



Debates

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Wednesday, 27 November 2013

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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.

Petition

The following petition was lodged for presentation, by Mr Wall, from 156 residents:

Uriarra Village—proposed solar farm—petition No 6-13

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly

This petition of certain residents of Uriarra Village in the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly plans by OneSun Capital Pty Ltd to develop a large solar farm in close proximity to our rural village, despite the overwhelming opposition of the majority of adult members of the Uriarra Village community. Our opposition is based on the loss of rural character and amenity promised in the Development Control Plan which guided the rebuilding of Uriarra Village following the devastating fires of 2003. The adverse impact of the development will also be felt by all citizens of the ACT and tourists who currently enjoy the scenic vistas of the northern view from Brindabella Road immediately in front of Uriarra Village.

Your petitioners therefore request the Assembly to call on the Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development to encourage OneSun Capital to move the site of the solar farm to a site which does not adversely affect the rural character of Uriarra Village. We further request that the part of the Territory Plan which allows major utility installations to be built on rural land without regard to the interests of nearby residents, be amended to ensure a one kilometre buffer zone between such installations and residential areas.

The Clerk having announced that the terms of the petition would be recorded in Hansard and a copy referred to the appropriate minister for response pursuant to standing order 100, the petition was received.

Transport—light rail

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (10.02): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) experience in over 400 cities and towns worldwide has demonstrated that light rail can transform cities into more sustainable and liveable places;
- (b) an investment in light rail will be transformational for Canberra and an important first step in a city-wide rapid transit system; and

- (c) since committing to light rail as the rapid transit mode for Canberra the Government has made significant progress in its Capital Metro project planning including:
 - (i) appointing industry leaders to the roles of both Project Director and Chair of the Board; and
 - (ii) undertaking critical consultation with stakeholders in the light rail integration study to inform the evaluation of options for the location of bike and ride and park and ride locations, for light rail stop locations, and for integrating the light rail service with the ACTION bus network and bicycle and pedestrian paths; and
- (2) supports a light rail network as the best rapid transit option for the future of Canberra.

This government is working hard to create a modern and efficient city that has a diversified economy and attracts people, business and investment. We have consulted extensively with the community on the future of our city. We have consulted on our transport and planning strategies and, more recently, on the city plan that received comments from over 15,000 Canberrans. Overwhelmingly, people want us to make the city a better place to live, work and do business.

To ensure the city develops in a way that people want, we need to overcome important barriers to our future growth. As our population increases to over half a million, we cannot continue spreading outwards. We need to use our space smarter and more efficiently. Our planning and transport strategies are working together to ensure that development occurs along established public transport routes whilst balancing where greenfield expansion occurs. We need to address the declining amenity of the city's core and accommodate people's desire to live in the city centre close to amenities, employment and entertainment. The city plan and city to the lake initiatives are supporting the city centre to realise its potential as a vibrant, lively and attractive place to live, work and enjoy.

We need to address our dependence on the car as congestion, vehicle costs, environment and health impacts are increasingly affecting our quality of life. If we look at cities across the world, we see that light rail has a transformational effect, attracting investment and opportunities, helping to increase accessibility for the most vulnerable and creating a sense of community.

Madam Speaker, I will give you just a few examples of how light rail is rejuvenating cities. In Washington the light rail system began operation in the 1980s, and areas within two kilometres of a stop have eight times the employment density and three times the population compared to outside the area. Property values within 100 meters of the Washington metro stop have increased between 12 and 20 per cent due to their proximity to light rail. In the UK, Manchester's Metrolink expansion facilitated over 3,000 permanent new jobs, stimulated \$100 million of additional investment by business and boosted the economy of Greater Manchester by \$117 million per year.

Manchester council emphasises these project benefits in their investment decisions, which has resulted in the light rail receiving 75 per cent of the infrastructure budget in recent years. In Dallas, its \$1 billion light rail system opened in 2003 and 28 per cent of the project costs were offset through the sale of land around only a few light rail stops. The value of commercial developments at stops alone amounts to some \$7 billion.

All over the world light rail is proven to attract investment, create opportunities and is effectively meeting the settlement and transport needs associated with population growth, not to mention its ability to increase the use of public transport. All these reasons are why it is an integral part of the government's plan for a sustainable city.

Experiences show that the timing of public transport investments is crucial. The project corridor is one of the most rapidly growing areas of the ACT, with a population growth rate of 6.8 per cent, five times the rate of the region. By investing in light rail along the corridor now, we will ensure we can benefit from this growth without putting additional strains on infrastructure. Investment now will ensure we capitalise on the development opportunities along the project corridor ensuring all Canberrans benefit from this important investment decision. It is clear that light rail, effectively integrated with other modes of transport, is the best option for Canberra's future. Accordingly, the government went to the election with a commitment to build the first stage of the light rail network for Canberra, the capital metro project.

Madam Speaker, contrary to opposition claims, the decision to deliver light rail for Canberra has not been made on a whim, nor was it a decision to hold power with the support of the Greens. The decision to proceed with the capital metro project is based on many years of work that included feasibility studies, preliminary business cases, the development of Canberra's transport policy and establishing the Gungahlin to city project office. All this work has fed into the government's plan to deliver transit and urban development along the Northbourne corridor. Over the next 12 months extensive preparatory work is required for this major infrastructure project. Work is being carried out across a range of areas to comprehensively define the project and further develop the business case to ensure we fully capitalise on the wider economic and social benefits that light rail can bring.

Work currently underway includes: finalising a revised Infrastructure Australia submission to include the land development uplift benefits of light rail as well as further demonstrating why the project is nationally significant; reviewing patronage demand and forecasts to ensure robust and accurate data; preparing a value for money report and developing a funding and affordability strategy to ensure the best options are put forward to government for consideration; and creating an early works schedule that surveys the planned route to determine what is under the ground and how capital metro will need to be constructed. This work will also identify potential government projects that can be initiated earlier to support implementation of light rail.

Further work underway includes: engaging with industry to determine interest and capacity to deliver the project, informing a detailed delivery and procurement strategy; developing a sustainability plan to ensure the project's sustainability benefits are identified and maximised; and the light rail master plan will determine how capital

metro can be rolled out to the rest of the city. As members would be aware, when I engaged with my constituents down in Brindabella they said they are very keen to see when the light rail will be brought down to that area.

In particular, I would like to draw your attention to the light rail integration study that is currently underway to identify how capital metro can best integrate into the overall transport network. As part of the study, information sessions were held across the city and were attended by several hundred people. An online survey seeking community views on the study has received over 400 responses. Feedback is currently being collated and reviewed, but early indications reaffirm that people are more likely to use capital metro than the existing bus rapid service. Light rail is the people's choice.

The benefits of the government's approach is also seen by industry and businesses. For example, the Property Council has welcomed the recognition of the city as both a metropolitan and regional centre, and expresses hope that we have set a new course for the future. It, too, sees the potential of the city to be a vibrant, world-class centre, voicing support for the draft city plan that is pulling together important rejuvenation projects, such as the city to the lake and capital metro.

The government's commitment to this project is strong, and the Capital Metro Agency is up and running to oversee the delivery of this major infrastructure project and undertake the extensive work that I have just described. It is vital that experienced people with the right skills and capacity guide the project, and I am pleased to let you know, Madam Speaker, that we have a wealth of experience guiding this project. Emma Thomas, the project director, joined the agency on 21 October and brings extensive experience in delivering large rail and road projects. Ms Thomas's previous roles include South Australia's deputy chief executive of public transport as well as a high level oversight of the Gold Coast rapid transit project. Since joining the agency, Ms Thomas has made it a priority to meet with community groups and stakeholders. In the first few weeks, Ms Thomas met with the Property Council, the Institute of Architects, the Gungahlin Community Council and many more.

In the important role of independent chair of the project board, we have appointed John Fitzgerald, specialist adviser to KPMG and chair of the Sydney convention and entertainment centres redevelopment. Mr Fitzgerald has a strong financial background, including spending the last 12 years in the infrastructure sector with the Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance. Mr Fitzgerald has overseen some 20 such projects including Eastlink and Melbourne.

Capital metro is a major infrastructure project that requires extensive planning and preparation, and we now have the right people and the project is underway. After many years of discussions, we are committed and on our way to delivering light rail for Canberra. It is happening now.

On the important issue of cost, the agency is revisiting previous estimates to ensure they incorporate the latest planning and project knowledge. It would be irresponsible of the government to start making further cost estimates before we have a clear and informed understanding of the project specification. It is contradictory for the opposition, of course, to criticise the government for the lack of planning while at the

same time criticise the allocation of funds to appropriately plan for the project. Let me remind members that, in the past, the Liberals committed \$8 million to a plan for light rail, including undertaking engineering studies, integration of bus and light rail connections, planning and rezoning and patronage assessments. What we see from those who seek to criticise the project is a lack of foresight and vision. It is irresponsible not to see the big picture and think of the legacy that we leave future Canberrans. In fact, the question should be: can we afford not to proceed with capital metro?

Earlier this week Mr Coe said Canberrans were not clear on where the project was heading. I think the government has made clear to the public its position on light rail, before and after the election. What we do not know is the opposition's position on light rail. At a community meeting on 16 October last year, you, Madam Speaker, expressed your support for light rail. In fact, the Liberals went to the 2008 election with a policy of getting light rail on track. That contained bold and sweeping statements like, "It's time to take light rail seriously." Well, Madam Speaker, I would like to draw your attention to Mr Coe's inconsistency yet again. At one moment he is questioning the need for light rail at all and the next he is discussing alternative routes. Mr Coe needs to come clean on his position on light rail.

Mr Coe advises the government that if we are serious about delivering light rail we need to get widespread community support and confidence in the project. I question how the government can do this when Mr Coe is actively undermining the project by consistently providing the public with inaccurate and misleading information. Mr Coe started talking about project costs of \$600 million, and now he is telling people it will call \$100 billion of taxpayers' money, all at a time when the government has indicated accurate costs are being revisited through the process of planning and deciding how it will deliver the project. Mr Coe further seeks to undermine the project by breaking down his inflated costs by person and geographical area in a simplistic and disingenuous manner. Major infrastructure projects are about the wider benefits they can bring to the community rather than simplistic assessment of cost per household and cost per passenger.

