think at this stage another inquiry is warranted because there is nothing in Mr Hanson's remarks or in the motion that flags new issues he wants explored above and beyond the extensive report the ICRC has already done into the cost of Cotter Dam.

None of us are happy with the fact that, over time, we have seen the cost of the dam increase significantly from the initial estimates that were first made publicly available. There is a debate to be had—and it has been had extensively—about the wisdom of those original numbers and whether they were appropriate numbers to release into the public domain. But the ICRC looked at this extensively last year and produced a report for the Assembly which went through the numbers in considerable detail. Mr Hanson has made no case as to where he sees fault in the ICRC report and, therefore, why further investigation is required. That does not mean I am happy with the final cost of the dam, but it is what it is, and the ICRC has looked into it.

Let me turn now to some of the other matters in the motion. As far as water assets and operations are concerned, I am not aware of any particular complaints about this. Again, inevitably, this will be part of the existing audit, and I see no need to create the reference Mr Hanson has proposed.

The issue of governance is perhaps the most pressing. As I have said publicly on a number of occasions, I am concerned about some of the reports that we are seeing out of ACTEW. When it comes to how to deal with these matters, this brings me to the amendments put forward by Mr Barr. I have indicated that I will support the amendments because they set out a clear path of what is happening and will happen in relation to ACTEW and it keeps the Assembly informed of that process.

It is important to clearly set out the various processes that are taking place, and let me touch on a few of them in a bit more detail. Next week there is the special general meeting to canvass these issues, and the amendments undertake to report back on that meeting at the next sitting of the Assembly. It is a transparent process; it has got a clear time line on. I have looked at some of these matters and what is wanted by various members of the Assembly. As a result of my years in various political fora and experiences, what I look for, the things that matter to me, when talking about drafting text and drafting negotiations—whether it is at UN level or in the Assembly—are measurable outcomes and time frames.

What we have here is a measurable outcome in a report back to the Assembly that all of us will be privy to, and we have a time frame—the next sitting. So that is a fairly concrete outcome. It means that all members, even though it will be only the shareholders in that special general meeting, will have access to the information that comes out of that meeting.

Secondly, we turn to the issue of what has broadly been tagged corporate largesse. As the amendments note, the shareholders have requested an independent review of the integrity of that program of corporate sponsorship, I guess you might call it, and other

matters that ACTEW undertakes. Again, various members of the Assembly—and Mr Hanson touched on it today—have heard rumours, and the fact that the shareholders have instigated this review is appropriate in light of those rumours. Whether those rumours are substantiated or not is a matter that time will tell. But the fact that there is an independent review underway which will be reported back is an appropriate form of action.

That will be finalised in May, and the government has undertaken to report back to the Assembly by June on that. Again, using the benchmarks I described earlier, we have a concrete report into the specific matters and rumours that are circulating about, and we have a time frame on when the Assembly will receive that information. Again, the Assembly and the public can have confidence that we will have the information. It may be when that report comes back that members of the Assembly have further concerns, and that will be the time to take them up. At the moment we have rumours circulating in this town. All sorts of rumours circulate in this town about all sorts of things. In this case the shareholders have taken the appropriate steps in seeking an independent review into those.

In terms of the governance issues, the ICRC has put out a draft report. Over the coming months that report will be finalised, at which point the government will respond to it and, of course, the Assembly will have the opportunity to consider the adequacy of that response. Members will also see that the government will make a submission in response, and that has been discussed in the Assembly already. We will be making a submission as part of the response to the draft report by the ICRC. So, again, there will be a publicly available document canvassing where the government is up to in that response process.

All those reports are coming through and there are time frames on each of them. I spent some time discussing the amendments with Mr Barr's office to ensure there was a level of transparency in each of these issues. On top of all of that, as I discussed at some length earlier, we have the Auditor-General's report and the normal processes which will follow with that—obviously the public release of it and then the public accounts committee will have another opportunity to consider the issue.

Some issues of regulatory reform are being discussed today, and I add that the other thing that these issues have given rise to is the regulatory framework in which ACTEW and territory-owned corporations generally operate. This is an important issue, and in light of these various reports I think we will be well placed to work out what the next step should be to address those regulatory issues.

It would be best to let the dust settle a little bit on some of the issues that are getting around and to look at the reports that come out. Then we can be clear on what we need to do, if anything, to address issues of concern about the regulatory framework for any territory-owned corporation. But I am not convinced we need to launch into that at this stage given all the other matters that are in play.

In summary, I simply conclude by saying that I am confident these processes will give us a clear picture of where we are at and what the best response to the issues is as they come to light. In supporting the amendments and not supporting the original motion,

which seeks an immediate full performance audit, let me be very clear that the reason is that there is already a perfectly adequate audit process underway, and I believe it is unnecessary to request an additional process at this point in time.

Through the various enquiries and investigations that are underway I believe we will get to the bottom of the issues that have been raised, there will be a public account of what has occurred and a thorough public debate about what the best course of action is to address this. The politics of this are reasonably clear as well, and Mr Hanson is no doubt going to elaborate on those when he speaks again. But the bottom line is that there are concerns about ACTEW. That is a view held across the Assembly to various degrees on various issues. There are, of course, a number of ways to go about getting to the bottom of those issues. Mr Hanson has put forward one way; the two shareholders have a series of other steps in place. You can have a different view on that, but I think to simply describe taking one approach or the other as some sort of cover-up or not allowing full scrutiny is simply a political stance by Mr Hanson.

Mr Hanson: You're a bit paranoid about this.

MADAM DEPTUY SPEAKER: Mr Hanson! You have spoken and you will get another opportunity.

MR RATTENBURY: It is simply an exercise in political positioning. It is important to look at the bottom line, and in the amended motion we will have a series of reports that will be made publicly available, and the date on which they will be publicly available is specified. There can be no more accountable a process than having those set out. It is certainly far more concrete, far more specific, than simply saying we want some broad ranging inquiry which could take a very significant amount of time. What we have here are commitments to delivering specific things in specific time frames, which I think will mean that, in the much shorter term, the Assembly will be able to look closely at these issues and evaluate whether we need to take further action.

I do not think this matter is closed; I am sure the Assembly will be coming back to addressing these matters further at a later date. I certainly welcome that debate, because ACTEW is an incredibly important corporation in this territory. It is a large corporation; it is a significant government asset and, therefore, a significant asset of the taxpayers and ratepayers of the territory. We rely on ACTEW to do a good job. The matters that are floating around are of concern, and it is quite appropriate that this Assembly scrutinise those issues, those accusations, those concerns in considerable detail. I believe the amendments that I am going to support will move us along quite well in undertaking that scrutiny.

MR SESELJA (Brindabella) (5.12): What a surprise! We have the Labor Party and the Greens member getting together to oppose some genuine scrutiny on this issue. What a shock! I am sure Mr Hanson will be shocked, having gone into this, that Mr Rattenbury has decided to side with the Labor Party in stopping the Auditor-General from actually having a look at this issue.

The reason Mr Hanson's motion should be supported and the reason he has had to bring it forward is because the shareholders have not done their job. Let us be clear on

this: it is because the shareholders have not done their jobs. The dysfunctional relationship we are now seeing between the shareholders and the ACTEW board I think is quite unseemly and does nothing to build confidence in the community that this government knows what it is doing when it comes to ACTEW. I think it is quite extraordinary that we have a Chief Minister who has had to go out publicly and virtually express no confidence in the management of ACTEW. That is effectively, I think, the tenor of the language we have seen from the Chief Minister when it has come to this issue.

Instead of dealing with the issue as a shareholder, as is her right—in fact, as is her duty as a shareholder to the taxpayers and the ratepayers of the ACT—she has chosen to sort of act as if it is all beyond her control. We have heard the Chief Minister, we have heard the Deputy Chief Minister and we have now heard Mr Rattenbury. There is a lot of expressing of concern. We heard it on the radio again this morning. Everyone is expressing concern. But they are not prepared to do anything about it. Everyone is concerned, but no-one is actually going to take any action. Being concerned is not good enough after more than a decade in government.

It is this Labor government that changed the rules. It is this Labor government that changed the rules in relation to the remuneration of the executive director of ACTEW. When ACTEW was established it was deemed reasonable for the shareholders, on behalf of the taxpayers, to have a role in setting the salary of the executive director. This has been changed by this Labor government. Then they turn around and say, “Shock, horror! We are shocked at the level of salary of the executive director.”

Then we have Mr Rattenbury saying it is obscene, but he is not prepared to actually support action to get to the bottom of it. Why would that be? Why would it be that he would not actually want to support action to get to the bottom of it? We can go back to all sorts of issues where we have asked the Auditor-General to look into matters on behalf of the territory and on behalf of the Assembly—whether it is elective surgery waiting times, children in care and protection, the management of food safety, mental health services for older persons, amongst many other issues. We would not have been able to get the level of detail, the level of information and the level of scrutiny had it not been for the Auditor-General conducting performance audits in those areas.

What we have now is a situation where the government has said, effectively, that they do not have confidence in the way things are being run. They do not have confidence. They are not happy about the level of the salary. Mr Sullivan, of course, offered to take a pay cut and that has not been supported by the shareholders. They are not happy about the level of salary, even though they were the ones who changed it. They were the ones who changed the arrangements for how that should be set.

