



Debates

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Wednesday, 7 August 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.

Budget 2013-14

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (10.01): I move:

That the Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the importance of “the openness of the way we govern, encompassing transparency, participation, and collaboration”;
- (b) the Select Committee on Estimates 2013-2014’s following recommendations that:
 - (i) the “Budget not be passed because of its lack of delivery, high levels of deficit, and deceitful plan to massively increase commercial and residential rates”; and
 - (ii) the “Appropriation Bill debate not be brought on until such time as the Treasurer has presented an amended bill and relevant budget documents detailing the effect of the ICRC determination on the ACTEW water dividend and balance sheet”; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) release modelling of its tax reform rates increases for the next 20 years;
- (b) advise the Assembly of the financial impact of the recent Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission (ICRC) water and sewage price determinations on the Territory’s budget;
- (c) present an amended Appropriation Bill reflecting the effect of the ICRC price determination on ACTEW; and
- (d) make publicly available all documents used as a foundation to proceed with the light rail project.

This is a very important motion, and it should be a very simple debate, because I would have thought everyone in this place agreed with the Chief Minister on the new era of openness and accountability that she heralded in her first speech in this place when she became Chief Minister. Remember that she tabled the lovely coloured chart that had all the objectives in it? She used words like the importance of “the openness of the way we govern, encompassing transparency, participation and collaboration”. What we are not seeing is transparency. We are certainly not being allowed to participate, and there is certainly no collaboration in regard to these documents and this budget.

These are very important issues. All three things that I have highlighted—there are only three but there are many more that one could put in this place—involve large sums of money. All three affect the bottom line. All three affect taxpayers and what may happen to the taxes that they pay. What we are simply saying is that, in agreement with the bipartisan committee report yesterday that said—

Mr Barr: I would give up on that one. Oh, it's bipartisan!

MR SMYTH: So it is not a bipartisan committee?

Mr Rattenbury: Come on! Credibility just flew out the door, Brendan.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, members.

MR SMYTH: So two and two is not bipartisan? There were only four members. Well, there you go. Let us go to the report then. The report was passed by the committee. The Labor members could have stopped the report and they did not, so there is tacit support for all the recommendations in that report; otherwise they would have stopped it.

Members interjecting—

MR SMYTH: They had their opportunity, Madam Speaker. Those opposite can laugh, but there is a report from the Select Committee on Estimates that was agreed to by the committee. It was agreed to and passed; otherwise it would not have been tabled.

Dr Bourke: You can't even say it with a straight face.

MR SMYTH: There you go. I am laughing at you, Chris. I am just laughing at you. I am laughing at your companion who moves motions and then moves dissent from his own motion.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Smyth! Mr Smyth, would you address the chair, please?

MR SMYTH: Yes, Madam Speaker; I will talk through the chair. This is the lunacy of what happened yesterday from those opposite. We have a report that was passed by a committee that consisted of two members of the Liberal Party and two members of the Labor Party; otherwise it would not have been tabled.

Members interjecting—

MR SMYTH: What are you objecting to? The report itself says there are holes in the budget. The report says that there are details lacking, and that those details should be made available before the budget is debated. That is not an unreasonable position. Let us look at what we are talking about. We are talking about a dividend from ACTEW that we believe will now be reduced by an estimated \$100 million. We do not know that it will be approximately \$100 million. We had the offhand remark from the

Treasurer yesterday, “It’s only \$25 million a year; a small amount.” Well, the small amounts add up. You can put on top of that that we do not know what the cost and the foundation will be of the light rail project, which is \$600 million.

The last time we gave Mr Corbell a big project to run, it went from \$55 million to about \$200 million. And you would remember well, Madam Speaker, the Gungahlin Drive fiasco that Mr Corbell oversaw. Of course Mr Corbell oversaw the prison. Remember the prison that was meant to last for 20 years and which is now full? And of course Mr Corbell was responsible for the debacle that is the building of the ESA headquarters. A great building and a good location; a pity about the cost. This is why these numbers are important—because we have a government that, according to the Auditor-General, simply does not deliver on capital works projects.

Of course we have the tax reform—the tax reform where, apparently, no work has been done. We have it in this budget, and we have it from the Treasurer himself, that yes, they will go up 10 per cent a year, and if you go up 10 per cent a year for 11 years, your rates triple. If we are wrong, table the documents to prove that we are wrong. But in all this time since these reforms were started, we have not seen a single document to disprove what the Canberra Liberals have said. That is why this motion today is very simple in its intent: give us the documents, prove us wrong, and that debate will end.

But you cannot prove us wrong because the documents either prove that we are correct, and this is exactly what will happen, or you have not done the work at all. And that is the hallmark of this government: “We had a bright idea. Let’s just do it.” We heard from Mr Barr in other hearings that there is no price too big for the light rail because it is a good policy idea. There are many components that make policy good, and I would have thought that one of the components that make a policy a good policy is the ability to afford it and deliver it. This government have shown us nothing to say that they can actually deliver this project, let alone afford to pay for this project. Their record on capital works in the last 11 years is simply appalling.

Remember that time in estimates when we asked Mr Corbell to name a single project that he had delivered on time, on budget and on scope? There was a deafening silence, Madam Speaker, and it had to be taken on notice, and then he tabled a list that were mainly projects that I had started when I had been the minister. So thank you for the confirmation that we are able, as the Liberal Party, to deliver capital works on time and on budget, Mr Corbell, because you certainly cannot.

That is why this motion is before the Assembly today. What it is simply saying is the Chief Minister’s own words. She wanted to show the openness of the way we govern by encompassing transparency. Well, here is the test. Here is another little hurdle. You have fallen at every other hurdle. There has not been transparency. There has not been openness. We know that from the litany of secret inquiries on everything from obstetrics to hospital numbers, but we never get to see the final reports. They are all done in house. So let us have some of this openness and let us have some of this transparency.

With respect to the Select Committee on Estimates, the report was passed by the committee and tabled in this place yesterday. It was a committee that had two Labor and two Liberal members on it, so it was a bipartisan committee. Both sides were there equally, and the report got up. The recommendation says:

... that the Budget not be passed because of its lack of delivery, high levels of deficit and deceitful plan to massively increase commercial and residential rates.

The other appropriate recommendation is:

... the Appropriation Bill debate not be brought on until such time as the Treasurer has presented an amended bill and relevant budget documents detailing the effect of the ICRC determination on the ACTEW Water dividend and balance sheet.

It does raise the question as to why we do not have those numbers. It is a question that, according to the Treasurer, can only be answered probably by February next year. For those who saw the ACTEW statement of corporate intent tabled in this place yesterday, on page 19 there is a big, glaring red box—warning!—which states:

These forecasts are based upon assumptions made by ACTEW prior to the ICRC's release of its final report for regulated water and sewerage services in the ACT on 26 June 2013. The likely impact of that report has not yet been fully determined. The key financial measures set forth in the following sections are subject to material change once the impact of the ICRC report has been determined. It is anticipated that ACTEW will provide revised financial forecasts in late August 2013.

If it is to be revised in late August 2013, let us put off this debate for a month. The government has got supply. The rules are quite clear. You can continue to spend. The normal tradition is five-twelfths of the previous year's budget. So there is no impediment to the government starting anything it wants to do or carrying on with what it has been doing. But we are being asked to pass something that we know to be inaccurate, and no member should be asked to do that. We are being asked to pass something when we will get the final determination a week and a half after we pass the debate. Why would we be asked to do that?

It is curious. The ICRC's draft report came out in February. So between February and June—let us say two months; February, March, April—ACTEW were able to do all the work, all the computation, all the argument with the ICRC that they needed to do to convince the ICRC not to go ahead with the large decreases, to stop the price gouging on water and sewerage, not to go ahead with that because there was a risk of ACTEW becoming insolvent. So they were able to do that work in quick time so that the ICRC then had time to discuss it with them and rewrite their report. They were able to do that in a couple of months. But since June—so June, July, August—they cannot do the same work as quickly so that we can have an informed debate on the budget. Why is that?

We have the glaring red box as the answer: 'We'll give it to you after you've passed your budget.' So there goes the transparency that the Chief Minister talked about. There goes the new era of openness and accountability. It behoves the minister to present to the Assembly a true picture of the state of the budget as quickly as he knows it. And it behoves the Treasurer, when he knows that something is not accurate, to either provide the accurate data or to delay the debate.

The one-month delay will not affect what the government is doing. It has supply and there are traditions and processes that allow that to occur. But we should not be in the position where we have to vote for or against something when we do not know the full story, and what is in the document we now know not to be true. The Treasurer should have come forward with an amendment. We have had amended budgets before. In previous budgets where we tabled our budget before the federal budget, every now and then we would have a revision when some of the commonwealth numbers did not marry up or there was a change in circumstances.

We have done it before; it is not hard. But you have to ask the question: what are they hiding when they can argue with the ICRC with so much data that they can turn the decision around, so that the proposed \$235 decrease in charges disappeared down to \$80? So they were able to argue that successfully. Why cannot they tell the Assembly? Indeed why are the two shareholders not demanding that we have this number, and have it expeditiously? It is because the shareholders do not want to debate the appropriation bill with the real and accurate numbers in it.

I thought Mr Rattenbury would have some sympathy with this debate. We will see what Mr Rattenbury says. The Greens always tout themselves as the new way, the third force and as seeking collaboration, cooperation, honesty, openness and accuracy. Let us see if they actually do stand for that today. Let us see if there is a principle that stands the test of being in cabinet. He is always quoting the four pillars of what the Greens stand for. Let us see what the Greens stand for in this debate when it is called to a vote.

These are important issues, Madam Speaker. You have only to look at the admission from Mr Barr that there is no price too high for the cost of light rail and the admission from Mr Rattenbury on radio that even though he is on the committee he had not seen the documents. He had not seen the cost-benefit analysis. So there we are.

Mr Rattenbury: Not what I said and you know it.

MR SMYTH: You can tell us what you saw and what you have not seen, Mr Rattenbury. But he had not seen the documents and he is on the committee. So that is collaboration inside the government, isn't it? That is that new spirit of participation and collaboration!

Of course, we have the tax reform—tripling your rates. We know that if they go up at 10 per cent a year, in about 11 years they will triple. But what we do not have from the minister is the facts from their side that they will not. He can lay this to rest today.

He can table the modelling that they have done. Nobody starts on a tax reform process that they have embarked upon without knowing how to get there and when you get there. If you do, you are probably a fool because you cannot guarantee anything there.

They have done this work. They have some data; they must have. They hide behind cabinet-in-confidence; they hide behind budget process. But what they will not tell you is the real truth. It is time they were called to account. It is time for the Greens to hold them to account. It is time that this Assembly is treated with some respect and given the full picture on these three—and we have only picked out three—very important issues that have a huge financial impact on the ACT.

Remember the Auditor-General's report on the financial audits last year where she said that the greatest risk is the debt? The greatest contributor to the debt is the government's capital works program, and here we are about to embark upon a project that is expected to cost over \$600 million. If you go down the same path as the dam that went from \$145 million to \$250 million to \$360 million to \$400-odd million, what will light rail go to—\$600 million, \$900 million, \$1,200 million, \$1,500 million? That is the way that they deliver capital works. We saw it with the GDE. The original cost for the GDE was \$55 million and it is now somewhere just under \$200 million. So it quadrupled under the management, the poor economic and capital works management, of this government.

It is a very simple motion, Madam Speaker. We ask for information; we ask for true and accurate information. We ask for that information before we debate the bill. The delay should only be for about a month. It is not unreasonable that we get the full picture so that everyone knows what is happening with this city's budget. (*Time expired.*)

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) (10.16): The government will not be supporting Mr Smyth's motion today. It is nothing but blatant political grandstanding and we have just witnessed 15 minutes of it from the shadow treasurer—no considered or intelligent contribution to economic debate in the territory. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

The government is proud of the taxation reforms that are currently underway. These reforms are making the territory's revenue base more stable and more efficient. Quite simply, the state and territory taxation systems are inefficient and unsustainable in their current form. Having a competitive taxation system is vital for this territory's economic future.

Every credible economist recognises the need for this reform. The Business Council of Australia has noted in its recent report, *An action plan for enduring prosperity*, the importance of having a competitive tax system and the benefits of undertaking long-term taxation reform. A couple of weeks ago a major report from PricewaterhouseCoopers said:

There would be a boost to economic growth, productivity and real per-person incomes if: Australia relied more on consumption and land taxes, and less on corporate and personal taxes, stamp duty, taxation of insurance, and payroll taxes in their current form.

Under the government's reforms, inefficient taxes are being abolished, notably conveyance duty and the duty on insurance premiums. Since the commencement of the government's taxation reform, the duty on general insurance premiums has reduced from 10 per cent to six per cent. Duty on life insurance premiums has been reduced from five per cent to three per cent. By 1 July 2016, this unfair and inefficient tax will have been completely abolished in the territory.

This will result in significant savings for Canberra households and for Canberra businesses. They will benefit as the government reduces tax on their insurance premiums, including on their building and contents premiums, motor vehicle premiums, professional indemnity premiums, public and product liability premiums and employers' liability insurance policies.

The government is committed to abolishing conveyance duty. Stamp duty is an inefficient and distorting tax that acts as a barrier to the purchasing of properties by Canberrans, including first homebuyers who want to break into the market and people wishing to downsize into smaller properties.

The government has already released its schedule of conveyance duty rates until 2016-17. These rates provide significant savings to homebuyers. For example, the buyer of a \$500,000 property is today saving \$3,400 on stamp duty, compared to before the tax reform commenced, while the buyer of a \$700,000 property receives a saving of around \$4,900.

As part of the 2013-14 budget I also announced a new conveyance duty measure to benefit parties undertaking large property transactions in the territory. Large transactions valued above \$1.65 million will now be subject to a flat rate of 5.5 per cent. This reform presents significant savings to local businesses. For example, a property valued at \$4 million will receive a benefit through a reduction in conveyance duty of around \$45½ thousand in 2013-14.

Fiscal responsibility dictates the revenue lost through the abolition of inefficient and unfair taxes must be recovered, and this will be achieved through the most progressive and broad-based taxation arrangement that we have available to us in the territory, our most efficient and our fairest tax base. This position is supported by the Business Council of Australia in their report released last week, which noted that state and territory governments need to raise revenue through their most efficient tax bases, such as consumption and land.

The government understands the importance of ensuring that general rates, though, remain affordable for all and that is why the rates rebate was significantly increased in the 2013-14 budget from \$565 to \$622. This increase helps offset the increase in general rates for those eligible for the concession.

The move to an efficient tax base is the most important economic reform for this territory in our second century. It provides a sound and stable revenue base for the future and ensures that our tax system is sustainable for the long run. It is fairer, it is simpler and it is more efficient, and it is the right tax system for the future.

The financial impact of the ICRC's water and sewerage pricing on the territory budget is not yet available. The final impact on ACTEW and on the territory budget can only be determined once ACTEW and the Auditor-General have finalised consideration of the potential impairment of assets resulting from the pricing determination. And as I have said on many occasions, the government will provide an updated forecast in the 2013-14 budget review. The final report and pricing determination of the ICRC for water and sewerage services was the result of a thorough and robust process which incorporated detailed consideration of the appropriate method to regulate and to set prices for water and sewerage services in the territory.

It is important to note that the ICRC have significantly revised their regulatory model for the setting of water and sewerage prices in the territory. And as can be seen from the final pricing determination, the end result of the ICRC process is a pricing direction that balances the needs of consumers, the electricity and water utility and the government.

The pricing determination has provided the average consumer with a decrease of approximately \$83 in their combined water and sewerage bill. The pricing determination has provided ACTEW with sufficient revenues to service its debt and to continue to make appropriate investments in its capital asset base. And it will provide taxpayers with a return on the considerable equity they have, as received through dividends paid by ACTEW.

As I have indicated, when the government is in a position to advise the Assembly of the final financial impact of the pricing direction on ACTEW and on the ACT budget, we will do so. The estimates relating to ACTEW that were included in the 2013-14 budget were based on ACTEW's submission to the ICRC on 12 April 2013. And as I indicated to the estimates committee in the recall hearings on 1 July and in question time yesterday, the initial estimated impact of the pricing determination on ACTEW's dividend to government is expected to be in the range of \$20 to \$25 million per year for the first two years only, 2013-14 and 2014-15. These estimates, however, are before the consideration of any potential impairment of assets that may be required by ACTEW.

The process to determine whether any impairment of assets is required and then to determine the magnitude of any such impairment is complex. It requires ACTEW to receive detailed accounting advice, which must then be presented within ACTEW's financial statements. Following this, the Auditor-General, as part of her duties, is required to consider the appropriateness of the assumptions made in regard to any potential impairment. Only then, once the audited financial statements are released, can the final impact of the pricing determination be assessed.

As indicated by ACTEW at the estimates hearings, this process is not expected to be complete until at least the end of August. Therefore, it would not be appropriate for the government to speculate on the final impact of the pricing determination until the process outlined in relation to asset impairment is complete and any level of any potential impact is known.

In the context of total budget revenue for the general government sector of \$4.2 billion in 2013-14, the potential impact of the pricing determination is not material. It would therefore be inappropriate to hold up the debate of the appropriation bill for consideration of this matter at this time.

Further, it is important to note the dividend payments by ACTEW to government are but one source of government revenue. Any variation to ACTEW's estimated payment of dividends in 2013-14 as a result of the ICRC determination is likely to be less than one per cent of total GGS revenues. This impact is not material and further, as I advised the Assembly yesterday, variations in other revenue streams are offset and can offset any impact. For example, GST payments from the commonwealth, in the update provided by the commonwealth government last week, increased, significantly mitigating the impact of any reduction in the ACTEW dividend. Correspondingly, the appropriation bill does not need any amendment to reflect the ICRC pricing determination for water and sewerage.

But more broadly, this motion indicates a fundamental misunderstanding of the respective roles of and relationship between the budget and the appropriation bill. The ACT budget is a point-in-time estimate of future revenues, expenditure and other financial information relevant to individual agencies, the public trading enterprise sector, the general government sector and the whole of territory. So from the moment the budget is published, economic, commercial and fiscal events will result in variances from the budget estimates. In nearly all cases, these variances do not prompt the need to vary appropriations.

The Appropriation Bill 2013-14 is the mechanism for the appropriation of moneys for the 2013-14 financial year. It allows government agencies to spend money. It is not dependent on the sources of these moneys. Delaying the budget until the effect of the ICRC price determination is finalised would interrupt the operations of government. It would delay the start of a range of new projects and a range of new appropriations.

In establishing the budget estimates included in the 2013-14 budget for the Capital Metro Agency, the government recognised that it is an early-stage project in its planning phase. And as such, \$18.7 million has been allocated for projects associated with capital metro. As my colleague Minister Corbell has indicated, the government will release relevant information about the project at the appropriate time, once the appropriate planning and investigative work is completed. This project will be managed professionally, and that is exactly what the government is doing.

In conclusion, the government does not support Mr Smyth's motion. I always welcome considered and robust debate of the budget, and we will have a week of that next week, but what we are seeing this morning is certainly not that contribution from

the shadow treasurer. If he has got alternative policies, bring them forward. If he has got a considered analysis of the territory's long-term economic future that demands a different policy direction, let him bring that position forward. But blatantly political motions, such as this one this morning, that demonstrate no understanding of the issues before this Assembly do the shadow treasurer no credit. In the meantime, the government will get on with the passage of the budget, the good governance of the territory and the delivery of these important transformational projects for the city of Canberra.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Housing, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and Minister for Ageing) (10.30): I rise to put my view today that I will not be supporting the motion brought forward by Mr Smyth. I think that there are, unfortunately, a number of elements to it that I simply do not agree with.

When one reflects on the estimates report, the most interesting part of it is the analysis prepared by the Centre for International Economics, which is the process the Assembly set up a number of years ago to help the estimates committee by providing them with detailed and expert analysis of the budget from an independent source, recognising that the Assembly cannot have its own parliamentary budget office—we are probably not large enough—but it is useful to have this.

It really is a tale of two documents. One looks at the actual report from the Liberal members of the estimates committee and then one looks at the report from the Centre for International Economics. And they really are strikingly different. I will quote from the headline summary of the CIE report. It says:

The 2013-14 Budget seeks to reprioritise spending and smoothly bring the budget back into surplus in 2015-16.

The return to surplus will only occur through an adjustment to build in expected future returns on superannuation investment assets, which are not yet realised. Without this, a trend toward Budget balance is forecast, rather than Budget balance itself.

Overall, expenditure is moderately stimulatory and the balancing of the budget reflects greater confidence in strong revenue growth rather than substantially pared back expenditure.

Overall, the revenue projections appear achievable, but are not conservative.

That is, I think, a fair analysis of the budget. And if you actually go through the rest of this paper, what you will see is that it is a very considered approach to the budget. It highlights that there are areas of risk, and that is inevitable. In a budgeting process, there are things that are going to be difficult to predict or areas where the government has taken some on-balance decisions on how to approach the budget. That compares quite starkly to both the analysis in the Liberal Party members' component of the estimates report and the motion we see before us today.

There are various other parts of this report that are well worth having a look at. Another example is that it notes:

While there is a significant buffer before an AAA credit rating may be threatened, there are also considerable risks to the net position of the ACT Government which are associated with unfunded superannuation liabilities.

That is a fair analysis. That points to the fact that there are risks in the budgeting process, there are risks to the ACT over the coming years, but it is far from the budget full of deficit and deceit that Mr Smyth's motion and the Liberal Party press releases refer to.

For want of it being suggested that I am selectively quoting from this document, I acknowledge quite openly there are bits in here where there are red flags, where the report says the government needs to be aware of these things, these areas of risk. And that is what I would expect that sort of report to do. But it is a very different story to that being put forward by the Liberal Party.

Unfortunately Mr Smyth undermined his own argument when he stood up this morning and tried to run this line about the estimates committee providing a bipartisan report. It is simply not the case. To even suggest so is actually embarrassing. It is quite clear, with the committee structure we have—two Labor members, two Liberal members—we have two different reports.

One might reflect on the quality of each of those reports. I think that the outcome is perhaps not ideal. To suggest the Labor Party members could have stopped the report, which is what Mr Smyth did, actually fails to recognise the willingness of those Labor Party members to try to get an outcome from the committee. It is quite clear what the outcome was. It was stated here in the chamber yesterday. The report was brought forward. Two Liberal members voted for it—this is Mr Hanson's report as the chair—Dr Bourke voted against it, which was what we were told in the Assembly yesterday, and Mr Gentleman abstained.

That was not because Mr Gentleman agreed with all of the recommendations. He stated very clearly here in the chamber yesterday that it was to enable a report to come out. That is transparency. That is actually making an effort to get something done in recognition of the fact that that is the way the numbers are balanced in this chamber.

So to come in here and try to turn that into "tacit support" of the assertions that Mr Hanson and his Liberal Party colleague on the committee have come up with is simply embarrassing. Again Mr Smyth has chirped up, saying, "They could have stopped it." They could have stopped it. But to the contrary, what Mr Gentleman's action did was allow Mr Hanson and his colleague to put their views on the table. And if they had blocked it, we know what would be going on here. They would be coming in here merry hell saying, "The committee system does not work. It cannot possibly work with having two and two," and we are going to come back to that debate tomorrow.

Mr Smyth is having one each way here, but I think simply trying to suggest that there is a bipartisan view that the budget should not proceed is the sort of distortion of the facts that does Mr Smyth no favours.

Mr Smyth: I said a bipartisan committee.

MR RATTENBURY: A bipartisan committee? There are two and two on the committee, but what you have tried to do, Mr Smyth, is—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, members! Mr Rattenbury, if you could address the chair, and, Mr Smyth, if you could not distract Mr Rattenbury by trying to conduct a conversation across the chamber we would get on a lot better. Mr Rattenbury.

MR RATTENBURY: I will do my best, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the reminder. But there are two members of each party on the committee. That is patently true. But to then use that to allude to the fact that all of the members of the committee support the conclusions that Mr Smyth has now quoted in his motion today simply is not true and reflects badly on Mr Smyth's own personal credibility.

Let us turn to one of the issues in the motion, the issue of debt and high levels of deficit. This budget does walk a fine line between balancing territory government expenditure and maintaining our AAA credit rating, and giving us enough fiscal space to ensure that if the worst comes to pass and there is a significant reduction in the size of the federal public service, we can respond to try to offset some of that contraction.

The Greens have long said that we are committed to a balanced budget over the economic cycle, and we support the planned return to surplus in 2015-16. There are spending cuts in the budget, and the Greens agree that we need to protect our AAA credit rating so that we can ensure that we have that strong rating and continue to pay the lowest possible interest costs on the borrowings that we do have.

The motion talks about a lack of delivery as a reason why we should not pass the budget. I am not exactly sure that the way that is phrased in the motion is quite how one measures that lack of delivery. But what I do know from the budget is that there are a large number of projects and policies that are being delivered. There is funding for the much-needed community legal centre hub and funding for the light rail master plan. I will come back to light rail shortly, but that project is being got on with.

There is money to enhance the biodiversity of Canberra's woodlands, parks and nature reserves. We have got funding for the delivery of common ground, a project which will help tackle homelessness for disadvantaged Canberrans and achieve stability, and support services to improve the quality of their lives. That has been funded in this budget and is scheduled for delivery by December 2014.

When it comes to delivery, I also go back to the CIE report. When it comes to capital works spending, it makes the observation:

Sixteen per cent is for rollovers and reprofiling from 2012-13, lower proportionately to last year's Budget indicating greater success in achieving on-time delivery.

Again, that is the independent analysis simply making that observation that progress is being made in that area.

Is there room for improvement? Undoubtedly, but the simple suggestion that the budget does not deliver and exactly what that means, I think, is again an area where I simply disagree with Mr Smyth's analysis.

Another reason given in the motion not to pass the budget is the "deceitful plan to massively increase commercial and residential rates". The tax reforms are complicated, and pretending you can catch them in a three-word slogan or even a whole sentence really is a disservice to the depth of the policy and the thinking that has gone into it.

The Canberra Liberals do seem to be the only political party in the whole country that cannot accept that stamp duty is an inefficient tax and that it is in our economic interest to get rid of it.

Mr Smyth: We never said that.

MR RATTENBURY: But you certainly oppose the tax reforms, Mr Smyth? Madam Speaker, I observe the interjection Mr Smyth has made, and in response to that interjection I observe that there does not seem to be any support for getting rid of stamp duty.

As we said during the campaign on many occasions and as WIN news managed to work out from information publicly available, rates across Canberra will rise by an average of about six per cent per year as insurance tax and conveyance duty are phased out. As I have said in this debate, and as some of my Greens colleagues have said in previous debates, we do believe this is a responsible long-term tax reform, one that will provide stability for the ACT in its revenue base and provide for a more transparent tax system.

Mr Barr has made a number of comments about the ICRC issue that Mr Smyth has raised. I concur with those comments and I would add simply that the nature of a budget, in bringing forward the appropriation bills, is that it is a budget; it is an estimate; it is a plan forward. Things will of course happen, things will change, and that is what the various updates are for—the midyear update, the end of year updates, these sorts of things.

I do note that the \$20 million variation that we are discussing sits in the context of a \$4 billion budget and so I think that we need to see that for what it is. It is certainly an important part of the budget, but other things will change as well. On the GST revenue, for example, the Treasurer provided some numbers in question time yesterday which indicate the quantum there.