Capital Metro will attract business, investment, people, and opportunities to Canberra. And even at the early stage of design, the economic analysis for Capital Metro carried out in accordance with best practice guidelines indicated a benefit cost ratio of 2.34. That means that for every dollar invested, a return of over \$2 can be expected. This compares to projects that are already underway in Queensland and New South Wales such as the Gold Coast light rail project with a ratio of 1.63, and Sydney's inner west light rail, which that we understand to be a ratio of 1.0.

I also draw the Assembly's attention to statements made by Mr Coe that further seek to erode community support for the project—that is, Mr Coe's assertion that recent changes to ACTION bus routes will undermine the government's case for light rail. Mr Coe states that the government's political approach to light rail is ad hoc and that this latest move is making a mockery of its implementation. Well, this is the very time the government is carrying out a detailed study and consulting the public on how the light rail will integrate with the very same bus network. Can we expect that every change to the public transport system from now until the operation of light rail will be

framed in this cynical and negative manner? Mr Coe has accused the government of being reckless. I would argue that, far from being reckless, the government is carefully considering and planning for the future of this city. It is the opposition that is being reckless by continuing, albeit inconsistently, to undermine this long overdue project.

We have listened to the community and we have worked hard to create a vision that is true to their wishes and needs. Research indicates that over 98 per cent of the community support improvements to the Northbourne Avenue corridor, an area suffering increasing congestion and that is in need of radical revitalisation. The community wants bold action and a vision for the future. The capital metro project is just one part of the government's vision for the city. We believe in making the right investment decisions right now, and we have the foresight and vision to plan for the future.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (10.17): I am not sure whether that was a speech about light rail or Mr Coe. Mr Gentleman seemed somewhat obsessed. I think it is somewhat the case when you are in opposition that if the government start praising you, you are probably in a bit of trouble. But when the government are out there making speeches attacking you, it probably means you are on the money. It probably means you are getting under their skin and pointing out the errors of their ways. I think that is exactly what we have here. We have Mr Gentleman—and no doubt the rest of the mob over there will join in—criticising Mr Coe. I think that is a badge of honour that he would wear proudly. I take this opportunity at the outset to congratulate Mr Coe on the analysis he has provided. Clearly, his having cut through, the government are concerned, because I think he is pointing out some truisms about the flaws in their project.

What we have here again is a superficial motion about light rail before the government has made the case as to why \$614 million of taxpayers' money should be spent on this project. As we have said in the past, we believe many people like the idea of catching a tram from point A to point B. However, here in the ACT, I am concerned that point A to point B for the light rail project will not mean there is adequate demand to justify the extraordinary expense.

To a certain extent, I think Canberrans, and perhaps all Australians, have been inoculated against the shock of governments spending such vast sums of money. The ACT government talks about spending hundreds of millions on dams, the GDE, city to the lake, light rail and a new stadium, as if there is money to burn. This complacent and arrogant government are continually treating taxpayers' money as their own, rather than it belonging to the individuals that have worked hard for it. The sheer fact that the government can tax and spend does not mean that they should.

The ACT light rail project is politically motivated, not transport or economically motivated. Of course, if the government really were determined to construct rapid transit down Northbourne Avenue, why did they abandon bus rapid transit? Their own submission to Infrastructure Australia said that bus rapid transit would see a better return on investment than would light rail. This point was not lost on Infrastructure Australia, who said in their assessment of the ACT government's proposal:

The case for favouring light rail over bus rapid transit has not been strongly made, especially when the submission itself points to the stronger economic performance of a bus rapid transit option.

I noticed that that bit was missing from Mr Gentleman's speech. Let us not forget this bizarre statement that Minister Corbell made on 27 July:

The IA submission, which presented the costs and benefits of both BRT and LRT on an equal basis, shows that the LRT benefit cost ratio, when taking into account higher population and employment in the corridor, is 2.34, compared to BRT's benefit cost ratio of 4.78.

You did not mention that, did you, Mr Gentleman? So even by the minister's own figures, the return on investment, which takes into account capital uplift; pollution, time and other variables, shows that bus rapid transit will offer a better return than will light rail.

A few weeks ago the ACT opposition brought to the public's attention through the *Canberra Times* the fact that the head of Capital Metro would become the second top paid ACT public servant with a package of approximately \$390,000 a year. Just a couple of days ago, it was reported that the government will be hiring a director of communications and stakeholder engagement on a salary of approximately \$185,000 a year. This is in addition to a media manager on around \$125,000 and a media coordinator on about \$85,000. So the ACT government will be spending about \$400,000 a year on salaries for PR on this project. It seems to me that the government are far more concerned with public relations than they are about the delivery of core services.

The economics of this project are questionable, as are the patronage projections. In Queensland the former Labor government predicted that about 50,000 people a day would be using the Gold Coast light rail once constructed. However, it took an incoming coalition government to do a reality check and to reveal that the figures are actually going to be more like 17,000, a third of what Labor predicted.

At present in Canberra about 3,000 people use the Northbourne Avenue corridor in the morning peak on ACTION buses. However, the government are only expecting 4½ thousand to ride the light rail. So the government will be spending \$614 million to get an extra 1,500 people onto public transport each morning. This is in a city of 365,000. Of course, this assumption is dependent on their calculation of 4,500 people being accurate. If this Labor government's figures are anything like Queensland Labor's then this 4,500 figure might be an exaggeration and the additional passengers figure might need some reworking.

The government still has not properly made the case as to why Gungahlin to the city was chosen as the first leg for light rail in the ACT. About 10 years ago a comprehensive study was commissioned by the ACT government which demonstrated that Belconnen to the city would be the more appropriate place to start a possible ACT network. Yet the ACT government has conveniently ignored that report and is seemingly blindly going forward with Gungahlin to the city. To date we have not seen

proper analysis to show why it has chosen the route that it has. This is a worry, given that the government is proposing what is set to be the biggest infrastructure spend in a territory government's history.

Has the government considered constructing light rail from Belconnen to the airport through the city? It would collect people at the University of Canberra, AIS, Calvary, CIT Bruce, ANU, CIT Reid and Russell Offices. Wouldn't having four education campuses, a hospital and the sports stadium on the light rail line make more sense? Was this considered? The opposition are not saying we should build this line; what we are saying is that all options should be considered before spending so much money.

When did Minister Corbell get his tram to Damascus? When did he abandon his preference for bus rapid transit?

Mrs Jones: When he became the Attorney-General.

MR HANSON: Perhaps. For years, he was an advocate for bus rapid transit but now he has dropped it. I think Minister Corbell needs to explain his change in position. I note that Mr Gentleman was quoting previous comments from the opposition. I think that Mr Corbell needs to explain himself—again, notably absent from Mr Gentleman's speech.

The real question is whether this project will get off the ground or not. How much will be spent along the way? I find it very hard to believe that there are not people in cabinet—and Mr Barr is absent today, I note—who are starting to think twice about this project. Is there really no minister or member of the backbench who is questioning whether this project should get the green light? We know that there are members of the public service, some very high in the public service, who have real doubts about this project. I just cannot believe that there are nine people in the government who are all absolutely resolute in their views that this project should go ahead, based on the information that is available.

Based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics census data and the ACT government's figure of \$614 million for the construction of light rail, each area of Canberra will pay the following: Belconnen, \$163,240,533; Gungahlin, \$77,475,401; the inner north, \$95,358,418; the inner south, \$52,314,565; Weston Creek, \$42,451,730; Woden, \$38,717,816; and Tuggeranong, \$144,893,538. Based on these figures Canberra taxpayers who will not be using the service will pay about \$450 million for construction, let alone operational costs.

The sheer fact that 400 cities around the world have light rail does not mean that it is the right thing to do with Canberrans' money. Many cities have heavy rail, many have undergrounds, many have ferry services, many have opera houses and stock exchanges. The argument that because others have it therefore we should too is a spurious one.

In fact the government might have a look at the experience of Velez-Malaga in Spain. By all accounts it is a lovely city in the Mediterranean that created a five-kilometre tram track in 2006. That city, just a few years on, shut down its line and its trams are

actually now being relocated to Sydney. What this example shows is that not every tramway is a success. Simply building light rail does not guarantee patronage, nor the transformation which this government is over-promising.

The opposition will not be supporting this motion. It is not possible to do so based on the limited information available. The government is being irresponsible with other people's money in committing to such a huge expenditure before appropriate research and assessments have been carried out.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations and Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development) (10.29): It is, of course, interesting that, having heard Mr Hanson's speech, he did not deliver it with much gusto or commitment. I have the impression that the speech came out of Mr Coe's office and he had been issued with the line, when it came to issues around light rail, by his shadow minister. But this motion is a timely one, and it is of critical importance to the future development of our city. The capital metro project will have a strong and positive influence over the manner of that development, and over where much of it occurs. It is an important part of the government's vision for our city.

We have to understand how good public transport integrates with effective land use planning. The territory's planning strategy, as outlined in the ACT planning strategy released last year, highlights further consolidation of residential uses close to centres and along public transport corridors. We saw yesterday the ABS release its data on the growth that is projected to occur in our city over the next 50 years or so. We know that the growth over the next 10 to 15 years is going to be equally significant—over 400,000 residents in Canberra in the next 10 years.

What we also know is that the fastest growing areas of our city are those along the Gungahlin to city corridor. Gungahlin itself continues to be the fastest growing part of our city and it will remain the case for the next 10 to 15 years. Growth along the corridor in the inner north of Canberra is also expected to continue to significantly increase. These will be the fastest growing areas of our city, and that growth means more people living in the corridor.

It also means more jobs in the corridor. The projections from the ACT government's demographers indicate significant growth in the number of jobs in the corridor—approximately 30,000 more jobs in the corridor over the next 10 to 20 years. That means a lot more journeys to work. That means a lot more people having to commute between point A and point B either as part of their journey to or from home or other journeys that they undertake during the day. So what we know is that there will be significant growth in our city and significant growth in the corridor in terms of people living there and working there.

The question is: are buses going to cut it? Is business as usual going to cut it along that corridor? We already know that Northbourne Avenue is the most congested corridor in the city. It is at capacity now. So we need to take some decisions on the city, not thinking about the next five years but thinking about the next 25, 30 or 35 years, because that is what this investment is about.