Mr Barr interjecting—

MR SESELJA: We have the interjection from Mr Barr. You have been the shareholder for a significant period of time. The Chief Minister has been a shareholder for a lot longer. What have you done in that period to make sure that there is not an obscene salary? What—

Ms Gallagher: You wish we had. You wish we had.

MR SESELJA: Sorry, I did not quite get that. I do not wish—I wish you had done your job, Chief Minister, on this issue. Then maybe you would not have to turn around—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Stop the clock, please. Mr Seselja, resume your seat. Ms Gallagher, please do not interject across the chamber. Mr Seselja, you are not having a conversation with Ms Gallagher about this. You are not having a direct conversation. You are addressing your comments through the chair. Will you continue and do that, please.

MR SESELJA: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Through you, we wish the Chief Minister had done her job on this issue. We wish the shareholders had done their job. If they had done their job, perhaps we would not have seen the massive cost blowouts that we have seen in relation to Cotter Dam. We are now told by representatives of ACTEW that there has been no budget blowout or that this does not represent a budget blowout. When you start with a price of around \$150 million and end up at \$409 million and counting, that looks like a pretty big budget blowout to me.

They have not done their job and they have failed to take responsibility as representatives of the community who are seeing their water prices go up and up and up. This is where I think the dismay comes from the community. They see that this government has allowed a situation to develop where one of their own ministers describes—one of the ministers of this government—this salary as obscene. Yet it has happened on the watch of this Chief Minister and this Deputy Chief Minister. They have allowed a situation to arise where one of their own ministers, a representative of their own government, believes that the salary of the managing director of ACTEW is obscene.

That is why this motion should be supported, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is because the shareholders have not done their jobs. So what we are asking through this motion, what Mr Hanson is asking through his motion, is that the Auditor-General be allowed to do the job that the shareholders have not done—to scrutinise what is going on, to make sure that taxpayers are getting the absolute best value for money. Taxpayers in the ACT, water users in the ACT, have been paying far too much for far too long. We in the opposition support the ICRC's approach that there should be cuts in water prices, that there should be cuts in water charges.

As part of that, we need to look at the cost structure of ACTEW. Is the money being spent well? Are they managing projects well? Is the board making good decisions? Are the shareholders doing their job on behalf of the community? These are the questions that should be looked at. This is why this motion should be supported.

Of course, the support of the Greens minister for the amendment I think is unfortunate, though not in any way unexpected. We have seen this time and time again from the four Greens that used to be in the Assembly and we are seeing it again from the one

remaining Green who is in the Assembly—a complete inability or unwillingness to take on the government, to hold the government to account and to ensure that we allow proper scrutiny.

I do not think anyone would disagree that an Auditor-General's investigation, short of a royal commission, which no-one is suggesting, is about the most detailed scrutiny we can have in the ACT. It is warranted here. It is warranted just on the basis of the Chief Minister's own words in expressing her concerns. It is warranted on the basis of what the shareholders are saying. Who knows what else exists beneath the surface? Who knows what we have not been told about? That is what the Auditor-General should be allowed to do, and that is why Mr Hanson's motion should be supported today.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Health and Minister for Higher Education) (5.20): Quite a passionate presentation there from the departing MLA, from the departure lounge. He managed to pull together a speech during what has been a very busy day signing thankyou cards or bon voyage cards; we are not quite sure what they were. In the last two sitting days that has been the priority of the member in the departure lounge up there. I must say, Madam Deputy Speaker, I find it very difficult to sit through a lecture from Mr Seselja, who has already signalled his intention. He has no more interest in matters in this place.

Mr Seselja: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Stop the clock, please. Mr Seselja, on a point of order.

Mr Seselja: Yes, on relevance, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are debating here the issue of ACTEW. We are debating the issue of whether an Auditor-General's investigation should be allowed to take place. Ms Gallagher is not being relevant to that and I would ask you to ask her to be relevant.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Ms Gallagher, continue and be relevant to the subject of the amendments; thank you.

MS GALLAGHER: I will be relevant to the amendments to the motion. My comments relate to the speech that Mr Seselja just gave, which was full of incorrect allegations levelled at the shareholders about us not having done our job. That is clearly incorrect. He completely overlooks the matter that is in the public domain about the level of information that has been provided to the shareholders and the acceptance by ACTEW and the ACTEW board that they did not provide the information to the shareholders that the shareholders had sought. That was not correct and Mr Seselja's entire address essentially focused on those points.

I am not going to take a lecture from someone who should not be sitting in this chamber, who perhaps tomorrow we will see with a bottle of whisky in the departure lounge up the back there. In terms of accepting the passion that Mr Seselja tried to create in that speech, I think it is very difficult coming from someone who does not

want to be here. To all of those who are going to be here and who will continue to work on the issues that are the subject of this motion today, I will listen to you. But I find it very hard listening to Mr Seselja, particularly when a lot of what he says is simply incorrect. The opposition in the last few days—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Stop the clock please. Members, you are going to have an opportunity to speak. Mr Hanson, you are going to have an opportunity to reply later. If you want to get to your feet and speak, Mr Wall and Mr Smyth, you may do so. Mr Seselja, you have already spoken. You will hear the Chief Minister in silence, please. Ms Gallagher.

MS GALLAGHER: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr Smyth: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You directed the Chief Minister—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Resume your seat. Stop the clock, please.

Mr Smyth: to come to the motion. She ignored you. When will you fulfil your role as Deputy Speaker and protect the honour of the house and direct her to address the motion?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Resume your seat, Mr Smyth. I have directed such.

Mr Smyth: Well, why is she ignoring you then?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Resume your seat, Mr Smyth. Ms Gallagher.

MS GALLAGHER: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. In the last few days we have been hearing concerns raised by the opposition that we have not heard before. I think today on radio we had a concern raised by Mr Hanson that the articles of association were changed without the proper process. I think we need to deal with those issues one by one, because I am not going to have the opposition going out in the media and putting allegations that are simply unfounded and trying to create, I think, distractions over what the current issues are that the government is seeking to resolve with ACTEW.

For the information of members—I think it is important to put it on the record, because it is certainly in the media transcripts—the articles of association which ceased to exist before we formed government in 2001 actually changed to the constitution of ACTEW in 2000. There were changes made. Those changes were made to reflect amendments to the Territory-owned Corporations Act and the Corporations Act in 2001 and, as required by section 9(2)(b) of the ToC Act, a summary of any amendments to the constitution must be tabled in the Assembly within 15 sitting days of the change.

The changes were made on 28 September 2005, pre-dating the current shareholders, and they were tabled in the Assembly by Mr Ted Quinlan on 14 February 2006. There was no record of any comment from the opposition in relation to those changes. Do not go out—

Mr Smyth: Because they were simply tabled.

MS GALLAGHER: Right. Asleep at the wheel; sorry, missed it, but all these years later when the opportunity arises you go out and allege that the proper process was not followed. Do your homework before you go out and make allegations that are simply not true.

Again, today we have had concerns raised about the structural integrity of the dam. If the opposition have got something to say about the structural integrity of the dam and concerns about it, well, say it.

Mr Hanson: We are asking you questions.

MS GALLAGHER: No; well, say it. You are raising questions without actually having a position. It is the same thing here with this motion. You have a position, but—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

MS GALLAGHER: What is your position?

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

MS GALLAGHER: You do not have a position on any of this.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

MS GALLAGHER: You are seeking headlines. That is about it. You are not serious about getting to the issues that we are and that we have been seeking to uncover, including putting information in the public arena about the status of those.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, I will warn you next time.

MS GALLAGHER: The Treasurer has already articulated, through his amendment, all the work that is currently underway and the fact that the referral to the Auditor-

General is at this point premature while we are working through that information. We have a special general meeting with the ACTEW board on Monday, where we will raise concerns that we have had. We will also work through the information that ACTEW has given us. There is here, in this motion, reporting back to the Assembly on a whole range of matters, including the enlarged Cotter Dam and the information that comes from the special general meeting.

It is all very easy to throw stones and carry on without actually having a position yourself. The shareholders have done their job. We have done our job at every step of the way. In relation to the remuneration, as the opposition knows—and it is clearly on the public record—we sought information about the remuneration. We do not believe politicians should set the managing director of ACTEW's salary. I do not believe it and I do not think Mr Hanson believes it. Maybe he does.

I do not know if you, Mr Seselja, think that politicians should sit and muck around with salaries. But we do not. We do not actually believe we should. We believe it is a function and responsibility of the board and that is quite common for companies that are covered by the Corporations Act. Indeed, when you look at a whole range of government-owned corporations, it is the board that sets the pay of the managing director.

This is what we believe, but, yes, we believe there is a concern around the level of that remuneration. There is a concern that the information that has been provided to the shareholders about that remuneration has not been correct in correspondence from the chair of the board and indeed in information provided to the Assembly through the annual reports process. We will meet with the board to let them know about that.

I am not going to accept that the relationship is dysfunctional, as members of the opposition would say. I am also not prepared not to raise concerns publicly when I have them. I am not just going to sit by and think, "Oh, well, I wouldn't want anyone to criticise the relationship between the shareholders and the board." If we have concerns as shareholders and I am asked questions about that then I will answer honestly. It is not going to just be a hand-in-hand relationship. And that is what you are seeing at the moment. There is disagreement between the shareholders and the board in relation to some of the material that we have been provided in relation to accountability and transparency of the board and we are addressing those matters appropriately.