These are the challenges as we seek to manage the financial state of the territory on an ongoing basis. I do not think that is a barrier to passing the budget at this point. The budget gives a clear indication of the executive's intent, and that is the basis on which we should be debating it.

The final thing I want to turn to in my comments today is light rail. Mr Smyth's motion calls on the government to publicly release all of the documentation it has relied upon in making its decision on light rail, and that is fine. We already passed a motion in the Assembly earlier this year promising transparency on light rail and I have always been happy for the public and the Liberals to read any of this documentation and make their assessments.

One of the ironies, of course, is that it seems quite obvious that the Liberal Party do not actually bother to read any of the information that is already publicly available. That is why they keep paying for answers that can already be found if they look on the internet or simply go to the library. For the edification of the Liberal Party, I am happy to list some of the documents the Greens and I have relied on in making the decision to progress light rail, which is exactly the point raised in Mr Smyth's motion.

I do not think it is feasible to actually list every document. There are large amounts. The Greens have looked at this issue for years and we have considered and researched a decision properly, as decision makers should. Let me list some of the documents that we have relied on. In 1994, we had the Canberra light rail implementation study, which found that light rail is feasible for Canberra. Then there is *Canberra at the Crossroads* in 1997, a very good report by the conservation council and Paul Mees. That is available upstairs in the library.

In 2004, we had the Canberra public transport futures feasibility study. It found it was economically feasible and beneficial to develop rapid public transport down the Northbourne corridor. The 2005 SMEC Northbourne Avenue study and report recommended light rail on the median strip corridor, which is the current plan, and identified millions of dollars of benefits to building rapid transit on the northern corridor. There was the 2008 PricewaterhouseCooper light rail study which listed the millions of dollars in benefits of light rail in Canberra. Incidentally that conducted an initial cost-benefit analysis on a whole Canberra-wide light rail network, which was 1.62.

Of course, more recently we have had the 2011-12 URS Australia's city to Gungahlin transit corridor study. MLAs who have read that study will have noted it concludes that light rail generates the best overall outcomes for Canberra. This was refined in 2012, with more detailed costings. There are now four project updates on progressing the Northbourne project.

This is not even all of the studies. There was a feasibility study of Flemington Road for rapid transit a few years ago. That resulted in the building of the current bus priority lanes there. There are almost endless reports and case studies from around the world about transport and light rail, and we spent a lot of time looking at them so that we could learn from them and compare them to Canberra.

I cannot even begin to count the amount of experts my staff and I have met with to talk about transport planning and transport modes—this is over many years—including of course Greens MLAs from previous Assemblies. Just as a few examples, we have met professors Graham Currie, Paul Mees and John Stone, academics from

Melbourne, and Peter Newman from Perth. There are others that I could list but in the time I have available I also note the international experts we have met over time and the interest groups, the Australasian Railway Association and the Bus Industry Confederation.

I must say that the idea there are not enough studies being done and not enough analysis being done in order to make a decision about mode choice is clearly ridiculous. And it certainly compares well when you contrast it to the effort of the Liberals when they promised hundreds of millions of dollars for car parks and road expansions at the last election. I would love to see the documentation they relied on when making some of their election promises. There were no feasibility studies or costings done on those promises.

The ACT Liberals' road duplication promises could not be costed because the Liberals provided no detail. Of the Liberals' road promises, Treasury said:

Treasury notes no specific projects have been identified, and as such, Treasury is unable to confirm the reasonableness of capital costs to deliver particular projects.

There are other examples I could cite, but I think that this demonstrates both the depth of work that has been done and the available documents that the Liberals might like to consider.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (10.45): I would like firstly to thank Mr Smyth for bringing this motion before the Assembly today. It is an important motion. The Canberra Liberals believe very strongly that this is a bad budget for the reasons that Mr Smyth has laid down and that we should not be debating this next week. I would like to take this opportunity to commend Mr Smyth for his contribution throughout this budget debate. I think he has articulated the Liberal Party position extremely well. His insights and his experience on the estimates committee were of great value to me as the chair. He certainly has the respect of his colleagues and of the community at large.

Before I go to the substance of the issue, what we just heard from Mr Rattenbury was what we hear from Mr Rattenbury all the time, which is essentially a defence of the government. It is increasingly apparent that it is a nonsense that we have a cabinet minister who stands up and on every occasion simply pats the government on the back and uses the opportunity to give the Liberal Party a kick. It seems that on every piece of legislation, on every motion and on every portfolio, Mr Rattenbury basically stands up and says how wonderful the government is, and kicks the Liberals.

To be honest, I am pretty sick of it. I am not sure what purpose it serves in this Assembly. I am not sure what benefit it is providing to good governance or to the democratic process to have a cabinet minister who can, at will, speak on whatever portfolio he wants to try and create this illusion. The Greens did this a little bit in the last Assembly as well. Meredith Hunter or Shane Rattenbury would stand up and say, "We've considered it and, yes, the government's wonderful and the Liberals are bad." That was the sort of narrative that we heard constantly from Mr Rattenbury.

It does not really matter what the issue is; it comes to a point where we simply hear the same speech from the Greens minister of this government each time, commending the government for being wonderful and criticising the opposition. So it becomes apparent that there is really little point in Mr Rattenbury speaking to these motions and getting involved in the debate if he is simply echoing the government's position, which is what he is constantly doing. He is a member of the government, so why are we dealing all the time with this sort of secondary minister, the minister assisting the other ministers with a Green tinge? It is a nonsense. There is no independent thought coming forward from the Greens minister. It is simply the government line.

I go to the substance of what Mr Smyth is saying in his motion. There are a number of real concerns that the opposition has with this budget. Recommendation 3 of the estimates report states:

The Committee recommends that the Budget not be passed because of its lack of delivery, high levels of deficit and deceitful plan to massively increase commercial and residential rates.

If I go to debt, the government is trying to say that the debt is not an issue, but when we look at the debt and deficit and we see what government borrowings—which include those territory-owned corporations—have gone to, it is \$2.7 billion in 2012-13, nearly 70 per cent of the total budget, and by 2014-15 it is going up to \$3.5 billion. We know that the Labor Party and the Greens philosophically like debt. You can see with the federal budget that that is the way they operate. They seem to think that the more debt you have, the better you are doing. They will let generations to come pay for the largesse they have got.

Mr Barr interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Barr! This is not a place for conversation. Do that in the lobby.

MR HANSON: When it comes to deficit, the recommendation is:

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government address the underlying deficit as a matter of priority.

Although the government is talking about surpluses in the outyears—and anyone would have to be a very strong optimist to believe ever again in a Labor surplus—the reality is that the structural deficit is \$668 million over the budget. And that is, as I articulated yesterday, despite the fact that this government is getting massive amounts of revenue, an extra \$250 million a year, so that by the outyears the budget is going to be about a billion dollars bigger in terms of revenue than it is now. The government is spending an additional \$668 million on top of that.

It really seems that no matter how much money this government get, how much they squeeze and how much they tax, as Ted Quinlan, Andrew Barr's mentor, said, "Squeeze them till they bleed but not until they die. Get as much revenue as you can and then spend more than that. Keep spending."

Mr Barr: You weren't even in parliament with Ted Quinlan, for God's sake.

MR HANSON: No, I was off serving my country when you were a political adviser for a bunch of Labor ministers, weren't you? Are you disputing the fact that Mr Quinlan was one of your mates?

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Hanson! Address the chair.

MR HANSON: When you see the Quinlan tax review that Mr Barr commissioned, I think it is difficult for Mr Barr to argue that he does not listen to Mr Quinlan, when it was actually Mr Quinlan that devised the plan to triple rates. Mr Quinlan had a table in his tax review, the Quinlan report, that said, "This is how you're going to triple your rates, Andrew." He gave that to Mr Barr, Mr Barr has implemented that and he now says, "No, rates aren't tripling." But we know that they are, and I will get to that in due course.

With regard to the issue with ACTEW's water pricing, the committee recommended:

... that the Appropriation Bill debate not be brought on until such time as the Treasurer has presented an amended bill and relevant budget documents detailing the effect of the ICRC determination on the ACTEW Water dividend and balance sheet.

Mr Smyth has articulated the position well—that there is \$100 million or thereabouts that is missing, that the amount is going to be determined by ACTEW by the end of August but we are in a rush to debate this budget when there is no reason for that to happen because we have supply. But the government want to get that through because what they do not want to have to do, in this budget, is to accept that there is going to be a need for either increased borrowings to ratchet up the deficits or for cuts. We know that Katy Gallagher last night was talking about job cuts. This would equate to a couple of hundred nurses a year—or how many teachers? No wonder the government do not want to debate that. We think that we should. We think we should have the full picture of what this budget is before we actually are in a position to debate it.

When it comes to rates, as Mr Barr seems to be denying that he is mates with Ted Quinlan—despite the fact that Mr Quinlan does, I guess, the dirty work for Mr Barr—the tax reform that the government have brought in is going to triple rates. There is no question about it because you cannot do what they want to do, which is remove stamp duty and replace it with rates, without tripling them. It is a mathematical equation; it is quite simple.

The real question is: what is the time frame? The government are refusing to provide the modelling that would show what the time frame is. I assume that they have done it. But when we have asked about it repeatedly, Mr Barr said, "Go to Quinlan." So we went to the Quinlan report and it has a table that shows it is happening in 10 years. We said, "Well, it's 10 years; show us what it is. If it's not that, what is it, Mr Barr?" And he will not show us. So we then wait for the ACT budget to be handed down and it shows 10 per cent a year which, extrapolated, assuming there is no increase in land prices, shows a tripling in about 11 years.

So Mr Quinlan's report was slightly wrong. It is 11 years, not 10 years, based on what is in the budget. Then Mr Barr says, "No, that's not it either." We said, "What is it?" He said, "It's not Quinlan; it's not extrapolated in the budget." We repeatedly say, "What is the time frame? Show us it. Show us the analysis." And Mr Barr refuses to do so.

What he says is, "Sign off on this budget, debate this budget. Trust me. I'm not going to show you what the modelling says. I'm not going to present the facts. Trust me, despite all the available evidence." I think it is fair and reasonable for the opposition, who are being asked to sign off on, as Mr Barr says, the biggest tax reform in ACT history, to know what the truth is on behalf of the community, because the community are the people that pay the rates.

I commend Mr Smyth for this motion. It is an impossible position for us to be debating this budget next week when we simply do not know what the implications are of what we will be debating.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (10.55): I am pleased to rise in this debate to talk about the budget process and the committee process in particular. I will begin by referring to Mr Smyth's opening comments, particularly on the bipartisan committee report. I will reiterate what I said yesterday. It was certainly not a bipartisan committee report.

In regard to the particular quotes in the motion from the recommendations of the opposition's report, I will say that not only did the government members oppose those two recommendations but we tried to remove them from the report, to no avail, because Mr Smyth and Mr Hanson simply voted against our motion to remove them.

I was really intrigued by the new meaning of "abstaining". Mr Smyth appears to view the word "abstain" as "tacit support". If we look at the legal dictionary, it says, "To avoid, to cease, decline, desist, dispense with. See also abandon, defer, desist, discontinue." I do not see anywhere in the legal dictionary that "abstain" means "tacit support". So I put on the record again that we did not support the opposition members' report and we certainly did not support these two recommendations that are echoed in this motion today.

I will go to the budget itself. I refer to our report, and I will go to page 72 first, in regard to tax reform. It states:

On 17 June 2013 the Committee considered the following matters regarding tax reform:

- whether, and to what degree, ACT households would benefit from reforms to ACT taxes and charges ...
- a shift from relying on taxes such as stamp duty and insurance tax to a revenue raised from rates;
- the number of ACT residents affected by reductions in stamp duty, and broader implications for the ACT economy;

- changes to the First Home Owner Grant ...

There are certain other aspects there in regard to tax reform. Dr Bourke and I noted the work of the ACT government and in our recommendations recommended that the ACT Government be commended for its transformational tax reforms. We also noted that the changes to the tax system were welcomed by the community. That was reflected in evidence given on 17 June, and we have reflected that in our recommendations as well. So not only have we referred to the inquiry but we have provided the evidence that gives us the imprimatur to give that recommendation.

On the AAA credit rating, in our report we noted the work that we did in the committee, again on 17 June, looking at the ACT's AAA credit rating and the significance of high credit ratings for the health of the economy. We looked at the annual process in which Standard & Poor's reviews the ACT's credit rating, the implications of the credit rating for the ACT's ability to borrow funds and the cost of money, the level of debt carried by the ACT compared with other jurisdictions, and the borrowings by ACT entities.

Dr Bourke and I recommended that the ACT be commended for maintaining the ACT AAA credit rating. We noted also that there are rolling reviews of expenditure in cabinet's expenditure review committee, and we thought that was prudent.

These particular lines were reinforced by the independent reviewer from CIE. Mr Rattenbury has already referred to the CIE report, but I would like to talk to that as well. The summary of the report states:

The 2013-14 Budget seeks to reprioritise spending and smoothly bring the budget back into surplus in 2015-16 ...

Moderate but robust expenditure has been committed to stimulate the ACT economy in light of softening in economic fundamentals ...

Revenue expectations are strong.

Revenue is projected to increase by approximately 5.9 per cent in 2013-14 and an even stronger 6.7 per cent in 2014-15. In absolute terms, revenue is estimated to be \$4 237.3 million in 2013-14 compared with \$3 999.9 million in 2012-13.

The projected increases are driven by higher Commonwealth Government funding and own-source taxation revenue which together account for 73 per cent of revenue.

The CIE report continues:

Is the return to surplus achievable and reasonable?

The 2013-14 Budget indicates that a surplus will be achieved in 2015-16 ...

Tax reform delivers a positive change in revenue.

The taxation reform package delivers an overall increase in revenue of 4.8 per cent in 2013-14 and 7.1 per cent in 2014-15.

On the credit rating risk, the CIE report states:

The Net Worth to Revenue Ratio is expected to reduce over time to around 3.5 times revenue. This remains significantly above the minimum ratio required to maintain the AAA credit rating (292 per cent).

On the economic outlook for the ACT, the report says that the ACT economy has performed better than other “non-mining states” in 2012-13 and that a recovery in 2014-15 is foreseeable. So to say, as this motion does, that there is some lack of delivery and levels of deceit is simply a nonsense. I think the budget is a strong process. It is backed up by independent review and, of course, backed up by our very strong report when compared to the opposition members’ report. We will not be supporting Mr Smyth’s motion.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (11.02), in reply: I thank members opposite for, I guess, what is a predictable position. It is interesting when you start these debates. A very easy measure of the comfort level that the Treasurer is feeling is whether he can actually put a case or he just goes for personal attack. Straight out of the box, there was Mr Barr into the personal attack. You are the Treasurer. You have got all the officials to back you up. You should have all this studied. You should be able to put together a reasonable argument. But no, as per the script, Mr Barr went straight into the personal attack.

He has got his own personal mantra now that every credible economist is on his side. It must be hard to carry that burden. It must be hard to carry that burden of everybody on his shoulders.

Mr Barr interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Barr!

MR SMYTH: Everybody is on his shoulders. But I wonder if the credible economists have read Mr Barr’s documents against the promises he has made. According to Mr Barr, stamp duty is going. Yet in respect of the percentage of own source taxation that the government raises, conveyancing in 2013-14 represented 16.6 per cent; in 2014-15 it is 16.7 per cent; in 2015-16 it is 16.4 per cent; and 2016-17 it is 16.6 per cent. Conveyancing, as a percentage of the revenue, remains the same. He is not weaning himself off it at all.

Mr Barr interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

MR SMYTH: It is not weaning. The amount grows and the percentage stays the same. At the same time, I think Mr Rattenbury said, “We knew said rates were only going up five per cent.” Yet the budget documents, if you do the year on year, see the rates go up about 11 per cent per year. So rates go up, the take goes up, the percentage of conveyancing as a percentage of the total taxation of the government remains the

same. He is not weaning himself off conveyancing. Where will it come from? It is quite clear where it will come from. They will keep slugging the rates. What we have said is simply that we think tripling your rates is too high a bill to pay.

It is interesting that people are starting to quote CIE. Yes, CIE do a good job. But read the whole report. Selective quoting is pretty easy. The interesting thing that perhaps Mr Rattenbury does not know is that CIE offered to do some extra work for the committee. The three areas that were nominated were that we would look at risk issues associated with the capital metro, the ACT's debt position and public sector workforce numbers in the ACT.

Here was an opportunity to get a report from an independent source to assist the committee. But, of course, that was not allowed to go ahead because the members of the government on the committee did not want that data. They did not want the risk issues associated with capital metro to be explored at all. If you are so certain that this project works, what are you afraid of and why will you not table the documents?

In regard to the ACT's debt position, the proposition was that CIE would look at our debt to give us a better understanding of our exposure. But again, the members of the government did not want that data or detail or did not want the independent assessment. You have to ask yourself: why not? What are you afraid of? Then we asked about the workforce as well. They did not even want that. They did not want to know what was happening in the public sector in the ACT, perhaps because the Gillard-Rudd cuts had scared them so much.

It is well and good to quote the bits out of the CIE that suit you. But what the CIE report does is actually quote the similar numbers that are in the budget. It shows that the take on conveyancing remains at about 16.5 per cent of total own source taxation. So there you go. We are not weaning ourselves off it. Rates are going up. Rates are going up significantly. Yes, there have been some concessions at the lower end on stamp duty. But the take continues to be a consistent factor in this government's forward estimates. So it is deceitful to say that you are abolishing stamp duty when it does not decrease in the budget documents at all.

This is an important motion and it is a test. It is a test that clearly Mr Rattenbury fails. There was a lot of self-justification. He says that there are two different reports: one from the Liberal Party, one from the others. There is not. There is a committee report. The Select Committee on Estimates passed that report. It was a report that was passed by a committee that consisted of two Labor members and two Liberal members. It says: do not have this debate. The government members could have stopped that and they chose not to. So the report stands and the report that stands comes from a committee that is bipartisan in its constitution.

We have the other report, of course, that I think the *Canberra Times* very gently but very mockingly called the "Love letter to the government". "Here I am, Katy. Make me a minister. Here I am; I am on the backbench." We know that the Chief Minister does not want a sixth minister, because she looks at her backbench and she probably just shudders. She could have had anyone in the backbench now. We are certainly in favour of a larger ministry. We understand the pressures that are there. The Leader of

the Opposition, to his credit, has put a bill forward to allow that to happen. The only people standing in the way of a larger ministry are in fact the current ministers, who obviously do not want to vote for it—the select club that do not want any of the backbenchers in—and the backbench that do not have the guts to stand up for it.

Any of them could cross the chamber and get that up. Then there would be an option for the Chief Minister to have the additional member in her ministry. But I do not think the love letter technique works. I do not think 500 recommendations of “We love everything you do, every single thing you do; commend, commend, commend, commend, commend, commend, commend, commend!” works. It is certainly—

Mr Hanson: Five hundred and seventy-five.

MR SMYTH: Five hundred and seventy-five times. It will go down—even Mr Barr had a little bit of a slight chuckle—

Mr Hanson: You would have to say that it is the worst dissenting report ever, wouldn't you?

MR SMYTH: I am not sure it is a dissenting report. I am not sure what it dissents from. Mr Rattenbury says they have promised to give us all the detail. I think there was an old Shirley Bassey song, “Promises, promises, that's all you're good for”. We hear promises time and time again from the government, but they are never fulfilled. They are never fulfilled. They are never carried through. Mr Barr is going to check whether it is Shirley Bassey. He is worried now. He is there on the internet checking. I think it is a Shirley Bassey song.

Promises are well and good. But people remember what you did and all they know is that their rates are going up; all they know is that debt is going up; all they know is that we have got a government that is not more open and more accountable. The new era arrived. It was probably a cold dawn, that new era of openness and accountability. It has been frost-burdened ever since. Here is an opportunity to actually make a commitment—

Members interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hanson and Mr Barr, you are not having a conversation across the chamber.

MR SMYTH: Here is an opportunity to make these documents available. Here is an opportunity to say that you actually can prove what you believe, that you know what you are saying is true, and they are going to squib it. Yet again the Treasurer will squib it. He says, “Look, it is not material.” I think most people think that potentially \$100 million is a pretty large number, particularly when—

Mr Barr: It is not \$100 million, Brendan.

MR SMYTH: You know it is not \$100 million?

Mr Barr: It is not \$100 million.

MR SMYTH: Well, how much is it, Treasurer?

Mr Barr: It is two years between 20 and 25.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, do not encourage—

MR SMYTH: I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sorry.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Address your comments to me.

MR SMYTH: Again, here we have the shift in the story. Here we are. Here we are, except it is with different details again.

Mr Barr interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members! You have got just over two minutes to go, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: I will enjoy every second of it, Madam Deputy Speaker.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I would not waste your time having this conversation across the chamber, please.

MR SMYTH: Again, we are not being told by the Treasurer what the effect will be. People understand that millions of dollars is a large amount of money, particularly when they are paying more and more on their rates every year, particularly when the budget documents show that total rates will go up about 11 per cent per year, year on year over the three outyears. They understand what is happening. They know the cost of living. They know the real impacts. It is time that the Chief Minister kept her words in respect of their governing encompassing transparency, participation and collaboration.

There has been no collaboration. The public are not allowed to participate in the full debate because they are never given the detail and were certainly not encompassing transparency. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 9

Mr Coe

Ms Lawder

Mr Barr

Ms Gallagher

Mr Doszpot

Mr Smyth

Ms Berry

Mr Gentleman

Mrs Dunne

Mr Wall

Dr Bourke

Ms Porter

Mr Hanson

Ms Burch

Mr Rattenbury

Mrs Jones

Mr Corbell

Question so resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

Payroll Tax Amendment Bill 2013

Debate resumed from 5 June 2013, on motion by **Mr Smyth**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Rattenbury**) adjourned.

Health—mental health facilities

MS BERRY (Ginninderra) (11.16): I move:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the Government is committed to continuing to develop specialist mental health facilities and services, including a secure mental health facility in the ACT;
- (b) a number of reviews have been undertaken in relation to the proposed secure mental health facility, and these studies have confirmed the need for a medium/low security facility of 25 beds to meet current and future demand;
- (c) extensive site selection investigations have determined the former Quamby Youth Detention Centre site at Symonston as the most appropriate location for the secure mental health facility; and
- (d) design for the secure mental health facility has begun, and that the current timetable for commissioning of the facility is early 2017; and

(2) calls on the Assembly to:

- (a) confirm its support for a 25 bed medium/low security secure mental health facility to be constructed on the former Quamby site at Symonston;
- (b) agree that the secure mental health facility project should be fast-tracked to allow for delivery ahead of the early 2017 timetable currently planned;
- (c) agree to consider project specific legislation which would expedite the planning process and allow construction of the secure mental health facility to commence as soon as possible; and
- (d) agree that appropriate comprehensive community consultation continue throughout the project's design, implementation and delivery phases.

I think it is fair to say that everybody in the Assembly understands the gravity of this issue. Mental illness, whether diagnosed or undiagnosed, touches many people in our city, not just those who suffer directly but also their families, friends, loved ones and

carers. In the early days of the federal election campaign, mental health has once again emerged as a health issue that demands national attention, destigmatising and appropriate resourcing. It is an incredibly complex area for the ACT health system to respond to, but we are not a government that turns our back on people because we face a difficult and complex challenge. The ACT government's commitment to specialist mental health facilities and services is a long and continuing one. Now is the time to support our health care professionals and mental health patients alike with a secure mental health facility in the ACT.

I want to talk about the government's record on specialist mental health. The government has been active in the delivery of consumer-focused mental health services over many years. The delivery of services is planned around four developmental stages: older persons, adults, young people and children. Over time, new facilities have enabled the delivery of more services and new models of mental health care with a framework of integrated and coordinated care. A mental health assessment unit was opened in the Canberra Hospital in 2010 and provides a six-bed assessment and observation facility which is closely coordinated with the emergency department. It is a specialised and safe environment for people who present with an acute mental illness.

Also, in 2009 the adult step up, step down residential facility was opened and has since helped 161 people who have been discharged from the hospital with mental illness to readjust to living in the community. Just this year the youth step up, step down facility has been opened with capacity for six people requiring intensive support. In 2012 the adult mental health unit on the Canberra Hospital campus was opened and has since admitted more than 1,250 patients. The new building has enabled the delivery of a therapeutic model of care in a purpose-designed environment, and it has been an important step in the treatment of many vulnerable Canberrans.

Community mental health teams operate in people's homes and from community health centres in Phillip, Tuggeranong, Civic, Belconnen and the new Gungahlin Community Health Centre. Expanded facilities for mental health teams have been planned for the Belconnen and Tuggeranong community health centres that are currently under construction. In funding terms, the ACT government has committed more than \$55 million to mental health community service organisations between the 2008-09 and 2012-2013 financial years.

The government has also funded mental health initiatives targeted to: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth; gay, lesbian and bisexual people; refugees and newly arrived migrants. These facilities and services—thanks in particular to their committed staff—have served many patients incredibly well. But the diverse needs of the mental health arena demand that government keeps diversifying the range of care provided for our mental health system, which is why the ACT government is planning for new facilities that will come on line in coming years. These include incorporating adult mental health rehabilitation in the University of Canberra public hospital, improved services for older people, and new adolescent mental health services.

There is a need for a secure mental health facility in the ACT, and a vital part of the government's mental health planning goes to forensic and secure services. Once again,

we have a system and a dedicated set of health professionals who have professionally dealt with a great number of complex mental health issues over many years. Currently, secure mental health services can be provided at the Brian Hennessy Rehabilitation Centre, the Alexander Maconochie Centre and the adult mental health unit of the Canberra Hospital when it is clinically required. High secure and longer term medium secure inpatient services are provided in New South Wales.

The construction of a secure mental health facility in the ACT is the next element of the territory's mental health system, and it is a high government priority. The scope of the project has changed over the planning period as other facilities and services have been developed and the need for the secure mental health services has been better defined. Through considering advice, talking to experts, and analysing the capital costs and demand projections, the need to construct a medium secure mental health inpatient unit has become clearer.

Although a 15-bed high security facility was previously recommended, external reviews by New South Wales Health Infrastructure and Forensicare Victoria have led us to conclude that more beds at medium and low secure levels should be a priority. Therefore, the government will build a 25-bed medium and low secure facility in Symonston at the former Quamby Youth Detention Centre. The site, like the specifications, is a recommendation based on extensive investigations. It allows for a safe and secure facility close to the Canberra Hospital with a supportive environment that could not be achieved if the facility was located at the Alexander Maconochie Centre.

As both an outside observer and since becoming a member of the government, I have watched the public discussion play out around this facility. The rationale, the due diligence, the thorough analysis, and the careful budgeting for this project have been clear. It is with the knowledge of all this work that the government has decided to expedite the design and build of this facility. The tripartisan support which has emerged for this decision suggests that all parties feel the same way, and I hope this spirit continues through the life of the project.

Public consultation will continue to be a vital part of the design and planning process, and the community as well as key stakeholders will have a say in how the project progresses. Just the same, public advocacy from MLAs will help give the public and the mental health profession the confidence that this project is in the interests of all Canberrans. It will not demonise mental health patients and it will not threaten local neighbourhoods. What it will do is add a vital string to the bow of the ACT's mental health network and help tailor treatment to people with acute health needs.