Mr Hanson and the Liberal Party continue to reject this project on the basis of their analysis of what happens now in the corridor. But this project is not just about now. This project is about the future. It is about tens of thousands more people living along this corridor under business as usual. It is about tens of thousands more people working in this corridor under business as usual, and whether or not buses are going to cut it. The government says they are not. They do not deliver us the carrying capacity, they do not deliver us the reliability, they do not deliver us the value uplift that can occur through a well-delivered light rail project along that corridor.

Mr Hanson rightly points out that I have been an advocate in this place in the past for bus rapid transit. But I will tell you why I have changed my mind, Madam Speaker. Bus rapid transit does not deliver the value uplift that light rail transit can. Bus rapid transit does not deliver the paradigm shift in the way people perceive public transport.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Hanson!

MR CORBELL: And if you are going to deliver and invest in large-scale public transport infrastructure, you also need people to support it.

I have stood in this place and advocated for BRT and those on that side of the chamber have opposed it. So do not give me all of this pious, sanctimonious lecturing from those opposite about why bus rapid transit is such a good thing. When this government proposed bus rapid transit they were opposed to that as well. So their record is clear for all to see.

Light rail transit delivers the support in the community to make the investment, it delivers better value capture, it delivers better quality of ride, it delivers better public transport services and it delivers better public transport carrying capacity.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR CORBELL: These are all good reasons to invest in LRT. And the business case is not negative; it is a net positive. The BCR, the benefit-cost ratio, for light rail is a positive one. Anything over two is considered a beneficial project in terms of return to the economy. So we have to decide—

Mr Rattenbury: A point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: On the point of order.

Mr Rattenbury: I do note that Mr Hanson was predominantly heard in silence but he has chirped away throughout the duration of Minister Corbell's speech and I—

MADAM SPEAKER: Chirped, did you say?

Mr Rattenbury: The only way to describe it is incessant chirping and I think it is quite unparliamentary.

MADAM SPEAKER: Stop the clock. I uphold the point of order. I have already called Mr Hanson to order on at least one occasion. It is true, Mr Hanson, that you were heard in relative silence. While we are on the point of order, as I have made the point before, I do not believe that debates in this place should be conducted in silence, except for maiden speeches and the like, and important milestone speeches. But I do take the point on this occasion that Mr Hanson has been chirping.

Mr Hanson: Excessively chirping.

MADAM SPEAKER: It could be considered that he may not have been, but I do think he has been considered chirpy.

MR CORBELL: Disorderly.

MADAM SPEAKER: I do not need to take guidance from you, Mr Corbell, about when someone is being disorderly. I uphold the point of order.

MR CORBELL: Those are the underpinning reasons why this decision to build LRT is so important: good benefit-cost ratio; good capacity to capture value uplift; good capacity to reinforce the territory's overall planning strategies. And the government is getting on with the job. We have established the Capital Metro Agency. Mr Gentleman highlighted that we have made significant investments in its capacity. Large-scale public infrastructure projects must be delivered by people with the experience and the capacity in the field with these types of projects. We are engaging those and paying them commensurate with what they would be paid for similar large-scale infrastructure projects. That demonstrates that the government is serious about delivering this project.

We have seen some good steps in recent days. The government has engaged in the light rail integration study. We have seen a very strong public response to this study. We had an online survey open to the public from 26 September to 15 November this year. Over 440 responses were received from right across the city. Respondents have indicated that the three most important factors influencing their use of public transport were good travel times, reliability and frequency. Also, what we saw with 75 per cent of respondents indicated they would be more likely to catch the light rail over the existing red rapid bus corridor. This is testament to the evidence we know exists and which we have outlined previously—that more people are inclined to consider public transport with LRT in place.

We continue to engage closely with the community. We continue to look at issues around station design and location and integration with bus, cycle and walking networks. These are all important considerations.

I come back again to this corridor and why LRT is important for this corridor. The project corridor is experiencing an average annual growth rate of 6.8 per cent. That is over five times the population growth rate for the rest of the city and that is expected to continue. The population of Gungahlin is expected to reach 73,000 people by 2021, a growth rate of 70 per cent in only a decade. At the moment in Gungahlin nine out of

10 journeys, all journeys, are by private motor vehicle. Our question, as members of this place, is: do we continue to consign Gungahlin residents to that car dependent future, with all the costs that come with it—rising fuel, registration and so on—or do we give them some good transport choices? And do we invest in a transport technology that is going to see them through for the long term? That is what this project is about, that is why it is important and that is why the government is getting on with the job. I thank Mr Gentleman for bringing this motion to the Assembly today.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (10.40): I welcome Mr Gentleman bringing forward this motion today because it gives me the opportunity to discuss the progress that is being made on delivering light rail to Canberra. Mr Gentleman has made a number of good points in his motion about where things are up to and the benefits that will come from light rail, and I am pleased to offer my thoughts on that. I think it is well known in this place that I do support light rail as a project that will deliver benefits for Canberra long into the future. It will deliver transport outcomes, environmental outcomes and economic outcomes, and I have put those views in the past. I think that is the sort of investment that government needs to make for the future of this city.

In terms of progress that has been made, Mr Gentleman has touched on that in his motion but I think the appointment of key staff has been a significant step. There was some discussion earlier about who those staff are. I think that we have managed to get on board staff with considerable experience and proven track records when it comes to delivering these sorts of projects. Of course, they are not in the public eye, and the public probably have not seen much difference yet, in that a lot of the work that has been going on has been key work in the background in terms of developing governance structures, doing the necessary planning and the like. Perhaps that would leave the public in a bit of uncertainty, but I think we can assure the community that a lot of work has been going on and that these are necessary steps in the planning and development phase.

What has also been very interesting from my perspective has been the industry reaction to the political commitment to move ahead with light rail. What we have seen is significant interest across a range of industry sectors in getting involved in this project and getting involved in the ACT. Whether it is the people who actually want to provide the light rail system itself or the people who are looking at other economic opportunities that will arise around the development of light rail, there has been considerable interest. Certainly I speak for myself in saying that the number of people who have approached me, saying, “How do we get more information? We are interested in investing in the territory,” is very positive for the future of this city and reflects well on the ACT as a place where significant companies from outside the territory are interested to come and work.

One of the key issues, I think, in today’s debate, particularly in light of Mr Hanson’s remarks, is that the decision to do something is critically important. You can ask questions until the cows come home and you can ask questions until the traffic is backed up on Northbourne Avenue more than anybody can bear, but there comes a point where leaders have to stand up and make decisions and say it is time to go forward.

There have been significant studies. We have heard criticism in this place of the lack of information, the lack of clarity and no clear basis for making the decisions, and yet those documents are available. There are significant reports out there that have been presented and, again, been discussed in this place on previous occasions. There does come a point where the leaders of the community need to make decisions. This Assembly is the place where those decisions get taken, and I am very pleased to be part of a government that has taken a decision to make this investment for the benefit of our whole city as we move forward into the future.

Members may have seen the article that appeared in today's *Canberra Times* that I submitted and was published in the Times2 section, which particularly reflects on a recent visit I took to Portland in the USA. I was in the USA on a personal holiday and I took a couple of days out to go across to Portland, because it is considered to be one of the cities that have really transformed themselves through taking this decision. The history of Portland is very interesting and one worth reflecting on in this place. Portland built their first light rail in 1981. That followed a 1970 citizen-led freeway revolt, in which the citizens of Portland got tired of their neighbourhoods being bulldozed to put in more freeways. They were seeing significant loss of amenity in their city because of an overreliance on car-based infrastructure.

There is an excellent quote from a former Portland mayor who summed up his approach very well, and it is a useful quote to reflect on, given some of the previous discussions we have had in this place about various members' apparent dislike of the private motor vehicle. I wish I had said this and I am going to repeat it in this place because I think it is a very valuable contribution. He said:

Portland didn't declare war on cars. We just made the conscious decision not to surrender to them.

I think that is what this project is all about. It is about saying we acknowledge that in a city like Canberra the private motor vehicle will continue to play a role but we have to give our city an alternative.

Northbourne Avenue is at capacity. It is the most congested road in this city. The average peak hour speed is 20 kilometres an hour. We should be giving the people of Canberra a better choice than that. We should be giving them the opportunity to avoid the expensive costs of a second family car. We should be giving them a decent alternative.

Anyway, that is the path that Portland took. They took that decision some years ago. It was fascinating to go there. The progress that has been made, the significant impact that light rail and their street cars have had in transforming that city, is really quite amazing. What they have seen is significant light rail-related development that has provided benefits to the community. They have seen whole areas of the city that were formerly derelict, run down and uninhabited, transformed into vibrant neighbourhoods that are full of families, full of city life that people really enjoy.

In the article today, I reflected on one particular spot where there is a public fountain. It was built as a piece of artwork and as an amenity for people to enjoy. It has actually

become a place where children go and simply play in the water, and families sit around. There was this wonderful square in the middle of this relatively dense part of town that, through essentially, I guess, an organic process, became a real community hub. But this was a whole neighbourhood where previously there were simply derelict workshops and run-down parts of town, and the installation of the light rail network made that redevelopment possible.

Similarly, at the other end of town, near the hospital, there has been a new area where, again through the extension of the light rail network, an old industrial site has been opened up. There is now student housing and, something we have not seen in Canberra before, a multi-storey retirement village. It is around 14 storeys high. In Australia we do not traditionally think of older people living in high-rise buildings. What I saw there was around 14 storeys of retirement units. Because of the concentration of older people and the provision of appropriate facilities in the same precinct—again, all constructed around a light rail connection—particularly for this retirement home, there was a stop right outside the front door, providing great public transport and enabling older people to remain active longer in their lives.

I will not reflect on too much more of the article, as members can read it in the paper today if they so wish, but it was very interesting to look at a city that has taken a very conscious decision to say, “If we keep going down a business-as-usual path, our city will grind to a halt and there will be a significant loss of amenity for our citizens.” Portland took a decision to go in a different direction. I am not standing here and saying Portland has got it exactly right. It was certainly interesting talking to business leaders, senior public servants, members of NGOs in the Portland community about the bits that they have learnt over the years, where they have learnt they needed to do some things differently.