The amendment put forward by the Treasurer is sensible. It keeps the Assembly informed at every step of the way; it keeps the Assembly updated at every step of the way. It acknowledges that the Auditor-General has already flagged a performance audit in relation to ACTEW and the ICRC in terms of the setting of water prices. I think this matter will be revisited—we accept that—but we also believe that there are a number of processes underway at the moment and the matter is being dealt with responsibly by the shareholders. We will continue to update the community and the Assembly as that work progresses, but we will not be supporting a referral to the Auditor-General at this stage.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (5.31): I am speaking to the amendments. I may speak later to close the debate. I would like to thank members for their contribution, in particular Mr Seselja. I think that you can always gauge the success of a speech in this place by the reaction that it generates. And based on the reaction that we got from those opposite, I think that it is fair to say that Mr Seselja might have touched on a few raw points. But it is reasonable to say that Katy Gallagher and Andrew Barr are sitting here, saying: “No, it is all tickety-boo. We have been doing our jobs as the shareholders adequately over the last”—what?—“seven years,” for the Chief Minister. Why have we got to this point that we have today? Why have we reached the point where just about everybody in the community is concerned?

In fact, this morning Mr Rattenbury described what is happening as obscene. It is obscene. But no, you can trust Katy Gallagher is doing her job, because she is telling us so. She is telling us in this Assembly: “Don’t worry. Take my word that I’m doing my job. There’s nothing to see here. You don’t want a review. You don’t want the Auditor-General, anyone independent, looking at our responsibilities and what we’re doing.” She is certainly titchy about it and playing the victim card. She does this very well.

She is trying to distance herself from what is going on in ACTEW, saying: “This is terrible. As Chief Minister, I’m just upset about what’s going on in ACTEW. This is awful. I’ll write a letter and we’ll get it all sorted out.” This is a little the same as when it all went wrong in the EDs. Remember that? Another, “It’s terrible, what happened.” What she does—and it is a clever little play—is try to distance herself as far away from the problem as she can, absolve herself of any responsibility and play the victim, and try to be the victim in the whole situation. But she is not, because when it comes to issues like this, she is their shareholder. When it came to the EDs, she was the minister. So it does not work.

Let us have this audit. Let us have a performance audit. What has the government got to hide? Mr Rattenbury was saying: “The Auditor-General is already doing something. There are all these reviews.” If the Auditor-General is already doing something, what has he got against this performance audit? Let us have the Auditor-General inquire into this matter. Let us not try to restrict her by saying: “Don’t look at this. Don’t look at what the shareholders’ responsibilities are. We don’t want to uncover that. Let’s not have a look at the largesse. Let’s not look into the salary. Let’s not look into these areas,” because God knows what the Auditor-General might uncover. “Let’s try to limit what the Auditor-General looks at.”

This is the way that this government does business. They have done it before. Whenever something like this comes up, the opposition says: “Okay, there’s a problem here. We don’t know everything that’s going wrong.” Like the onion, every layer that you peel, there is something else there. Let us get the Auditor-General to have a full performance review, performance audit, to say what is actually going on in this place. But what the government does, the same with EDs, the same with elective surgery, the same with just about any other matter, is say, “Let’s limit that review.” In

response to the bullying at the Canberra Hospital, they said, “Let’s try to limit that review as tightly as we can, because we don’t want anything leaking out that might cause us further problems.”

So it is not surprising that the government would not want any light shone on this matter beyond what has already been shone, because they have got some skin in the game, the shareholders. They have not been doing their job and they do not want that exposed.

But I think that the real loser in this in many ways is Shane Rattenbury, because Shane Rattenbury has been out in the community peddling this line that the salary is obscene: “I’m really angry at the board. They’re not doing their job.” This is the confected outrage that he has been going on with, but then what happens? He meekly comes in here and supports the government. There is this difference between Shane Rattenbury, the radical—Rattenbury the radical who is out there in the community thumping on the desk, “It’s obscene”—and the meek little Rattenbury that comes into this place and does the government’s bidding.

Where is the integrity in Shane Rattenbury? Where is his integrity? It is remarkably absent. He has got very little credibility left, members, because if you go out in the community, if you go out in the media saying one thing, and then you come into this place and you are just a patsy of the government and you are just doing their bidding, then you start to burn your credibility. I think the next time that Shane Rattenbury is on 666 or talking on the news or wherever he is in the community talking about how this is obscene and he has got all these concerns, people should reflect on his actions. And his actions are to go behind closed doors with Andrew Barr, have a cup of tea, stitch up a deal, come in here and just follow what the government is doing. And that is the reality of what has happened.

So there is no doubt Shane Rattenbury has got a significant credibility problem that is coming out of this. He had a decision today—whether he was actually going to stand up for the community, whether he was going to stick by his comments, whether he was going to provide that third-party insurance that he talked about before or whether he was just going to be a patsy for the government. I think we can see conclusively—without too much surprise, I would have to add—which decision he has made.

I remember Jon Stanhope used to call the Greens the Lite Greens. I think yellow is a more apt colour for Shane Rattenbury—yellow, the colour of cowardice, the failure to stand up for what you believe, the failure to stand up for what you say, the failure to come into this place and say: “No, I am going to make sure that we do what is right. We’re going to make sure that we actually have open, accountable government. We’re going to make sure that where there are issues to be addressed, we will address them.” But he has come into this place today, despite his rhetoric, and meekly tried to basically sweep it under the carpet.

I would have to say I am a bit disappointed. I thought, to be honest, that there might be some opportunity that Mr Rattenbury would support this, based on his public comments. And I am—

Ms Gallagher: I am sure you have done wonders for the relationship by just calling him a coward.

MR HANSON: I think that the relationship is fairly clear. It is: back the Labor Party at any cost. And the cost just might be light rail. The cost might just be light rail at any cost. How much does Mr Rattenbury get in terms of policy, in terms of benefit from this government in terms of policies that he wants delivered in order to support this government regardless of cost, to make sure there is no scrutiny? What does he get? We know that he has got a lot of staff in his office. That is one thing. But what else does he get? Light rail at any cost? You have got the Chief Minister saying she is not sure she is going to rebuild the tower block at the Canberra Hospital because of the available capital, but we know that there is going to be light rail at any cost. Why? Because we know it keeps Shane Rattenbury in the tent. And we can see how beneficial that is for the government today, can't we? We can see that keeping Shane Rattenbury in the tent is pretty useful, because the option, the other alternative, is that we might have some scrutiny of this government.

So the community is not only paying because of the fact that we are not going to get the examination of ACTEW that we should, but they are paying because this government is going to give Shane Rattenbury anything he wants, anything he wants in terms of policy outcomes, to make sure that he stays in the tent. I think we have got a very clear example today of how this mob are going to operate over the next four years.

There are a number of reviews that are occurring, and I do not dispute that. But what has this government got against a full performance audit of ACTEW? When we look at what has happened with the dam, when we look at this fiasco with regard to the salary, when we look at the fact that the shareholders have reached the point after seven years that we have so many problems with ACTEW, what have they got against a performance audit?

Members interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Porter): Mr Smyth! Ms Gallagher! Stop the clock, please. Mr Smyth and Ms Gallagher, Mr Hanson is on his feet trying to speak to the—

Ms Gallagher interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Ms Gallagher! Mr Hanson is trying to finish, I presume. Are you closing the debate?

MR HANSON: I am trying to finish.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: If members could remain silent for the next 58 seconds, he may be able to do that. Thank you.

MR HANSON: There is no doubt that there is a level of concern over there, that they are pretty titchy, that the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister are nervous about what is going on. They are concerned about what is going on. They do not want any additional scrutiny. They are pretty happy with what Mr Rattenbury has done today.

I will now, in closing, finish my remarks. I think everybody now knows where we all stand. I think this has been a bit of a watershed day for Mr Rattenbury. He had a decision to make, and he has made that. It is disappointing for the community, but I think it is probably not one that is a great surprise; it is just disappointing.

I would say to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the community ultimately will be the biggest losers out of what has happened today and so will ACTEW, in many ways, because public confidence in that institution will not be restored until a full performance review audit is conducted. *(Time expired.)*

Question put:

That the amendments be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9		Noes 8	
Mr Barr	Ms Gallagher	Mr Coe	Mr Seselja
Ms Berry	Mr Gentleman	Mr Doszpot	Mr Smyth
Dr Bourke	Ms Porter	Mrs Dunne	Mr Wall
Ms Burch	Mr Rattenbury	Mr Hanson	
Mr Corbell		Mrs Jones	

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Amendments agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Budget—lease variation charge

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (5.45): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the continued underperformance of the Government's Lease Variation Charge (LVC);
- (b) that rather than the \$9.7 million anticipated for the December Quarter year to date 2012, the LVC collected \$2 million;

- (c) the revised revenue estimate for the LVC for 2012-13 from \$23.4 million to \$19.4 million;
 - (d) the LVC's negative impact on the Government's Urban Improvement Fund as a result of this underperformance; and
 - (e) the LVC's negative impact on the housing sector; and
- (2) calls on the Government to:
- (a) provide all documents and data in relation to revenue generated (or not) by the LVC since its inception;
 - (b) provide all documents and data in relation to the financial status of the Urban Improvement Fund and projects that it has funded; and
 - (c) detail the financial and policy connections between the LVC and the Urban Improvement Fund.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is nice to speak to a full audience for a change. I hope they all stay, but I suspect that none of them want to debate the lease variation charge, and that is a disappointment. It is a very poor attitude from those opposite to just walk out on this very important issue.