Mental health advocates have often lamented our society's reluctance to discuss mental health. This project gives us a great opportunity not only to support some of the most vulnerable in our community and their families but also to lead a more compassionate and informed discussion on this public health issue that touches so many of our lives. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (11.24): I indicate at the outset that the Canberra Liberals support the thrust of this motion but I will move an

amendment which I think paints a more accurate reflection of why we do not have this facility in the ACT, why it has been delayed, why there is confusion and delay around this project and which makes it very clear who is responsible for that.

We support this facility; it has enjoyed bipartisan support. It is a missing piece of our mental health spectrum. There has been debate about the best location for this facility, but, yes, we support it. But the reality is that after eight years of it being promised we are really no further advanced to it being built. At this stage it is not going to be completed until May 2017, and that is just what is projected. Based on the way this project has been progressed, that is a very optimistic assessment. And that is 12 years after it was first promised by those opposite.

It was first proposed on 30 May 2005 by the then Chief Minister and the then Minister for Health, Simon Corbell. This was labelled as a new way forward for forensic mental health. The ACT Labor government announced at that point:

...the provision of facilities for the secure detention, treatment, and care of offenders and alleged offenders, including a secure facility located at the Canberra Hospital for short and medium-term care ...

So that was in 2005. Then it took a couple of years before we actually saw any funding for that. An amount of \$1.2 million was allocated for the design and planning of the facility in the 2007-08 budget. The 2008-09 budget provided \$11.6 million in capital funding and said it would be completed in September 2010. So it is about three years ago that this thing was meant to be built and operational. At that stage the government said:

This provides for the construction of a 15 bed Secure Mental Health Unit at The Canberra Hospital. The unit will provide a new service accommodating patients requiring short-to-medium-term treatment and placement in a secure facility.

At the 2008 election the ACT Labor Party went forward and promised \$17.4 million to provide a secure mental health unit. At this stage the government had been talking about it for three years with nothing being done. The announcement was:

This funding will provide for the running of a secure mental health facility from mid 2011.

So there you go with the first delay in terms of when this was going to be projected. So it was going to be up and operational two years ago, so it was already subject to some significant delay.

The government then revealed in 2009 after the election that the facility would be delayed because there was not enough space to co-locate the 15-bed secure unit at the Canberra Hospital site because they got the planning wrong. In the 2011 budget the funding for the facility was removed, so the minister made the decision to take out of the budget as a projected saving the \$11.6 million that had been increased to \$17 million with the government stating in answer to a question on notice that the project had been put on hold for further analysis. Essentially, that was due to a cost blowout—they got it wrong. They got it wrong when they said that it would go to the

Canberra Hospital and then they got it wrong when they looked at the site at Quamby and, for various reasons, it had gone from the \$11.6 million to \$30-odd million. The price of this project had tripled to \$30 million for a 15-bed facility. The government decided at that stage to take it away, and that was the minister's decision.

Then after allocating \$3.2 million for the design of the facility in the 2012-13 budget, the Labor Party promised a 15-bed secure mental health facility at the 2012 election. There was an announcement back in 2005. They took it to the 2008 election. They took it to the 2012 election, and the policy stated:

This new operational funding, follows a commitment by ACT Labor to build a new 15-bed secure mental health facility. Design is currently underway for the facility with a preferred location to be at the former Quamby site and this design work is expected to be finalised by next year. It is anticipated that the new facility will be opened in 2016.

So at the last election in 2012, based on what was first promised, a six-year delay was anticipated. But between the election and April 2013 the plans and the budget changed again and a new proposal was put forward. The new proposal, which is the current proposal as I understand it, is for a 25-bed facility at a cost of \$24.6 million to be completed in 2017. So the current plan for 2017 represents a seven-year delay on what was first promised. This means it is a promise that has been made at three elections without ever being delivered—the 2008 election, the 2012 election and the 2016 election, and that is the best case.

Given the project has been subject to delay every step along this process, I think it would be very bold to lock ourselves into that 2017 figure. Based on the way the government is delivering this project, a more realistic assessment would probably be in 2021 after yet another election.

The new model encompasses 25 beds, of which 15 beds are medium security and 10 are low security, rather than the 15 high security beds as originally proposed. We will continue to look in to this project, but I think that that is, on the surface, a better way to deliver this project. It is probably going to meet a greater demand of need within our community. Regardless, based on what the government is currently offering, that is 12 years, at best case, for this facility to be operational since it was first promised by Simon Corbell and Jon Stanhope.

Not only has it taken eight years for the government to stop dragging their feet, it has taken a number of serious incidents. We have raised this issue repeatedly in this chamber—and Mr Smyth before me—and in other forums. But it seems it is only after a number of serious incidents have occurred that it will progress. We have seen a very unfortunate death in custody at the AMC and a disturbing number of assaults on nurses at the mental health unit at the Canberra Hospital. The *Canberra Times* has been following this issue and they should be commended for some of the work they have done in highlighting it in our community. The Public Advocate has also renewed calls for some action to be taken.

It is really only after it was highlighted in the media and the government was facing media pressure and after the very disturbing case of the death in custody at the AMC

that the government realised, “We’d better do something about this. This dragging our feet, this constant delay, the meandering between various budget amounts and various models is unsatisfactory.” I think it is fair to say we have been saying that for some time.

It is not unusual that this sort of situation occurs with an infrastructure project with this government. Mr Smyth in the previous motion outlined some of the delays and the cost blowouts we have seen from Minister Corbell, but we have also seen it in health. The Canberra Hospital car park went from an initial proposal of \$20 million to \$40-odd million, a \$13.5 million blowout, and it was 18 months late. We also have the bush healing farm, which is still not anywhere to be seen seven years after it was promised, and the Gungahlin health centre was 20 months late. In this budget alone there is more than \$100 million dollars of project rollovers and reprofiling in health infrastructure. This is a very public project; it has been subject to some scrutiny by the media, but this is just a drop in the ocean of the \$100 million of delay that we have seen.

The point we need to remember, though, is that this is not just about the dollars; this is not just about delays in infrastructure. We need to remember the impact on people. Ms Berry made some good points about the concerns we all have for people facing a mental illness. Ultimately, they are the losers. The people with those mental illnesses are the people who have been the losers for the last eight years while this government has dragged its feet.

It has become apparent that people working within our health system who have to treat people with mental illnesses in inappropriate facilities are also losers. I do not know if it is the case, but it is quite feasible that a number of the assaults on our nurses have occurred because people who should have been in a secure facility that was promised years ago were being treated in a facility that was inappropriate. So there are real impacts on lives as a result of this delay. It is not just the dollars; it is not just the bricks and mortar; it is the patients, the nurses and the staff at the AMC who have to deal with the consequences of this government's delay.

Because of the embarrassment in the media, we now have this desire from the minister to push this project through and the call for it to be fast tracked. And we support that. I have raised some issues with the Quamby site. I am not convinced the government has done the necessary work to look at other sites. The minister may assure us that she has, but, as I say, I am not convinced of that. But what is clear is that the government is locked into the Quamby site. The opposition is now in a position where we have a choice to either support the secure facility at Quamby or not, because it is the only option on the table. Given that is the option, we will support it.

In terms of what fast tracking means and agreement to consider legislation, we will wait to see that. There are some caveats around the motion moved by Ms Berry to make sure the community gets the appropriate amount of consultation, but we will, essentially, offer in-principle support for the intent of what the minister is trying to achieve. But the opposition reserves the right to make amendments to the legislation after we see it and if there are significant or minor problems with it to make sure it is appropriate legislation.

My amendment has been circulated, and I now move:

Omit all words after “notes”, substitute:

- “(a) that the ACT Government first promised a Secure Mental Health Facility in 2005;
 - (b) that, at the 2008 election, the ACT Government promised \$17.4 million to deliver a Secure Mental Health Facility by 2011;
 - (c) that, in the 2011-2012 Budget, the Health Minister removed funding for a Secure Mental Health Facility;
 - (d) that, at the 2012 election, the ACT Labor Party again promised a Secure Mental Health Facility;
 - (e) that, to date, no construction has progressed on a Secure Mental Health Facility;
 - (f) that, based on current plans, a Secure Mental Health Facility will not be built until after the 2016 election;
 - (g) that there have been numerous assaults on nurses at the Adult Mental Health Unit at The Canberra Hospital and a death in custody at the Alexander Maconochie Centre; and
 - (h) that the Government is ‘locked into’ the Quamby site for the facility; and
- (2) calls on the Assembly to:
- (a) agree that the Secure Mental Health Facility project should be fast-tracked to allow for delivery ahead of the early 2017 timetable currently planned;
 - (b) confirm its support for a 25 bed medium/low security secure mental health facility to be constructed on the former Quamby site at Symonston;
 - (c) agree to consider project specific legislation which would expedite the planning process and allow construction of the Secure Mental Health Facility to commence as soon as possible;
 - (d) agree that appropriate comprehensive community consultation continue throughout the project’s design, implementation and delivery phases; and
 - (e) condemn the Health Minister for her failure to deliver the facility as promised.”.

My amendment condemns the minister because, ultimately, somebody has to be responsible. We cannot have the situation where such a fiasco, such delay and such impact on those who are mentally ill and our staff can occur without somebody being responsible, and it needs to be the minister. This is about the point about Westminster government—it needs the minister to stand up and say, “Yes, I’ll cop it,” instead of

trying to blame health officials. I want the minister to stand up in this place, acknowledge the mistakes, say, “Yes, we’ve stuffed it up. We’re going to fix it up but we’ve stuffed it up,” and to accept responsibility.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Health and Minister for Higher Education) (11.40): I think that is about the best we are going to get with respect to bipartisan or tripartisan support for the secure mental health facility. Can I begin by thanking Ms Berry for bringing the motion to the Assembly, and indicate from the outset that the government will not be supporting the amendment moved by Mr Hanson. I think it has been written in a particular way that ensures that the government would not be in a position to support it. I think that is unfortunate considering the opportunity we had here, despite the stump speech that we knew would be given by Mr Hanson, to actually do something good together, as a 17-member Assembly, about what will be and what are, in other jurisdictions, often controversial projects.

From my point of view, having regard to the decision I have taken along the way, I will stand here and take responsibility for the fact that there is no secure mental health unit operating in Canberra at the medium level. I did not hear a lot from Mr Hanson about Brian Hennessy House. Of course he would be aware that there are secure beds in that facility. I do not think he is probably aware of it due to the lack of interest he has shown in the area of mental health—unless issues are raised in the *Canberra Times*, in which case he becomes incredibly interested in them.

I think we need to get a realistic grip on the fact that there are extensive forensic mental health services operating across the ACT. There are secure mental health beds operating across the ACT. In the adult mental health unit, there are high dependency beds which allow for an extra level of security in that facility. In this budget, the budget which Mr Hanson has been arguing should not be passed, there are extra funds going in to enhance forensic mental health services here in the ACT. The services provided to people are often more critical to their treatment and care than the place where that care and treatment is provided.

Yes, I am guilty of enhancing forensic mental health services during my time as minister. Yes, I have built and taken responsibility for the adult mental health unit, the mental health assessment unit and the plethora of step up, step down and community facilities that I have ensured are funded in the ACT, because not everything relates to one building. Indeed, in a report released yesterday, the ACT was acknowledged for the gains that we have made in the last two terms of government in building the mental health service system across this city—an independent, rational look at what has happened.

We do not have a secure facility yet. We do not have a secure facility for a lot of reasons that Mr Hanson has decided, for want of political convenience, to overlook. For example, there was the very significant push that was provided to me when I first became health minister by consumers not wanting a co-located facility. So it was not poor planning. The secure unit could have fitted on the Canberra Hospital site. Yes, it would have meant that the adult mental health unit’s outdoor area would have had to have been smaller, and that could have compromised the quality of the amenity

associated with that facility. But it was not poor planning. The secure unit could have gone there, but I did what I am elected to do, and that is listen to stakeholders and constituents about what they wanted. They did not want a co-located facility. I listened to them and, in the end, after taking a lot of advice, I agreed with them, and that changed the project.

With respect to the costings, Mr Hanson has criticised the \$11 million. The costing when it was co-located was \$11 million. The government then undertook a very extensive site selection process, which was tabled—all relevant information—probably four years ago. Mr Hanson has not had a word to say about it. So he comes in here and says, “I’m not sure if Quamby is the right site. I haven’t had time to make up my views, and now the government is locked into it. So we’re just going to have to go along with it.” What a load of rubbish. That report was tabled. There were consultation processes available and open to everybody, and there was not one word from the Liberal Party.

If I go back and look at the election commitments from the Canberra Liberals, there was not one election commitment about a secure facility. This is how big a priority this is. There is no—

Mr Hanson: I thought it was going to be built.

MS GALLAGHER: You went to the last election without a commitment to a secure mental health facility. Not there; did not factor; did not raise it; did not have an idea about it; had no view about it; and now comes in and criticises. Your policy presumably in 2012 was developed about what the next four years would require should you be in government. There was no mention of a secure unit; did not care.

When I look at the way this project has developed—and it has changed over time—and I listen to the criticisms of Mr Hanson, he criticises the fact that projects are not scoped properly. He then criticises me for seeking to make sure it is scoped properly and within budget. He then criticises me for returning \$11 million to the budget because it is clear it is not going to fund the project. He complains about the potential for budget overruns, and then complains when I seek to make sure that the budget is costed appropriately. He then complains about the delays regarding the reviews, yet he endorses what the reviews find. So he says, “You shouldn’t have taken all this time, it was too long. But actually no; you know what? You’re right. You shouldn’t be building a 15-bed unit; you should be building a 25 medium secure facility.”

So going on his logic, we should have just built the unit for 15 beds at the Canberra Hospital site, despite the concerns of consumers and despite the fact it would not deliver what our city needed. We have had one high secure mental health patient in the last five years. So it makes incredible sense for us to have reviewed that in line with new services that are open in New South Wales, in light of how the jail is operating and indeed how the adult mental health unit is operating.

Yes, I am guilty of taking my time to get this project right, but this project is for the next 40 to 50 years. Yes, we could have built, on that timetable, a 15-bed high secure facility at the Canberra Hospital site. But do you know what? When this facility is

built, health ministers, and, I believe, the mental health service system, will appreciate the fact that we have got it right. It will be an incredibly hard service to run; it will be an incredibly hard service to staff. We do not have the staff available to staff that. We will have to train our own staff because of how hard it is to get people into these positions.

There is a whole lot more work that will need to happen as we build infrastructure to provide this capacity. It is the final missing piece in the service system across the mental health system here. And we will get it right. A 25-bed medium secure facility at the Quamby site, with a revised budget, is the right way to go, and it will last this community into the future.

I note Mr Hanson listed concerns around reports of violence in the adult mental health unit and incidents at the jail occurring because we do not have this. I would caution against that. The adult mental health unit will always be a place where staff are going to have to manage at times aggressive and unstable people, regardless of whether there is a 25-bed medium secure facility over the hill, and the jail will have to manage people. So I do not think it is fair to link incidents, and it is not helpful, because when this service actually establishes it should not and will not be a dumping ground for people who are inappropriately placed there. It cannot and should not. We need to be clear about that from the beginning of this project.

In terms of project-specific legislation, there are further discussions that need to be had about the type of response or how we approach that—whether project-specific legislation is most appropriate, whether we should look at the model that was followed under building the education revolution, whether there are other ways to have a reduced timetable for the delivery of this project.

I am very hopeful now that if everything lines up, this service can be operational in 2016, but there is some more work to do, not least of all in attracting and retaining staff who are suitably qualified for a facility like this. I cannot underline how difficult that is going to be, and the money that will have to go into doing that over the next few years.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (11.50): I thank Ms Berry for bringing this motion before the Assembly today. The issue of appropriate care for people with mental health concerns has long been at the forefront of the concerns of the ACT Greens. My former colleague Amanda Bresnan was a staunch supporter of the need for increased funding, evidence-based practice and the vital role that community service providers can play in providing the best response to what is an increasingly large and complex issue.

This passion for caring for vulnerable people led to near-record expenditure on mental health in the term of the last Assembly, and informs the relevant items in the current parliamentary agreement between Labor and the ACT Greens. Item 5.4 calls for \$35 million in new funding to mental health related services over the term of the Assembly, including specifically the construction of a secure adult mental health unit.

Certainly, I was pleased at the time of the negotiations that the Chief Minister was personally committed to this facility being designed and built, and that there is a shared understanding amongst all members of the Assembly, and across the parties, that this is an essential component of our overall mental health system. So the recognition that this is a facility that is needed in the ACT is in the parliamentary agreement. There was a shared agreement there between the ALP and the Greens that it needed to go ahead. With the debate in the Assembly today, again there is that shared recognition that this is a facility that Canberra needs and that the vulnerable members of our city need.

I do not believe I need to spend too much time on outlining the case for the facility. As Ms Berry's motion indicates, there have been a number of reviews undertaken in relation to the proposed secure mental health facility. While there may have been some early discussion around the exact scope and make-up of the security rating, to my knowledge there have not been any dissenting views about the actual need for such a facility.

Stakeholders and advocates from the justice system, mental health consumer groups, medical practitioners and carers of those with mental health concerns have all supported the need for such a facility. So today we are really being asked to consider not the need, but the where and when of its development.

Let us look at the "where". The location of such a facility will always be open to some debate and criticism, and that is true in all jurisdictions. I know that there has already been some consternation expressed by a business that operates in the area of the proposed facility, and I understand that senior ACT Health Directorate officials are actively engaged in ongoing discussion with them about the design and the specific concerns they may have.

Suffice to say, the government must always have a sophisticated discussion on the costs, the needs of staff, the local community, the issues of security and proximity to allied health or justice institutions, and environmental impacts, in line with a triple bottom line philosophy.

It is my understanding that, for many of the reasons outlined above, the former Quamby site in Symonston best suits the needs of the day and the needs of the government. As a former secure facility located in proximity to the Canberra Hospital, and alongside another operational secure facility in the periodic detention centre, you can see why it makes sense that that location is considered suitable. With minimal residences in the immediate area, this site provides the best option for adaptive reuse and value for money.

Let me turn to the "when". The motion calls on the Assembly to agree that the secure mental health facility project should be fast-tracked to allow for delivery ahead of the early 2017 timetable currently being proposed. For all the reasons I have already outlined, I do genuinely believe that the need is apparent enough to convince us all that it should be built without delay.

However, I make no bones about believing in genuine community engagement and consultation on new developments, and I stand by my comments that the frequent use of call-in powers in the ACT can at times detract from that engagement. That is why I believe that the drafting and debating of project-specific legislation is a better approach. In having project-specific legislation, there is a level of transparency about the fast-tracking that I think the community deserves.

Some might argue that having to draft specific legislation is a cumbersome way to speed a project up, and in some regards it is. But that points to the fact that this should be the exception rather than the rule. I believe that having project-specific legislation offers much better transparency than a call-in, because the Assembly will need to specifically consider the merits of shortening the process and weigh up all of the considerations for the community.

Of course, this sort of fast-tracking does not mean that community consultation should be completely excluded. Such legislation can be designed to allow community input, and also the efforts and attitude of government to taking on board perspectives from the public are as important as the text of the legislation. One can have all the written rules in the world but the spirit in which discussion takes place with the community in some ways is almost as important, and the willingness to take on board the comments and the concerns that can be reasonably addressed is something that any government must go into such a process with.

Project-specific legislation should not be about excluding public views, but rather providing for a definitive time frame. I note that in Ms Berry's motion there is specific reference to this. The motion states that the Assembly agrees that appropriate, comprehensive community consultation continue throughout the project's design, implementation and delivery phases. I think that is particularly important in the context of considering project-specific legislation.

With those few remarks, I simply underline my support and recognition of the necessity of this project and the need for it to be made available as soon as practicable. I underline, particularly in my capacity as the Minister for Corrections, the acknowledgement of the need for this kind of facility to provide us with the full spectrum of care for people in the ACT. On that basis I will be supporting the motion that Ms Berry has moved today.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra) (11.57): I thank all members for their participation in this debate, and I recognise that whilst all sides may have differing views on the way that the government should respond to an issue like mental health, we are all committed to providing support for those who suffer mental health illness and finding ways to reduce the rates of mental health issues in our community.

Mr Hanson's speech today and his public comments over several years have shown that he understands the need for quality mental health care. Today I thought that the mythological creature, the nice Jeremy, was going to come out. But straight after that "I support this", there is, in huge capital letters, a "BUT". What he has shown today is

that he does not yet understand the responsibility that comes with government to ensure that complex issues are responded to in considered ways. Designing a mental health system that meets the needs of patients takes time.

Anyone who has a friend or family member suffering mental illness knows that a person's condition changes rapidly and their support requirements can move from subacute to crisis in a matter of days. Mr Hanson talks about this motion as if the secure mental health facility in the ACT is the only thing that the ACT government is doing to address mental health issues in the ACT, and it is simply not true.

Mr Hanson: No, I did not. What you are saying is not true. That is not what I said.

MS BERRY: In Mr Hanson's speech he indicated that the ACT government is doing nothing, is sitting on its butt and is not doing anything to address the very serious and very complex issues that people in our community—

Mr Hanson: That is not true.

MS BERRY: Well, you have just said it, Mr Hanson. But the ACT government has been doing much more than that. In 2010 a mental health assessment unit was opened. In 2009 there was the adult step-up, step-down residential facility. Just this year there was the youth step-up, step-down facility. In 2012 there was the adult mental health unit at the Canberra Hospital campus and the community mental health teams.

In terms of funding, as I said before, the ACT government has committed more than \$55 million to mental health community service organisations between the 2008-09 and 2012-13 financial years—the time frame that Mr Hanson was referring to in which the ACT government was doing nothing.

Having seen the impact of good, integrated and flexible care in the lives of friends and family with mental health issues, I am proud to be part of a government that has taken its time to make sure that the responses we offer meet the needs of the vulnerable community members who access it. As the Chief Minister said in her speech, as a government we have been building and strengthening our mental health system, both by providing services particularly in subacute care and by ensuring that the infrastructure we invest in will provide the right foundations for those programs over time.

As I said earlier, the construction of a mental health facility in the ACT is the next important part of the territory's mental health system. I am pleased that the Assembly has ensured that the government can expedite its construction and treat it like the priority that it is. I will not be supporting the amendment and I commend the original motion to the Assembly.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 9

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

Question so resolved in the negative.

Motion agreed to.

Waste—resource management centres

MR WALL (Brindabella) (12.05):

(1) notes:

- (a) small and medium businesses are an integral part of the ACT economy;
- (b) cash flow is critically important for the sustainability of small and medium businesses; and
- (c) the impact on small and medium businesses as a result of the suspension of approvals for credit accounts at ACT Resource Management Centres; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to immediately recommence approvals for credit accounts at ACT Resource Management Centres for applicants who meet the appropriate criteria.

The current ACT Labor government has failed to make the ACT an attractive proposition for anyone who has started up, or plans to start up, a small business. Despite the rhetoric, they have failed to improve the way it interacts with business at all levels. It is because of the inconsistencies and the way that each member of the current government views, interacts and deals with businesses, particularly small businesses, that I bring this motion to this place today.

The issue that was brought to my attention, which prompted this motion today, is by all accounts a pretty small one. In fact, however, it highlights how what is seemingly a small decision by government has a huge impact on the way businesses may operate. The ACT business landscape is made up predominantly of small businesses. According to the Canberra Business Council, 55 per cent of small businesses here in

the ACT are operated by a sole trader. A further 35 per cent employ between one and 19 people. The survival rate for small businesses here in the ACT is also something that should be noted with great alarm.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics indicates that 40 per cent of operating businesses do not survive after four years. For the ACT these statistics are dire and trending downwards. We now have the worst survival rate in the entire country and recent data tells us that only 57 per cent of small businesses in the ACT will survive after four years. This is down from 83 per cent in 2008. In other words, if you are brave enough to start up a small business in the ACT you may as well toss a coin to judge if you will still be in business in four years' time. The odds are that bad.

For quite some time I have sat here and heard Andrew Barr claim to be the best friend of local business. He claims to be improving the way the government relates to and interacts with the business community. We also hear his sermons as he claims to be the great reformer, reducing red tape and lifting the burdens on small businesses. However, in the background, and contrary to this rhetoric, his cabinet colleague Mr Rattenbury has taken the decision to remove a convenience that has long been in practice and operating well by all accounts. Perhaps this is not one government after all.

The Chief Minister also used words at a Tuggeranong Community Council meeting earlier this year, when trying to allay concerns by a resident about connectivity and communication between directorates and ministers in her government, similar to the effect of, "We are not always one government".

Madam Speaker, I bring this motion here today on behalf of small and medium business operators across the ACT who are sick and tired of the hurdles placed in their way by this government. It is legitimate and prudent financial management to ensure that credit is not offered to all and sundry and that proper risk assessments must be carried out. This is a fact also accepted by the business community.

In the particular situation that prompted my motion today, a new policy approach taken by the TAMS directorate has become evident. Betta Bins is a small family-owned business that has been operating in the ACT for a number of years. The business disposes of a significant amount of waste from building, commercial and domestic sites. Skip bins obviously need to be transported by a truck to the tip several times a day. This business has recently changed hands and is now a father-son operation that hopes to grow and employ many local staff over time.

For convenience and cash flow stability—most importantly convenience—Betta Bins applied to ACT NoWaste to open an account for use of the Mugga Lane waste resource management facility. The account was not approved on the grounds that the business had not provided sufficient trade history under the current ownership, a fact that the owners happily accepted.

Given that the proprietor of Betta Bins also operates a building company that has been in business in the ACT for over 30 years he then attempted to open an account under his building business name, which has an extensive trading history. But to his absolute

dismay this account also was not approved. This time the explanation was, “It is no longer financially viable to provide this service.” It is at this point that Betta Bins approached my office seeking clarification. Mr Rattenbury, in his response to my representations confirmed, and I quote:

... from late April 2013, the Territory Municipal Services Directorate has suspended the approval of credit accounts for disposal of waste at its Resource Management Centres across the ACT. This decision has been taken due to the number of companies that have entered into liquidation in recent times, resulting in the Territory incurring unrecoverable debts. In addition, a recent review of the landfill credit accounts identified repeated delinquent accounts. Consequently, to limit the Territory’s exposure to potential liabilities for bad debts, new applications for credit facilities have been suspended.

This statement highlights the hypocrisy of this government. This illustrates that this government simply wants to have its cake and eat it too. The government claims that the service has been scrapped as a result of an increase in business failures in the ACT. As a result, it is employing a heavy-handed approach to all new applicants, a heavy-handed approach to everyone because it has not properly managed the risk portfolio of its current account holders. There are steps that the government should be taking to minimise their risk exposure to the failing businesses, but it has instead decided to punish the entire business sector alike.

Providing account services in the circumstances outlined in my motion benefits not only the small business sector but also offers efficiencies for the government. For the business that I have highlighted here today, it offers flexibility in their cash flow, an important aspect for any business, particularly in an uncertain economic climate. It offers businesses security, in so far as they do not need to provide their truck drivers with cash or a credit card in order to use the tip facilities.

For government there are also significant benefits. An account system provides data relating to how many businesses are delivering refuse to the tip and the volumes of waste that are being dumped. It also provides security at the waste management sites by having less cash on hand and ensures that there is no temptation for tills to be skimmed.

Madam Speaker, I mentioned earlier that this is a case of the government wanting to have its cake and eat it too. On one hand, we have TAMS demanding cash up-front at the tip. Yet on the other hand the government only operates on an invoicing basis for goods and services it receives. The government demands that local businesses extend and absorb the credit risk in providing services to governments, yet the same courtesy is not being extended in return.