We are in the fortunate position in the ACT of being able to look to cities like Portland or, as Mr Gentleman notes in his motion, the many other cities around the world that have put in this kind of infrastructure and look at some of the things that have worked well and some of the things that people would probably avoid if they had their time over again. So we are in that very fortunate position that we can do those things.

For me, it is very clear that light rail is not just a transport solution. It is about improving transport options but it is also about starting to create the city we need to see into the future, a city where people are not so reliant on cars, a city where economic growth is driven by some of the innovation that will come attached to light rail, whether it is the direct connections or the simple reputation that I think Canberra is starting to develop as a place that is progressive and forward thinking. I think we are earning that reputation on a number of fronts.

Our excellent solar research at ANU has for many years perhaps led the way. There is the work that has been done by the Canberra Convention Bureau to position Canberra as a place where major ideas are developed, where decisions are taken, where research is innovative and vibrant. This is the sort of reputation that a city like Canberra needs in a competitive global environment. If we want to attract talent to this city, if we want to attract investment, we need to have that broader image of a city that people want to come to.

I think we need to have good alternatives to the private motor vehicle, good alternatives to simply having to sit in your car to drive to work. Whether that is good cycle networks, good walking networks or good public transport networks, people want an alternative. If you talk to the mobile, young professionals who will be a critical part of driving economic growth for cities into the future, they are the sorts of cities those people are looking for. They do not want to spend an hour sitting in a car driving from the suburbs.

There has been considerable criticism both in this place and in the media—in fact, almost predominantly from the Canberra Liberals—which simply does not stack up at this point in time. There have been criticisms—and Mr Hanson has reiterated some of them today—that there is not enough information to make a decision. “We have not seen the case.” These documents do exist. There is considerable information available in the public domain about why this route has been chosen, the basis on which the current costings have been developed, the sorts of projections that the government studies have revealed as to the basis on which this decision has been taken and why this route has been chosen.

I think that the criticisms about the gearing up of staff are simply cheap point-scoring. Any major project needs considerable staff, and I am sure if you sat down and looked at any other projects, including ones that the Canberra Liberals would support, you would see similar salary structures.

I think the economics of it do stack up. The cost-benefit studies have been made public. The figures are there in the public domain for people to look at. Yes, light rail is more expensive than bus rapid transit. It is easier to take that out there and put that simple fact out there but it leaves out the second half of the sentence which says the overall benefits for the community are greater. And that is about the long-term decisions here. Those studies show the overall economic outcomes for the city are greater with light rail, and that is a long-term decision.

The investment now will continue to deliver for this city and deliver more for this city over an extended period. Certainly, from my perspective and from the perspective of the Greens, we want to harness those benefits for this city, for the current residents and for the future residents.

As to the criticism of the route, I have already talked about that. Minister Corbell has given some very good data on the growth of population in the corridor that is being planned. We have spoken about the significant congestion. I think the people of Gungahlin in particular deserve good transport outcomes. Other parts of the city have got significant transport infrastructure already. Gungahlin is a rapidly growing area with a lot of people still to move in and it needs these options. That said, it is quite clear that the work is being undertaken to plan further parts of the network.

Once we get this first stage completed—and we have already seen Canberra Airport embrace the notion of light rail and say, “We want more bits installed. We want extra parts of the light rail network”—I expect we will see those extra parts in the future. Mr Hanson spoke of Belconnen to the city and the various institutions along the way.

I think that does underline the fact that there will be potential for another link, probably quite soon, to Belconnen. The airport is very keen. This is certainly one of the lessons from Portland.

What they saw in Portland was that the key part of the success there was due to significant private sector involvement in leveraging additional parts to the network. Rather than waiting for government to simply be able to afford it, the private sector in Portland recognised the significant benefits and contributed real money to make those extensions of the network happen.

In the area I spoke of earlier, where the retirement village was, there was also a key connection to the major hospital and medical research institution in Portland. And because of the value of that light rail network to the hospital and medical research institution, the institution actually contributed at least half of the cost of that light rail extension because they saw the benefits for themselves and they knew that light rail would deliver for their institution.

That may well be something we can see in the future in Canberra particularly where, for example, the airport is suggesting they would like to see it. It may be the government can partner with the private sector to make it happen faster than if the government simply has to finance it itself. So I think that there is a lot of opportunity. I think the fact that we are seeing the private sector in the ACT and from outside the ACT embracing this project underlines the fact that this will be a benefit for our community as a whole.

I thank Mr Gentleman for bringing this motion forward today. I look forward to further discussion in the chamber as this project progresses. There will be significant discussion with the community. It is vitally important that the community is engaged in this project. I think there is a lot of knowledge and ideas in the community about how to get this project right, and that is where having some of these community outreach positions or, as some cynically phrase them, PR positions is incredibly important because we need the community engaged in this project and contributing their ideas. I commend Mr Gentleman's motion to the Assembly.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Health and Minister for Higher Education) (10.55): In this year's budget the government set out our 2013-14 agenda under four key areas: urban renewal, liveability and opportunity, growing the economy, and healthy and smart. These priorities have provided an overarching framework for the government as we have funded election commitments and continued to invest in better services for Canberra. Capital metro is a commitment which goes to all four of these areas.

A growing city needs a plan for urban renewal. The population of the ACT is expected to increase by 80,000 people over the next 15 to 20 years. We expect that the city centre will accommodate 10 per cent of that population growth, around an additional 8,000 people. We also know that growth on the city to Gungahlin corridor has averaged increases of 6.8 per cent in recent years, more than five times the ACT average. It makes perfect sense, therefore, for the first stage of light rail to be built through this corridor. It will rejuvenate Northbourne Avenue, attract new investment

and create new interest in Canberra from further afield. I am already aware that the project is doing just that. It will transform the city in the lives of those who use it and in the minds of those who make judgements from elsewhere.

If you look at our transport challenge from a liveability point of view, it is estimated that the cost of congestion, vehicle operating costs and environmental impacts alone could exceed \$200 million over 30 years if the project does not proceed. A 90 per cent dependence on private transport in this corridor is too high. We enjoy less congestion than many cities because of our smaller population and our quality road network, but our per capita ratios will become more problematic as we grow. Indeed, the articles and the data released by the ABS yesterday go exactly to this point.

Canberra's public transport modal share is four per cent, compared to the capital city average of 11 per cent, a figure which must improve as the city grows. By increasing the share of journeys made by public transport, we can not only reduce the cost of congestion but drive important benefits in the health of our population. Public transport is a healthier, more active mode of travel than the car. Those who can leave their cars at home or at public transport hubs automatically get the benefits of physical activity during their commute. It also helps to build a culture in our city, the culture we are targeting through the healthy weight initiative, where physical activity is a far greater part of our daily lives, whether in the home, the school, the workplace or the transport system.

Therefore, governments and prospective governments in the ACT face the choice of whether they act on these demands or ignore them, whether they invest while the corridor is relatively clear because they can see what the future holds or whether they put it off so that future generations have to grapple with far worse scenarios, greater congestion and transport corridors which are prohibitively expensive to reclaim. On this side, we choose to be proactive, to look forward and to look at the environmentally and economically smart option.

Capital metro will indeed be good for the ACT economy. It has already increased interest in the Gungahlin to Civic corridor. The potential uplift affecting property values and investments alone is likely to reach many millions of dollars. This is the experience of hundreds of cities around the world, cities renowned for having excellent liveability because of their transport systems. We believe Canberra belongs to those best cities in the world, not among the also-rans catching up with the missed opportunities of their past.

Yes, light rail is a big budget item, as Mr Hanson continuously points out. Budgets, as we know, are about priorities. A project which simultaneously delivers on the key priorities of this government is a priority for our budget. Part of the government's commitment to make sure this project is delivered to the highest standard is having the best qualified professionals we can attract.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, members! There is too much conversation. I can barely hear the Chief Minister.

MS GALLAGHER: This year's budget allocation of \$18.7 million for the establishment of the Capital Metro Agency and the development of design and delivery studies will help make sure this is what happens from the start. The light rail integration study is a recent example of this work rolling out. It is assessing options around integration with other modes, options of park and ride, and demand factors for the new service.

We have been questioned by the opposition and some in the media about why we would offer competitive salaries for positions in Capital Metro. It is simply that we want the best people for the job, and we want to adequately remunerate them. We want the best possible advice to government so that our decisions can be made with the full knowledge of their consequences. We also want the best communication with the community, so that its views are heard throughout the process and people are properly informed during construction.

I saw the analogy drawn between the head of the communications area and a doctor in the hospital. I think we have over 300 registrars at the hospital, and that was the salary link made. These are doctors at the beginning of their careers; they are junior doctors in the hospital that do not have the full range of responsibilities that comes with being a staff specialist. So I think there is a bit of an unfair contrast pointed to around priorities there—over 300 junior doctors, or doctors in the middle part of their training, compared to one director of communications for a major project like this.

In yesterday's MPI, we spoke at length about the success of the centenary year and the legacies it will leave. Mr Smyth said we got lucky with the arboretum. I think that was him almost conceding that the arboretum actually is a great idea. Ten years on—10 years on—there is almost a grudging acceptance. I do not think we have seen Mr Hanson up at the arboretum yet, have we? Have we seen you up there?

Mr Hanson: I have been up there about a dozen times.

MS GALLAGHER: Good to see you.

Mr Hanson: And I have spoken in this place to say that we support it.

MS GALLAGHER: Good, good.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, this is not a conversation across the chamber.

MS GALLAGHER: Sorry; I did encourage him. No, I do not remember all your speeches, Mr Hanson. In fact, I do a lot to repress them and not listen to them. But it is good to see that support—belated support—for the massive success that the arboretum has been.

The fact is that the government backed the arboretum all the way, and the decisions of 10 years ago have been vindicated. I think the same might happen with light rail: we will be opposed for the duration of it; we will be questioned consistently; the project

will be talked down; and people will try to blow up small matters like the appointment of a communications director into a front-page story.

But at the end of the day, this project will be successful. It will be successful because it is the right thing to do. It is the right thing for future generations of this city. It will give us the opportunity to change the way the city operates. It will encourage us to meet our priorities around urban renewal, about promoting liveability in the city, about making sure that our community is living healthy lifestyles, and about growing our economy. It ticks the boxes in each one of those priorities. Some tripartisan support for this project, to give it the best shot it has from the get-go, would be most welcome.