The lease variation charge's recent financial performance in the December quarter 2012 consolidated financial report is very, very poor. Since the new arrangements in the 2011-12 budget, revenue has not met target on one occasion. It is interesting that after the first year the minister said there were not enough quarters in for him to make a decision. Well, we have six quarters now, and none of those six quarters have met the projected revenue. Indeed, the actual revenue received in 2011-12 was just \$8.7 million, down from the predicted \$22.4 million that was expected. That is \$13.7 million less than the government has for its urban improvement fund.

The 2012-13 September quarter received \$1.3 million, \$4.5 million below target. As of 31 December of this financial year, only \$2.1 million was received. That was \$7.7 million below target for the half year and not nearly enough to get to the expected \$23.5 million, which has now been revised down by the Treasurer to \$19.5 million.

There is no better illustration of underperformance than this sad and sorry record. In the December quarter 2011, rather than \$11.2 million for the first six months of that year, receipts totalled only \$4.7 million. I think it is fair to say that this tax is the ACT Labor equivalent to their federal counterpart's mineral resource rent tax. As the Treasurer said in his own words, developers make windfall profits when a lease is varied for redevelopment. Well, that is true, but only if the redevelopments go ahead. We now know that the redevelopments are not going ahead. Indeed, much of the money that initially came in was, of course, for developments, applications for which were put in under the old scheme before the changes occurred. What we have got since that time is the real state of affairs this government has foisted upon the people of the ACT.

It is a problem when you start to believe your own rhetoric. According to the minister, this is the perfect tax. Remember, this was Minister Gallagher's tax when she was the Treasurer. This is the perfect tax—it has no effect on sales, it has no effect on purchases and it has no effect on rents. On that basis, “We'll make it a bigger tax.” Well, go for your life, because it is never going to raise the level of moneys predicted simply because it does have an effect, simply because somebody at some stage must pay for this tax.

I am sure there are a lot of philanthropic developers out there, but they are not going to be able to carry this. If you want to keep your business afloat, you cannot keep carrying the government's taxation; you must pass it on. It is either passed on to those that sell in that they get less for the land or those that purchase pay more for the property. It is then passed on and damages housing affordability in the territory, which all profess to be interested in. But what we have done through the lease variation tax is put a tax on housing affordability.

The government's stated aim in its planning documents is that, in future, 50 per cent of development will be urban infill. What do you do as your first action when you say that you want to have urban infill? You put a tax on it. The Treasurer quite rightly said in estimates not so long ago that every tax has a drag. Every tax has an effect. And, yes, it does, even this perfect tax that former Treasurer Gallagher designed. It definitely has a drag. You can see it has a drag because, as a consequence of this taxation regime, we have a quote from the Treasurer:

Our Urban Improvement program is in arrears.

And that is true. It is in arrears because they are not getting the \$20 million-odd that they expected they would get every year; they are getting far less than that.

Mr Barr: You left out the word “funded”, didn't you?

MR SMYTH: Sorry?

Mr Barr: You left out the word “funded” from that quote, didn't you?

MR SMYTH: No, I did not:

Our Urban Improvement program is in arrears.

Mr Barr: It is “funded” in arrears.

MR SMYTH: It does not say that. No, I am reading your quote. If you have got a problem with the quote, you should talk to the *Canberra Times*. It is your quote.

Mr Barr: No-one has ever been misquoted by the *Canberra Times*.

MR SMYTH: Well, did you complain, minister? I mean, it stands. It is your quote, mate. If you cannot get them to get it right, that is your problem.

The context of this is: why has it come to this? There are three reasons, and the first is simply that it is just bad policy. It is a tax on housing affordability. In effect, this is probably the only government in the country addressing housing affordability by increasing taxes. It discourages infill developments, and yet the government's stated aim is that 50 per cent of future accommodation will come through infill. It has been a very, very bad process.

The government snuck in the change in the first Gallagher budget and tried to pretend it was not a tax by saying it is a charge. But let's face it, it is a tax—the lease variation tax. They wildly altered the legislation through its drafting and then hid the details. Until the very last moment, even when the bill was to be voted on, not all the key documents were on the table and available for review. What we have is a bad piece of legislation. You have only got to read one of the sections—276C states:

Lease variation charges—amount payable

- (1) The lease variation charge for a chargeable variation of a nominal rent lease is—
 - (a) for a s 276E chargeable variation—the determined charge for the variation;

If ever legislation was drafted to make it difficult to understand let alone to comply with, this legislation is it.

As much as the government tries to hide the fact that this is a tax by calling it a charge, it is a tax on development; it is a tax on that infill that delivers 50 per cent of future accommodation in the ACT. The truth is that it is impossible to levy a charge of up to \$50,000 on every unit in an apartment development and not have an effect on housing affordability and the development sector. In this year alone, multi-unit alone—

Mr Barr: Why have unit prices fallen, then, Brendan?

MR SMYTH: Why has the number of developments fallen? In this year alone, multi-unit developments of five to 10 units will incur the following tax increases: Braddon and Turner, \$24,500 per unit; and Phillip, \$19,250 per unit. Dual occupancy developments will face increases such as: Kambah, \$15,750; Mawson, \$24,500; and Aranda, \$21,000.

Consultation with Canberra residents and industry has found unanimous agreement that the lease variation tax will have the unintended consequences of increasing the prices of homes, increasing rents, discouraging infill development and thereby limiting scope for effective and efficient public transport, decreasing property values, increasing industry uncertainty and decreasing job opportunities, perhaps leading to skilled workers leaving the ACT.

Since ACT Labor and Greens implemented this tax, we have heard of many projects stalling or being cancelled in the ACT. However, the negative picture is not based on mere anecdotal evidence; according to ABS data, approvals fell by 18.5 per cent in

trend terms in May last year and have fallen by 60 per cent in trend terms in the year before that. In other words, this ACT Labor cash grab is having an impact—and it is not a positive one—on housing in the ACT.

In light of this, it is probably not surprising that the latest consolidated financial reports noted that lower taxation revenue by \$26.36 million due to less conveyancing revenue than expected reflected the continuing softening in the housing market and the timing of payments for the lease variation charge. We have this notion that it is somehow locked up in the timing of the payments for the lease variation charge. The payments are only due if the developments go ahead. If the developments are not going ahead, there is no timing because there will be no payment. That is why in the last quarter the payments were so small. You can say there are a number of DAs approved, but if the builders do not take up the approvals and go to construction, then the government is not going to get the tax.

The problem is, of course, the flow-on effect, and we see the softening in the conveyancing charges as well. The problem for the government is that one clearly affects the other. So you are losing the lease variation tax, but it is also affecting your conveyancing. The other side of that is that if people are not going for infill, they have to go to greenfield sites, and the greenfield sites, of course, require more infrastructure. That seems to go against all the stated policies of the Greens-Labor alliance over there, but they blithely continue to do it.

It is about time we found out through this motion the full story on the lease variation tax and the urban improvement fund so we can have a sensible outcome to make sure we get the infill we all say we are in favour of and which things like the light rail will be dependent upon. If there is not infill, even though we are going to build the light rail no matter what the cost, the return off the light rail and the subsidy will be less and the subsidy will have to be greater.

The Treasurer credits the lease variation tax underperformance to payment timings. But I prefer the Chief Minister's explanation from 1 May where she conceded that the tax was hurting. Chief Minister Gallagher said:

We've tried to do that but we haven't had enormous success ... In the last month I think we've had one request ... so the developers at the moment aren't inundating us with that sort of application.

This, of course, is in relation to brownfield developments converting office space to apartments. They have killed the golden goose. What we need now is acknowledgement that that has happened and how we are going to fix this problem.

Given the underperformance of the lease variation tax, this will also have a negative impact, therefore, on the government's urban improvement fund, which, of course, is funded by the lease variation tax. This fund was a political stunt in the lead-up to the last election and an attempt to slur the developers—"The developers must pay their fair share. The developers must contribute." Well, of course, they do. The developers put their money out there. They take the risk; not the government. The developers employ large numbers of people in one of our biggest industries, but it is not enough for this government.

What we have is a stunt where the government said all this money will go straight into the urban improvement fund. In February last year the Chief Minister commented about that fund where she said the results will be noticeable. Actually, they are noticeable because the money is not in the fund, and that is the problem for the government.

If they are hypothecating this money, as it seems to be—an explanation on how the arrangement works would be useful—and there is no money there, they have either got to take it from other sources to the detriment of other programs or they just blow the deficit out further. The Chief Minister is right that the results have been noticeable, but for what it is failing to deliver to Canberra in terms of better local services and not for its success. The industry characterised it as:

... a complicated and unworkable new way to fund the maintenance and upgrade of municipal services, which the community expects to be covered through the rates and land tax we all pay for these services.