Perhaps there is a solid case for the business sector to start demanding cash payment up-front from the government. In a question taken on notice during the estimates hearings, the Treasurer has revealed to me that currently there are 173 invoices that are over 30 days. That is, they are late. These invoices amount to over \$470,000 and on average these invoices are 101.7 days late. In fact, some of them are as late as 355 days. With that sort of uncertainty, it is impossible to do business.

This is a damaging set of figures and is of significant concern to the business sector. Tardiness such as this erodes confidence and breaks small businesses. The government is failing to lead by example and refuses to extend the same courtesy to the business community as it demands in return.

Failing to recommence approvals for credit accounts at ACT resource management centres for applicants who meet appropriate criteria will place increased pressure on not only the business highlighted by me today, but many other small businesses across the territory. If the government fails to reinstate this service it will highlight their ability to only pay lip-service to these important issues, but an absolute inability to take solid action when given the opportunity.

If it becomes too difficult to access services, I can only speculate in turn that this may result in an increase in illegal dumping within our community, simply because it is too hard to access tip services, an issue that Mr Rattenbury should be concerned about. I therefore urge all members of this Assembly to support the motion, and small business in doing so.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Housing, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and Minister for Ageing) (12.13): I actually thank Mr Wall for raising this issue today because I think it is a good opportunity to discuss this matter. I do believe that small and medium businesses are critical to the ACT economy and, of course, ensuring that these businesses are viable is essential. Certainly from the Greens' perspective, over many years we have actively advocated the case of small business and medium business and see them as a real driver of the economy in the territory, in some cases actually often much more so than large business. Mr Wall has already taken the opportunity to reflect on Mr Barr's views on this matter on behalf of the Labor Party and I think he has done that admirably.

Certainly a key number of small and medium businesses are vital in meeting the government's recycling targets. The government has clear waste reduction and recycling targets but these cannot be achieved by government alone. The work on the ground is frequently done by Canberra residents, with their individual efforts, whether it is through using the recycling bin at home or making trips to the tip or down to the various recycling drop-off points in town centres and other places, but also it is supported by businesses which run the many and varied waste and recycling businesses in the city.

Fundamental to the viability of these businesses is the capability to maintain cash flow, which is equally important to both business and, I might say, government. In recent times, the ACT government has experienced increased levels of account delinquency through ACT NOWaste, resulting from businesses apparently managing their cash flow by creating large, unpaid and overdue accounts with the ACT government.

I would like to take the opportunity to clarify the situation here. Mr Wall has gone through in some detail a specific situation, but I think it is important that I also outline the broader context, because this motion makes it come across as though ACT

NOWaste has cancelled all credit accounts, which is in fact not the case. Over 500 customers continue to be allowed to access credit accounts for use of ACT NOWaste facilities. This means that these customers use the services and at the end of the month ACT NOWaste issues an invoice and the customer has 30 days to pay it.

At the end of the 2012 financial year, unpaid and overdue debts had risen to over \$4.5 million, with normal recovery actions, the suspension of accounts and proactive action to establish repayment plans having had little impact on their recovery. Today, 44 per cent, or 186 of the 420 active accounts, are in arrears, with over \$2 million overdue. As a result, ACT NOWaste has suspended the establishment of new credit accounts, to assess the significant risk and liability exposure of the ACT government.

Over the past 18 months, the government has devoted considerable resources to identifying, managing and collecting overdue accounts, including appointment of additional dedicated debt recovery staff. The direct cost of these additional debt recovery resources has been over \$100,000, excluding the not inconsiderable debt recovery charge, up to 20 per cent, on amounts referred to a debt collection agency.

I do note that in an online interview with Mr Tony Ozanne, Mr Wall stated:

A trend that we and many other businesses are experiencing is the increased challenge of collecting payment for services rendered. Keeping on top of this is often time consuming but it is essential to maintain cash flow.

It is precisely these difficulties and the time consuming nature of this collection of payments for services that Mr Wall outlined in his interview that have rendered it necessary for ACT NOWaste to insist on immediate payment for services where an account is too small to justify a credit account or where the time spent collecting overdue payments becomes excessive.

Despite the endeavours that the government has undertaken to manage this, it has been required to write off in excess of \$300,000 in debts, enter into payment plans for the recovery of over \$200,000 and, for delinquent accounts, both bar the account and refer the outstanding debts of over \$800,000 to a debt collection agency. I must emphasise that no customer account has been barred where a customer has maintained a satisfactory payment history.

The suspension of new accounts is to enable ACT NOWaste to review the risk to and liability exposure of the territory. This review will include an assessment of the activity level required to make it cost effective to maintain accounts. This review will be completed by the end of September 2013, with a customer consultation process to follow in October.

Many existing NOWaste customers use cash, EFTPOS and credit cards to manage their cash flow at ACT resource management centres. I continue to support small and medium businesses. However, it does not serve the greater community well if the government is required to increase waste disposal fees and charges to fund bad debts and business cash flow. The review will include a robust analysis of existing account performance trends, as well as government risk and exposure, and recommend a way forward that protects the interests of all parties.

Thus, while I commend Mr Wall's interest in supporting small and medium businesses, I also imagine that Mr Wall would support the examination of the viability of credit lines and of the government ensuring that it actually gets paid for the services that it is providing.

I have prepared an amendment which reflects the work that ACT NOWaste is doing in this area and I now move that amendment:

Omit all words after paragraph (1)(b), substitute:

- “(c) that over 500 customers continue to be allowed access to credit accounts for use of ACT NoWaste facilities;
- (d) that 44% of the 420 active accounts are currently in arrears with over \$2 million overdue;
- (e) that, as a result, ACT NoWaste has suspended the establishment of new credit accounts to assess the significant risk and liability exposure of the ACT Government; and
- (f) that ACT NoWaste is assessing the activity level required to make it cost effective to maintain accounts. This review will be completed by the end of September 2013, with a customer consultation process to follow in October.”.

Let me conclude by simply saying that what the amendment does is outline a number of the facts that I have spelled out today, including the fact that the government is reviewing this system. I think that the TAMS Directorate has found itself in a difficult position where if we were not taking serious action, I suspect that either the estimates committee or through question time I would be being rightly scrutinised in this place as to why the agency was not managing the considerable non-payment of funds owed to it. TAMS has had to take the action because, as you can see from the details I have outlined today, despite considerable efforts to work with business to resolve this situation, TAMS cannot sustain the sorts of patterns that we are seeing.

I do find it very distressing and somewhat concerning that Mr Wall would go so far as suggesting, because somebody now has to turn up with cash or a credit card or EFTPOS, the possible alternative is illegal dumping. Frankly, any business in this town that has that sort of attitude is not necessarily a business we really want in this town. That is not a community-minded approach to running a business. Businesses also have a social responsibility. Government have not barred them from accessing the site. They have simply said, “You need to turn up with a credit card.” Plenty of businesses run with corporate credit cards. I think that sort of suggestion, that sort of insinuation—

Mr Wall: You do not know small business, do you, Shane?

MR RATTENBURY: What, you do not have a credit card?

Mr Wall: I ran a business for 20 years, no credit card.

MR RATTENBURY: That is very old school of you, Mr Wall, but I should refer my comments through the chair. Plenty of people are using credit cards. The point is that people can still access the facilities. Government has to manage the debts that are accruing. We need to review this suspension of the service to make sure that the service can operate on an ongoing, viable basis and to suggest that somehow, because it is slightly inconvenient for somebody to have to turn up with a suitable payment method, they should illegally dump is really of concern.

I simply conclude by making the remark that the government will continue to work with the community to try to find an effective way to operate this system whilst at the same time recovering the funds that are owed to it for the services that are provided.

MR WALL (Brindabella) (12.22): In closing, I find it quite disturbing that Mr Rattenbury thinks that a business that operates without having to rely on credit is old school. It gives you a hint of the disconnect between what the Greens think is how the world operates and, in truth, what is sound fiscal management.

Mr Rattenbury interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Rattenbury, desist from those sorts of interjections. Mr Wall has the floor.

MR WALL: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I agree with Mr Rattenbury that it is prudent and essential that the debt portfolio be managed and that delinquent accounts be scrutinised strictly and recovered as best as possible. But to punish new applicants and new businesses that are looking to access these services simply because people that have come before them have done it wrong is not the fault of the new businesses. It is the fault of the management processes in the department.

Why not change the way applications are granted? Personal guarantees could be requested or a more demanding credit application, stricter criteria, to ensure that the businesses that are being offered accounts are able to meet the liability that is likely to accrue. I think it is quite disappointing that Mr Rattenbury's amendment does not go to the crux of reinstating this service and simply applies an audit of how customers are currently finding the services at the tip. That will be in October. It does not give any new confidence to businesses. It does not allow them the opportunity to run in a time where the economic situation is quite dire for most businesses around town. Many of them are viable and many of them will survive, but the government's unwillingness to work with them and provide services to ensure that they can survive is quite disappointing.

Unfortunately the Canberra Liberals will not be supporting Mr Rattenbury's amendment to my motion.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 8

Mr Barr	Ms Gallagher	Mr Coe	Ms Lawder
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.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Estimates 2013-2014—Select Committee Report

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition), by leave: I table a schedule of outstanding answers to questions on notice, as mentioned yesterday in my tabling speech on the estimates report. I failed to table it yesterday. I present the following paper:

Estimates 2013-2014—Select Committee—Schedule of outstanding answers to questions on notice at 6 August 2013, dated 6 August 2013.

Sitting suspended from 12.28 to 2.30 pm.

Questions without notice ACT public service—wage negotiations

MR HANSON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, I refer to comments you made yesterday on the ABC. You said, in relation to the wage negotiations currently being conducted, “It will at some point come to a decision about more money versus jobs. At the moment we are just managing to keep the balance right. But if it gets too much further down the track we are going to have to look at our job numbers.” The CPSU responded by saying, “The government is well versed in using the big stick in relation to threatening jobs if you don’t accept an inferior pay cut.” Chief Minister, why are you now using the “big stick” of threatening jobs when you have previously promised ACT public servants that you would protect their jobs?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. I was answering a question asked by a journalist, and I was answering it honestly. I have made that point clear to the unions. The unions are doing what they need to do at this point in time, which is to organise and recruit members. This is an opportunity for

them as well, and we all understand how those arrangements work. So it is no surprise that those comments were made by a union official. Indeed I would have made them in my time as a union official, had the employer made the same claim.

In my meetings with unions, the Treasurer and I have made it clear that we had prioritised a modest pay increase so that we could defend jobs and keep our job numbers where they are now. We needed to explain to the unions that anything over and above that that was not offset by savings would come at a cost of jobs. The wages component of our budget, as you would know, Mr Hanson, from chairing estimates, is over 50 per cent of our budget. I note Mr Hanson's claims to give more money to public servants. We could do that. We could give them four per cent or five per cent tomorrow, but the cost of every one per cent is approximately \$20 million and we would have to find that money because we have not created room for that over and above the money we have put in the budget for the EBA. So that is what it comes down to. My comments are in line with comments I have made to the unions. We have prioritised jobs, but in terms of settling this, if the unions are not going to be reasonable about the pay outcome then we will have to look at other ways of funding the pay outcome they seek.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Chief Minister, what analysis have you done on how many ACT public service job cuts will be necessary to keep the balance right? How many job losses does that analysis show?

MS GALLAGHER: This is currently a matter for negotiation between parties to the EBA. Yes, we will have an understanding of what each pay outcome costs in terms of financial costs to the budget. We have an understanding of how much is allowed for within our budget and within the forward estimates, and if there is a difference it will have to come from somewhere.

It can come from other savings measures. It can come from productivity gains and there has been some very good progress in discussion with some unions around that. We have no problem with funding pay rises through productivity and there is opportunity for that across the ACT public service.

But if the baseline is going to be more pay, no loss of conditions, no change to work practices and over and above what we have allowed for in the budget, that money will have to be found from somewhere. Each one per cent is \$20 million. So that is a pretty straightforward analysis in terms of what we would have to find if it goes over and above what we have allowed.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Chief Minister, why are you now demanding that your public servants take a pay cut in real terms and threatening their jobs if they do not accept your offer?

MS GALLAGHER: We are not asking anyone to take a pay cut in real terms. Let's go back for a moment and have a slight history lesson on what Mr Smyth offered

when he was last a minister. What was it, Mr Smyth? I think it was 1.5 per cent. The last two Carnell wage outcomes for the public service were 1.5 per cent. That is a little bit of a history lesson—lots of job losses and 1.5 per cent.

What we are talking about is no job losses, no changes to conditions and two per cent per annum. We have revised that in response to the union's claim. That is what we have put on the table; we have revised it based on some feedback. The ACT CPI is 1.9 per cent. They are the facts. We have prioritised jobs because we are worried about jobs in the ACT over the next few years. We would like to be a good employer and maintain the level of public service employment. But we have to be mindful of modest pay increases.

We have been a good employer. We have improved conditions year on year on year in the EBA. We have been a much better employer than any other government, I think. Look at the improvements to carers leave. Look at the improvements to maternity leave. Look at all of the arrangements we have put in place to work with our union colleagues. I will continue to talk to all the unions and make sure we can resolve the EBA claims as soon as possible but within a budget we can afford.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Chief Minister, how important is it to prioritise jobs in today's economy?

MS GALLAGHER: The government has a very firm view on this, that the next couple of years, particularly with the threats of significant job losses from Canberra which the federal Liberal Party seem to enjoy trotting out every few days—and I imagine we will see a fair bit more of it in the next 30 days—

Mr Hanson: Is Kevin Rudd cutting jobs?

MS GALLAGHER: There is quite a difference in what the federal Labor Party talk about and what the federal Liberal Party talk about. Go and have a look: 20,000 jobs in Canberra. I think the government has taken the right decision. The unions are not arguing with us around maintaining jobs.

We have taken the view that we are a significant employer in this town. That generates confidence when you have got an employer maintaining jobs, and we will continue to do it. But we also need to finalise the EBA as quickly as we can, with minimal—hopefully, no—industrial action.

Transport—light rail

MR COE: My question is to the Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development. Minister, why was at-grade light rail chosen as the mode for capital metro?

MADAM SPEAKER: I am sorry, Mr Coe; I did not hear the end of that question.

MR COE: Why was at-grade light rail chosen as the mode for capital metro?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Coe for the question. At grade is the most cost-effective option. At this stage we believe it to be the most cost-effective option. I assume the question relates to whether it should be at-grade or whether it should be elevated. I assume that is the subtext to the question. Issues around elevation do bring their own costs, but we will test these assumptions further as we work through the further development of the project and finalise our assessment of the final preferred design outcome.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: When were plans for bus rapid transit abandoned? What was the basis for that decision?

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Corbell, the Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development.

MR CORBELL: Is that—I ask for your guidance, Madam Speaker. Is that a supplementary to the previous question? The previous question was about elevation and alignment. Now it is a question about bus rapid transit. Is it consistent with the substantive question?

MADAM SPEAKER: The first question was about at-grade in relation to capital metro—

MR CORBELL: That is correct.

MADAM SPEAKER: which is why I asked Mr Coe to repeat it because I did not hear what he said. Supplementary questions from matters really are—

Mr Coe: Just to shed some light on this, the question was: why was at-grade light rail taken as the mode for capital metro. Therefore, bus rapid transit is another mode. So that is the link to the primary question.

Mr CORBELL: I have taken a point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: On the point of order, the supplementary question is in order because it relates to the mode of transportation. The first question was about light rail. The second part is about bus rapid transport.

MR CORBELL: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The government took the decision about preferred mode in the lead-up to last year's election and we announced it during the election as part of our election policy.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, what advice has been received from Infrastructure Australia about the capital metro project?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Wall for the question. The government has not yet made a submission to Infrastructure Australia in relation to the capital metro light rail project. The submission the government has made to Infrastructure Australia is about transport priority along the Northbourne Avenue corridor. The submission that the government has made, which I have made publicly available, is a submission that details options for either bus rapid transit or light rail along the corridor. That submission was made prior to the government going into caretaker mode last year and prior to the government's election announcement on its decision, if re-elected, to proceed with the development of a light rail project.

As a consequence of that, the government is now proceeding with development of a revised business case to Infrastructure Australia outlining in further detail the benefits of light rail as the chosen mode, because to date there has been no submission to Infrastructure Australia asking them to endorse light rail as the preferred mode or endorse the benefits that flow from it. That will be developed and submitted to Infrastructure Australia in due course.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, what comparisons have been made regarding patronage levels of light rail versus bus rapid transit?

MR CORBELL: There have certainly been some very interesting comparisons made about patronage levels for light rail versus bus rapid transit. In fact, one of the best summaries I have seen is from Madam Speaker who, in a presentation to the state of Australian cities conference at Griffith University in 2005, said:

The claims in favour are strong. Rail friction is seven to eight times less than that of rubber-tyred vehicles. While a road lane can carry about 2,500 an hour and a busway about 5,000, light rail can carry between 7,000 and 10,000.

I think this really does highlight the importance of making a long-term strategic investment decision when it comes to light rail and anticipating future growth in patronage as a result.

Child care—after-school care

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for Education and Training. The Prime Minister has announced an additional \$450 million will be made available under the better schools program for additional before and after-school care and that it will be delivered through additional grants to some 500 schools across Australia. He also suggested it will allow schools flexibility in operating hours and delivery of new programs. I ask: have officers from the Education and Training Directorate been consulted by their federal counterparts either before or following the decision, and how many Canberra schools are likely to be in a position to be able to apply for and deliver additional out-of-school and holiday care as proposed?

MS BURCH: I thank Mrs Jones for her question. I have been seeking some advice about how it would apply to the ACT. I know before and after-school care is very popular for working families, but I have also heard, as with long day care, sometimes the opening and closing hours are not as responsive to family needs, and that is why family day care often has a role, particularly for younger children. But it is some detail I am seeking. Once I have it I am more than happy to share it with the Assembly.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Jones, a supplementary question.

MRS JONES: Minister, do you support changes to the current school operating hours, notionally around the nine to three model?

MS BURCH: Is the question: do I support any change that would make the system more responsive to family need? Yes, Mrs Jones.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot, a supplementary question.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, where will capacity be found to run these additional centres, or will it depend on the school community to arrange such services?

MS BURCH: I refer Mr Doszpot to the earlier answer. It is the level of detail I am seeking about how it would apply, or if it will apply here in the ACT. When I have that information, I will share it with colleagues.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, how many ACT public schools currently have before and after-school care?

MS BURCH: I do not have the detail in front of me. I would say that the majority do, both in the government system and in the non-government system. But I can bring numbers across both of those sectors, and certainly the number of places across the ACT as well.

Education—international students

MS PORTER: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, the study Canberra initiative was announced in the 2013-14 budget. Can you update the Assembly on progress of this important project?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Ms Porter for the question. The study Canberra initiative is an important major project the government is undertaking which was outlined in our election commitments and commenced in the 2013-14 budget. The government had made our election commitments based on the work that had been started by the learning capital council, which has now changed to be led by the vice-chancellors forum which I established subsequent to the learning capital council.

This forum will be used to direct the initiatives under study Canberra. One of the first things we will be doing—I have had a meeting with the vice-chancellors—is to identify the priority areas of how we can coordinate and collaborate on our promotion of Canberra. The universities each do their own thing, and that is entirely understandable and will continue, but I think there is genuine agreement that the universities can coordinate the work they are doing with the work the government is doing and we will all have a shared benefit from that.

I am pleased the vice-chancellors have seen the opportunities in collaborating with the government. It will allow us to have a single approach to promoting Canberra overseas, and I hope my role in it will be able to add some weight to the work they already do on an individual university level.

With the Vice-chancellors forum we have ANU, UC, the Catholic university and the University of New South Wales represented. It has had one meeting to date. We will have further meetings, but I am very pleased with the progress that has been made and look forward to working with it once the budget passes to prioritise study Canberra and the benefits it will bring to the city.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Chief Minister, what kind of measures do you think are important to create Canberra as a study destination?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Ms Porter for the question. I really think there are some natural strengths that the ACT has in promoting our community to both domestic and international students as a study destination. We already educate about 38,000 students attending university. We have just over two per cent of the international student market, which puts our numbers between 8,000 and 9,000 and growing. There are some very strong positives around Canberra which are seen as advantages for parents overseas, particularly when they are considering a place for their children to attend university.

There is a lot more work we can do to promote the city as a study destination. We have had some discussion on that at the vice-chancellors forum. There have been many ideas put up—whether we have an annual international student day, whether we look at having an international student component to some of the festivals that we have, whether we look at having some coordinated work done to bring agents to the ACT and showcase to them parts of Canberra and the universities so that they can go back and sell Canberra to their local students. So a range of ideas have come up. Many of them have merit, and we will work with the vice-chancellors forum to progress them. The study Canberra initiative allows us to do that.

MADAM SPEAKER: Questions without notice.

DR BOURKE: Minister, is there a target group or country that you have identified—

MADAM SPEAKER: Sorry, hang on a second. Dr Bourke, are you asking a supplementary question?

DR BOURKE: Yes, I am.

MADAM SPEAKER: The usual convention is to stand and say, “Supplementary question”, because I thought there were no more supplementaries. So this is a supplementary question to Ms Porter’s question?

DR BOURKE: Thank you, Madam Speaker. May I ask a supplementary?

MADAM SPEAKER: Yes, by all means. I just need to know; that is all.

DR BOURKE: Chief Minister, is there a target group or country that you have identified to raise awareness of Canberra?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Dr Bourke for the supplementary question. At the recent vice-chancellors’ forum it was agreed that one of the priority groups for us should be international students, that the international student market presents the greatest opportunity for benefits both to the university and to our economy from the different groups, with a particular focus initially on China followed by India and Indonesia.

I am sure those opposite will have read that I will be attending a delegation to China with the vice-chancellors of ANU and the University of Canberra, both as Chief Minister and Minister for Higher Education. We have a very full program over five days visiting universities that ANU and UC already have connections with. I will be meeting with education recruitment agents on the ground, with alumni networks in both cities and I also hope to be able to meet with the mayor of Beijing to recommit to the sister city relationship that has existed between our cities for the last 13 years. It will be an important mission. I think—

Mr Smyth: Which no other member voted for.

MS GALLAGHER: Sorry?

Mr Smyth: Which no Labor member voted for.

MS GALLAGHER: I should not respond to interjections.

MADAM SPEAKER: No, you should not.

Mr Smyth: I would be embarrassed to respond as well.

MS GALLAGHER: I am sure that is the case, Mr Smyth, and the sister city relationship is there and as Chief Minister I should respect that relationship and I intend to do that in Beijing when I am there. The visit will be between Shanghai and Beijing with meetings, as I said, mainly focusing on the university sector. I look forward to being there and supporting the ACT community and promoting Canberra. I look forward to reporting back to all the interest that no doubt exists over on that side of the chamber.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Chief Minister, where will these additional students live, given the crisis in affordable housing in the ACT created under your government?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mr Smyth for the question. Indeed, both universities that I will be travelling with are in the position now where they offer an accommodation guarantee as part of the package for international students, and that is because we have worked with them to deliver student accommodation and accommodation through the national rental affordability scheme. Both the University of Canberra and the ANU do not see accommodation as a barrier.

But having said that, we are mindful of the fact that we do need to continue to focus on affordable housing, and that informs the work that certainly the Treasurer and Minister for Economic Development has been doing. I feel very confident that housing will not be an issue. In fact, it is an advantage that is not offered by many other large cities.

Employment—skills forecast

MR WALL: My question is to the Minister for Economic Development. Minister, the Education and Training Directorate recently published a draft ACT skills needs list under the heading “Forecasting of industry needs and entitlement” to provide what it claims to be an “adaptive and dynamic approach to identifying ACT skills needs at a qualification level”, which will inform the ACT government’s allocation of funding to VET training in the future. Minister, what consultations have you had with the Minister for Education and Training regarding the skills on the ACT skills needs list?

MR BARR: I think for five or six of the last seven years I have been the minister responsible for the development of that list and then for a period I had overlapping responsibilities both as Minister for Economic Development and as Minister for Education and Training. So I am familiar with the issues that go towards the development of that particular piece of work. I am certainly aware of the engagement that occurs at officer level in the development of proposals to be put to ministers. I am also aware that from time to time there are changes in the skill needs within our economy and that the capacity to respond to that through an annual publication such as the one the member refers to provides the capacity for there to be a quick response from government. In large part the skill needs for our economy will evolve over time, but we have the capacity within the education and training sector to meet those needs.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, are you aware that this skills list does not include almost all media, art and design subjects currently on offer at the CIT?

MR BARR: Certainly that would reflect consultations with industry and prevailing trends within our economy.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, why are you not supportive of Canberra's creative industries by denying them access to this funding?

MR BARR: The government is very supportive of Canberra's creative industries, and that is demonstrated through, for example, the establishment of ScreenACT, the support that we provide through the business development portfolio and also the support that is provided through other areas of territory government.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, in regard to the skills list, can you advise whether it includes automotive training, and are you aware of the electric vehicle automotive training that has been going on at the CIT?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Gentleman. I have had the pleasure of visiting the CIT facility that he refers to in my time as Minister for Education and Training. It is a particularly positive partnership between the CIT and Toyota, who certainly are world leaders in hybrid engine technology. Yes, there clearly is an opportunity through that partnership and, indeed, through other partnerships between industry and training providers in the territory to broaden the skills base within the ACT.

Tourism—events

MS BERRY: My question is to the Minister for Economic Development. Can the minister outline how the ACT government's events strategy is benefiting the ACT community?

MR BARR: The ACT government has a strategic, comprehensive and very successful events strategy.

Mr Hanson: Is it transformational?

MR BARR: It could well be. The strategy is indeed proving successful in boosting the ACT economy. Some might go so far as to say it is playing an important role in the transformation of our city's economic activity.

Madam Speaker, as I am sure you are aware, events are a key means of attracting tourists to any city, town or region. In a competitive tourist market it is not enough just to rely on static offerings. As impressive as these may be, no city can rely simply on attractions, whether they are natural beauty, cultural attractions or indeed nightlife. What is needed, and what we have in the ACT, is a strong program of events that add to such offerings, to serve as an extra and proactive way of encouraging tourists to visit and stay in the territory and in the region. These events in the territory range as far and wide as exhibitions, festivals, sporting events and other flagship events such as Floriade.

As I am sure members have heard me observe on many previous occasions, tourism is indeed a vital part of the territory economy. I can advise the Assembly that the latest data from Tourism Research Australia shows that tourism contributes now over \$1.6 billion to our economy each year, 5.1 per cent of our gross state product. Data shows that the tourism sector is one of the territory's largest employers, generating 16,000 jobs now, representing 7.8 per cent of total territory employment. As such, boosting our tourism and events sector is an important part of overall economic growth in the territory.

It is clear that events are an important part of Canberra's tourism offering but also are an important part of the experience of living in this city. A vibrant events calendar does a great deal to enhance the overall tourism experience in the national capital. In addition to attracting tourists, there are a great range of events that Canberrans can attend and enjoy.

To outline how much the territory economy benefits from some of our major events, I will give you a brief snapshot. Floriade last year attracted 122,000 interstate or international visitors and resulted in an increase in direct expenditure in the territory economy of \$27.6 million.