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (11.03): Madam Deputy Speaker, I, like you, happily, have Ginninderra constituents in west Gungahlin, east of Gungahlin Drive, who will benefit directly from capital metro and are looking forward to it. Some are within walking or cycling distance of the planned Gungahlin town centre stops. They will also be able to bus to it or use park-and-ride facilities.

However, it is not just people who will ride the light rail who will benefit from it. Capital metro also promises to benefit all Canberrans, with the economic activity generated along its route, the different styles—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

DR BOURKE: What is that?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Dr Bourke, do not respond to things that are said across the chamber.

Mr Hanson: I did not say anything across the chamber.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Address your comments to the chair, thank you.

DR BOURKE: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Capital metro also promises to benefit all Canberrans, with the economic activity generated along its corridor, the different lifestyles new developments there will offer, and the lessening of the dependence—

Members interjecting—

DR BOURKE: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am having difficulty speaking with this constant interjection and conversation coming from across the chamber.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Dr Bourke.

Mr Smyth: On the point of order—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order.

Mr Smyth: There is no interjection from this side. Mr Hanson made a comment to me, and I made a comment back to him. They are not interjections. Perhaps the minister might like to lift his performance—sorry; the potential minister might like to lift his performance.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, your conversation with Mr Hanson is not helpful. It is a loud conversation. If you want to have conversation about something—I would not recommend that you both go out of the room, because I might have to call a quorum, but I do believe these conversations are not helpful—lower your voices or go outside. Dr Bourke, you have the floor.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, if you interject again, I am afraid I am going to warn you.

DR BOURKE: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Capital metro also promises to benefit all Canberrans, with the economic activity generated along its route, the different lifestyles new developments there will offer, and the lessening of the dependence on private transport for people living along the corridor.

I say unashamedly that the Gungahlin-Civic line relies over time on the build-up of higher density housing along Northbourne Avenue and flats already built, with more under construction along Flemington Road.

When I went to high school and university in Melbourne, I was a frequent user of Melbourne's excellent tram system. I can say that the availability of comfortable—much more comfortable than the best buses—reliable, regular public transport along routes will drive this intensification over time and drive up government revenues from the sale of land and rates.

I say this unashamedly, because some recent commentary on the future of Canberra would lead you to believe that this government is imagining a city of flats—like Paris, beautiful in the centre, but with six-storey flats from the CBD to the outer edges. This is completely wrong. There will always be room for freestanding suburban houses with a front yard and a back yard; the kids' basketball hoop; a vegie garden, even if you can only manage to grow silverbeet and parsley, like me; maybe a dog; or maybe chooks providing fresh eggs for breakfast. Do you prefer yours poached or fried?

It will not be that this is the only option on how to live. There will be higher density living around commercial areas, offering benefits to people who want to live that lifestyle close to services, shops, restaurants and cafes. The thing is that people living in the surrounding suburbs in their freestanding houses also benefit from those rejuvenated shopping centres and the local businesses that can be built on a larger consumer base. This was reflected in Minister Corbell's comments when he talked about the uplift in land values along the light rail corridor.

We all go through different phases of our lives when we might like the different lifestyles of high density living or suburban block living. The future of Canberra's quality of life depends on offering a wide range of choice in how we live. Part of the test of capital metro over the next 20 years or so will be seeing how it enlivens and intensifies Northbourne Avenue and Dickson in particular.

Canberra's expansion from the 1960s and 1970s on gave little thought to alternatives to the car or walking as the main modes of transport. Public schools and shops in new suburbs were within walking distance during the baby boom that accompanied the growth of the city. Ample free parking near work sites was common.

Times change. Back in the 1960s and 1970s, the office and shopping core of Civic was surrounded by acres and acres of asphalt car parks. These car parks have made way for a much more dynamic and exciting city, offering more of everything except more and more parking. Public transport, buses and capital metro offer an alternative to more congestion, more wasted time in peak hours, and more pollution. One projection estimates that capital metro could produce savings of more than \$200 million—\$200 million—over 30 years in the costs of congestion, vehicle running expenses and environmental impacts. The population along the corridor is already growing, with or without capital metro. Congestion along Northbourne Avenue, already our most congested peak hour road, will get worse without capital metro as an alternative.

Introducing light rail is a transforming move for Canberra. It is not cheap up-front, and the opposition, while it has supported light rail at different times, is predicting the end of Canberra civilisation as we know it, as oppositions often do. This is the kind of reckless inconsistency that Mr Gentleman was talking about before. Around the world, as we have heard today, comparable cities are turning to light rail or investing in their existing systems for the same reasons we are. In Australia both Labor and Liberal governments are investing in light rail. We are not alone. We are not alone timidly putting a toe on the tram. In years to come, capital metro and other modern light rail around Australia will be seen as best practice public transport in high density urban environments.

I look forward to capital metro getting rolling and proving its worth on our initial route. All Ginninderra MLAs, including that chief naysayer Mr Coe, as we have heard from Mr Hanson this morning, are imagining how we could use light rail in Belconnen and the best routes for our constituents. Belconnen town centre and our rapid transit routes through Bruce, past the University of Canberra and Calvary Hospital, could be easily adapted to make the most of light rail once we have the capital metro Gungahlin to Civic route established. It is time we got all aboard.

MS BURCH (Brindabella—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Disability, Children and Young People, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Women, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Racing and Gaming) (11.11): I thank Mr Gentleman for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. We have heard of the benefits of this transformational project and what it will bring to our city. We have heard of the progress and clear direction that this project has achieved in its first year and that it remains on track to commence construction in 2016.

We have heard the usual criticism from the Canberra Liberals, the same short-sighted arguments and the same lack of vision. But it was not always so, as those opposite should be so well aware. Call me an optimist, but I believe that there are some in the Canberra Liberal ranks who are embarrassed by the narrow-mindedness of their leadership team on the issue of light rail. I believe that there must be some in the Canberra Liberals who believe that light rail is the right choice for Canberra, the circuit breaker our city needs to get more people out of their cars and into sustainable transport options, as Mrs Dunne so eloquently put it in a media release back in 2003.

So Mrs Dunne has a long-burning passion over a decade for light rail. Her words in 2003 were, “To wean a car-addicted populace away from its habit, we have to demonstrate that there are quicker and more effective ways to commute, which means addressing both the vehicles and the infrastructure as an integrated system.” They are very wise words from Mrs Dunne. We have again heard the criticism of the cost of this project without taking into account the enormous benefits, both economic and social, that this investment will give to our city in return.

Of course, in the history of our nation, state and federal governments over the last 100 years have borrowed to deliver nation-building projects such as the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Where would these projects be today if they had been given to a visionless group of people such as the ACT Liberal opposition?

Madam Deputy Speaker, as I have noted, perhaps Mrs Dunne is the exception because she once recognised the benefits of delivering a major integrated transport system. In 2005 Mrs Dunne said—I note again that she has a long history of support for light rail—in a paper which was titled “The potential and limitations of sustainability policy: modest proposals from the garden city”:

... clearly, a light rail project would require a significant capital outlay. All governments these days—but especially, and ironically, Labor governments—are now reluctant to borrow in order to fund what any sane person would regard as necessary, long-term investment ... Just as the average family can only finance home ownership through borrowing, so the average polity must finance at least some of its wealth-building infrastructure from borrowings.

Mr Wall: Yes, but homes appreciate in value. Light rail is going to cost money. It is going to be a black hole.

Ms BURCH: These are the words of one of your own, Mr Wall—of Mrs Dunne herself. Light rail down Northbourne Avenue will also attract commercial interest and interest from the private sector. They understand that this project will significantly improve property values along the transport corridor. Again, this was a benefit that was acknowledged by the Canberra Liberals, through Mrs Dunne in this paper in 2005. She outlined how this could be leveraged to minimise the cost to government. Mrs Dunne, on behalf of the Canberra Liberals, wrote:

One type of partnership which may avoid the need for direct borrowing is based on *value capture*. As a leasehold city, Canberra is particularly well placed to utilise such a model to help pay for expensive infrastructure through the

increasing value of land along any light rail route. Businesses would have numerous reasons to relocate along the transit route: reduced general transportation costs, and access to larger pool of potential services, jobs, customers and employees.

She went on:

Investors gain from increased land value along the route—a *permanent* route, unlike most bus routes. This would encourage medium to long-term investment and permanent business relocation.

Thank you, Mrs Dunne, for your words of wisdom. Perhaps we could call on Mrs Dunne—Madam Speaker—to convince her party colleagues of these very logical arguments and observations. I would like to be a fly on the wall during that party room discussion.

Indeed, it is unusual that the government itself is criticised by the opposition for making a firm commitment to build the light rail and to get on with it because for over a decade we have been criticised for not progressing this project quickly enough. Just for a change, I will move away from the eloquent quotes of Mrs Dunne. I will move to another very valued member of this Assembly, Mr Steve Pratt. I quote from the *Hansard* of 2008. He said in this place:

The government are just waiting for their comrades on the hill to bankroll major infrastructure projects in this town. They have not got the guts, the foresight or the wherewithal to commit dollars where dollars ought to be committed—to underwrite projects for the delivery of infrastructure which this city badly needs.

This is what we are doing. We are going it alone, pending commonwealth investment. If Mr Hanson has any sway with his federal colleagues I urge him to lobby with the ACT government for some commonwealth investment for capital metro. As Mr Gentleman has said this morning, it was not that long ago that the Canberra Liberals believed in light rail. When Mr Hanson and Mr Coe were the hopeful candidates of 2008, they were campaigning for light rail. It was their election platform. As Mr Gentleman outlined, their policy statement said:

The Canberra Liberals are seriously committed to addressing Canberra's future transport needs and assessing the adoption of light rail in the Territory. The community are crying out for vision and for something to be done on this issue ... As Canberra grows, light rail will become increasingly viable and it will be preferable that all land required for the project is ready and available.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Canberra is ready for light rail and this government is ready for light rail. If the Canberra Liberals do not get on board they are going to miss the tram.