Indeed, we have already paid. It is a double dip, because this is a government that cannot manage its budget. But it was probably best summarised by the Treasurer himself, who last year conceded that:

Our Urban Improvement program is in arrears.

Promising Canberrans improved basic services with an implausible program is tantamount to doing nothing at all. It is an empty promise, as so many of the government's promises are. In essence, this government has interfered with housing and rent prices, it has created a disincentive for future development and, at the same time, it continues to underfund basic services because it is not collecting the revenue it thought it would.

So what does this mean for Canberra residents? It means nothing more than having to pay more and get less. We have heard that so many times about this government: people get to pay more but time and time and time again they get less. The Allen Consulting Group was commissioned by the Property Council, and they outlined significant adverse consequences of the charge which applied when landowners seek to change how a property will be used. The report said that the true impact of the charge may take time to be fully realised but said evidence that it stifled investment was already emerging as the development application numbers fell. The ACT government processed 158 applications requiring lease variation in the 2009-10 financial year and 187 the following year. The report said the current financial year to mid-May—so almost a full year—recorded 64 relevant applications. That is in the very first year of operation. The government refuses to accept that.

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.

MR SMYTH: With my last 10 seconds I will simply say this is a very sad tax. This motion seeks some information, including the link between the fund and the tax, and I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Sport and Recreation, Minister for Tourism and Events and Minister for Community Services) (6.00): I thank Mr Smyth for again bringing forward the lease variation charge. It is probably on his greatest hits list: “When there’s nothing else to talk about, why don’t I bring on an LVC motion?” I think this would be the fifth or sixth time that we have debated this. But I am always pleased to have an economic policy debate with the shadow treasurer.

Members would be aware that I have circulated an amendment to Mr Smyth’s motion, and I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit all words after “notes”, substitute:

- “(a) the Lease Variation Charge (LVC) represents good public policy. It ensures the community receives an appropriate benefit from the increase in value that accrues to a landholder following a change to the permitted use on their land;
- (b) the latest activity report shows that revenue received to 4 April 2013 is \$7.361 million on 115 applications. This includes:
 - (i) \$1.735 million from residential redevelopments (46 applications or 281 units);
 - (ii) \$0.888 million from commercial sector redevelopments (29 applications);
 - (iii) \$0.460 million from industrial redevelopments (14 applications); and
 - (iv) \$4.278 million from mixed and other redevelopments (26 applications);
- (c) as at 4 April 2013, there were 82 applications in the system, totalling \$15.411 million that has been determined but not paid over the past two years. The main applications were:
 - (i) 45 residential redevelopments with assessed revenue of \$2.344 million;
 - (ii) 13 commercial applications with assessed revenue of \$1.570 million;
 - (iii) 7 industrial applications with assessed revenue of \$0.443 million; and
 - (iv) 17 mixed redevelopment applications, with around \$11.054 million in assessed revenue; and
- (d) that 25 projects have been funded through the Urban Improvement Fund to date. These projects are detailed on pages 203-204 of Budget Paper 3.”

I will now take the opportunity to discuss the policy rationale behind the lease variation charge. As members would be aware, the ACT is the only Australian jurisdiction with a leasehold land tenure system on which the government may provide additional or amended rights and privileges attached to a lease. Invariably, the provision of these additional or amended rights adds directly, and often considerably, to the land value, and it is on this principle that the change of use charge has been levied for more than 40 years. The lease variation charge continues this.

It is a very simple statement that it is only fair that the community recovers some of the unearned value that is provided to the leaseholder through no other effort than the lease having been changed to grant additional development rights, and that this additional value, and that government share of it, is redistributed back to the community. This is known as the betterment principle, and it is the foundation upon which the lease variation charge is based.

In the simplest of terms, the lease variation charge is a payment for the granting of additional development rights to a lease which directly increases the value of the land. This is effectively no different from the payment for a greenfields land sale. It is correct, and it is important, to charge the market value for the additional development rights and the value attached to those rights. It is also important to recognise that betterment charges are not only fair but also critically they are economically efficient, a fact recognised by every eminent economist.

As one of many examples, ACIL Tasman stated:

The Change of Use Charge has a very strong basis in economic theory. Economic rent is defined as an excess distribution to any factor in the production process above the amount required to draw that factor into the process or to sustain the current use of the factor.

True economic rent can be selected by governments for the purpose of public finance without the adverse effect caused by taxes on production or consumption.

The Change of Use Charge appears to be an attempt to isolate and tax economic rents.

To the extent that it is successful in isolating and then taxing those rents, it should have no impact on production and consumption decisions.

The rationale for the Change of Use Charge would be in keeping with the recent Henry Tax Review.

Since 2010-11 the lease variation charge has raised a total of \$42.8 million, and with, as I indicated in my amendment, a further \$15.411 million having been determined but not yet paid.

The lease variation charge has not stifled building activity in the territory, as has been claimed by the opposition. In fact building activity continues to grow. This is reflected

in the number of developments to which the lease variation charge has been applied since 2010-11. In 2010-11 a total of 168 developments were assessed, with a total value of \$21.7 million determined. In 2011-12, a total of 181 assessments were made, with a total value of \$13.8 million determined.

The latest LVC activity report continues this trend. It shows that in the financial year to 4 April there have been 115 applications, with a total determined value of \$22.772 million. The amount of revenue received to date has increased to \$7.361 million on those 115 applications. And I will repeat those figures: \$1.735 million from 46 residential redevelopments, encompassing 281 units; \$888,000 from commercial sector redevelopments across 29 applications; \$460,000 from industrial redevelopments across 14 applications; and \$4.278 million from mixed and other redevelopments across 26 applications.

There are around 82 applications with an assessed value of nearly \$15½ million that have been determined in the last two years but are not yet paid. Applicants, of course, have—

Mr Smyth: What does that tell you?

MR BARR: Applicants have two years, Mr Smyth, to pay the lease variation charge once it has been determined on a development application.

In accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2007, ACTPLA keeps a public register for each section 277 chargeable variation of a nominal rent lease through the requirement for these to be documented in the relevant development applications, all of which are listed on the ACTPLA website.

Applications set to flow to the territory include 45 residential redevelopments with assessed revenue of \$2.344 million, 13 commercial applications with assessed revenue of \$1.57 million, seven industrial applications with assessed revenue of \$443,000 and a further 17 mixed redevelopment applications with about \$11,054,000 in assessed revenue.

The government recognises the important contribution that is made by developers who build housing and commercial developments. I think the principle that has been in place in this city for more than 40 years is that it is only right that developers who profit from the city's vibrancy and make windfall profits granted by a change of lease to allow a redevelopment share some of that with the community for the benefit of all Canberrans.

The point the government has made that so upsets the shadow treasurer is that every cent that is earned through the lease variation charge is invested directly into the government's urban improvement fund. This fund ensures that the returns from development are reinvested back into the community to improve the amenity and support the growth of our great city.

In the 2012-13 budget the urban improvement fund was used to fund a number of upgrades around the city, including restoring and upgrading sportsgrounds, upgrades

to improve the amenity and accessibility of bus stations throughout the city, the upgrading of roads, the upgrading and maintenance of public parks, and providing essential walking and cycling infrastructure.

With respect to the point of the establishment of the urban improvement fund and the hypothecation of revenue from the lease variation charge, the way that the urban improvement fund operates is that the lease variation charge that comes in in the financial year previously is then hypothecated to the lease variation charge in the following financial year.

With respect to the quote that Mr Smyth referred to in his presentation, about being funded in arrears, the important word, the operative word, there is “funded” in arrears. So we collect the revenue first and then we allocate it out in the following financial year. That way we are not over-allocating against the lease variation charge collections from the previous year.

Of course, the government also maintains within its capital program a capital upgrades program and we make provision for new capital works. So in any given budget, the amount expended on urban improvement will contain elements of capital upgrades, elements of the urban improvement fund and any other decisions the government makes through the budget round to allocate funding towards projects that improve the urban amenity.

The question for the opposition, in consistently raising this, really is: why then did you not go to the last election promising to abolish the lease variation charge? Do you or do you not support the principle of betterment? Do you or do you not support it?

Mr Smyth interjecting—

MR BARR: This is the question in the end. If Mr Smyth had the courage of his convictions, perhaps if he was like Richard Mulcahy, he would move a motion or seek to—

Mr Smyth: If I was like Richard Mulcahy, I would not be here, would I?

MR BARR: That day will happen.

Mr Smyth: That day will happen to us all, Andrew. It will be interesting to see when your day comes.

MR BARR: Indeed. It will be interesting to see whether yours comes before mine.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Barr! Would you address the chair? Mr Smyth, would you cease interjecting, please?

MR BARR: Apologies, Madam Speaker. The challenge for the opposition is to state their position in relation to this particular charge. If Mr Smyth has the courage of his convictions, he should move, during a private members’ day, not to have further inquiries, because we have certainly canvassed this extensively, but to abolish it. He

should state his preference and be clear about it. You are perfectly entitled to hold the view that you do not think developers should pay any tax on the windfall gains they get from a lease variation, and that you do not support that money being reinvested in the community. If that is your position, fine.

MADAM SPEAKER: If that is Mr Smyth's position.

MR BARR: That is Mr Smyth's position, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: And you will refer to Mr Smyth as "Mr Smyth".