Business events are an increasingly important part of our tourism sector. Last month I was pleased to be able to announce that the Canberra Convention Bureau had achieved its 2012-13 target of generating \$41.6 million in confirmed business, delivering 66,400 nights of accommodation room occupancy into the Canberra economy. This represents a five per cent increase in overnight stays generated by the bureau over the previous fiscal year.

The *Toulouse-Lautrec* exhibition at the National Gallery attracted over 170,000 visitors, making it one of the gallery's top 10 visited exhibitions of all time. Almost 80 per cent of those 170,000 visitors travelled to Canberra to attend the exhibition and it provided an estimated \$37 million injection into the territory economy. The accommodation sector also benefited greatly from the exhibition, with 18,869 room and exhibition ticket packages sold. This represents an increase of over 2,000 packages on the *Renaissance* exhibition.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Minister, how have the centenary year events added to Canberra's economy?

MR BARR: The centenary year has provided important opportunities to showcase the city as a great destination to visit. Pleasingly, Australians have taken up that opportunity. The number of Australians visiting the ACT for a holiday increased 53 per cent in the March quarter of this year compared to the same period in 2012, the latest figures from Tourism Research Australia show. The number of people who have come here to visit friends and relatives in the first quarter of the centenary year rose 30 per cent on the same quarter last year. It is no coincidence that this coincided with a big program of events for our city.

The annual figures have shown a 9.2 per cent increase in international visitors. That represents the city's strongest year-ending March result since 2002. Critically, the Tourism Research Australia data also shows the economic impact of tourism for our city. The international visitor spend in the ACT for the year ending March 2013 was \$388 million, an increase of \$45 million on the previous year.

Mr Hanson: What happened after 2002?

MR BARR: Well, there was the Sydney Olympics, actually. Never mind that they were in 2000. The Sydney Olympics were in 2000, and that was the all-time peak—

Mr Smyth: That was 2000.

MR BARR: Yes, that is correct. The Sydney Olympics were in 2000, and that was the all-time peak for tourism in the territory. We are now getting back to levels—

Mr Hanson: You said since 2002.

MR BARR: Yes, this year was the largest since then—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Barr, what you are seeing here is what happens when you respond to interjections—you completely got off the track. Do you want to get back to answering the question.

MR BARR: Getting back to the point, Madam Speaker, \$1.18 billion in total visitor spend in the ACT in this period—very strong results for the territory.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, what plans does the government have to support the events sector in coming years?

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, I remind you that you cannot announce new policy.

MR BARR: The government certainly plans to capitalise on this important year for our city. The 2013-14 budget delivers \$11.5 million in new funding to support the territory's tourism and events sector into the future. These initiatives will bring the total spend in this area to \$27.3 million in the 2013-14 fiscal year.

Some of the support for the events sector that has been announced in the budget includes continuation of the tourism events fund, more money for the Canberra Convention Bureau, a \$4.4 million funding package for them over the next four years, \$3.6 million to continue and further expand the Enlighten festival, more funding for the national capital educational tourism project to support the city's push to be the premier educational tourism destination in the country, and more support for existing and new local events that can demonstrate economic benefits by attracting more visitors to the city. We are also developing the tourism and events strategic plan for the rest of this decade, against the principles of the national tourism 2020 strategy.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Can the minister outline some alternative events strategies?

MR BARR: You could seek to organise a car race in the parliamentary triangle. It probably would not cost too much to establish the infrastructure for the track. It would not upset anyone in one of the busiest parts of the city. You could spend millions of dollars of taxpayers' money trying to organise this event. You could put it on on the coldest weekend in the city's calendar and hope to attract people. Then when they do not come, think, "Maybe we have got that a little wrong." You could find yourself the subject of an extremely critical Auditor-General's report and you could blow one-third of your events budget on such an outcome.

Alternatively, you could build a futsal court. You could build a futsal slab. You could put it there without any dedicated change rooms, without any seating. You could put it in a spot that was largely inaccessible to most people. Maybe over the years as the tumbleweeds roll past it might host the odd circus. They could be some alternatives.

In the end, the government's position of supporting the growth of this sector of our economy and our capacity to deliver outcomes such as I have highlighted in terms of the economic, social and cultural benefits from our tourism events strategy, compared with what was on offer previously, demonstrates that the government has the right policy direction.

Taxation—payroll

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, the budget anticipates an increase in payroll tax revenue of approximately 6.8 per cent in the 2013-14 financial year and increases to around 7.3 per cent per year between 2014-15 and 2016-17. Treasurer, what are the government's general growth forecast assumptions in its calculation of tax collections from the contributing private sector?

MR BARR: There will be two factors driving those forecasts. Firstly, there will be the wage-price inflation. Secondly, there will be a factor of those in employment in that particular sector.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, a supplementary question.

MR SMYTH: Minister, what are the identified industries that were used in this calculation and what were their respective payroll tax values?

MR BARR: The Revenue Office will look at long-run experience and growth in this revenue line. It will look at all payers of payroll tax. It will look at wage-price parameters and levels of employment anticipated over the forward estimates.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot?

MR DOSZPOT: Treasurer, what were the government's assumptions for wage growth for industries that are subject to payroll tax?

MR BARR: The wage price index forecast is three per cent.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Treasurer, what decisions did the government take in response to the review you undertook into the ACT taxation system in relation to payroll tax?

MR BARR: The government, in reviewing the territory's taxation system, made a decision to raise the payroll tax threshold in the territory. We have the highest payroll tax threshold of any jurisdiction in Australia. This ensures that small and medium-size enterprises in the ACT are not subject to payroll tax. As a result of increasing the threshold from \$1.5 million to \$1.75 million, we provided a payroll tax cut to every business that pays payroll tax and exempted around 120 businesses that were previously paying payroll tax from having to pay payroll tax.

Overall, the way the legal incidence of payroll tax falls on the small business sector and on employers, the economic incidence demonstrated through detailed modelling tends to see that tax passed on to consumers in most industries—not in all, but in most. So the economic impact of payroll tax is, in effect, a de facto consumption tax. Nevertheless, whilst it is not the most inefficient tax that state and territory governments levy, it is certainly more efficient than stamp duty, for example, or tax on insurance. That is why the government in its tax reforms is seeking to abolish those most inefficient taxes first.

Disability services—funding

DR BOURKE: My question is to the minister for disability. Minister, can you update the Assembly on the first round of enhanced service offers available through Disability ACT in preparation for the full implementation of DisabilityCare in the ACT?

MS BURCH: I thank Dr Bourke for his interest in DisabilityCare. The move to DisabilityCare will indeed bring significant changes for people with a disability in our community. It will mean individuals will have greater choice and greater control about the kind of services and supports that they receive and who provides them.

The enhanced service offer is a package of one-off grants worth \$7.7 million that will help in the transition to DisabilityCare. The first round of enhanced service offer grants opened on 1 July this year and will close this Friday. The offer is designed to meet the needs of the broadest range of people possible. All ACT residents under 65 with ongoing support needs related to a disability can apply for a grant. Successful applicants will have funding paid directly to them to purchase the supports and services they need. This will give people a chance to “test drive” the way that DisabilityCare can be delivered when it is launched here in July next year.

The grants can be applied for online and have been widely promoted. Information has been circulated through Medicare, libraries, community radio, *Koori Mail*, housing tenants' newsletters, mainstream and specialist school newsletters, as well as the usual funded provider networks.

The ACT NDIS task force and the team of individual planners have attended numerous network meetings, community groups and service provider forums to promote the grants and to educate individuals and providers on the enhanced service offer and the future of DisabilityCare. In addition 120 workers from government and community services, including therapists and teachers, have attended sessions targeted at health and disability workers. Five community information sessions have been held across Canberra and were attended by 450 potential applicants and their families. Furthermore, 18 workshops were attended by 32 people who did not have access to a computer and needed a hand in completing and submitting their applications.

Individual planners are available to answer questions from applicants or service providers via telephone or email. The individual planners hold regular weekly sessions at various outreach sites, including Winnunga, Rainbow and Carers ACT, and meet with potential applicants on an individual basis. The individual planners have met with several hundred people to provide them with assistance or information about the enhanced service offer grants. This shows the government's determination to get this, the first part of DisabilityCare, right. It is a significant change for all those involved and it will dramatically improve the lives of many Canberrans.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, how many clients will have the ability to access an ESO through the grants round?

MS BURCH: Any resident who meets the eligibility criteria can apply for an enhanced service offer grant. The eligible population could be up to 5,000 Canberrans, which is the projected number of ACT residents eligible for DisabilityCare. The actual number to receive a grant will depend on the number and the nature of requests and the recommendations of the assessing panel.

Eligible ACT residents with disabilities, including those with psycho-social disabilities, are able to apply for one-off grants that may be used in a variety of ways to improve their quality of life. These grants may be for aids and equipment or for other services that reduce the impact of their disability, improve independence and increase participation in community activity.

The second round of grants will commence in September, providing an opportunity for those who have missed out in the first round. We know from our highly successful quality of life grants that people can make improvements to their independence if they have control over the support that they need.

DisabilityCare represents the biggest change to how people with disability and psycho-social disabilities access support and services. One of the greatest challenges is to prepare for the change to the way funds are provided. These grants offer an opportunity for people to start thinking about what makes a good life. They provide opportunities for the community sector to start gearing up to provide services and supports differently.

The grants have drawn the interest of the broadest range of ACT residents with different support needs. Disability ACT has received applications from people from different cultural backgrounds and people with high needs but limited engagement with the formal support network. To date I understand that close to 600 applications have been received. I think this is evidence of the interest in DisabilityCare and the opportunities that the enhanced service offer will bring to many.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, given that the number of grants depends on the types of services individuals apply for, how will the applications be prioritised?

MS BURCH: It is a very sad question. There are nearly 600 applicants already in the pipeline in round one and those that will come through in round two. We have been very much aware of the need to put a very fine filter through this and have a solid level. That is why the panel that we have convened includes experts from both Disability ACT and Health; also community providers and individuals with a disability or those caring for an individual with a disability will all form part of the assessment process, with quite clear guidelines about the weighting applied to each and every application.

I suspect that there will be more interest than even the \$7.7 million can provide. I think that is good in one way, that the information is getting out, but it certainly will inform us about how we continue this journey of transition to disability care.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Minister, what types of enhanced services will clients be able to access?

MS BURCH: I thank Ms Berry for her interest. Under the enhanced service offer three categories of grants are available. The first grants can be for aids or equipment or minor modifications to the home and possibly vehicles up to the value of \$10,000. This might include wheelchairs, communications devices or equipment adaptations that will enable a person to be more independent around their home.

The second type of grant is considered a quality-of-life grant which is valued at up to \$5,000. In previous years people have used quality-of-life grants to fund things such as courses for vocational or recreational purposes, play equipment or learning aids for children, support to set up small enterprises or to attend an event or activity.

The third type is for flexible supports and services up to the value of \$12,000. This might include support to take part in a regular skill-building activity during the day while providing a break to the applicant's parents or unpaid carers.

The grants are able to be used flexibly so the applicants can make the decisions about how they will best suit their own individual needs. One of the most significant changes DisabilityCare brings is the ability for individuals to plan for and participate in life as they choose. This means that, as a government, we need to be flexible in our

thinking and in our approach, and I am confident that the enhanced service offers provide a genuine opportunity for us to work with people to meet their needs and support their goals. I am certain that, as the first round of grants close, we will have some fantastic examples of individuals and their families and the community and community providers thinking about what is possible under DisabilityCare.

Schools—autonomy

MR DOSZPOT: My question is to the Minister for Education and Training. Minister, the ACT Education and Training Directorate has scaled back an autonomy trial in Canberra schools from an original 23 schools to eight schools. How successful was the trial in the original 23 schools and what feedback did the directorate receive from participating principals?

MS BURCH: I thank Mr Doszpot for his question. School empowerment is part and parcel of the better schools reform. Certainly it is recognised nationally and locally that the school executive, the school leadership, are best placed to make those decisions at a local level. We did start off at the beginning of this with quite an ambitious range, and 23 schools were interested in being involved. Over time, we realised that, with the reforms coming into place, it was better to work with a smaller number of schools and to use that intelligence and learning in a more focused way. That is why that decision has been made. But all schools, as we move through the better schools reform, will embrace and move to the local leadership and that local decision making. The feedback that I have had from many schools is that it is working. It is not without some learnings and some need for change, but it is certainly the way to go.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, the Australian Education Union and the Council of P&C Associations have both been critical of any moves to give principals more autonomy. Do you agree with their objections, and what efforts have you made to minimise their concerns?

MS BURCH: I am actually a supporter of school empowerment because I think it does give the executive and the leadership the power to make local decisions to do the best for their schools, their communities and their students. The conversation I have with school principals and with the AEU and others is about what is best held centrally. What the schools really need to worry about is the local decisions that best affect the students and then what can central office manage because it is the best use of the central office approach to this.

It is something that comes up regularly when I meet with the AEU, and it was just a week or so ago that I met with close on 30 from the AEU council. This was part of that conversation. So it is an open dialogue, but I think the union certainly recognises that it is part and parcel of the better schools reform. It is about moving slowly and getting it right as we move through.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, can you give us an example of how the local leadership program is working in Brindabella?

MS BURCH: I am quite happy to do that. I think many in this room will know of great schools such as Erindale College, for example. The principal there has certainly embraced a very modern approach to educating our young men and women of tomorrow. The work he has done with community connections and local schools is, indeed, significant. For example, I think everybody in this room will recognise the fabulous work that Kulture Break does. They now have their own studio space and their digs are at Erindale College. That is a decision and a community connection that is clearly quite possible and, indeed, encouraged with local leadership.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: How and why were the remaining eight schools selected and why eight?

MS BURCH: Thank you, Mrs Jones, for the question. It is my understanding that the directorate went out to those schools involved. I need to say at the outset that all schools are involved in some way in the school empowerment journey. We are focusing on eight schools and these eight schools put their hands up to be champions and leaders in this, to be at the forefront of this and to share their learnings with other schools.

I think that is how we got down to eight. As we move through the better schools reform, we will use them as champions or pilots to say, “How do we extrapolate and transition all those other learnings across the schools?”

Health—nurse-led walk-in centres

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, the review into the nurse-led walk-in clinic by the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute found that, in regard to the clinical decision support software, or CDSS, used in the English National Health Service walk-in centres, “the evidence indicated that the adaptation of clinical support software originally developed for telephone consultations for use in face-to-face consultations was problematic and recommended caution when implementing CDSS”. Minister, given this evidence, why did ACT Health implement a CDSS that was adapted from a program originally developed for telephone consultations?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Ms Lawder for the question. In relation to the software that was implemented, as Ms Lawder would know, there was a very tight scope of practice that was implemented as part of the nurse-led walk-in centre and in the first year of operation there would be an evaluation done. That was the agreement that the government reached with stakeholders about pursuing a nurse-led model. Part of that was making sure that the decisions made by nurses were well documented. That software allows that to happen. Anyone who has been to the walk-in centre would have seen how that software is used. It guides the nurses’ decision making very

closely and adds some time to the consultation. But it was used, and I think there was merit in using it from a clinical safety point of view. We have of course been monitoring the feedback from staff about that. There are further options being developed, particularly when the software moves out to the community, about the type of software that should be used in the next nurse-led walk-in centres.

The review, the paper that you refer to, is an academic perspective on how you would have implemented the nurse-led walk-in centre in a perfect world. Unfortunately we do not live in a perfect world and the practical implementation of that service has varied from what particular people believed was the best way forward. I actually believe we did the best thing we could at the time, and that has been demonstrated to be proven because the service is very popular. No safety issues have been raised about the clinical decision making of the nurses in that service. It is very popular and every month we see presentations grow.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Minister, thank you for your answer. Can I clarify: will ACT Health be seeking nurse feedback and making changes to the software?

MS GALLAGHER: We work very closely with our staff, and feedback around software right across the organisation is always listened to. I do not think we will be moving away from the clinical decision making that that software allows, because it allows, I think, some safety in autonomous decision making for nurses and it allows us to monitor very closely the work that is being done in the nurse-led walk-in centre. Where we can look at improvements to it, of course we will do so. But I think the type of software that is being used is appropriate for the walk-in centre.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Minister, do you have a licence to change the software, and will the software be implemented in the Belconnen and Tuggeranong walk-in centres?

MS GALLAGHER: I will need to take on notice the licence arrangements and come back to the Assembly with that. In answer to the second part of Mr Hanson's question in terms of that software, the clinical decision-making support software, yes, it would be the intention to use that in the new centres.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Minister, do you agree with the review's findings that the walk-in centre has led to increased pressure and activity at the emergency department and that this has led as a consequence to longer waiting times?

MS GALLAGHER: I do not think that anyone can answer that honestly. I think there are different opinions. If you talk to people in Calvary at different times over the life of the walk-in centre, they actually believe that the walk-in centre has improved and reduced the presentations of category fives to their hospital. That has been said directly to me by clinical staff.

I do not think anyone will be able to estimate whether, if we did not have the walk-in centre there, presentations at the emergency department would have grown faster than they have grown. I would accept that there are mixed views around it. Those views differ depending on your particular background and perhaps your expertise in different fields. But I do not think anyone will be able to unpick it and determine a causal effect from the walk-in centre to the emergency department at Canberra Hospital.

Crime—criminal assets

MR GENTLEMAN: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, you recently announced the recipients of the ACT government's 2013-14 confiscation of criminal assets trust fund grants program. Can you please outline for the Assembly who the grant recipients are?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Gentleman for the question. I am pleased to advise the Assembly that last month I announced 10 community organisations and two government organisations would receive grants this year from the confiscation of criminal assets trust fund. The trust fund is a very important element of the criminal justice system in providing for restoration for the harm caused by crime where that crime results in material gain which can be then confiscated following the successful conviction of a person.

This year I am pleased to confirm that a total of just over \$100,000 will benefit 12 organisations in the ACT to assist with crime prevention and support to victims of crime in the ACT. A number of organisations have received this funding, including the Police Citizens Youth Club for a new youth crime prevention café, Legal Aid ACT, the Women's Centre for Health Matters for their summer of respect respectful relationships advertising—very important in the context of tackling violence against women and children—and the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union for their initiative—a very important initiative—for workplace tragedy family support.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR CORBELL: Mr Hanson should not laugh, Madam Speaker, because this is a group established to support families whose relatives are killed in workplace accidents. It is not laughing matter. It is not a joke. It is a very important initiative, something that addresses a real gap in the support to families whose loved ones are killed in the workplace. Often they are killed and they are victims of crime because of the failure to properly adhere to safety standards in workplaces. It is a great initiative and I am very pleased the government is supporting it.

Of course, there is also the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre for their all about rape resource specifically designed to assist men in addressing their offending behaviours and tackle issues around rape. A grant went to Menslink, an excellent community organisation, for their young men winter camp program, and also to three other projects: the Kambah Playgroups Association, which sought funding for improved lighting at Thiess Cottage to help improve safety and prevent crime at their facility,

and I am very pleased the government is providing that support; the Melba Tennis Club for the upgrade of facilities at the complex and improved security to prevent opportunistic crime; and, finally, to the Beryl women's' refuge for the installation of CCTV cameras at three refuge premises.

These are all excellent initiatives that help prevent crime, that help the victims of crime and help to take measures to ensure that crime is not repeated into the future. A great use of confiscated funds from ill-gotten gain.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, can you explain to the Assembly what is the purpose of these grants?

MR CORBELL: Thank you, Mr Gentleman. Obviously it is all about fundamentally encouraging law-abiding behaviour in our community, giving effect to the principle that people should not be enriched by crime and that ill-gotten assets should be redirected to practical and positive purposes that help prevent crime into the future. Obviously some of the key principles of the act are also to deprive people of property used to commit their crimes, to deprive people of any material advantage gained from the crime and also to enable the effective tracing and seizure of criminal assets.

The grants scheme is unique because it draws on moneys collected as a result of criminal behaviour. Those moneys are growing in volume and I am very pleased that the government is able to make distributions from the trust fund to help worthy causes in our community.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Attorney-General, does this represent the full amount of the funds that have been confiscated, and who is making the decision about which groups are awarded the funds?

MR CORBELL: It does not represent the full amount of the fund. The fund is now well over a million dollars in value, and I am making disbursements effectively based on the interest earned in the account. We now have a very strong core of funds in the account, and interest earned on the account is now able to be disbursed because of the size of the fund.

That is not exclusively the case. There are other instances where disbursements are made as a result of requirements for seizure orders as a result of ill-gotten gain, and I would be happy to talk about that further.

In relation to the allocation of grants, my directorate undertakes a merit-based assessment of applications. Submissions are sought and public advertisement is made, seeking submission from groups interested in accessing grants when the grants round is advertised. The submissions are assessed on merit, by my directorate, and recommendations are made to me. I am the final decision maker, but I am pleased to say that in relation to this round and, indeed, the previous round, I have accepted in full the recommendations of my directorate.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Attorney, can you please advise the Assembly about a large payment that was recently made to the Catholic Education Office under the Confiscation of Criminal Assets Act?

MR CORBELL: On 26 March Mr Timothy Patrick Cousins was sentenced in the Supreme Court for “obtaining property by deception”. Mr Cousins illegally obtained funds from the Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, who was his employer at the time. He was sentenced to 6½ years in prison with a non-parole period of four years. On the same day the court made orders that Mr Cousins pay reparations in the amount of \$1,190,000 to the Catholic Education Office.

The Supreme Court subsequently made an order in May last year which forfeited Mr Cousins’ Calwell property to the territory under section 59 of the Confiscation of Criminal Assets Act. This order was made on the basis that the property had been restrained under the act because the property was derived by Mr Cousins from the commission of the offence that he was convicted of. Once the property was sold, the Public Trustee for the ACT held the net proceeds of the sale of this property.

The Public Trustee also received funds from a Community CPS Australia bank account in Mr Cousins’ name which had also been forfeited to the territory. The total proceeds from the sale of the Calwell property and the CPS bank account was \$198,000 after the Public Trustee’s expenses. On 15 May, therefore, I decided that the amount available for distribution from the confiscated assets trust fund for the financial year was \$303,000. From this, \$198,960 was distributed to the Catholic Education Office in relation to the matter of Mr Cousins.

This is a very important element of restoration for the victim—in this case the Catholic Education Office, who was the victim of a serious criminal offence, a serious fraud, and I am pleased that the fund has been able to be used for these purposes.

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

Hospitals—emergency departments

MR HANSON (Molonglo-Leader of the Opposition) (3.39): I move:

(1) That the Assembly notes that:

- (a) a review of the Nurse led Walk-in Centre (WIC) at The Canberra Hospital found that the evidence used in planning the WIC was ignored, used selectively and misinterpreted by ACT Health;
- (b) the 2009 ACT Health Emergency Department Strategic Plan advised that the WIC was “not expected to provide any improvement in performance”, was “likely to create demand” and “should not be regarded as a strategy that will contribute to ED performance”;

- (c) the Chief Minister ignored her Department's advice and the evidence and stated publicly that the WIC would reduce pressure on the Emergency Department (ED);
 - (d) the review found that "contrary to this rationale, the location of the ACT walk-in centre actually resulted in a 'net increase in ED activity'";
 - (e) the latest National Health Performance Authority results, released on 25 July 2013 shows a further deterioration in ED results; and
 - (f) the Chief Minister has also ignored Health officials' advice regarding the establishment of a paediatric stream in ED;
- (2) condemns the Chief Minister for ignoring evidence and advice that resulted in increased pressure on the ED and contributed to longer waiting times;
 - (3) calls on the Chief Minister to table all ACT Health advice regarding the establishment of a paediatric stream in the ED; and
 - (4) requests that the Auditor-General conduct a performance audit of ED waiting times in the ACT as a matter of priority.

It is disappointing in a way that I am back here talking about the emergency department because there are a number of things that have occurred since we were last here. I think they have as a whole increased the need for what is the nub of the motion, which is that there should be an independent review by the Auditor-General. What I intend to do is to go through some of those new issues. The first of those is the review that we were talking about during question time into the nurse-led walk-in centre at the Canberra Hospital.

The review found that the evidence that was drawn from the National Health Service in the UK was ignored, was used selectively and was then misinterpreted by ACT Health. I will quote what was said:

Three areas were identified as problematic in the way that evidence from the NHS—

the National Health Service—

was translated—

to the ACT—

The use of clinical decision support software (CDSS);—

That is the software program we are talking about—

the marketing of the walk-in centre; and its location.

The decision to locate the centre on the hospital campus was heavily influenced by interest groups. The difficult computer system was adding as much as 50 per cent to the time nurses spent in consultation, and the centre had been marketed to a specific demographic group rather than those in need of access to primary care.

The report found that despite seeking out evidence, this seems to have been used selectively and cautiously, at times misinterpreted and largely influenced by the views of interest groups. That is part of what the review into the walk-in centre found.

We also know from the 2009 ACT Health emergency department strategic plan that the walk-in centre was not expected to provide any improvement in performance at the Canberra Hospital site. I will quote what is said. It is stated that it “is not expected to provide an improvement in performance,” was “likely to create demand” and “should not be regarded as a strategy that will contribute to ED performance”.

Under “Future strategy and implementation plans/considerations” the strategic plan also stated that, “It will not target the majority of category 3 and category 4 patients, the clear group requiring intervention. Walk-in clinics are not expected to produce an improvement based on publication of experience.” The nub is, and I will make this point clear because I want to repeat it, that the plan also states, “They should not be regarded as a strategy that will contribute to ED performance. They should not be used as a strategy to contribute to ED performance and, further, are likely to create demand.”

What we know is that the review of the walk-in centre that was conducted by the academics found it was going to apply pressure because it was in the wrong space. I will go to some more detail around that. But Katy Gallagher’s own department said the walk-in centre should not be promoted as a strategy to reduce pressure on the ED.

But the Chief Minister and health minister ignored that advice. She ignored what her own department was saying. She put out a number of press releases that contradicted the evidence and the advice. There was a joint media release by the Prime Minister, the minister for health and the then ACT Deputy Chief Minister, Katy Gallagher on 25 May 2009 saying, “The Rudd government today announced \$10 million to establish a walk-in centre at the Canberra Hospital to help take pressure off its busy emergency department.”

There was a joint media release by the federal minister for health and the ACT Deputy Chief Minister Katy Gallagher on 12 May 2010 which stated, “Substantial work has gone into developing this innovative model of care which aims to reduce pressures on services such as emergency departments.”

Again on 27 December 2011, we were told that it was “particularly positive and is helping to alleviate the pressures on our busy public hospital emergency department”. But that is not true because the review found that, contrary to the rationale of putting the walk-in centre at the ED, as the department said in their own strategy it did not work. It actually increased the activity at the ED. I quote from the report:

A key rationale for establishing the ACT walk-in centre was to reduce pressure on the ED, despite the English evidence of no impact ... There was no evidence from the national evaluation of the NHS walk-in centres that co-located walk-in centres had 'any effect on attendance rates, process, costs or outcome care' of the EDs.

The evidence that ACT Health went specifically to find said that it would have no effect. The ACT health department said that it is actually going to make it worse, but the minister at the very same time was making public statements saying the opposite—contradicting the evidence, contradicting her own department's assessment and advice.

What the evidence from the National Health Service also said was that the walk-in centres that were co-located in hospitals were not nurse led, that doctors and nurses moved between the centres and the ED in accordance with demand and, in fact, that about 40 per cent of patients in the co-located walk-in centres were seen by a doctor. So the nub of that then comes to the point that the academics found that the location of the ACT walk-in centre actually resulted in a net increase in ED activity.