In closing, Mr Hanson made a comment that intense criticism means that they are on the money. Given that and given the voice of criticism that has come of a recent federal government announcement I would assume, given that New South Wales, Victoria, ACT and South Australia have all united in concern and criticism of the policy backflip on Gonski funding, by your statement that you are saying you support that backflip.

Mr Hanson: Madam Deputy Speaker—

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

Mr Hanson: I have point of order. I wonder whether the minister's comments, in a debate about light rail, are necessarily relevant. She is sort of wandering off into a debate about Gonski. I would ask her to be relevant to the debate.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Your point of order is on relevance. Thank you, Mr Hanson. Ms Burch, do remain relevant for the next one and a half minutes.

MS BURCH: I will remain relevant. Mr Hanson brought in lots of other conversations and projects of this government. I only thought it was fitting to say that if you decide that criticism is on the money, then you must be backing the policy backflip of the Gonski reforms.

Mr Hanson: Madam Deputy Speaker—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Resume your seat, minister.

Mr Hanson: Madam Deputy Speaker, you ruled on the point of order. I do not think this is a matter for debate. I would ask that the member be relevant to the debate and not continue with this argument.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Hanson. If you are going to say more, I would ask you to remain relevant, minister.

MS BURCH: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will close. I thank Mr Hanson for drawing attention to his concerns over my statements on that policy backflip. On light rail, by over a decade of history, the Canberra Liberals have been committed to light rail, have been committed to borrowings, indeed, for major projects to build this great city. It is truly a level of irony and disbelief that they now, when those things are being delivered for this city, are saying that this is not the way to go to grow our city. I think it shows the limited vision of those opposite.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra) (11.21): I wish to speak in favour of Mr Gentleman's motion today. I would like to talk about the benefits that the light rail network capital metro will have on our community and our economy. As we all know, capital metro will stimulate Canberra's economy. It will help to diversify its base by encouraging business investment and attracting and retaining people through the jobs that will be created to build the network and to support the network after it is constructed.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is an interesting project to talk about in the electorate, especially in and around Ginninderra. It really brings out the diversity of views and opinions of the residents in our community. The conversations that I have had with residents in Kippax or at Charnwood shops or when I am visiting voters have been very insightful. I have to say this up-front: there is a clear generational difference of opinion when it comes to this project.

The younger Canberrans I have spoken to—obviously, I include my own age group in that category—are generally excited about this project. They can see the long-term benefits that building a light rail network in Canberra will have in the years to come. For them light rail is a sign of modernity, of Canberra becoming a grown-up city. This instils confidence in them about the future of Canberra.

The older Canberrans I have spoken to have some concerns. They are legitimate concerns but ones that I think we can alleviate. With all large projects such as this one there are fears. I know that I have fears myself from time to time. But when you look at the facts, when you look at what is being built here and the opportunities that will come from this project, those fears turn into optimism.

This project will create jobs. Specifically, it will ensure a steady stream of employment in construction and engineering throughout the entire construction phase of this network, let alone during the construction of phase 1 from Gungahlin to the city. The network will also need to be serviced, tickets will need to be sold, the trains will need to be driven and maintained and the stops will need to be looked after. All of these tasks require people to do them. That amounts to significant job creation for our city.

We also expect jobs to be created to coincide with the redevelopment of Northbourne Avenue and other corridors as they are built. When the federal government is expected to cut investment in Canberra, we have a responsibility to do what we can, using the limited resources at our disposal to encourage job creation and economic diversity in Canberra. It might not fill all the gaps left by the federal government, but it is the right thing to do.

Building on this discussion of the benefits versus the negatives of light rail, too often when governments embark on large projects such as this one, we fail to see the forest of benefits for the trees of negativity and complications. Because we spend so much of our time looking at the rail network itself, looking at the trains, looking at the line that the trains will travel down, looking at the experts who will manage the project and looking at everything that could possibly go wrong with these parts, we fail to take a step back and look upon the broad benefits that light rail will have for Canberra.

As Mr Gentleman alluded to in his speech earlier today, and as Mr Rattenbury outlined in his op-ed in today's *Canberra Times*, which I read—it was a very good read; I recommend that everybody else in this place take the time to read it as well—investing in light rail now and getting people into public transport will help us to get ahead of our increasing congestion and ahead of traffic jams that are experienced in other cities in this country.

The Gungahlin to Civic drive is one of the most congested in Canberra. With the population in Gungahlin set to increase greatly in the coming years, it is the government's responsibility to ensure that we build the public transport system that best meets this projected demand. Based on all the expert advice, the solution is light rail.

The Canberra Airport is also a supporter of light rail in this city. When he attended the public hearings of the Select Committee on Regional Development, Mr Snow made it clear that they saw the economic and societal benefits that such a network will have for Canberra, especially if they were included on the network.

There is a job for me and my colleagues to get out and advocate for this project. The benefits that this will have for Canberra are greater than any group of naysayers such as those opposite may throw at it. I know we will win this debate in the long term.

I wish to end on a slightly symbolic note, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I said earlier in my speech this morning, when people think of light rail, they think of it as a fundamental characteristic of a modern city. I think this too reflects much of what Mr Rattenbury is arguing in his speech today. Can we imagine great cities such as New York, London, Rome, Paris, Chicago or even Portland functioning properly without their rail networks, metros, tubes and tram systems? The answer is no.

As the great 20th century thinker Tony Judt wrote in his advocacy of social democracy *Ill fares the land*:

Railways remain the necessary and natural accompaniment to the emergence of civil society. They are a collective project for individual benefit. They cannot exist without common accord and, in recent times, common expenditure; by design they offer a practical benefit to individual and collective alike.

I thank Mr Gentleman for bringing the motion to the Assembly. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (11.28), in reply: I thank everybody for their comments on this very important motion. I will go to some of the comments that members contributed during the debate. I turn firstly to Mr Hanson, who acknowledged that many people like the idea of light rail. But he made reference to the bus rapid transit system and some conjecture there, because he feels that the bus rapid transit would be a better option. It is interesting that we have heard today the Liberal Party did oppose the bus rapid transport system. Of course, the survey on light rail said that 75 per cent of respondents indicated that they were more likely to catch the light rail service than the Red Rapid bus rapid transport system.

Mr Hanson gave us some figures on transportation numbers on Northbourne Avenue. He referenced those to our population. He said that our population was 360,000. Mr Hanson is 20,000 behind. That population figure was back in 2010, as I understand it. The Bureau of Statistics now indicates that we are just under 380,000. Indeed, Mr Corbell mentioned that our population will be near 400,000 in 10 to 15 years. Today's *Canberra Times* indicated that we are going to have just under a million people by 2061. So it is very important that we plan for the future a sustainable rapid transit system.

Mr Corbell talked about better carrying capacity and better uplift in property values. Light rail has a great benefit-cost ratio and a good capacity to reinforce the

government's transport strategy. Mr Rattenbury talked about delivering better transport, environment and economic outcomes. Industry reaction has been very good. We have seen significant interest in both light rail itself and the associated industry benefit as a commercial opportunity.

Mr Rattenbury said that there comes a point where government must stand up and make a firm decision on our future for the benefit of all Canberrans. He referred to the history of Portland. The citizens of Portland got tired of their city being bulldozed to create more freeways. Of course, the Canberra Airport is on side. They want to see an extension to light rail so that their clients from other cities can access the transport infrastructure.

The Chief Minister talked about the cost of congestion with vehicles and pollution being \$200 million over time. Light rail will ameliorate those costs. Our public transport modal share is four per cent compared to 11 per cent in other cities. We see some challenges that government can either act on or not act on. This government chooses to be proactive and plan for the future.

In regard to salaries, we need to be competitive. We want the best people to take those jobs. This project will be successful because it is the right thing to do. The Chief Minister encourages tripartisan support. That would be most welcome.

Dr Bourke said that capital metro will benefit all Canberrans through the economic uplift, developments and lifestyle improvements it will deliver. He also talked about the projection showing cost savings of \$200 million. Across Australia he said both Labor and Liberal governments are supporting light rail programs. It is time we all get on board—a great phrase at this time of this infrastructure project.

Ms Burch talks about Mrs Dunne's life passion for light rail—over a decade, we understand—and referred to nation-building projects such as the Sydney Harbour Bridge. She wondered whether the Canberra Liberals would have supported such projects. Light rail will attract commercial activities and value uplift. These are Mrs Dunne's words. She referred to partnerships based on value capture, investor gain and permanent business relocations being available. Ms Burch also referred to Steve Pratt and his words. He said that the government did not have the guts to invest in large infrastructure projects. I think you can see, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we do have the courage.

Of course, Ms Berry stated that capital metro will stimulate our economy. Conversations that she has had with constituents show that younger people are excited to see the project and they see the long-term benefits. It builds confidence but there are concerns with older persons having fears about the future and the costs. She said that there will be jobs in construction and engineering and jobs in maintenance and ticketing. Whilst the federal government is cutting jobs in the ACT it is important for us to encourage jobs growth.

She also said that it is interesting to see how light rail will help us ameliorate congestion. She made reference to the figures mentioned earlier on about the cost involved in that in future. She made reference to the presentations to her select

committee from Canberra Airport. Mr Snow made clear the economic benefits of a light rail project for Canberra. She said that light rail is a fundamental part of a modern city.

I would like to thank everybody for their contributions. I remind everybody that investing in light rail will provide our city with the most reliable and convenient form of public transport available. It will provide people with an attractive alternative to the car, easing congestion and pollution as the population continues to grow. This is a transformational project for our capital and it will ensure that our home, the nation's capital, will be able to continue to grow sustainably well into the future.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 7

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

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Emergency Services—management

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (11.38): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes the various problems existing within the ESA and its component organisations:
 - (a) ACT Fire and Rescue;
 - (b) ACT Ambulance Service;
 - (c) ACT State Emergency Service; and
 - (d) ACT Rural Fire Service; and
- (2) calls on the Minister to establish a statutory authority to manage emergency services in the ACT.

The history of the Emergency Services Agency under Mr Corbell has been a sad saga of mismanagement and one catastrophe after another. Despite debating a motion in October this year, in the short period of time since then three more issues have emerged: we have now confirmed that WorkSafe ACT is investigating bullying inside the ESA; we have had the report of the Fair Work Ombudsman; and, of course,

yesterday and today there are reports about concerns about how the control room is run inside the Emergency Services Agency.