MR BARR: If that is Mr Smyth's position, let him say so. But the shadow treasurer finds many ways to skirt around the heart of this issue, which is: do you or do you not support the principle of this charge? And that is an open question, clearly. He probably says one thing when he is lunching with the Property Council and says another thing in this place or publicly. It is all about reviews publicly, but I am sure—

Mr Smyth: What did you say when you were lunching with the Property Council?

MR BARR: Well, I stand up—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Barr, sit down. Can you stop the clock, please, Clerk? The imputation, by saying that Mr Smyth says one thing to one group and one thing to another, is that he is dishonest, and I would like you to withdraw.

MR BARR: An interesting assertion, Madam Speaker, but if that is your ruling, I will withdraw.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you.

MR BARR: To continue that point, there are many people who very firmly support the principle that if a developer gets a windfall gain from a decision of government to allow a lease variation then there should be a contribution back to the community. I think it is right and proper that that contribution goes back to improve the urban amenity of our city. That is why we introduced the urban improvement fund and I think it is very good public policy.

In the context of the sorts of taxes that governments can seek to implement, this is, as I have said on many occasions, one of the very best because it does not distort economic activity; it seeks to tax economic rent. Compared with other inefficient options—and we are the only government in the country moving away from inefficient taxation, and moving away from it faster than anyone else—those principles of efficient taxation and not seeking to distort economic activity are critical. I urge members to support my amendment. *(Time expired.)*

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (6.16): I think it is fair to say that we are all at the point now where everyone's view on the lease variation charge is very clear. I do not know how many times we have actually debated this since the scheme came into place in 2011 but there certainly have been a number of occasions which have filled a

large number of pages of *Hansard* where each of us or each of our party groupings has spelled out our respective views on this issue. I do not propose to add too many more pages to that collection at this time.

The Greens will be supporting the amendment brought forward by Mr Barr, predominantly because I believe it actually provides the information that Mr Smyth has sought in his motion. In that sense, I think it is a pretty effective way to resolve the matter today. The Greens do believe that the windfall gain that the lease variation charge seeks to garner does belong to the community. As I said, the amendment provides the information that Mr Smyth is seeking and, combined with information that has been given about the LVC for 2011-12, the statements that have been made by the Treasurer and the information in the budget papers, I think that all the requests in the motion have been answered.

Further, I will just take the opportunity, while I have the floor and while we are talking about the LVC, to very briefly express the Greens' ongoing frustration that the remission provisions that were created as part of the new scheme have not yet been utilised. I believe this failure to utilise the levers to get better outcomes for the community is a disappointing shortcoming at this point in time, and I look forward to that matter being progressed in a timely manner.

That said, that issue aside, the Greens strongly support the premise of the charge and are proud to have been able to make a positive contribution to the scheme.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (6.17): I thank Mr Rattenbury for his line about a large number of pages in *Hansard*. Yes, it has contributed—

MADAM SPEAKER: Just to clarify, Mr Smyth, are you speaking to the amendment?

MR SMYTH: I am speaking to the amendment and closing, I suspect.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you.

MR SMYTH: It has filled a large number of pages in *Hansard* and may well continue to do so. But what it has not done is fill the large hole in the budget called the urban improvement fund. By the minister's own admission—and I thank him for the additional information; it is very useful to get the information during the debate—what we see confirmed is the absolute hole that exists in his budget. And I think it is very sad that we have this hole now clearly outlined by the Treasurer.

It is interesting that the Treasurer goes the snide route. We always know he is in trouble when he gets a little bit snide and says, "Mr Smyth says one thing to this group and one thing to that group." I was at a lunch at the Property Council—I think Mr Wall might even have been there—where the Treasurer got up and said one thing to the Property Council when he said he was going to get rid of the commencement and completion fees but then did not do it. He absolutely, point-blank made it abundantly clear that here was an initiative that got a rousing round of applause from the gathered audience, quite to the astonishment of Ross Solly, who was the MC, and it never happened. They are still waiting for it. You say one thing; you never deliver.

But let us look at the information the minister has just tabled. Remember that in this year this tax was meant to raise \$23,484,000. And year-to-date, nine months to 4 April of the financial year, it has raised \$7.3 million. It is a failure. It is meant to raise about—let us call it—\$2 million a month. It is raising \$800,000 a month. It is a failure. Mr Barr would expect that we would get to \$19 million by the end of the year. He has downgraded it by \$4 million. So what he is saying is that currently we are getting \$800,000 a month from the lease variation tax; yet miraculously in April, May and June that is going to jump to about \$4 million a month. We would all be amazed if it happens, none more so than I.

But there is his problem. The problem is in the numbers. Based on \$800,000-odd a month times 12 months, it will pick up about \$9.8 million—call it \$10 million—less than half, probably about, call it, 40 per cent of what it was estimated to bring in. That is a failure of tax policy. To set a tax that does not achieve its objective, and now that we know that it is hypothecated to the urban improvement fund, Minister Barr can perhaps tell us, given this year that he has only raised year-to-date \$7.3 million, and I am apportioning that out, pro rata-ing that out, to 12 months, maybe he will get \$10 million. Yes, there is on page 203 the summary of the urban improvement program, \$16.5 million this financial year. “So I’m going to raise \$10 million, but I’m going to spend \$16 million.”

Mr Barr: What about next financial year?

MR SMYTH: You can get up and explain your numbers.

MADAM SPEAKER: Stop interjecting. We will not have a discussion across the chamber. We have discussed this already, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: But remember, it is in arrears. The minister has now explained that it is in arrears. For 2011-12, he only raised \$8.7 million. But he has got \$16.5 million in the budget, and that is why, Minister Rattenbury, we want a full explanation, we want all the documentation. And I note that you will not support it, as you do not. That is okay. You keep covering up for your colleagues in cabinet.

But what we have here is quite an interesting expose. And then we get the same old excuse:

... as at 4 April 2013, there were 82 applications in the system, totalling \$15.411 million that has been determined but not paid over the past two years.

What does that tell you? You do not magically get a DA. You do not just wake up one morning and think, “I’m going to put a DA in,” and you go down to ACTPLA and you put your DA in and it magically gets approved. There are tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, if not millions of dollars involved in putting a DA together and lodging it.

I lodge this magical DA—and apparently 82 have—and then they sit on them. What does it tell you? It tells you that they have gone to the bank with the approved DA and

cannot raise the funds or that this minister's lease variation tax has changed the economics of the situation. And that is what is happening.

Projects that were formerly viable are now no longer viable because of this tax. And we know that because we have got the report from Allen Consulting that tells us so. Allen Consulting say in their report that it is doing irreparable damage to the economy and it needs to be changed. They say it needs to be modified:

The territory's controversial lease variation charge needs to be modified before it causes irreversible damage to housing affordability, development and the economy, a new report says.

This is what this minister is doing to housing affordability, to development and to the economy of the ACT. And the numbers, coughed up like they were some sort of revelation of success and that validate the failure of this tax, have just been tabled by the minister. Let me read it again:

... as of 4 April 2013, there were 82 applications in the system, totalling \$15.411 million that has been determined but not paid ...

If you have done the work and you have got a DA and it is worth doing, it is viable, and you actually make a return out of it, a return that most businesses reinvest in their next development—this notion that there are all these greedy property developers out there who are pillaging the landscape and the countryside and it is all turning up in bundles of \$50 and \$100 bills that they stuff under their mattresses—they put it back into the economy and employ subbies, apprentices, architects, designers, suppliers, accountants and lawyers, and they contribute to the economy.

You got greedy, and you got it wrong. The evidence is there before all of us now that in three-quarters of this financial year, instead of raising \$23 million, reduced to \$19 million, we have \$7 million. And the minister wants us to believe that magically \$12 million, or five times the monthly rate, will turn up in the next three months. We will see. We will see when we get the budget and then we will see when we get the statement for the quarter, because it will not be there. It has affected the market. You said it, Treasurer, every tax has an effect. Every tax has a drag. And your tax is dragging down the market at a time when it does not need it. And your tax, in contradiction to your government's stated policy of 50 per cent of new development being urban infill, is a tax on that infill.

That is the disconnect with this cabinet. You have got three ministers who are vying for supremacy, and none of them can get it right for the people of the ACT. And they are all addicted to tax. Instead of finding the appropriate savings or not spending, using restraint, he says, "It's okay, we've set up a fund and we'll fund it through a tax that doesn't deliver." And that is the problem. He has created another hole for his budget. It will hurt the deficit, it will cause an increase in the deficit. At the end of the day, it hurts taxpayers.

I thank the minister for the information. I thank him for the explanation that the lease variation tax is now hypothecated to the urban improvement fund. It will be an empty fund for a long time to come. It will be well and truly underfunded. I thank him for his

expose that there are still those 82 applications in the system, totalling \$15 million. They are not going ahead because people are worried, people are scared and people cannot make a buck out of it.