Had the evidence from the National Health Service been heeded, the ACT walk-in centre would actually have been located somewhere else or would have had doctors in it. But certainly what should not have happened is that we should not have had the minister out there telling the community something that was entirely different to the evidence that was being provided to her and her department.

There is a pretty tragic effect of this, Mr Assistant Speaker. It is that we have seen the results decline. We have seen the results decline so that our jurisdiction, when it comes to ED waiting times, is performing the worst in the nation. It has been a steady decline when we have seen other jurisdictions improve. The latest National Health Performance Authority results released on 25 July show that 53 per cent of patients were seen within the recommended time frame. That is actually against a target of 65 per cent that we were meant to meet. Eventually that is going to grow to about 90 per cent of patients that are meant to be seen within four hours.

The quarterly performance report July to March 2013 shows only 51 per cent of presentations to the ED were seen within the prescribed times. For the sort of categories that need to be addressed in this with some degree of urgency, only 46 per cent of cat 4 patients were seen on time—that is semi-urgent patients—and only 42 per cent of urgent patients were seen on time.

There are some statistics for you, Mr Assistant Speaker. But I think it is very important to remember that this means there are elderly people, there are families, there are people in pain, people with chronic conditions, people that need treatment who are not seen on time. In some cases—semi-urgent—46 per cent are seen on time and only 42 per cent of urgent patients are seen on time.

We know that a contributing factor to that was the walk-in centre. The minister was warned. I think it is one thing that the minister was warned and decided to make a different decision. Look, I do not say that ministers cannot make decisions contrary to

the advice of their bureaucrats. They can. But what the minister should not be doing is saying to the community something that simply was not true, saying that it will relieve pressure, saying that it is actually going to help the EDs when that was not the case, when she was warned it would not be the case and it has been proven not to be the case.

The problem comes when ministers ignore the advice, ignore experts, ignore the evidence and get it wrong, and as a result of getting it wrong, it means that people in our community are waiting in emergency departments longer than ever.

There is then the next issue, and that is the paediatric stream at the emergency department. I raise this because I do not know whether it is going to be a good idea or not, but the experts have said, “Do not do it.”

I refer to an article in the *Canberra Weekly*. Katy Gallagher, if she wants, can tell us that Ross Solly has not got the story right, but clearly when you read the article you see that there has been a degree of communication between the Chief Minister and Ross Solly in the production of this article. It states:

Early last week, when the proverbial was hitting the fan in the Chief Minister’s office over the ACTEW salary fiasco, Katy Gallagher went missing.

It caused no end of consternation within her office. It was a Monday, and as far as everyone was concerned it was a normal workday. Except the boss was AWOL.

And then, mid-afternoon, a Tweet turned up on the Chief Minister’s account: ‘Spent day in Sydney visiting Royal North Shore hospital’s new ED with purpose-built paediatric area. Will help to plan #canberra ED changes’.

Her staff might have been surprised; ACT Health bureaucrats were stunned ... This had to be bad.

And they had every right to be worried. After repeatedly telling Ms Gallagher a purpose-built paediatric unit would not be a good fit for Canberra Hospital, and would not work, the Chief Minister decided to check one out for herself.

It speaks volumes for the relationship between the CM and her bureaucrats that she needed to pull off such a clandestine operation, but in her own words—‘I needed to see for myself. I needed to see if it really couldn’t be done.’ ... Ms Gallagher took the first step toward implementing her plan by promising a dedicated paediatric emergency service during last year’s election.

To say this surprised her bureaucrats is something of an understatement. They had no idea such a unit was still on their boss’s radar.

But it is, and after going rogue last week the Chief Minister sounds determined to see it through.

There may be some merit to what has been proposed but my concern is that when we were seeking advice, when we were finding out about the proposal that was being put forward and gave it our support, we were unaware that officials were advising against it.

Again, the minister was saying one thing and people in the community take that at face value. They want to believe what their ministers say. But again what we have is not the full picture. The full picture was that the health experts, the health officials were saying do not do it, and Katy Gallagher ignored that advice.

The last time she did that, it caused chaos at the ED. I want to make sure with this motion that we actually know what that advice is. So it is pretty straightforward. What I want to know is: what is that advice? What is it that the health experts have been saying to Katy Gallagher that in this case she has been ignoring? I think that is pretty reasonable. I think that she should table that advice and give an explanation of it.

We want the facts on the table so we can make a valid assessment, so the community can get a full picture of what has been proposed, because the last time, it was only after the fact that we found out the truth about what was being advised about the walk-in centre. If the community had known that the experts were all saying, "This will increase pressure on your ED; you will end up waiting longer," which is exactly what turned out, I do not think Katy Gallagher would have been out there with any credibility saying, "This is going to fix our EDs. This is going to take off the pressure," which is what she was doing and which is entirely disingenuous.

I think it is reasonable that when we now know again there is a pattern of behaviour, we want to see the advice so that we can ask, "Is she again going to do something at our ED, as she did last time, that is going to actually make the situation worse rather than better?"

I accept that this does get mired in politics. I think that if we are going to make sure that the objective assessment of whether the paediatric stream is right or not, whether the walk-in centre is the right strategy there or not, whether doctors should be employed or not, let us take it out of this arena. Let us give it to the Auditor-General, and say, "You do a review and tell us whether it is going to be a good idea and what else can be done." I continually ask for that to happen. The Chief Minister refuses to let it happen and we see ED waiting times get longer. I again call on this Assembly to get the Auditor-General to do that work for us.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Health and Minister for Higher Education) (3.55): The government will not support Mr Hanson's motion, but we welcome the opportunity to talk, again, about the very successful nurse-led walk-in centre model that I was the minister responsible for implementing and which has now seen over 21,000 presentations in the last financial year and also to talk about the paediatric emergency department, which will commence construction this calendar year. That is another measure to improve the emergency department in amenity for patients but also for staff.

I start by saying that it is important that ministers test and challenge and question advice from officials. I have been in a range of different situations where I have not accepted the advice from my directorate. But in terms of official briefings to me as minister, they did not say to me at the time we signed on with the commonwealth that a walk-in centre on the Canberra Hospital site would increase emergency department

presentations. So let us just make that clear. The document Mr Hanson relies on for his argument is a working document at a very low level officials group within the hospital that did not make—

Mr Hanson: The Chief Executive of ACT Health. Not particularly low, is it?

MS GALLAGHER: Sorry, I thought you were referring to one you had done previously that certainly did not form a formal brief—

Mr Hanson: Canberra Hospital performance, yes. From Mark Cormack. Remember him?

MS GALLAGHER: Well, as I recall it, it did not form a formal brief to the minister.

Mr Hanson: Remember Mark Cormack?

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Doszpot): Mr Hanson, you were listened to by the Chief Minister before.

MS GALLAGHER: Perhaps, Mr Hanson, can clarify that.

Mr Hanson: I remember Mark Cormack.

MS GALLAGHER: Yes, well, I am sure he remembers you, Mr Hanson; that is partly why he does not work for ACT Health anymore.

Mr Coe: A big call.

MS GALLAGHER: Well, I do not think there is any secret about the way Mr Hanson behaved—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Chief Minister, please do not engage in discussions.

MS GALLAGHER: in relation to the treatment of a senior and valued official in the ACT public service, as he has done from time to time.

But in terms of the claim that there is an increased demand on the emergency department, let us just go through the figures. Prior to the walk-in centre opening, demand for emergency department services had grown by five per cent in the ACT, up six per cent at Canberra Hospital and three per cent at Calvary hospital. A similar growth pattern has continued since the opening of the walk-in centre. Canberra Hospital has seen a six per cent growth in presentations each year for the first two years of the operation of the walk-in centre. But, at the same time, despite the walk-in centre being located on the other side of town, Calvary has also seen an increase in presentations to the emergency department of four per cent in 2010-11 and five per cent in 2011-12. So despite Calvary not having a walk-in centre, presentations have grown in line with those at Canberra Hospital.

However, you should also note that category 5 presentations to Canberra Hospital, whilst rising in 2010-11—which was the year the walk-in centre was opened—have reduced by 11 per cent over the past two years from 7,825 presentations down to 6,999. And the figure has been more dramatic at Calvary Public Hospital—when you talk to the doctors there they will tell you that—which has seen a reduction in category 5 presentations by 34 per cent. Considering that the walk-in centre is primarily targeting category 5 patients, or that cohort of patients, the data could suggest that people are opting to use the walk-in centre over presenting to the emergency department for minor illnesses and injuries.

Furthermore, presentations to the walk-in centre have grown substantially, with over a 26 per cent increase in presentations in 2012-13 compared with its first full year of operation. So we have seen presentations to the walk-in centre grow from just over 15,000 to over 20,000, and the rate of referral to the emergency department from the walk-in centre remains very low at 4.8 per cent. They are the facts. That is the reality.

Mr Hanson can quote from a particular document; he can link it to ED timeliness if he chooses, but what we are actually seeing in the two years since it opened is a very significant reduction in category 5 patients and an increase in presentations overall to the walk-in centre with similar increases in presentations to emergency departments at both Canberra and Calvary hospitals, despite Calvary not having a walk-in centre located on its site. That is the reality of what we are seeing.

Mr Hanson does not acknowledge that the author of the report he uses to further his argument of hostility towards a nurse-led model of care actually wrote a letter to the editor of the *Canberra Times*. I think she was probably feeling a bit concerned about the way the debate had gone, because it is politicised—the Liberals say the walk-in centre is bad; we say it is good. She wrote:

The ACT nurse-led walk-in centre is an innovation bringing the ACT up to speed with its international colleagues. Use of findings from the evaluation ... can only strengthen this and future models of care.

She also said the ACT is the leading jurisdiction rectifying the lag in nurse-led models of care. Again, put in perspective an academic's analysis of a perfect world with a perfect model. If I had a perfect world here, I would have opened a walk-in centre somewhere off the Canberra Hospital site and it would not have had such a tight scope and practice for the nurses that has led it to be really an advanced practice nurse model rather than a nurse practitioner model. However, that was not the environment we were working in. We were getting representations and concerns were raised with me by medical practitioners about the safety of the service. They made it very clear that in the early days of the service, from a service safety point of view, they did not want to see a new model of care that had never been tried in the ACT being implemented away from medical governance structures. That is the reality.

I had the choice of having doctors campaigning against a nurse-led walk-in centre or trying to find a solution. So I found a solution—the solution was to establish it on the grounds of the hospital, to have it come under the clinical governance structure of the

hospital, then to evaluate it after 12 to 18 months to demonstrate that the service was safe and high quality and then look at expanding it out to the community, which is exactly what we are doing with the new ones that will open in Belconnen later this year and in Tuggeranong next year.

Every single time the walk-in centre is raised I get people talking with me and putting things on Twitter about how much they love the service. When this issue arose a couple of weeks ago I got responses on my Twitter page, for example:

I used it about a year ago. Nurse was so great I wanted to hug her.

Another:

Attended the Walk in Centre the other day—super service and friendly staff!
Great initiative!

Another:

I love this service, never long to wait to see a nurse. Exceptional clinical practice and staff. Better than some GPs.

It goes on:

Would be good to see a walk in clinic in Gungahlin.

Another one:

As a working mum of 3 kids I have used the walk in centre many times.
Fantastic service.

More comments:

The Walk-in Centre is brilliant ... Why does the opposition think their only job is to “oppose”? Why can’t they come up with “constructive alternatives” ...

People love the walk-in centre. They love it. It is out-of-hours extended care, easy to get into, free and quality care. That is what the walk-in centre offers the people of Canberra. And it is not only seen—

Mr Hanson: You shouldn’t have lied about what effect it would have on ED, minister. That’s the problem.

MS GALLAGHER: And, yes, we wanted it to relieve pressure on the emergency department, and we believed having it there could, potentially, achieve that, and I have to say the jury is still out on what its impact has been. As I said in question time, I do not think it will ever be proven because the increases in presentations to the emergency department were happening in the years before the walk-in centre opened and they have continued afterwards. And they have continued at the hospital where there is no walk-in centre. I could easily stand here and argue that the walk-in centre eased the pressure—maybe the presentations to the Canberra Hospital would have

grown by eight or nine per cent in the year if we had not opened the walk-in centre—and nobody could measure it. But it is just as valid an argument as the one Mr Hanson puts.

But putting all of that aside, we were looking at a GP shortage, huge pressure on our emergency departments and very busy hospitals—so, yes, find me guilty as charged of implementing a new health service that had never been tried before in any public system in the country.

Mr Hanson: Are you responsible for anything?

MS GALLAGHER: I am responsible for everything, Mr Hanson, unlike you.

Mr Hanson: Really? Only the good news.

MS GALLAGHER: Absolutely everything. Right, yes, the day is full of good news, Mr Hanson.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Doszpot): Mr Hanson, you were given a relatively good run. Could you please desist from any further interjections.

MS GALLAGHER: The day is full of good news. That is the day in the life of a Chief Minister—and I say that with a heavy level of sarcasm for the benefit of *Hansard*.

In relation to the paediatric waiting area, this was an election commitment of the government. In my time as health minister, and certainly when we were developing the women's and children's hospital, I wanted to see a paediatric emergency department in the women's and children's hospital. At the time I was briefed by officials in a range of meetings that I had around that project that that was not the way to go. That was supported by the emergency department clinicians I spoke to at the time. They did not want to see a fragmented emergency department, and because of the layout of how that building was going to be built, that would have compromised the emergency department care. And I took that advice.

Instead, I found money and we built a paediatric waiting area in the emergency department as a way of addressing some of the complaints that I was getting from parents about how children were having to wait in areas where, particularly on the weekends, there was a level of presentations affected by alcohol, and parents were very distressed at that. So within the confines of the emergency department we created a paediatric waiting area and within the emergency department a paediatric space was operational.

I received information from clinicians when I was putting my own election policies together specifically in relation to the paediatric area, and Mr Hanson adopted those. It is not my fault he had not done his homework over whether it was a good or bad thing. He just adopted it the next day. Now he has to stand by that. But I had done the work myself as a politician creating an election commitment. It was not driven by the department; it was driven by me.

I had been watching what was happening at Royal North Shore Hospital, which has an emergency department with very similar characteristics to ours. I know it is hard to listen to, Mr Hanson, but when you get rational responses and you put them all together, you would agree that this is an okay thing to do. The Royal North Shore Hospital has very similar presentations to Canberra Hospital. About a quarter of its presentations are paediatric patients. It probably sees between 55,000 and 65,000 presentations a year, and it implemented a paediatric treatment area designated alongside its emergency department. So, yes, I went to the election thinking that was a good idea for Canberra, and I also sent it to the commonwealth government and asked if they would help fund it, and I got them to agree to \$5 million. That is a good outcome.

The paediatric emergency department will start construction later this year. Of all the complaints I get about the emergency department, most of them are not about timeliness; many of them are about parents wanting their children to be treated in a child-specific area. That is what this paediatric emergency department will do, and we will be very happy to keep the Assembly informed of progress.

Just briefly, in conclusion, if the Auditor-General wants to do a report into any aspect of the healthcare system there is nothing preventing her. In fact, the Assembly cannot direct the Auditor-General. The Auditor-General, I am sure, follows debates across the ACT community. She has already done a review into a particular aspect of the emergency department and it is on her forward program, as I understand. But there is absolutely nothing to prevent—

Mr Hanson: No, it isn't.

MS GALLAGHER: It is. It is on her forward program to come back and have a look at the work that has been done around the emergency hub, but there is nothing to stop the Auditor-General doing whatever she likes and examining whatever she likes within the ACT administration. She does not need a referral from the Assembly; she can do it herself. That is her role and those are the choices she makes in putting forward her work plan.

But in terms of the work that has been done to date, there is a lot of work and a lot of goodwill, and these programs, both successful, will continue.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (4.10): I rise to oppose this motion this afternoon due to the motion's blatant disregard of the community's sentiments on the nurse-led walk-in centre.

Again, I find myself rising to refute the opposition's claims on government programs, this time in health. The opposition have obviously not gone out into the community and talked to the families in the ACT who have used this free service. I have, and they think it is fantastic. This is substantiated by the independent evaluation of the nurse-led ACT Health walk-in centre, showing that 80 per cent of patients reported they were very satisfied with the treatment or advice that the nurse gave them, and 84 per cent said they would definitely recommend the walk-in clinic to their family and friends.

I quote from a statement from ACT Health:

This report shows that the Walk-in Centre at Canberra Hospital provides a safe and effective service that is supported and valued by many members of the ACT community.

The Walk-in Centre located at Canberra Hospital is the first nurse led Walk-in Centre in Australia.

This Independent Evaluation of the Nurse-led ACT Health Walk-in Centre report was compiled by representatives of the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute and The Australian National University.

This report confirms that the implementation of this first nurse led Walk-in Centre is having a positive impact on patients and practitioners across the Territory.

The report highlights that 84% of patients surveyed would definitely recommend the Walk-in Centre to family and friends, with 82% stating that they would definitely use the Walk-in Centre again.

I mentioned that earlier. It continues:

There are many positive findings in the report and there are also some areas of improvement.

The ACT government is working on those. During the election campaign I, along with my team, doorknocked more than 6,000 south Tuggeranong residents about this very topic and ACT Labor's commitment to increase this service by creating an additional centre in Tuggeranong. May I resonate the sentiments of the independent evaluation as, when I was out in the electorate speaking to these residents, the response we received was absolutely ecstatic.

Most residents that we spoke to through our visits during the campaign were pleased with the government's decision to take the walk-in centres into town centres and therefore boost the availability to those who need it most. With \$951,000 being allocated to the Tuggeranong and Belconnen walk-in centre design and fit-out in the 2013-14 budget, this government is showing its commitment to the future of these walk-in clinics. This is exactly what the government's health reform is all about. This government is committed to ensuring that affordable and, whenever possible, free health care is accessible to all residents who require it.

While receiving no negative responses—so out of all of those doorknocks not one negative response—to the walk-in centre, some people had had the opportunity to utilise it—so some had actually been there—but all thought it was a great idea.

This motion implies that the walk-in centre is not wanted or properly used by the community. That is simply untrue, with the walk-in centre's popularity growing steadily, with 21,000 visits in 2012-13 alone. This, along with the positive feedback that I and many others in the chamber hear every day, makes the opposition claims completely false. I will quote one satisfied visitor to the walk-in centre:

Thank goodness someone has finally seen the need for this service and to have extended hours. These nurses and admin staff are providing a gift and I believe this needs to continue.

Here is another:

Excellent facility—we could not access our regular GP and this service is great—please continue this clinic, as the mother of three young children, it is a comfort to know I can get care for my children if outside my GPs normal business hours. Thank you.

This is very similar to the feedback that I continue to hear and look forward to hearing more of when the Tuggeranong walk-in centre is delivered in the near future.

Of course this is only one part of what the ACT government is doing in the Health portfolio in Brindabella, with this adding to the \$4.9 million allocated through funding of stage 2 of the upgrade of the Tuggeranong health centre. The Tuggeranong community health centre delivers a comprehensive range of healthcare services to the local community. The centre offers services aimed at assisting clients to better manage acute and chronic conditions in the community and closer to home, while reducing the reliance on hospitals.

I will name just a few of the services which are offered by this vital community health service: community nursing, including ambulatory care clinics; allied health services such as physiotherapy, podiatry and nutrition; diabetes services, including services for those with gestational diabetes—nurse educator and dietician; women, youth and children services; adult mental health services; alcohol and drug counselling; and pathology collection.

The upgrade of this facility is something that is welcomed by the community in Brindabella, and the improvements will bring the community health services in Tuggeranong to be something the area can be truly proud of.

I urge the Canberra Liberals to take a serious look at what the community wants from their health services and to stop using these important programs as yet another political football.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (4.16): I would like to thank Mr Hanson for raising this issue again today. I think it is important that we continue to talk about these matters.

I would like to take the opportunity to reiterate the Greens' support for the nurse-led walk-in centres. Although many of us in this place agree that it would have been preferable for the walk-in centre at Woden not to have been located at the Canberra Hospital, I think that the Chief Minister has explained to us, both on previous occasions and again in some detail today, why the decision was taken to establish it there. I am certainly of the view that whilst it might have been optimal to have it somewhere else, it is better to have it where it is than not to have it at all, as might

have been the case. I do not believe that the evidence given to the Minister for Health was ignored and misinterpreted. The role of a minister is to look through all of the evidence available at the time and make the best decision possible.

I think that Mr Hanson has taken a selective view of the independent evaluation of the walk-in centre. Overall, the review shows that there have been positive outcomes from the centre.

The Greens certainly support the plans for the construction of new centres at Belconnen and Tuggeranong. It is pleasing to see \$9 million for the expansion and enhancement of the Belconnen community health centre, and especially to co-locate a walk-in centre at Belconnen, as well as to open another one in Tuggeranong. We all appreciate the importance of these centres in their role in preventive health care and in reducing emergency department pressure. The walk-in centres will be a great relief for residents on both the north side of Canberra and in Tuggeranong.

I have prepared an amendment, which I have now circulated, which calls on the health minister to table implementation plans for the forthcoming walk-in centres at Tuggeranong and Belconnen, including consultation with key stakeholders. That will provide the Assembly with some additional information and it will be helpful to see what both the timetable and the implementation plans are.

I look forward to seeing the improvement in health services that these new walk-in centres will provide. Some of the comments that Mr Gentlemen made about his experience of talking to constituents about the impact certainly matches the conversations I have had. People find them to be a very convenient service, as well as a real addition to the spectrum of health services in the territory. Their extended hours, beyond those of the average GP, as well as their affordability, make them really valuable, especially for people with children, who often end up with the sort of injuries that can be treated with that level of health care and who do not require an ED type of visit.

When it comes to the paediatric stream at the emergency department, I understand that it is universally accepted in this place that it would be beneficial to have a separate paediatric stream in the ED. At least, that had been my understanding coming into the discussion. I am less clear having listened to the debate now. I do recall that it was an issue that the ALP announced during the 2012 election. The Canberra Liberals supported it the next day, or followed up or replicated it the next day. I also understand that there is \$5 million of federal funding available for such a stream, which is a great start to providing that additional service.

The amendment I have prepared calls on the Minister for Health to table ACT Health's implementation plans regarding the establishment of a paediatric stream in the emergency department. I have framed it in this way after a discussion with the Chief Minister. She reiterated in her comments in this debate the fact that she prepared this idea. Therefore my understanding is that there is not specific advice as such in the way that Mr Hanson was framing it. But the implementation plans will provide the analysis that I believe Mr Hanson is looking for. They will draw out what is being prepared, how it is being rolled out and the like. I think that meets the spirit of what I believe Mr Hanson was asking for in the motion.

When it comes to an Auditor-General's review of the emergency department, the Greens do agree that emergency department waiting times need to be addressed. Again that has been acknowledged in this place repeatedly—the desire for improvement there. When we last debated this in February, the last time Mr Hanson brought a motion forward in this regard, the amendment I put forward called on the Minister for Health to detail the government's plans to improve waiting times in the emergency departments.

As a result of that, in March 2013 the Chief Minister tabled the emergency access plan 2013-17, which outlined the government's plans for improving patient flow and waiting times at the emergency departments at Canberra and Calvary hospitals. There is quite a list of initiatives in there. Members will recall this document as it was tabled in the Assembly, which the motion in February required. It goes through in quite some detail the initiatives and the timing for them, and provides it in quite a comprehensive way.

I believe that is a very useful plan which gives a full and holistic picture of what the various improvements are which are being undertaken and when they will occur. I believe it is a plan which will work to address waiting times in the EDs, and one which we should ensure that the government stays focused on. We cannot sit here at this point and guarantee that this will produce all the results we hope that it might. But it is the best plan that ACT Health, I guess in partnership with the minister, have been able to prepare at this time. There is a level of transparency there and certainly time lines on which the government can be held to account. I think that gives the Assembly a strong foundation moving forward to examine this issue.

The budget for this year, the 2013-14 budget, funds a number of targeted initiatives which are designed to improve performance and waiting times in the emergency departments, including \$8.25 million to complete the planning and forward design stages of a new public hospital at the University of Canberra, \$12 million for improving services at Canberra Hospital's emergency department and to establish a rapid assessment unit at Calvary Public Hospital, and introducing mobile primary health care. I certainly look forward to working with the government to develop this program in future years because we know that mobile services such as these can make a real difference for some people between seeing a doctor or a dentist and not doing so. Whilst they are not a direct substitute for a trip to the emergency department, we know that that kind of preventive work, where somebody's health problems are picked up early and they are given the treatment that they need, can mean that something does not become worse and ultimately result in a trip to the emergency department.

That is certainly a key emphasis of the Greens in our health policy—to acknowledge that pressure on the EDs is growing and that we really need to look at some of the root causes for that and at whether we can provide solutions now that take pressure off the emergency department and perhaps provide extra resources or new strategies where they are needed, while also looking at the longer term strategy of trying to avoid people needing to make that trip to emergency.

In terms of the Auditor-General, my office has spoken to the Auditor-General's Office. I understand that the Auditor-General will be conducting a review in 2014-15 on the progress of implementation of the recommendations of performance report No 6 of 2012—*Emergency department performance information*. This review will largely only address the processes around the performance information, but I do understand that one of the issues is to look at how to ensure that the indicators which the department reports against go to the heart of the issue.

I note that recommendation 1 from the 2012 Auditor-General's report was to improve publicly reported performance indicators to include additional qualitative indicators. The Greens would like to see more work done to address ways to reduce the pressure on our hospitals, and in particular, having regard to this motion, our emergency rooms. We all know that there is a huge amount of pressure on our emergency staff, but this is not necessarily an indicator of a poorly run facility.

All members in this place would agree that it is vital that the emergency department runs as efficiently as possible. But we do not want to divert huge amounts of government resources to evaluating artificial KPIs when they do not actually address the key issues—reducing the number of people using emergency in the first case, for instance.

They are the comments that I wanted to make when it comes to this motion. There are really two issues blended together here. One is the nurse-led walk-in centres and how that is going, and the issue of how that then relates to the emergency department and how that is performing. The reason I have framed the amendment in the way I have is that I think there are steps being taken which will improve the performance of the emergency departments. I do believe that the walk-in centres will help to ease pressure on the emergency departments. In particular, when they are opened in Belconnen and Tuggeranong, they will provide both an alternative for some people to making a trip to the emergency department and a good health service for those parts of our city.

I believe, as I have outlined, that in the emergency access plan and the resources that have been provided to implement that through the budget, practical steps are being taken to improve performance in the emergency department. I think there is information that Mr Hanson has asked for that is valid to be presented today, and that is why my amendment calls on the health minister to table that information in the Assembly. I now move my amendment as circulated:

Omit all words after "That this Assembly", substitute:

- (1) affirms its support for nurse-led walk-in centres, and supports the Government's plans for the construction of new centres at Belconnen and Tuggeranong;
- (2) notes that:

- (a) in March 2013 the Health Minister tabled the Emergency Access Plan 2013-17, which outlined the Government's plans for improving patient flow and waiting times at the Emergency Departments at Canberra and Calvary Hospitals;
 - (b) the 2013-2014 ACT Budget funds a number of targeted initiatives which will improve performance and waiting times in our Emergency Departments, such as planning for a new public hospital, introducing a rapid assessment unit at Calvary, increasing resources at The Canberra Hospital Emergency Department and introducing mobile primary healthcare; and
 - (c) the Auditor-General will be conducting a review in 2014-2015 on progress of implementation of the recommendations from the Performance Report 6/2012—Emergency Department Performance Information; and
- (3) calls on the Minister for Health to table:
- (a) ACT Health implementation plans regarding the establishment of a paediatric stream in the Emergency Department; and
 - (b) implementation plans for the forthcoming walk-in centres at Tuggeranong and Belconnen, including consultation with key stakeholders.”.