During the motion on 30 October, Mr Corbell, as he always does when he does not have something sensible to say, sought to simply ridicule the motion. I will read from what he said:

I am sure that if there was a malfunctioning drinks machine at the ESA headquarters I would be held responsible for it ... He seems to have a remarkable understanding—unique, I would suggest—about the role of a minister when it comes to the day-to-day management of our emergency services. Believe it or not, I do not check and make sure that the oil is put into the tankers when they go through their service. Believe it or not, I do not check that the batteries are charged for the radios. It is not my job to do so. It is the job of the operational leaders of the services to make sure these things are done.

Well, what is Mr Corbell's job and where does ministerial responsibility come into the management of an agency? *House of Representatives Practice* says it is through ministers that the whole of the administration—departments, statutory bodies and agencies of one kind and another—is responsible to the parliament and thus ultimately to the people. Yes, Mr Corbell—surprise, surprise—you are responsible for your department and your agencies and your statutory bodies, and you are responsible to this place. You can laugh and snigger and do all you want, but the reality is that ministerial responsibility says you are responsible for the things that go on inside your department, particularly when they have been brought to your attention.

Oddly enough, *House of Representatives Practice* goes on to say parliament is the correct forum—the only forum—to test or expose ministerial administrative competence or fitness to hold office. There you are, Mr Corbell. This is the place where you are tested over your administration. You are responsible to us for the appropriation this Assembly might vote to you in your role as minister for emergency services, and you are responsible to us for the day-to-day administration and reporting back to this place of what you do with the funds and the responsibility given to you through approp bills and through the administrative arrangements.

I have to say, the minister fails dismally when it comes to the management of the Emergency Services Agency. It is an important agency; it is an agency that people turn to in times of need. They have very high expectations, as they should, of what that organisation does. That is why we are saying today it is time to take the emergency services out of the justice and community portfolio and put it back into a statutory body, as so many people have recommended and as so many people recognise, to ensure it can operate properly.

Perhaps that is the reason the Chief Minister has moved for extra ministers—so she can take from him some of the more troubling portfolios Mr Corbell seems not to be able to administer. Perhaps that would be a good thing, Chief Minister. Perhaps you should take ESA off Mr Corbell. I suspect anybody on your backbench could do a better job of it than the current minister does.

Following the January 2003 bushfire disaster in the ACT, the ACT government established an inquiry to examine the way in which the emergency services responded

to the bushfire disaster. We know that in August that year—10 years ago—Mr Ron McLeod released his report, *The Inquiry into the Operational Response to the January 2003 Bushfires in the ACT*. It is interesting to note that Mr McLeod then went on to be the assistant commissioner in the Victorian bushfires royal commission.

A major recommendation made by Mr McLeod was that an emergency services authority be established because, in his expert opinion, services should be managed by a single larger operational body specifically set up outside the framework of the ACT public service. Mr McLeod spent an entire chapter of his report—chapter 6—setting out his analysis of the evolution of the management of emergency services in the ACT, and why this should happen. Mr McLeod's arguments were very strong in 2003 and, given Mr Corbell's administration of the emergency portfolio, they remain valid now in 2013. It is quite easy to see that, if the recent history of the management of the emergency services in the ACT is anything to go by, Mr McLeod was right.

Then, of course, following the McLeod inquiry we had the coronial inquiry, and the coroner supported the findings made by Mr McLeod. Coroner Maria Doogan presented her report in December 2006. She made a major recommendation that the Emergency Services Agency be transformed into an independent statutory authority reporting directly to the minister. So here we are where in the last decade two independent experts have found that emergency services in the ACT should be provided through a stat authority. McLeod made that recommendation; Doogan made that recommendation. Now, for reasons that we still do not know, because the Costello report that suggested it is still kept secret by the government, the Stanhope government acted to abolish the authority on the flimsiest of grounds. The Labor government refuses to engage the community in effective discussion of the analysis and findings contained in the Costello report.

In one of the 2006 budget papers the Stanhope-Gallagher government noted that the Costello report had commented critically that the authority's budget had increased by 46 per cent since 2002-03, but in the next paragraph the government sets out all the additional spending that had been made on the emergency services. The arguments used by the Stanhope-Gallagher government to abolish the authority were very, very weak. In any event, the authority was abolished. The management of emergency services was treated in a sorry manner by the Stanhope-Gallagher government, and sadly that situation is no better today.

We only need to go back a month ago to see the litany of failings the minister treated so flippantly and so lightheartedly. Let me run through them. For ACT Fire and Rescue: first responder medical training and pay issue, which is still running today; the draft terms of reference for the capability review to be carried out by JACS, which we still have not seen; the effectiveness of cross-crewing; the requirement for the second Bronto, which fire crews tell me they need desperately simply because you can either fight a fire or you can rescue—you cannot do both from one Bronto; post-incident debriefs are still an issue; and the replacement of the out-of-date PODs.

For the ACT Ambulance Services: the culture within the service, and we now know there is a complaint about bullying being investigated by WorkSafe, and this is all happening under the leadership—in all reality the lack of leadership—of this minister;

the status of cardiac monitor and defibrillator problems; disciplinary processes; the complaint to the Fair Work Ombudsman, which we will get to in more detail shortly; and complaints before ACAT.

Of course for the ACT Emergency Services there is the replacement of the deputy officer as per section 58, and it is still very unclear whether these officers have been replaced and whether they are to actually be replaced or whether the money is to be taken as savings or used for other purposes; the issue of having to get truck licences for all the SES members because they purchased vehicles that are not standard vehicles with the requirement only for a standard drivers licence attached.

In the Rural Fire Service we have: the replacement of deputy officer as per section 53 of the Emergencies Act 2004, which might happen in February, apparently, after the bulk of the fire season has passed; payment of the close-call, on-call allowances; the availability of trained IMT officers; funds for training; the acquisition of a second bulk water carrier; and the movement of fire tankers.

Mr Corbell treated that debate flippantly and Mr Rattenbury said, “Well, you can get your answers in estimates.” But, as we know, there was only about 40 minutes, 45 minutes in estimates, so instead of getting documentation on these issues, the government has been able to gloss over it. But since that debate we now know there has been a report to WorkSafe ACT and it concerns bullying in the service. And this is the point: the minister was aware of the culture inside the Ambulance Service November last year—12 months ago. And what has he done? He has announced a review. Has that review commenced? No, it has not. Have the terms of reference been made public? No, they have not. Do we know who is to conduct the review? No, we do not. That is because this minister does not manage his portfolios, and Chief Minister, you need to do something about it.

We need a new minister, but we also need an independent statutory agency to enable it to work better. Just yesterday in the paper concerns were raised by fire brigade officers about the control room and the working conditions there. And then it was revealed, much to the amazement of the United Firefighters Union, that the control room, which is under review—I think people knew that—may lead to the loss of jobs there for the UFU. I do not think people were aware of that, and I do not think the minister has talked about that publicly. So, again, we have a minister who is not in control of his portfolio and we have a portfolio that should not be an agency inside a much larger agency. It should be an independent statutory authority. This litany of errors just in the last 12 months—these mistakes and these faults—show that something has to change.

This morning the report of the Fair Work Ombudsman was released, and the ABC described it as a scathing report on the performance of the ACT Ambulance Service under this minister. It is well and good to say the Labor Party is the party of the worker, but the workers had to take their complaints to the Fair Work Ombudsman because the minister would not act. The questions for you, minister, are: when did you find out, who spoke to you about these problems concerning the leave balances, and what did you do? Clearly, you did not do anything to fix it such that the union representing paramedics in the ACT Ambulance Service had to take it to the Fair Work Ombudsman.

What does the Fair Work Ombudsman say? There is a chronology in the report and a list of events and issues which led to the concerns over the accuracy of employee records including the employer's publication of incorrect and potentially inflated leave balances on employee payslips for a period of more than two years. Two years, minister, and you could not fix it. Two years! Perhaps the sixth minister is required quite quickly Chief Minister, with the minister not being the minister of emergency services.

The report goes on to say that some steps were taken by the employer, but the actions did not successfully manage the potential consequences resulting from the continued publication of incorrect leave balances. So whatever little we did did not actually work, and the problem continued for two years. The Fair Work Ombudsman has found that the Justice and Community Safety Directorate contravened workplace laws relating to keeping accurate employee records and correcting those records as soon as the employer becomes aware of the error. They broke the law; they broke the law on a basic entitlement of workers, and they could not fix it for two years. As a consequence, there will be further inspections and, in the first instance, the Fair Work Ombudsman has issued a letter of caution.

It is very sad that workers in an ACT department have to go to the Fair Work Ombudsman to get some justice, because the minister cannot deliver the workplace that they deserve in the framework that best allows them to do their job. That is why we are asking the government to go back to what McLeod said, to go back to what Doogan said, to go back to what everybody acknowledges would be the best outcome for ESA—that is, the establishment of a statutory authority to manage emergency services in the ACT. I will just do a bit more of what the Fair Work Ombudsman said: the investigation disclosed the ACT government's employment entity failed to comply with statutory record keeping procedures from 24 October 2008 until 16 August 2012. Failed for almost four years to comply with the law. They broke the law for four years, most of which, if not all, was under this minister. Prior to 1 July 2009 the ACT government employing entity contravened the Workplace Relations Regulations 2006 and after 1 July the ACT government employing entity contravened section 535 of Fair Work Act. They broke the law for almost four years.

It seems that by 28 August 2009 the employing entity was aware, but it continued until 16 August 2012. So for three years they could not fix it. This calls into question the ability of the employing entity to monitor and record records. The employing entity published leave balances on payslips from 28 August 2009 to 15 September 2011 that were incorrect. For two years the officers of the agency did not know what their balances were. These mistakes need to be fixed. The best way to fix them is to have a statutory authority that is run properly and correctly, and the best way to fix it is to replace this minister.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations and Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development) (11.53): I remain convinced that, should we ever suffer the fate of Mr Smyth becoming the minister for police and emergency services, he will end up running the comcen from his office. It is the sort of view he

has about responsibilities for ministers—that somehow ministers are directly engaged in the day-to-day management of every aspect of their agency. He may think that that is the way the world operates but it certainly is not. The government has in place a very capable team of professional operational leaders who drive the day-to-day management, direction and delivery of services of our Emergency Services Agency.