I thank him very much for part (b) where he reveals that this vaunted tax has only raised \$7 million, when at this time of the year you would expect it would have been up around the \$12 million, \$13 million, \$14 million mark. This tax is a failure. This minister has failed in his application of the tax. This minister has failed by having such a tax in place. This minister is hurting housing affordability. This minister is hurting the economy. And through that, this minister is hurting the average taxpayer of the ACT. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 8

Mr Barr

Ms Gallagher

Mr Coe

Mr Seselja

Ms Berry

Mr Gentleman

Mr Doszpot

Mr Smyth

Dr Bourke

Ms Porter

Mrs Dunne

Mr Wall

Ms Burch

Mr Rattenbury

Mr Hanson

Mr Corbell

Mrs Jones

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Mr Barr**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Christian Schools Australia

MR COE (Ginninderra) (6.31): I rise today to acknowledge the work of Christian Schools Australia. Christian Schools Australia is the largest association of independent Christian schools in Australia and its role is to be a strong national voice for Christian schools. CSA supports Christian schools by promoting principles of religious freedom, choice and equitable and fair funding. CSA was formed in 2002 as an amalgamation of Christian Community Schools and the Christian Schools Association of Queensland. CSA has a membership of 140 schools, educating 55,000 students, including Brindabella Christian College and Trinity Christian School here in the ACT.

On 16 February I was pleased to attend the opening of CSA's new office in Manuka. The new office was officially opened by Senator Jacinta Collins, the Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations. Other speakers at the opening included Keith Francis, chairman of the CSA national council; Reverend Bob Frisken AM, the founding president; and Stephen O'Doherty, the CEO of CSA. The new office was made possible in part by generous bequests from Christian Community Schools, which dissolved in 2002 to allow for the establishment of CSA.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the CSA national executive: Stephen O'Doherty, Hannah Cole, Mark Spencer, Susan Pieterse, and Richard Taylor. I would also like to acknowledge the New South Wales and ACT state council members: Ian Maynard, Gary Gannell, James Honor, Sue Skuthorpe, Stephen Tibbs, Brendan Corr and Elizabeth Hutton.

I congratulate Christian Schools Australia on their new office and their continued promotion of independent Christian education. For more information about the work of CSA and independent Christian schooling, I urge Canberrans to visit their website at www.csa.edu.au.

Baroness Margaret Thatcher

MRS JONES (Molonglo) (6.32): I rise to express my heartfelt condolences to the family of Baroness Margaret Thatcher, who died on Monday aged 87, and to express my support and admiration for the remarkable achievements of her life. A grocer's daughter who single-handedly broke through the barriers of gender and class to become Britain's first female Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher went on to become one of the dominant political figures of the late 20th century. An inspiration to women everywhere who demonstrated that truly we can do any job our talent allows, Mrs Thatcher was, in the words of our own former Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, "a woman of total commitment, integrity and decency".

Mrs Thatcher, fondly known to her political contemporaries as "Mrs T", will be remembered by history as the greatest British Prime Minister since Sir Winston Churchill, who saved Britain from socialist decline, fought and defeated a South American fascist dictatorship and, together with US President Ronald Reagan, helped bring down the Soviet empire.

Unique amongst her contemporaries, Mrs Thatcher recognised the constituency inversion that had occurred for Conservative and Labour parties. While the old-time socialists leading Labour were banging on about union control of production, council houses, rent controls and secondary modern education, Mrs Thatcher alone realised that working people aspired to more. No longer content with Labour's eastern bloc vision for Britain, the working class now aspired to own their own homes, have careers, own businesses and send their kids to exemplary schools.

In 1979, while Labour's core constituency shrank to the red brick rump, Mrs Thatcher swept to power as the first woman Prime Minister on the vote of blue-collar workers who aspired to a better life. Articulating the core values of thrift, hard work, personal

responsibility and traditional morality that she had learned from her parents, Mrs Thatcher became the spirit of her times and led a hitherto sceptical Conservative Party to bring forth a new birth of freedom and enterprise in Britain, rekindling economic growth, crushing inflation and ending irresponsible industrial militancy.

Breaking the power of the extremist miners union, Margaret Thatcher faced down and defeated one adversary after another, and rolled back the three-decade-long march to government control of every means of production, distribution and exchange. Privatising bloated and loss-making state-owned industries, allowing government houses to be owned by their tenants, Mrs Thatcher created an economic renaissance in Britain that saw the material wealth of the average person soar, and for the first time in their lives ordinary families were able to own their own homes.

As the Cold War reached its climax, Mrs Thatcher and her great friend President Ronald Reagan worked hard to support the champions of freedom in the benighted Soviet empire. In Moscow the Soviet press called Mrs Thatcher the Iron Lady, intending to insult her, but it was a badge that she adopted with pride, and the name stuck. One by one, Poland, East Germany, Romania and other Warsaw Pact nations overthrew their oppressors until, at last, the Soviet Union itself was brought down by the long-suffering Russian people and the long, dark night of socialism finally ended.

In South America the fascist dictatorship of General Galtieri mistakenly thought that with a woman running Britain they could seize the British Falklands and get away with it. The generals thought wrong; they underestimated the Iron Lady. Mrs Thatcher's army smote the aggressor, finally raising the Union Jack over Port Stanley and freeing the British Falklands from Argentinean tyranny.

In her later years, Mrs Thatcher championed British sovereignty in the face of an increasingly meddlesome European Union, warning that the benefits of a free trade union did not extend to membership of an over-bureaucratic centralist European state, which is unravelling as we speak.

Perhaps Mrs Thatcher's greatest legacy is the political paradigm shift that she created. Before her, politicians of the right and left generally accepted that consensus between unions and government was necessary to run the country. They accepted the premise that government had an increasingly large role to play in the economy and ordinary people's lives.

Mrs Thatcher broke the mould. In rejecting the postwar consensus which she correctly saw as a blind alley at the heart of Britain's demise, she embraced the politics of conviction. She forcefully articulated the view that governments alone are elected to govern based upon what they believe and that unions should be restricted to representing their members' interests in a lawful and socially responsible manner.

Against the views of many of her time, she rejected that governments know what is best for us. Inspired by Hayek's seminal work *The Road to Serfdom*, Mrs Thatcher recognised that collectivism is the siren song that leads only to poverty, misery and oppression. She saw that government is often the source of the problem in society rather than any solution and that less government, less regulation and more self-reliance are the answer.

Against the often condescending views of many politicians on both sides of politics, Mrs Thatcher proved that a woman could not only lead the nation but be the right man for the job. Against the misplaced conviction of Labour that they are a monopoly of working class political leadership, Mrs Thatcher showed that the self-made working person can achieve anything on their own.

The political spectrum today has been permanently shifted to the right as a result of what Mrs Thatcher achieved. In the final analysis, though, Mrs Thatcher's legacy is all about freedom—the freedom to enrich yourself by honest hard work, the freedom to live according to the dictates of your own conscience and the freedom to not have to live by another's leave.

The greatest Prime Minister since Churchill, a woman who rewrote the political rule book, who made conviction rather than consensus the model to be emulated, Mrs Thatcher was a truly remarkable individual and remains an inspiration to women everywhere.

Baroness Thatcher, rest in peace.

Anzac Day

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (6.38): I would like to pay tribute tonight, in the lead-up to Anzac Day, to the veterans in our community and the role of the armed services in the development of Canberra. I had the pleasure of attending the Anzac aged-care wreath-laying ceremony last Wednesday. The ceremony recognises aged veterans and aged-care residents in the lead-up to Anzac Day, especially those now too frail to cope with the memorial's full Anzac Day services.

The ceremony was a moving event, and I congratulate all involved, including the veterans, their families and the nursing home staff who made it possible. The service included veterans from the Goodwin Village homes at Farrer and Monash, Mountain View Aged Care Plus Centre, Morshead home for veterans, Horton House and Warmington Lodge, Thomas Eccles Gardens and Morling Lodge.

In this Canberra centenary year, it is also appropriate to recognise the role of members of our armed forces in the history of Canberra. Amongst the first powers of the commonwealth parliament listed in the Australian Constitution is the defence power. Soon after parliament chose the national capital site, it established the Royal Military College, Duntroon. In 1911, it was one of the earliest commonwealth institutions in the capital territory. Two years later, at Canberra's naming and foundation ceremony in 1913, the Light Horse, the Australian Field Artillery and the New South Wales Lancers represented Australia's new national army, soon to be enmeshed in a world war. The tri-service Federation Guard reprised these units' role at the first Canberra Day 100 years later, on 12 March.

Of course, when the Griffins designed Canberra, there was little air travel, no air force and they had no air strip in their plan. The new Royal Australian Air Force set up a temporary camp at Duntroon air strip, near the site of our current airport, for the

opening of federal parliament in 1927. There was also an air strip at Dickson. However, the Duntroon site won out, with lasting influence on the growth of Canberra to the east. Air force units were first stationed in Canberra in World War II. The aerodrome was renamed Fairbairn in honour of air minister James Fairbairn killed nearby in the Hudson bomber crash in 1940. The Chief of the General Staff, four air crew and two other ministers, veterans of World War I, also died.

Before the horrors of World War I, Griffin had envisaged a casino of public playgrounds on the site where the Australian War Memorial opened in 1941. In the aftermath of World War II, the Queen opened the American War Memorial in the linked paddock at Russell Hill in 1954. Soon after, Prime Minister Menzies ordered the defence department's various administration headquarters to start the move from Melbourne to Canberra. The completion of the Russell Hill offices in 1964 also completed the transfer of Defence to Canberra and the influx of thousands of defence personnel and their families. It was a major boost to Canberra's population in the early 1960s, requiring new houses, suburbs, schools and other infrastructure.