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (4.26): I oppose Mr Hanson's motion. I wonder whether Mr Hanson has read the patient satisfaction statistics in the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute review that he thinks is so damning. Mr Gentleman has. For the benefit of Mr Hanson, I will quote from page 58 where it says:

The majority of respondents left the Walk-in Centre (96%) without any unanswered questions. Eighty-three percent would definitely and 16% would probably recommend the Walk-in Centre to family and friends. Eighty-two percent would definitely and 16% would probably use the Walk-in Centre again.

The report adds:

The patient satisfaction with the Walk-in Centre is high and suggests that a quality service is being provided to the community.

I do not know what Mr Hanson wants for his constituents, but this service sounds very good to me. Despite Mr Hanson's carping, I want one in my electorate. The even better news is that Belconnen residents and people working in Belconnen are getting one at the new Belconnen health centre that will include a nurse-led walk-in centre.

The walk-in centre will increase the range of options for people seeking advice or medical assistance and take the pressure off other frontline services efficiently and effectively. The walk-in centre is just one of the benefits from the \$9 million allocated in this budget for the newly completed new Belconnen health centre which greatly expands the range of community health services available in Ginninderra.

The Belconnen walk-in centre will have the advantage, for clients, of being in the Belconnen town centre, not next to the nearest emergency department which is at Calvary. Indeed, the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute's review of the Canberra Hospital walk-in centre sang the joys of walk-in centres located in a community setting as even more effective, based on their research. I have been eagerly awaiting the announcement of Belconnen's walk-in centre. It is an exciting development in health care in Ginninderra.

But the wait means Belconnen's new centre will benefit from the experience gained at our first walk-in centre at Canberra Hospital. It will learn from that centre, the practice nurses and nurse practitioners who run it and from the review of the first centre that they contributed to.

Of course, we have seen the respect the Liberal Party holds for nurses, with the mass sackings of nurses in Liberal-governed states, especially Queensland. Perhaps there, but for the grace of the ACT electors last October, would have gone Canberra nurses. In chapter 5 of the review, "Walk-in Centre Nurse Satisfaction", it says at page 82—

Members interjecting—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Doszpot): Dr Bourke, could you sit down for a second. Members, we have heard most people quietly. Can we give Dr Bourke a chance to be heard as well now. Thank you. Dr Bourke, resume.

DR BOURKE: Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker. In chapter 5 of the review, "Walk-in Centre Nurse Satisfaction", it says at page 82:

When higher levels of nurse job satisfaction are experienced, there is an increase in morale and commitment which makes it more likely that a nurse will stay in the profession. Nursing job satisfaction is important to both health care providers and patients. Nursing satisfaction has been linked to positive patient outcomes and a greater perceived quality of care.

Furthermore it says:

A clear understanding of the nurse practitioner role in the Walk-in Centre, the associated clinical governance and need for collaboration will support successful implementation; providing a source of satisfaction for nurse practitioners able to fully implement their roles, and for advanced practice nurses in terms of an available career structure and organisational mobility.

Nurse practitioners are enjoying new levels of responsibility in the walk-in centres. Other professions in the health sector are getting used to them and recognising them as key members of a healthcare team. Nurse practitioners require many years of experience in a clinical speciality and a masters qualification. The ACT now has 30 nurse practitioners working in both the public and private sectors, and they are leading the way for the profession nationally.

I would also like to praise the great essential work done by the many nurses in my electorate and pay tribute to the nurses and midwives at Cavalry hospital, those who are working in community health and aged care, nurses teaching and studying at the University of Canberra faculty of health, and I also look forward to seeing many more nurses working in Belconnen at the University of Canberra public hospital.

I believe the evolution of nurse-led walk-in centres in the ACT is a recognition of the breadth of skills we have in our nursing workforce. They have not always received the respect they deserve for their contribution to our community. However, as the review highlights—and here I repeat what Mr Gentleman and Ms Gallagher have already said—some of the greatest advocates for the Canberra Hospital walk-in centre are the patients. Since the Canberra Hospital centre opened, it has seen 51,829 people. About 21,000 patients used the service in the 2012-13 financial year. Patients surveyed in the review are pleased with, amongst other measures, the ease of seeing a nurse and the service's accessibility.

The current service, being open 16 hours a day every day of the week from 7 am till 11 pm, means it is meeting the needs of families when illness does not work to a timetable. And, of course, no appointment is necessary, and it is free. Canberrans have voted with their feet and flocked to the first nurse-led walk-in centre. They will do the same with the new centres in Belconnen and Tuggeranong.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (4.33): In speaking to the amendment and in closing, I thank members for their contributions, particularly old Statler and Waldorf up the back there. And if people do not know who they are, Statler and Waldorf are a pair of Muppet characters. They are two disagreeable old men who first appeared in the television series the *Muppet Show* and heckled the rest of the cast from their balcony seats.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Porter): Excuse me, Mr Hanson, just a minute. Would you mind referring to people by their proper names instead of by those of cartoon characters.

MR HANSON: Sure.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I do require you to refer to people by their proper names.

MR HANSON: I certainly will.

Ms Burch: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order, we have had many a comment withdrawn, and I would ask that that comment be withdrawn. I think it is a derogatory comment on members in the chamber.

Mr Smyth: On the point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, he has already withdrawn, and the minister should wake up and pay attention to the proceedings of the house instead of wasting time with spurious points of order.

Ms Burch: Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not think he was asked to withdraw. You asked that they be referred to—

Mr Smyth: She did, he did. Wake up!

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, I will—

MR HANSON: Can you stop the clock, if that is possible? This is dragging on a bit.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, we will stop the clock, please. Mr Hanson, would you like to formally withdraw those comments please?

MR HANSON: Certainly, Madam Deputy Speaker. But the point I want to make is that Dr Bourke and Mr Gentleman, perhaps intentionally or unintentionally, are missing the point of the motion. The motion is not: do we like the walk-in centre or not? Is it providing a service to a lot of people in our community or not? Do people, when we are door-knocking, like it or not? The point of the motion is that the evidence drawn from the national health service and the analysis by Katy Gallagher's own department shows that the walk-in centre, if you put it at the Canberra Hospital, will cause problems at the emergency department, will increase activity. It has been found in this report to have increased activity at the ED. That is the point of this motion. That is what we are talking about.

So the point Mr Gentleman needs to consider is: if you had knocked on doors and said, "Do you like the walk-in centre but are you aware that the analysis is that they are going to increase pressure at the ED and your children will wait longer at the ED, and the minister is out there telling them something different?", I wonder whether you would have got the same response. Perhaps not. And this is where the members either intentionally or unintentionally are trying to spin this into a "do we like nurses or not" type motion. That is not the nub. The nurses in the walk-in centre do a good job, work hard, are very well qualified. The issue is not about them.

The issue is about the fact that a service was put at the Canberra Hospital that the evidence has found has increased activity at the ED. The department said it would increase activity at the ED, and the minister was out there spruiking the opposite, the minister was out there saying, "It's going to fix the problem. It's going to release the pressure on the ED," and it simply was not true.

What I am saying, through this motion, is that we now have another situation where, based on what is obviously a conversation between Katy Gallagher, the minister, and Ross Solly, she has been boasting about how she has gone off and ignored her department's advice. Health officials have warned against having a paediatric ED but she is going to do it anyway and she has gone off and secured some money. And the point I want to clarify is: is history repeating itself? Are we going to have the same situation where Katy Gallagher has been only telling one side of the story and, you could say, mis-telling it or certainly putting a gloss on it?

I think it is reasonable to say, “Here we go again.” Let us make sure that this is the right decision. If the evidence and the experts are saying something contrary, I think now would be a nice time to know so that we can make informed decisions. And this is all about open and accountable government. In opposition or in the community we do not have access to all the information. I do not have access to the experts.

We do freedom of information requests. We ask questions on notice. We work diligently. Indeed, it was only through a freedom of information request that we secured the strategic plan. Katy Gallagher said, “This is just a low-grade, minor sort of report.” No-one saw that. But the addressees on it include Ian Thompson, who is a very senior health official and is now running the hospital, Mark Cormack, who was the previous chief executive, and a number of other very senior health officials. So I think it is a little disingenuous for the minister to say that this is a strategy that does not have much of a part to play, when the strategy said very clearly that this should not be considered as something that would improve ED performance. Based on what the review has said, it did not.

Let me go to the review and what it found. Despite seeking evidence to inform development on the UK walk-in centre, the evidence was not fully used and some clear lessons were ignored, resulting in much of the evidence being lost in translation. There is no evidence from the national evaluation that co-located walk-in centres had any effect on attendance rates, process costs or outcomes at ED. This lack of evidence had significant implications for the establishment of a walk-in centre at the campus with a tertiary hospital, with a stated rationale of relieving pressure on the ED. Contrary to this rationale, the location of the ACT walk-in centre actually resulted in a net increase in ED activity.

This is not the Jeremy Hanson theory on what happened. This is an analysis that has been done. And it is interesting that Mr Gentleman and Dr Bourke were spruiking the report and the evaluation that was done of the walk-in centre—and they are happy to quote from that and rely on that—but when I quote from this document, the academic research, they say, “That’s just a report. That’s just someone’s opinion.” You cannot have it both ways.

What are we to rely on, if not experts from the *Journal of Health Services Research and Policy* who actually did a detailed analysis? If we are not going to accept their evidence, whose are we going to accept? Are we just going to simply say, “We will take Katy Gallagher at face value and we will just agree with what she says”?

We will not be supporting the Greens’ amendment because, once again, what we are seeing is a Greens’ amendment that ignores the nub of the motion. It is not going to provide us the evidence that we need regarding the paediatrics and it is not going to give us what we need, which is an independent performance review or audit of the emergency department.

The ministers say, “The Auditor-General can do one whenever she wants. She watches the debate. She is informed. She can do one when she wants.” But what the Auditor-General would be doing is watching the debate, looking at what the various

sides are saying and seeing that a full performance audit that is being proposed has not got bipartisan support because there is a motion saying, “Let us do one. Let us request that the Auditor-General do one,” and what the Auditor-General would be seeing is that there are nine people in this chamber that do not want her to do it. It is disappointing that they are not supporting the motion that calls on her to do it.

In the Chief Minister’s speech, she provided some statistics and evidence trying to suggest that there is different evidence to what is provided in the report. But what I would say is that the last time we had a debate about ED statistics the Chief Minister presented ED statistics which were improving. And I think we know why that was. We have to question whether Katy Gallagher is going out there and saying, “I have a strategy. I have a plan. I am going to put walk-in centres at the Canberra Hospital.” Contrary to all the evidence, Katy Gallagher was saying, “I am going to improve EDs, the waiting times,” and the opposite occurred.

How much pressure did that put on Kate Jackson to then fabricate the results? Did all of this play into the fact that Kate Jackson knew the minister said she had the plan to improve it? Kate Jackson would have read that review, would have read the strategic plan for the emergency department and would have known, because she certainly would have been someone who had access to this, that what the minister was saying was directly contrary to what the department was saying and what the strategy was. How much pressure did that then put on Kate Jackson to try to support the minister to make the numbers look like what the minister wanted? And that is probably a question we will never get the answer to.

I am disappointed we have not got the support for this—

Ms Gallagher: Again.

MR HANSON: because what we are going to see, again, is people in the ACT waiting longer than they should for treatment in our emergency departments. And what we are going to never know is whether the advice provided on the paediatric stream said do it or do not do it so that we can make an objective decision about whether that is going to help or whether that is going to hinder.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 8

Mr Barr	Ms Gallagher	Mr Coe	Ms Lawder
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.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Housing—homelessness

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (4.46): I move:

- (1) notes that in National Homeless Person's Week 2013:
 - (a) the Common Ground project, a joint initiative between the ACT and Federal Government and Common Ground Housing ACT, supports people to move directly from homelessness into permanent housing and follows through with the support they require to stay housed, to improve their health and employment prospects, and to live independently and with stability;
 - (b) the 2013-2014 ACT Budget has provided \$7.6 million to the Common Ground project; and
 - (c) the Federal Government, through its National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness Development Fund for 2013-14, has announced it will also make a \$4 million contribution to the Common Ground project in Canberra;
- (2) supports the establishment of a Common Ground project in Gungahlin, noting that:
 - (a) it provides for one and two bedroom self-contained units that will house a mix of people including low income renters and those who have experienced homelessness;
 - (b) tenants will receive ongoing on-site support, including access to mainstream and specialist services and tenancy support, to ensure they can keep their homes and improve their lives;
 - (c) it will be located close to shops, employment opportunities, public transport and community facilities and will include security features and communal spaces to help build a strong sense of community; and
 - (d) the local community will continue to be engaged on the development of Common Ground in Gungahlin; indeed the support of the local community is integral to the success of the project; and
- (3) further notes:
 - (a) the Common Ground model has proven successful in Australia and overseas as a sustainable, practical project that improves the lives of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness;
 - (b) that the advocacy of Common Ground Housing ACT has contributed to strong support for a Common Ground project in Canberra;

- (c) that the Common Ground project is an important part of the Parliamentary Agreement for the Eighth Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory; and
- (d) the ACT Government will continue to explore support for innovative models that have proven successful in reducing disadvantage to vulnerable Canberrans.

I rise today to speak to the motion in my name on the Common Ground project, an exciting joint initiative between the ACT and federal governments. This is a particularly pertinent motion in national Homeless Persons Week, which we are acknowledging in the Assembly this week. Addressing homelessness has been a long-term commitment of the ACT government to assist the vulnerable in our community. It is underpinned by a social inclusion agenda that has the aim of maximising each individual's participation in the economic and social life of the community.

The ACT government sees safe, secure and affordable housing as a cornerstone of this commitment, and it is the foundation upon which other support and assistance rests to enable people to live their lives to the fullest. It opens up opportunities for education, training and employment, and improved wellbeing. The ACT government has committed \$7.6 million in the 2013-14 budget and \$130,000 in the 2012-13 budget to the Common Ground project. As you can see, Madam Deputy Speaker, it has been in the ACT budget program for quite a while. This demonstrates the government's strong commitment to this innovative approach in providing real solutions to people experiencing homelessness. Common Ground has also received support from the commonwealth government with a \$4 million contribution under the national partnership agreement homelessness development fund.

Establishing a Common Ground project in Canberra fits within the social housing continuum. It adds to housing initiatives that have been established through programs under the national partnership agreement on homelessness such as our place and a place to call home. The Common Ground model will coordinate the delivery of affordable and long-term stable accommodation with on-site and off-site supports. There will be a fifty-fifty mix of homeless and low income tenants who will live in 40 one and two-bedroom units. The target tenants for Common Ground will be some of the most vulnerable people who have experienced homelessness in the ACT—singles and couples without children and those over 18 years of age.

There will be commercial and community spaces on the ground floor that will be used to provide on-site support and assistance to tenants. Areas for social inclusion activities and casual interaction will also be included. There is also potential for a social enterprise to be included in the building. This would provide enormous potential for the tenants to build up an enterprise which provides job opportunities, training and also a connection with the broader community.

The ACT government will provide a site in or near the Gungahlin town centre for Common Ground. It will be close to commercial activity and employment, community facilities—including a public library and health centre—and public transport. Consultation with the Gungahlin community, initially through the

Gungahlin Community Council, has commenced on the Common Ground project and will continue until its completion. Indeed, as the motion notes, support from the local community is an integral part of the success of the model.

Common Ground has been successful in other states and territories and overseas. Common Ground Canberra and this project have been informed by the lessons learnt from Common Ground developments in Sydney, Hobart, Melbourne and Brisbane. For members who are unaware, Common Ground in Australia is an idea borrowed from the United States. It was started by Rosanne Haggerty in 1990 after building an alliance between government, businesses and philanthropists to convert the rundown drug den of New York's Times Square Hotel into an attractive and affordable housing project.

From its inception the idea was to provide secure accommodation to people on low incomes as well as to the homeless and to provide support services to increase the chances that residents would be able to make a success of their tenancies. Since then, Common Ground has created 3,200 units of housing in the north-east of the United States, assisting more than 5,000 people to find a secure place to live.

The Common Ground philosophy is an example of housing first or home first, and that is the approach to homelessness that aims to facilitate immediate entry into permanent accommodation. This means the first aim is to get stable housing for people experiencing homelessness. Homeless people often present with a multiple and complex problem scenario. A more conventional view is to treat addiction or mental health issues before trying to move people into secure tenancies. A housing-first approach is based on a belief that a homeless person's mental illness or addiction can only be successfully dealt with after his or her housing has been stabilised. Evidence from around the world and Australia is that this approach works well for most residents.

It is exciting that the ACT government has committed to and supplied the funding for such an innovative model here in Canberra. As I stated, this is not just a government initiative but one that has support from business and community groups. Common Ground has strong support from members of the Common Ground Canberra group, comprised of businesses and community sector leaders in the ACT. The group has been very successful in gathering wide support from the Canberra community and has secured a number of pledges and donations. I salute its outstanding efforts in getting Common Ground onto the radar of Canberrans.

I would also like to draw the Assembly's attention to another new housing model here in the ACT, which, like Common Ground, has also operated successfully overseas. The Getting a Life Intentional Community Cooperative supports young people with a disability and provides additional public housing in the ACT. It has been established to provide an innovative and supportive environment comprising an intentional community, or neighbourhood of friends, made up of specially selected ACT Housing tenants.

It was a fantastic privilege for me to attend the opening of the intentional community program. I was at the launch, and just before the official proceedings began with Her

Excellency the Governor-General, I was given a tour of one of the units by a parent of one of the prospective tenants. She was so proud that she could see an opportunity for her son to grow up in that specific intentional community. But not only was it important that he had those around him of perhaps similar needs and concerns, but also that the construction of the unit itself was specifically designed for his needs. She commented particularly on what you would call the family room close to the kitchen and said it was big enough and secure enough for him to dance in his wheelchair in that location. That was quite a moving experience.

The benefits of the intentional community were recognised recently by the Real Estate Institute of the ACT which awarded the Community Services Directorate a community services award for the project. The ACT government can be proud of its many services and initiatives to help address homelessness and disadvantage. These other services include initiatives such as the supportive tenancy service, the street to home program and support for the early morning drop-in centre.

The supportive tenancy service is an example of how early intervention can be effective in preventing homelessness by working with vulnerable people who are experiencing specific challenges and difficulties.

Street to home provides assertive outreach with the aim of addressing the causes of homelessness and assisting people to move into stable accommodation when the time is right for them. The program not only helps to move people off the streets but also seeks to address the underlying issues that may have contributed to them becoming homeless in the first instance. Over \$1 million has been invested in the street to home program.

The ACT government has also invested close to \$700,000 in the early morning centre, which is located at Pilgrim House in Civic. The early morning centre provides warmth, food and shelter during the day as well as showers and locker facilities. It also provides the opportunity to link homeless people with further supports as required. The early morning centre complements the free food service which is run from the Griffin Centre. The free food service provides a free meal to people experiencing homelessness or those in crisis most nights of the week. I look forward to the ACT's future continuing success in supporting affordable housing options in Canberra.

I just want to come back to the free food service at the Griffin Centre. Prior to the election last year I had served for four years as a board member of the Canberra Men's Centre. I was frequently aware of the wonderful odours that would come up from the service during the morning when they would provide services for those people in need, and also in the late afternoon and evening when they were taking homeless people off the streets and providing services. It is a fantastic service for those in need in the ACT.

The Common Ground project is an important and exciting initiative by the ACT government. It is a core element of the parliamentary agreement for the Eighth Assembly. Combined with the ACT government's additional range of services to address homelessness, its provision of community housing through Housing ACT and its initiatives to increase the supply of affordable housing, Common Ground adds another element to address housing needs in the ACT.

We still have a lot more to do to ensure Canberrans do not experience homelessness, but funding that will see Common Ground a reality in the very near future is a huge step and sends a clear message of the government's commitment to addressing homelessness now and into the future. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (4.59): I am delighted that Mr Gentleman has raised this topic today and referred to national Homeless Persons Week in his motion. As you can imagine, that is an issue very close to my heart, and I commend Mr Gentleman for bringing up the topic. I also commend the Common Ground Canberra initiative, which is a fine example of commonwealth, state and philanthropic cooperation to address an important social issue. The Common Ground Canberra alliance, especially the dedicated and hardworking Elizabeth Dawson, is to be commended for its tireless pursuit of funding and support for Common Ground in the ACT, and I am very pleased this is going ahead.

The Common Ground model brings together government, corporate, philanthropic and community stakeholders to promote and deliver innovative, supportive housing solutions for chronic homelessness. In the context of yesterday's matters of public importance debate, I had expected to hear mention of this project and the philanthropic support for it, but perhaps I missed it.

Common Ground projects target the most vulnerable chronically homeless people, providing them with safe, high quality places to live and the support services and security required to keep them housed, healthy and stable. While we support this Common Ground Canberra project, we also have some concerns about the location, the cost per person and the cuts to other homelessness services. Is Gungahlin the best location, since the residents will need access to many other off-site support services, the majority of which are located in the city in the CBD? Also, the residents will need access to education and training as well as employment opportunities. Having the Common Ground Canberra project in Gungahlin may not provide the residents with the best chance to have access to the services and opportunities they will require.

Per person, the cost of this project is high—but, admittedly, not as high as keeping someone homeless. In Canberra, we have an extremely large number of people experiencing homelessness, and this means we have to think about the maximum bang for our buck. The money needs to be used in the most effective way to ensure the most number of people possible can be helped.

There is no doubt that people living rough are the most extreme and most vulnerable group of people experiencing homelessness. In the ACT two per cent of our homeless population are rough sleepers compared to six per cent nationally. Almost 300 children under the age of 12 are classed as homeless, and around 30 per cent of the ACT's homeless are aged 18 or under. And the Canberra Common Ground project will not be for children.

Just as great a concern for us are the cuts that are being made to other specialist homelessness services in the ACT. Reportedly these cuts are as high as 23 per cent. This means that other vital services which facilitate assistance to everyone, including

women and children, are being cut. The services which help a woman and her children escape physical abuse are having their funding cut. The services which help teenagers who, for one reason or another, require emergency accommodation and support are having their funding cut. Funding one model at the expense of others is a dangerous game to play.

Homelessness is many faceted. It affects people of all ages, backgrounds and genders, and a multi-pronged response is therefore required. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. In the ACT, the reasons cited by people experiencing homelessness include: financial difficulties and housing stress, 21.7 per cent; accommodation issues due to inadequate or inappropriate housing, 32.2 per cent; domestic violence and family breakdowns, 26.4 per cent; health reasons, including mental health, 6.5 per cent; and other issues, such as transition from care or discrimination, make up 13.2 per cent of people experiencing homelessness. The reasons are wide and varied and could affect anyone.

Homelessness can happen to anyone, and anyone who is homeless is someone's mother or father, brother or sister, son or daughter. Forcing other homelessness services into closure or cutting their funding to the point where they need to lay off key staff will impact on our city's vulnerable residents immediately. Staff and services have already been cut. I have heard from many homelessness services staff over the past few months expressing their concern about their funding levels and what actions this will force them to take. Robbing Peter to pay Paul is not the way to end and ultimately prevent homelessness.

Once again, I thank Mr Gentleman for raising this important issue, and we will support this motion.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Housing, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and Minister for Ageing) (5.04): I would like to thank Mr Gentleman for bringing this motion and national Homeless Persons Week to the attention of the Assembly.

I also take this opportunity to formally welcome Ms Lawder to the Assembly, and acknowledge her background in the area of homelessness. I look forward to her contribution to the debates, and I do share her view that we must all work together to better address the structural causes of homelessness.

That said, I was somewhat surprised by the observations Ms Lawder just made around the funding cuts to the homelessness sector in the ACT. This certainly has been a difficult period. This funding announcement does come at a time of some turbulence for the wider housing and homelessness sector, and I acknowledge this.

I would like to sincerely thank the many service providers who are already working to support people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness, and to thank them for their consideration of Common Ground as a welcome addition to the spectrum of support that exists. But what I cannot share is the analysis that suggests that we are funding one model at the expense of others. Those that work in the

homelessness sector are well aware of the fact that the changes that have come about were set in train many years ago. In 2009 there was a change to the commonwealth funding formulas for the ACT. That set in train a process that would see the ACT lose \$5.9 million in funding in the homelessness and housing sector by 2015. That was decided in 2009.

That implementation is now rolling out. The sector have been aware of it for some time. This is not a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul. In fact those cuts are driven by changes to commonwealth funding, and I think we should be very honest and very clear about that. That does not make them any less difficult. I am well aware of how challenging they are for the community. But the ACT government has, in addition to that, decided to provide the specific service that has been recognised to be highly successful in many other places in making a significant difference. Intertwining the two is an inaccurate reflection of what is actually happening in the homelessness sector.

The theme for this year's Homeless Persons Week is the "hidden homeless". The reason for that is that most people have an image of homelessness as being about older people sleeping rough on the streets. But for many Canberrans, that is not the whole story, and I know that this issue needs campaigns such as the one currently promoted by Homelessness Australia to bring the real story to the attention of the broader community.

The reality is that there is an ever-growing population of Canberrans who are couch surfing or staying with friends, with no long-term housing options, and we need adequate and compassionate responses for these people. We also need true tripartisan support if we are ever to really tackle the very difficult challenges that are faced.

I believe Common Ground represents just that—an opportunity for government, philanthropists and the community sector to work together to provide, firstly, a home and, secondly, the services needed to break the cycle of homelessness for some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

From the mean streets of New York to most states in Australia and now, or soon, here in Canberra, Common Ground is a proven and effective model of responding to homelessness. Common Ground is also a key item in the parliamentary agreement between the ACT Greens and Labor and could not have progressed as far as it has without the support of both parties. But perhaps more important, and as other speakers have touched on today, has been the support and tireless passion of the Common Ground Canberra board. The board has been an incredibly effective force in Canberra in recent years. I recently had to smile when I heard that a staff member of a federal member of parliament asked whether, now that the project is funded, the board would stop calling him every other day asking if there was anything they could do to help.

There has been that absolute persistence and commitment. In particular I would like to recognise the passion and commitment of Liz Dawson, a member of the Common Ground board, who was recently awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia for her tireless work in providing assistance to homeless individuals and families. Ms Dawson's incredible energy on this has inspired other members to join the board and

the board really has made a wonderful contribution in recent years to both driving the philanthropic side of this project to get political parties on board and working with the federal government.

I would also like to acknowledge the announcement last week that the commonwealth government is contributing \$4 million of capital funding to this project. Of course we have the significant support of the Snow Foundation, who have made a very generous contribution to the ongoing costs of the Common Ground model.

I should not be drawn, really, on who has been badgering federal parliament, but various members of the chamber might have their own views on what is the case there.

Common Ground is not just about the physical building of new homes, of course. It is also about the location, the sense of community inclusion and the wraparound services that are provided. Certainly, when I took the opportunity earlier this year to visit the Common Ground project in Melbourne, it was a wonderful insight into just how the project works and also some of the learnings that the Melbourne operation has had. I was down there for a housing ministers conference. I took the opportunity to go around to Common Ground, and it was very insightful in that they set off with a plan and they built the facility, and the beauty for the ACT is that we are able to draw from a few of their lessons, where they would make some tweaks in their implementation.