Today, Canberra and the defence forces cater much better for defence families on posting to this city. We have orientation programs for new arrivals, support organisations, defence liaison officers in schools. Canberra is also leading in the introduction of the national schools curriculum, which will make the transition from different education systems much easier.

In this centennial year's Anzac Day, Canberrans might also remember how members of the defence forces and their families have been a major part of the history of our city.

Yellow Van

MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (6.42): Last week I had the great pleasure of meeting Dave Burnet, director of Yellow Van. Like many Canberrans, I have heard of this Communities@Work initiative but not in such an enthusiastic way as I did from Dave. He is obviously very proud of the Yellow Van program and gave me an interesting insight into the way they operate. Dave has targeted schools to assist in this inspirational program and has been seeking partnerships with schools and colleges.

The partnership with St Edmund's College is the latest in a strong and growing connection with local schools and colleges. Communities@Work's Yellow Van has worked closely with St Clare's College, Canberra College, Canberra grammar, Deakin high, St Francis Xavier and many more schools in the area in the last five years. The food value-adding component is new and it is hoped more schools will choose to become involved in this initiative.

Most schools have hospitality programs as part of their curriculum, and it is a natural fit to see some of Yellow Van's rescued excess good food delivered to the students who learn to cook while assisting the community. It is a real challenge each week as classes must create menus from a constantly changing range of ingredients. The quality of the prepared meals is so high that there is a constant call from local charities for more deliveries from St Edmund's.

So with this information fresh in my mind, I was very pleasantly surprised to see a great article in this week's *Chronicle* by Mark Sawa that detailed a partnership to help the poor between St Edmund's College and the Yellow Van food rescue service, a partnership that was based on an idea by a year 9 student at St Edmund's College and his father, who happens to be Dave Burnet, the director of Yellow Van.

Tonight, in my capacity as shadow minister for education, I would like to congratulate the initiative of the students and their teachers at St Edmund's College in Griffith and, of course, Dave Burnet of Yellow Van. Mikey Burnet, Dave's son, was the year 9 student at St Edmund's that came up with an idea to have hospitality students at his school prepare food for refugees and charities using raw produce that is donated to Yellow Van. Yellow Van is that wonderful charity that we spoke about, operating in the ACT, that relocates unwanted food from restaurants and shops to those in need.

Mikey's dad, Dave Burnet, is director of Yellow Van. Obviously it was his inspirational discourse to his family that launched this auspicious partnership, but it would not have happened if students at the school were not prepared to take in the raw ingredients, cook and pack the meals they make and then have Yellow Van deliver them to where they are most needed. I applaud their hard work, their initiative and their enthusiasm. I am sure those that are in receipt of their cooking skills are particularly appreciative.

This is the kind of community activity in which everyone is a winner. The skills the students learn in this project are as valuable as the goodwill they demonstrate to the community at large. Well done, St Edmund's College, and congratulations to the acting head of food science and hospitality at St Edmund's College, Dean Parkes. Well done also to Mikey Burnet and others involved in the school's hospitality course: Angus Rhodes, Tracey Brown, Mark Wadsworth, Jake Dumbrell, Brenton Meares, Jack Gibson, Kane Harper, Megan Matthews, Jackson Bruce, Sean Nicholson, Brent Mackey, Luke Kerr, James Kenny, Bailey Crawford Ong, and Bronson Mowat.

Multiculturalism

MS BERRY (Ginninderra) (6.45): It is interesting to hear Mrs Jones associate herself with a politician who called Nelson Mandela a terrorist and supported the military coup in Chile. Tonight I rise, however, to speak about the progressive value of multiculturalism.

Late last month I had the opportunity to open the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services harmony sports carnival which celebrates another successful year for their harmony players program. The harmony players program is funded under the diversity and social cohesion program within the federal Department of Immigration and Citizenship. It is overseen by the ACT migrant and refugee resource service. When it was founded, the aim of the program was to create a space where a group of young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds would be able to learn a new sport in a fun and safe environment and, from what I saw on the day, they have achieved this and much more.

Sport is an important part of community life in Canberra. This Saturday I spent the morning at Belwest gala soccer day where both my children were playing. Not only were there plenty of young people learning and enjoying healthy habits that will last them a lifetime; parents, grandparents, volunteers, coaches, organisers and a few bored siblings were a broad cross-section of our community who were given a great reason to come together and mingle on a Saturday morning.

It is these community relationships which make sport so important to migrant and refugee families trying to establish new lives in Canberra. The harmony sports carnival is well supported by clubs and groups throughout Canberra to achieve this goal. This year's carnival saw MARSS' men's, boy's and girl's harmony players basketball and soccer teams take on the AFP, the Rats, the Ramblers, the Eagles, PCYC, ANU and Companion House, all of whom brought their friends and family along to participate and enjoy the day.

The harmony sports carnival was not only a great community event; as a basketball fan, I was impressed by the quality of the play displayed by the teams. The skills of the harmony players have been greatly enhanced through the support of Basketball ACT and the exceptional efforts of harmony coaches Tony and Chris Jones and Rachael McNaughton.

Basketball ACT is also investing in the longevity of the program and the confidence of the participants by training up harmony players to take on positions of leadership as referees and coaches. I would like to commend MARSS on their fantastic program and pass on my congratulations to all of the players, teams, clubs and friends and family who came out for a great community day and a display of serious sporting skills.

Organ donation

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (6.48): I would like to speak tonight on the issue of organ donation. Members will be aware that the federal government in the last week announced that it will pay living organ donors the minimum wage for six weeks to help ease the financial burden of surgery and recovery. This initiative has been praised by organ donation agencies who have been campaigning for more than a decade for donors to be given financial support. It is important to note that the scheme does not amount to a financial incentive to donate, but rather provides support to those people who are making the tough personal decision to donate their kidney to help save another life. It is an important step in reforms to substantially lift organ and tissue donation rates.

Australia is a world leader for successful transplant outcomes. The number of organ donors and transplant recipients last year was the highest since national records began, with 1,052 people given a new chance of life. Still, around 1,600 people are on Australian organ transplant waiting lists. We know that around four out of five Australians are generally willing to become organ and tissue donors, but unfortunately nearly half of us do not know or are unsure of the donation wishes of our loved ones.

It is important to note that in Australia the family are always asked to confirm the donation wishes of the deceased before donation can proceed. The quality of care for a potential donor—and the wishes of their family—is always the foremost consideration and is never compromised by the potential for organ and tissue donation, unlike in some parts of the world.

I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly to a roundtable event which happened on 20 March at Parliament House, hosted by Senator John Madigan, which drew the attention of federal parliamentarians to the ethical implications for Australia of the disturbing practice of illegal live organ harvesting. Speakers were Professor Maria Fiatarone Singh from the University of Sydney—she is a geriatrician and contributing author to the book *State Organs: Transplant Abuse in China*—and David Kilgour, a former Canadian member of parliament and secretary of state. David won the 2009 human rights award from the International Society for Human Rights for his work on organ harvesting. He and his colleague David Matas were nominated for the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize for their investigation into allegations of illegal live organ harvesting practices in China in 2006.

Recent medical advances have improved the success of organ transplantation. There has also been a rise in the illegal harvesting and trafficking of organs. Internationally, this has led to a market developing so that those with money to buy organs are able to visit countries where forced organ harvesting occurs in order to receive a lifesaving transplant.

This produces real and ongoing abuses of human rights. At its worst, organ harvesting can see people killed to order, with one person's life being deliberately taken to save another. I am sure that there would be nobody here who would find the prospect of live organ harvesting to be anything other than utterly abhorrent. It is an issue of great concern to us as global citizens. I think we are grateful that we live in a country where respect for the personal choice of potential donors and their families is paramount and central to our organ and tissue donation and transplantation program.

While most countries like Australia have laws prohibiting both the sale and forced removal of human organs, there are a number of countries where the practice continues to be widespread. This includes countries in our region such as China. One way of addressing this brutal trade is for countries such as Australia to impose prohibitions on its citizens and residents from receiving trafficked organs, wherever the transplant occurs. This would make it a crime for Australian citizens to receive organs sourced by illegal and unethical means. Such a prohibition should also serve to direct attention to the need to improve organ donation rates in Australia.

My colleagues in the New South Wales Greens are currently considering law reform to create specific offences of receiving harvested or trafficked organs within New South Wales or overseas. Such law reform could highlight the injustice of the global organ trade and provide a strong disincentive for New South Wales to participate in it. They are seeking broad consultation with the community, members of the medical community and other stakeholders.

Turning to another matter, along with around 3,000 Canberrans, a few months back I participated in the DonateLife walk as part of a TAMS team. There were 25 TAMS walkers, including family members and a couple of four-legged walkers, who got up early to join the walk. I would like to thank Kim Smith for organising the team.

I think it is timely for us to congratulate DonateLife on the wonderful work they do in our community and to note that in other parts of the world there are some extremely disturbing practices going on in relation to organ transplants. As global citizens, we have a responsibility to be aware of these things. I would like to congratulate my New South Wales colleagues on putting this issue on the agenda in their jurisdiction.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.54 pm.