As Mr Gentleman's motion states, the support of the local community is integral to the success of the project. I recently attended a meeting of the Gungahlin Community Council alongside Ms Dawson and others from the Common Ground board where a presentation was made on the Common Ground model. Certainly I have strong hopes that it will be well received and well supported by the community. This was just the first of many meetings and conversations with the local residents. I look forward to their continued positivity and willingness to engage. The residents of Gungahlin were both very interested in the model and quite positive about the opportunities it presents to help people in Canberra who do require assistance to break the cycle of homelessness.

In closing, I would like to reaffirm my support for Common Ground Canberra and indicate my absolute dedication to ensuring that it is built as quickly as we can. Housing ACT are putting considerable energy into driving this project forward. We have an ambitious deadline to have this completed by December 2014. I am hopeful that we can achieve that deadline. I think that it is the sort of urgency that we need to demonstrate in trying to tackle homelessness, because, as has been discussed today and as the Bureau of Statistics figures showed when they were released last November from the most recent census, homelessness is a very significant issue in our city, and one that is often hidden in a couple of ways. It is hidden in a perception that this is a wealthy city and it is also hidden, of course, in the way that I mentioned earlier, which is that it is not just about people who are sleeping rough on the streets. There are the many other forms that homelessness takes under the Bureau of Statistics definitions.

I would like to thank all the stakeholders and advocates who, over the years, have helped to bring this fantastic development to fruition. We are very close to achieving it now, and I truly believe that this project will bring deep and sustainable benefits for our whole community.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (5.12): I, too, stand to reaffirm the support which Ms Lawder offered for this motion moved by Mr Gentleman. Common Ground is a unique and special proposal which does have the potential to offer tremendous services to some of the most vulnerable in our community. I would like to lend the opposition's support for the work that Elizabeth Dawson has done. I know that Gwen Wilcox has been a passionate advocate for Common Ground as well and has certainly been in touch with my office and me about the many benefits that Common Ground will offer Canberra.

I would like to commend Ms Lawder for her contribution to today's debate and for the passion, expertise and knowledge she brings to this subject area and many others. I think that was quite evident in her response on behalf of the opposition to this motion today and also in her maiden speech yesterday. The experience that she brings is something that I think is unparalleled here in the Assembly, and it is something that I hope we will all be able to take advantage of over the remainder of the term.

It is important to note that Common Ground is not a silver bullet. It is not going to solve all of our problems here in the ACT. It is very important that we do not overpromise or oversell the benefits of Common Ground. I am by no means saying that we should do the opposite, but we have to be very realistic about what it is actually going to deliver. The sheer fact that the ACT government has committed funds to it, along with other agencies and organisations, including the federal government, does not mean that the hard work is over. Of course, there are going to be issues with construction. There are going to be issues with operations. And we have to be vigilant to ensure that they are managed properly.

We also have to ensure that Common Ground does not simply steal finances or attention from other programs. It is very important that the spotlight does not shift from other homelessness programs here in the ACT to Common Ground. We have to ensure that, in actual fact, the spotlight broadens rather than actually shifts.

I do commend Mr Gentleman for this motion and, as I said earlier, I, too, would like to reaffirm the support for the motion.

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) (5.15): I would also like to speak briefly on Mr Gentleman's motion. My colleagues have outlined the benefits of the Common Ground project in supporting the ACT government's goal of reducing homelessness through early intervention and prevention, and a better integrated service system through seeking to break the cycle.

The ACT government has been involved with a number of projects that have proved that, where there is a common goal, government, business and the community sector are able to work very well together to enhance outcomes. Indeed we spoke of such activities yesterday when talking about philanthropy in our city.

I hope there will be further opportunities for organisations in the private and community sector to talk about collaboration on new models of housing in the

territory, particularly in the area of affordable housing. The ACT government will continue its significant work to increase the supply of affordable housing in the territory.

In addition to the initiatives under the affordable housing action plan, it is important to stress here the very positive role of the government's tax reform agenda in improving housing affordability through the abolition of one of the most pernicious taxes, stamp duty, and through the expansion of our homebuyer concession scheme.

Common Ground adds another innovative model for disadvantaged Canberrans to access secure housing. As part of the development, Argyle Community Housing has made an application for funding under the national rental affordability scheme for 20 affordable rental units in the Common Ground project. It is pleasing that the ACT has been one of the most successful jurisdictions in accessing this commonwealth scheme, securing 6.8 per cent of all of the incentives awarded nationally, equating to 2,695 dwellings in total. When you consider that the territory's population is roughly two per cent of the national population, to have secured 6.8 per cent of the NRAS incentives is recognition of the work that has been undertaken in the territory.

For each dwelling delivered through the NRAS scheme, applicants receive incentives equivalent to \$7,763 per annum for 10 years from the commonwealth and \$2,587 per annum for 10 years from the ACT government. Dwellings must be rented to eligible tenants at no more than 80 per cent of the market rate. The ANU is nearing completion of 1,022 new dwellings for student accommodation under this scheme. The University of Canberra is in the process of providing 1,000 new student dwellings. CHC Affordable Housing will also deliver 601 new dwellings through the scheme. In March this year, CHC began advertising its NRAS investment product in Bruce for sale to private investors.

There is no doubt that Common Ground is a missing piece of the puzzle in how we address homelessness in the territory. Its strengths lie in the wraparound services it provides to its tenants and also in the mix of tenants. With half of the tenants being income earners, they provide positive examples to other tenants coming out of homelessness of participation in everyday social and economic life.

Another of its key aspects is its integration into the local community. There is no doubt that the continuing engagement between the ACT government and the Gungahlin community in the development of this model will enhance its success. I understand that the Community Services Directorate's presentation to the Gungahlin Community Council was well received, with a number of locals expressing their interest in working together to advocate throughout the community on behalf of this innovative new housing model.

Indeed the location of Common Ground in the Gungahlin town centre will see residents able to take advantage of the many new amenities that the town centre has to offer, including the child and family centre, the Gungahlin community health centre, the Gungahlin library and, in the not-too-distant future, the Gungahlin leisure centre and enclosed oval.

I am also pleased to hear this afternoon that this innovative model of housing has attracted support from across all parties in this place. I look forward to continuing to support innovative housing developments in the territory, particularly those that address the needs of some of our city's most disadvantaged citizens.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (5.20), in reply: I would like to thank all members for their contributions this afternoon. I would like to note Ms Lawder's continuing support for those in need in the ACT. She asked whether Gungahlin was the best location for Common Ground. I am sure those of us looking after constituents in Brindabella would like to see Common Ground come down there as well.

Mr Rattenbury acknowledged the difficulty in homelessness, but does not share Ms Lawder's view on the sector's funding. He notes the ever-increasing number of couch surfers that need some support to break the cycle of homelessness. I share his view that Common Ground is a fantastic opportunity to address these needs. I am very pleased that the minister is dedicated to having this completed by December 2014.

Mr Coe noted that the program is not a silver bullet. Perhaps it is not but it certainly is a good start in addressing the most serious needs. I would like to thank Mr Barr for his contribution as well. He reiterated the important need to break the cycle, as Mr Rattenbury spoke about too, and the collaborative responses from governments and philanthropic organisations and people that shows that we are doing even more. He also said that we are doing more with affordable housing, with Argyle's projects, and the ANU and UC's projects too, which is fantastic.

Again, I thank all members for their support, and I look forward to seeing this community project coming up out of our common ground.

Motion agreed to.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Mr Barr**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Schools—active travel by students

MS BERRY (Ginninderra) (5.22): Earlier this year I rose to talk about Walk Safely to School Day, and in that speech I spoke about the importance of making active travel a safe and practical way to get kids to school. I was reminded of this speech at a recent meeting I attended along with my colleague Mary Porter at a local school which is struggling with traffic flow in their morning drop-offs.

I do not need to tell any parents that the drop-off and pick-up are stressful and congested and sometimes dangerous for most Canberra school communities. Indeed, it is a problem that has emerged across the world. With more parents in work, we have busier roads and busier lives. That means more parents are choosing to do the school drop-off on the way to work, and the reality is that our suburban schools were not built for the majority of students to get dropped off by car.

The positive is that in my conversations with the community I have encountered a kind of sensible and altruistic approach to finding long-term solutions that are often missing in the morning rush. No-one I have spoken to wants to turn playgrounds into large, dangerous car parks, or footpaths into roads, and everyone I have spoken to wants to reduce congestion to improve the safety of children on the walk or ride to school. There are schools throughout the ACT trialling lots of innovative solutions to this problem. Kiss and drops, staggered start times, safe walking maps, traffic flow changes and student and parent education are just the beginning.

I have also been impressed by the parents and communities that have considered what kids want in the commute. During bad weather, adults are mostly concerned about getting to work without waterlogged shoes but, for our children, walking with umbrellas on a rainy day or riding bikes through gusty winds can be a real treat that many schools are trying to make sure is a safe and practical option.

What all of the positive solutions have in common is that they have involved parents showing leadership and finding multi-faceted solutions to the problem. Schools that are dealing with this problem have shown an attitude shift away from individual parents trying to find a safe spot to park in the daily rush to communities working together to make sure every child is as safe in the car park as they are in the playground.

As I said on Walk to School Day, just like many parents, most mornings the car is the only option, it is a reality of modern life. But good solutions combine a range of strategies to make sure that, on those days we take the car, the drop-off is quick and orderly and that, on the mornings when active travel is possible, traffic is safe for those who walk and ride.

I look forward over the coming years to working with school communities to find and support school commute solutions that improve the health and safety of our children, facilitate active travel and protect the sanity of parents battling the morning rush.

Arthritis ACT

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (5.25): I rise to commend the work of Arthritis ACT. In late July, I attended an information session on falls prevention with speakers Brad Butt from Cooleman Court Pharmacy, Marion Shaw from the Independent Living Centre and Shirley Syme from Arthritis ACT. I want to thank and acknowledge those speakers on the information they provided, but I would also like to pay tribute to Arthritis ACT, who hosted this event.

Arthritis ACT aim to provide quality services, contribute to research and improve the health and wellbeing of people in the ACT and surrounding regions suffering from arthritis, osteoarthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions. They were established in 1977, and they are affiliated with Arthritis Australia and other state and territory arthritis foundations. More than 30 per cent of Australians, adult and child, male and female, will be affected by arthritis or some form of musculoskeletal condition in their lifetime.

I would like to acknowledge the executive members of Arthritis ACT for the fantastic job they do in keeping this valuable organisation front and centre and active within our community, including their CEO, Ms Helen Krig, and Ms Anna Hackett, their president, as well as all the other valued members of the committee.

I would also like to acknowledge all the other members of our community who volunteer with and donate to Arthritis ACT. And of course you can find out more about that fantastic organisation at www.arthritisact.org.au. It is well worth a look if you have not already done so.

NAIDOC Week

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (5.27): Last month we celebrated NAIDOC Week. Australians have celebrated NAIDOC since 1975, but it draws upon the Aboriginal civil rights movement of the 1920s and the 1938 day of mourning. NAIDOC Week is a time for Australians to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and achievement.

Achievements in sport, politics, education and the arts are obvious. Indigenous players are vastly over-represented in the player lists of our national sport, AFL, as well as the other major codes. We have Indigenous politicians in our territory, state and federal parliaments, including an Indigenous Chief Minister. Arguably the rest of the world only understands or recognises Australian art through Indigenous art, and in education, for the first time, the proportion of Indigenous students in first-year medical school is the same as the proportion of Indigenous people in the Australian population.

This last result is a stunner. It does not seem possible to have imagined this outcome 50 years ago. But people did, and they put in place the foundations for this success. In the 1960s the National Union of Students launched Abschol, a scholarship program for Aboriginal university students, when there were just a handful in the country. Realising that more needed to be done, the NUS reached out to Indigenous high school students as well.

In 1969 the Gorton government, with Malcolm Fraser as education minister, recognised the policy opportunity, copied the program and renamed it Abstudy. They used the new powers provided by the 1967 referendum enabling the commonwealth to legislate for Aboriginal people. Universities followed suit, introducing scholarship and special entry programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, as well as on-campus support to facilitate Indigenous success.

The outcomes have been magnificent, from less than a dozen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates in the 1960s to 25,000 graduates by 2010. With more time and effort, we can achieve the further 100,000 Indigenous graduates needed to achieve parity with the proportion of non-Indigenous Australians with a university degree. We can imagine a day when every Indigenous child and every non-Indigenous child can look up to an Indigenous teacher at some stage in their schooling.

But with success, especially in Indigenous affairs, comes pushback. The 2012 Queensland Liberal National Party convention in Brisbane passed a motion to scrap the Abstudy program. To his credit, Senator Nigel Scullin, the federal opposition's Indigenous affairs spokesman, described the motion as nonsensical and ill-conceived and said the federal coalition would not support it. Queensland Nationals MP Paul Neville also opposed the motion and said that it would brand them as a mob of bigots.

So where does this pushback come from? Is it a failure to recognise the multiplier effect of more Indigenous doctors, nurses and teachers upon efforts to close the gap? Do these people not know about the past and present history of dispossession and discrimination? Perhaps they just harbour the soft bigotry of low expectations or are uncomfortable with Indigenous high achievers. Or is it just a crude dog-whistle to garner some more votes? Whatever the motivation, these attacks upon the most successful program ever in Indigenous affairs must be opposed.

In NAIDOC Week, all Australians can celebrate Indigenous triumphs and plan for more.

Telstra Australian business awards

MR WALL (Brindabella) (5.31): This evening I rise to pay tribute to the finalists and the winners of the 2013 Telstra Australian business awards. On 12 July I attended, along with my Assembly colleague Mr Smyth, the Telstra business awards gala dinner at Rydges Lakeside. The awards were a great opportunity to showcase some of the local success stories from within our own local business community. Telstra business awards have strict criteria for nominating and businesses often learn quite a lot about themselves as they navigate their way through the nomination process.

The awards are judged against eight criteria, which are: business achievements and vision; sales and marketing; customers; team; planning and performance; financials; innovation; and social responsibility. There are four awards businesses can choose to nominate for, and each category is judged against the same criteria.

This year's winner of the start-up award, which is awarded to a business which has been operating for between one and two years, was Shop Handmade. The finalists for the micro business award category, which is for businesses with five or less employees, were Deli Planet at Fyshwick, Screencraft, and Canberra Furnished Accommodation, who were the winners for this category.

The next category was the small business award, which is for businesses employing between five and 20 employees. The finalists were Choku Bai Jo, the farmer's outlet, HorizonOne Recruitment, Tiffen and Co, Transformed Pty Ltd, and Residential Property Reports, who took out the category.

The final award was for medium business, for businesses with up to 200 employees. Finalists included Adore Tea, Intelledox, Noetic Group, Robson Environmental and Rudds Consulting. With an outstanding commendation, Rudds Consulting were the winners.

Each of the category winners was also eligible to be the ACT's Telstra business of the year, and Rudds Consulting were the successful business who won that award for this year.

I would like to pay tribute to Telstra. I think it is a fantastic opportunity and a fantastic method by which Telstra gives back to the community, showcasing some of the great successes and the high achievers that do business in our community and provide employment for many Canberrans.

Canberra Refugee Support

MR COE (Ginninderra) (5.34): I rise today to speak about the work of Canberra Refugee Support. Canberra Refugee Support is a volunteer not-for-profit organisation that provides support to refugees in Canberra. Not only does CRS assist refugees to settle in Canberra through practical support and training, it also provides advocacy and policy advice. The aim of CRS is to help asylum seekers and refugees become as independent as possible as soon as possible. CRS seeks to achieve this by conducting training courses, providing mentoring and practical support to assist with accommodation, access to education and English language training, health care, jobs and networking opportunities. CRS also sponsors the refugee mentoring program at Calvary hospital and provides financial support where it is possible.

On 17 June, World Refugee Day, I was pleased to attend the annual CRS scholarships presentation. The scholarship program is designed to recognise meritorious performance and to encourage and support outstanding refugee students in the pursuit of their personal development goals.

This year the scholarship presentation was MC-ed by Virginia Haussegger. Attendees also heard from Geoff McPherson, the CRS president; Martin Bowles PSM, the Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship; Richard Towle, the UNHCR regional representative for Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific; and Fatemeh Hosseini on behalf of the scholarship winners. CRS scholarships have grown from a one-off presentation about 10 years ago to an annual presentation.

This year CRS was able to raise nearly \$20,000 for its scholarships due to the generous support of many donors. I would like to place on the record my congratulations to all the scholarship recipients: Amin Ghanimi, Hamzah Mohammed Ali Abdulaal, Sajjad Ghanimi, Mitra Tajik, Poe Kwar Si, Sedigheh Tajik, Sip Pi True Moo, Chelsea Htoo, Ali Nazari, Aziz Muradi, Eh Ta Mwee, Myo Di Gay, Saeedeh Bahreh, Saw Wah hi, Achuil Bet Malou, Mo Thu, Shaista Haidary, Zaw Win, Fatemeh Hosseini, Paw Moo, Reza Amiri, Seik Htaw Win, Sharmin Sultana, Yesinawork Sisay Sahle, Yuot Malual Deng, Dina Akram Yousif, Faisal Fyas, Brikela Cela and Khosro Mokkahtari.

I would also like to place on the record my appreciation to all the sponsors of this year's scholarships: ActewAGL, Uniting Church Canberra Central Parish, the national office of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, staff of the ACT regional

office of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, UNHCR Canberra, Merici College, South Woden Uniting Church, St John the Apostle Parish Resettlement Committee, 2012 graduates of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, the ACT Office of Multicultural, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Soroptimist International Canberra Club, Francesca Beddie, Barbara Bennett, Nick and Vailiki Bogiatzis, Susie Brown, Sean Costello, Marlene Dodge, Sandy Forbes, Barbara Gillies, the Gyngell family, Doug Hynd, Clare Lahiff, Ruth Lin, Sarah-Jane Lynch, Margaret McLeod, David and Tirscha McPherson, Penny Moyes, Jeremy Newman, Anne and David Reese. Margaret Ryan, Richard Smith, Barbara Todd, Carolyn Tweedie-Curnow, John and Joan Warhurst, Donelle Wheeler and Louise Wignall.

I commend all the volunteers at Canberra Refugee Support who have given thousands of hours to support refugees. For more information about CRS, I urge members to visit their website at www.actrefugee.org.au.

Dinosaurs Down Under Dr Eva Papp

MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (5.37): On Saturday morning I had the pleasure of launching the *Dinosaurs Down Under* travelling paleontological roadshow, which is one of the activities supported under the umbrella of National Science Week. This road show provides clear evidence that the way to inspire children to grow into talented, inquiring adults is to make natural history real, to challenge their thinking and to tell a story. The importance of science in our everyday lives cannot be overemphasised. As we become more and more dependent on new technologies to feed, clothe and house the world's billions, science will become ever more critical to that task.

How disappointing and perhaps even alarming, then, that the results of an international comparison undertaken last year by the Australian Council for Educational Research that compared tests for reading, maths and science across years 4 and 8 amongst 600,000 students in 45 countries showed that Australia was ranked only 25th out of 45 countries in science at the year 4 level. Perhaps a small comfort is the fact that while we performed poorly at the national level, Canberra students at least led the rest of the states and territories. If we are to improve these results, we need to have children more engaged and teachers better prepared to teach science in an engaging and exciting way to young children. When children can feel and do it themselves, they learn.

The *Dinosaurs Down Under* travelling exhibition is exactly the sort of interactive learning that children need. With this roadshow we are lucky to have access to *100 years of the Canberra geologist*, a mini exhibition which highlights the role of the person, the scientist and the geologist in mapping our state, our country and even Antarctica. I encourage everyone in the Assembly to take time to view this display, which traces the work of the life of a geologist over the last century and how their way of working has changed and why the work they do in tracking our natural history is so important.

I would also urge parents to encourage their children to engage, explore and question and learn about all that the world of science has to offer. You never know, they may be the next palaeontologist to discover a new species of dinosaur.

I offer my congratulations to all of those who have been instrumental in putting together these displays and also to the directors of the National Dinosaur Museum for their commitment to Canberra, to palaeontology and to children of all ages and, in particular, manager Richard Mancuso and his enthusiastic staff at the museum, many of whom are university students.

But in particular, I would like to recognise the vision and energy of Dr Eva Papp, academic visitor based at the research school of earth sciences and senior scientific adviser to the museum. It was Dr Papp's idea and initiative, superbly backed up by the directors of the Dinosaur Museum, that enabled them to win the federal national science week grant to stage the *Dinosaurs Down Under* exhibition, that I had the pleasure of officially launching on Saturday.

Dr Papp is active in several geoscientific organisations and this exhibition is Dr Papp's contribution to Canberra and Australia, highlighting the need for enhancing the future of scientific education in Australia. I would like to finish with a direct quote from Dr Eva Papp in a letter she wrote to me about her vision and passion regarding earth sciences and its importance. She said:

I think it is very important that Earth Sciences are part of the Science Curriculum now, but we need to strengthen the training of teachers in this discipline to achieve a good outcome of this initiative. We also need to provide much more support to institutions where paleontology as a discipline is taught and researched: such as universities, and museums.

Fossils are the only witnesses of the past evolution of life on earth and they are our irreplaceable treasures. Just as the Mona Lisa can never be painted again, those unique plants and animals we find fossilised can never evolve again in the future. Fossils are not curiosities, they are our history books and teachers!

I should add that a visiting paleontologist from Hungary, Dr Marton Rabi, scientist Dr Eva Papp, and science educator Mr Phil Hall from Canberra will be travelling on this roadshow that we talked about. They will be travelling about 2,000 kilometres in two weeks with their truck, carrying life-sized dinosaur replicas and hundreds of smaller fossil items of the exciting new exhibition. And they will be travelling through many parts of Australia. In fact, they are travelling now through Cootamundra, West Wyalong, Griffith, Hay, Deniliquin, Echuca, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Lakes Entrance and Eden. And Canberra will be on the map again with an opening and closing event at the National Dinosaur Museum at the end of the month. I commend Dr Eva Papp for all her energy.

Friends of Mount Majura

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (5.42): On Sunday, 28 July I attended the national tree planting day at Mount Majura with the Friends of Mount Majura. The friends

group works closely with the ACT Parks and Conservation Service to manage the reserve, undertaking monthly weeding and planting activities and has also fostered support from local groups such as the Majura scouts and local schools to undertake regular activities on the mountain.

The national tree planting day event was a collaboration between the Friends of Mount Majura, ACT Parks and Conservations Service, the ACT Conservation Council, Greening Australia, Watson Woodlands Park Care Group, Village Building Company, North Canberra Community Council, Watson Community Council and the Majura scouts.

I take this opportunity to make special mention of the outgoing coordinator of the Friends of Mount Majura, Waltraud Pix, who has played a pivotal role in driving activities on the mountain over the last 10 years. Waltraud has recently announced she will be stepping down as the coordinator of the Friends of Mount Majura, a role she has performed since the inception of the Parkcare group in July 2003.

Waltraud has an infectious enthusiasm for the natural environment of Mount Majura and has been an effective advocate for the local environment. Under her leadership, the Friends of Mount Majura have invested thousands of hours of weed control, track and trail maintenance, habitat restoration work, rabbit warren monitoring and endangered species monitoring. Waltraud was instrumental in the delivery of the successful dragonfly project, which saw habitat enhancement work delivered in and around two old dams on Mount Majura. Many hundreds of plantings have gone in towards the summit of the mountain on the site of old sheep camps which were previously heavily weed infested.

More recently, Waltraud has coordinated the delivery of plantings around the Fair subdivision in north Watson. She was also instrumental in negotiating a financial contribution from the developers of the Fair, which has since been invested into the preservation of the nearby nationally endangered yellow box-Blakely's red gum ecological community.

Probably Waltraud's greatest achievement is the inspiration she has provided many hundreds of local residents. We need advocates like Waltraud to remind us how lucky we are to live in a bush capital and how important it is to preserve our unique natural environment. This is not the end, of course. Waltraud will continue her work on Mount Majura as a member of the friends, but I think she is relieved to no longer have the responsibility of coordinating the entire group.

As the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services and an occasional attendee at the working parties that Waltraud organised, on behalf of the ACT Parks and Conservation Service I formally thank Waltraud Pix for her years of hard work and for making a substantial difference to the Mount Majura reserve and the surrounding community.

National Disability Awards

MS BURCH (Brindabella) (5.45): I draw to members' attention that on 25 July of this year, the Minister for Disability Reform, Jenny Macklin, announced 27 finalists

for the 2013 National Disability Awards. I think it is great news that we have three of those 27 finalists here in the ACT. I would like to offer my congratulations to Sue Salthouse and Anne Proctor who are finalists in the lifetime achievement award in the disability category. I would also like to congratulate local entrepreneur Huy Nyguen who is a finalist in emerging leaders in disability award.

I think that is a good outcome for those three people. I am sure all of us in this place know them and recognise the work they do. The awards will be at the Great Hall of Parliament House on 28 November this year. I wish those people every success to take out those awards on the twenty-eighth.

Galilee School

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (5.46): I rise tonight in Homelessness Week to discuss another great program run by Communities@Work in my electorate, being the Galilee School, which had their open day just last month. The Galilee School is an alternative education program that provides educational opportunities for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, Family Services clients or young people who, for whatever reasons, are unable to access the mainstream schooling system.

This program is co-educational and caters for years 7 to 10 based on the ACT curriculum. Galilee School is an accredited independent school which provides an alternative education program for disadvantaged and at-risk young people aged 12 to 16 years in the Canberra region. It is a special place, because it caters for the needs of students who do not fit into the mainstream schooling system. It provides a well-established program with over 15 years experience working with young people who present with a range of support needs.

This program caters for both full-time and part-time enrolments. The school has a student-to-staff ratio of four to one, and utilises small group learning as a key to educational strategy. The young people attending Galilee School are perhaps likely to have some history of truancy, drug and alcohol issues or behavioural difficulties and may have an involvement with the Care and Protection Services or the community youth justice system.

The primary focus of Galilee is to encourage young people to return to the educational system. But it also provides for quality individualised and holistic education and training and skills for young people moving into the workforce. To facilitate this, the program is flexible and structured around youth needs. The program content focuses on literacy and numeracy skills but also covers other curriculum subjects such as interpersonal skills, life skills and training in transition to independent skills.

The program provided by Galilee does not focus on a quick fix, but rather on developing long-term resilience and resourcefulness. The objective is to promote respect and self-esteem and to inspire young people to realise their full potential by developing and utilising their unique talents and capabilities. Last year, the school was able to take on 13 full-time and 14 part-time students, with four students receiving their year 10 certificate and two young people obtaining school-based apprenticeships.

The open day was well attended, with my former MP colleague, Annette Ellis, and also Brendan Smyth being a two of those present on the open day. Many displays were on offer of the students' outstanding work in the fields of maths and English. In addition to the standard subject matter, there were two great features of the school, one being a documentary made by the students as well as a putt putt course that the students had learned to create and substantially built.

Unfortunately, I had to run to another event, but I cannot wait for my next visit so I can give the course a go. I would like to conclude by thanking the business program manager, Priscilla Thornton, the CEO, Lyn Harwood and all the students who worked on the barbeque and were more than happy to show us all around the school.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.50 pm.