What Mr Smyth fails to do in his motion today is to demonstrate how his so-called solution addresses the issues that he raises. It seems to me that it is a solution looking for a problem. Mr Smyth has the simple refrain in his motion today, “I believe there are all these problems, and the way to fix it is to have a statutory agency.” He does not actually explain how having a statutory agency addresses any of those issues that he lists. He does not explain how having another corporate area, how having another ministerial support area, how having its own HR function, would in any way address the issues that he raises.

I will tell you the only thing it would do, Madam Speaker. It would mean taxpayers would be paying more for administration and back office support than they do today. That would be the only outcome of having a statutory agency. We know what comes with establishing separate agencies, particularly statutory agencies, where they are not allowed to have any other relationship with other parts of government or any other administrative unit. It means you are going to have another ministerial support area. It means you have to have another HR area. It means you have to have a whole range of other support functions that currently are shared across the Justice and Community Safety portfolio from within Justice and Community Safety itself.

That, of course, was the reason why the government took the decision to make the Emergency Services Agency part of the broader Justice and Community Safety portfolio—to reduce overhead costs, so that taxpayers’ dollars were not spent on overheads but were spent on the front line. And it has worked. We have improved budget accountability on the part of the ESA, we do not have duplication of overhead costs, and we have more money and more investment going into the front line where the community expects it to go.

Once again we hear from the shadow treasurer, who lectures this government at length about costs and the need for savings, proposing duplication of functions and more taxpayers’ dollars being spent on overhead costs around HR, personnel management, ministerial support, cabinet liaison and all the things that come with a separate administrative unit and which are currently met from within the broader Justice and Community Safety portfolio.

I am very proud of what this government has achieved for our emergency services. We now have state-of-the-art capabilities across all of our emergency services and they are backed up with significant investment in resources, in training and in facilities. I would like to talk today about what this government has done under the existing administrative arrangements to deliver better emergency services for our community, because that is what people expect at the end of the day.

First of all, we have right now an extensive station relocation program underway. We have delivered excellent new fire and for the first time intensive care paramedic

ambulance support to the west Belconnen area, with the new Charnwood or west Belconnen fire and rescue and ambulance station, delivered on time, under budget and for the first time making sure west Belconnen is serviced by the intensive care paramedic support that it needs as a growing area.

We have delivered funding for the construction of the new south Tuggeranong fire and rescue facility. This facility, for the first time, will make sure there is effective fire cover for the Lanyon valley. This is a very important shift in the deployment of our fire and rescue personnel. It has been funded in this year's budget, DA approval has been granted and it has gone to tender. That project is going to kick off in the coming months, and it is going to be a welcome facility, I know, for everybody who lives in the south Tuggeranong area.

There are other important aspects to the station relocation program also underway. We have the proposals for the development of the new fire and rescue and ambulance station at Aranda. That project is expected to proceed to its DA assessment stage in the coming months. We have stage 2 of station relocation also underway, with due diligence and assessment right now occurring for station relocation in places like Pialligo, Fairbairn, in the city, Fyshwick and a range of other locations. These are all indicators of a government committed to the delivery of improved front-line operational response capability for our emergency services, and delivered under the administrative arrangements that have now been in place for well over half a decade.

The government has invested significantly in fleet upgrade as well. We have seen major fleet upgrade activities occurring right across the ESA—new ambulances, and extra ambulances, on the street, a refresh of all of the pumpers across ACT Fire and Rescue, an upgrading of significant amounts of tankers within the Rural Fire Service, as well as new light units and a range of other capabilities. We have seen upgrades and new equipment for the State Emergency Service—new vehicles and new flood management equipment. For the ACT Rural Fire Service, we have also seen significant investments in a range of other capabilities.

The government has delivered major new projects. The ESA headquarters at Fairbairn is now delivering a capable, state-of-the-art, modern emergency services headquarters function. The government has invested significantly in a new training facility at Hume. The ESA training centre is now regarded as one of the best combined training facilities for emergency services in the country. It replaces the outdated, old and antiquated fire and rescue training facilities in Lathlain Street in Belconnen, and for the first time opens up our training capabilities to our other services, particularly our volunteer services, so that Rural Fire Service volunteers, community fire unit volunteers and SES volunteers can all take advantage of the state-of-the-art training facilities we have at Hume. These are investments that this government has made, and which are paying dividends in terms of the capabilities, training and ability to respond that our emergency services now have.

Of course, the government has also invested in other important pieces of infrastructure. The new RFS helicopter base, again at Hume, for the first time gives us a dedicated capability for that critical element of firefighting response in the summer months, aerial firefighting capabilities, a dedicated heli-base with all the facilities needed to run a large-scale incident with multiple aerial appliances.

These are things that simply did not exist 10 years ago but are now in place as a result of this government's ongoing commitment to improving the capabilities of our emergency services, and which have occurred during my tenure as minister.

The government has also invested significantly in a major upgrade of our communications systems. We know, following 2003, that communications was one of the critical failures of the 2003 bushfires. We have made the investment in a new trunk radio network, a digital radio network, that gives our services the capability not only to talk with each other but also to talk with services across the border in New South Wales and to have great capacity for growth and multiplicity of talk channels to manage large-scale incidents. These are the investments that this Labor government has made, and which improve the capability and operational response delivered by our emergency services.

We also put in place the strategic bushfire management plan. The strategic bushfire management plan now delivers one of the most comprehensive on-the-ground fuel management programs of any jurisdiction. We see tens of thousands of hectares every year managed for fire fuel, everything from grazing, slashing and physical removal to hazard reduction burning. These are important measures that help keep our community safe, and the government has put in place the investments needed to make them happen.

The government also has supported better training and investment in training for our volunteers and paid personnel in ambulance and fire and rescue. We have developed new capabilities that are now regarded as some of the best, if not the best, in Australia. The remote area firefighting team capability, for example, means that we can get our firefighters to remote area fires quickly. We can get on top of those fires early and stop them growing and becoming a major problem.

That is exactly the capability that we demonstrated last summer, when the ESA deployed a comprehensive and aggressive attack on multiple lightning strikes in Namadgi national park with only days before a dangerous hot weather system arrived with very strong winds from the prevailing north and north-west. Those fires were brought under control. Those fires were put out before they became a threat to our environment, a threat to Namadgi national park, a threat potentially to other landholders or to the city itself. That is the capability, that is the investment and that is the leadership that this government has put in place when it comes to our Emergency Services Agency.

Emergency services agencies are complex beasts—multiple interests, multiple services, each with a different culture and perspective. They are challenging organisations to run. But do not for a moment detract from what these services and these operational leaders deliver on the ground every day—capability to deal with emergency which is one of the best in the country, and which has been backed up and supported every inch of the way by this Labor government and by the investments it has sought to make and the strategic decisions it has made to support the growth and development of our emergency services.

Mr Smyth has failed to make the case today. He has failed comprehensively to demonstrate how his solution, looking for a problem, is any answer at all. The government will not be supporting this proposed resolution.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (12.06): This has certainly been an interesting debate to listen to—two very different perspectives on the world. I think for me the key question really is: firstly, what is the problem that is seeking to be addressed? Mr Smyth has certainly outlined that and, in his recent motion, has identified areas in which he had concern. There is that debate. Do these problems exist? Then the second question flowing from that is: does this proposed restructure deliver a different outcome? They are quite detailed and complicated questions.

There is, of course, a significant history to this matter, one that both Mr Corbell and Mr Smyth have been prosecuting for some time, and prosecuting with each other for some time. I, of course, was not in the Assembly before 2008, but I am aware of the considerable discussions that have gone on about the history of what is the appropriate management model for emergency service responses in the ACT.

After the 2003 bushfires, the McLeod inquiry looked at the structure of the Emergency Services Bureau and, amongst many other things, recommended that a new statutory authority should be established. The McLeod inquiry said it would be separate from and independent of any department of state and would be outside the public service. It is interesting to note, though, that the McLeod report seemed to suggest that the prime concerns were cultural problems of the old establishment. It is now 10 years since that report, and I think it is fair to say that we are operating in quite different times.

Following the report, the Emergency Services Authority was established in 2004 and did sit outside the public service. My understanding is that a few years later the ESA was altered to its current form. This was in 2006, post the functional review, and it was placed under the administrative control of the Justice and Community Safety Directorate.

Why did this happen? My understanding is that there were several reasons. Primarily, I think they were that the ACT faced budget constraints and that as a small jurisdiction it is difficult for the ACT to operate a large number of statutory agencies. This is a genuinely vexed question, and I do understand the difficulty that the government is in when it comes to thinking about those sorts of matters.

Having said that, I would point out that the current administrative structure surrounding the ESA does have several positives. The Emergencies Act, for example, still ensures that the commissioner and chief officers, for operational response, have independence. They also have direct communication with and report to the minister. That is a critical fact, and probably the most important element of a statutory authority.

As members can imagine, there are also significant efficiencies to be gained by having the ESA in a directorate. It saves duplication on things like corporate functions and financial governance. The benefit is that this also allows the ESA to focus more on operational service delivery.

At this point, I am not convinced by the argument that any of the difficulties and challenges that the ESA is facing will be assisted by returning the ESA to the administrative structure of a statutory authority. It will be a change, certainly, and it allows Mr Smyth and his colleagues to say that the current system and current minister are a failure. But I am not sure that that is necessarily the way to improve the ESA at this point. It delivers a political outcome for Mr Smyth, but the key question for me is: will it make an operational difference on the ground, and will it improve response to emergencies in the ACT?

The key questions really are: is the emergency response in the ACT adequate? Is the ESA doing its job? And are we responding in a timely and satisfactory way to emergencies? These are really the questions that matter. I think from that flows, then, a discussion about structural situations.

As I said in my earlier remarks, I think this has been the subject of many inquiries over the last decade, and the 2003 bushfires were certainly an incredible wake-up. The McLeod and Doogan reports have given the ACT government and emergency services a tremendous wealth of recommendations to work with, trial and implement.

The Auditor-General has also undertaken a number of relevant inquiries. The most recent one, on bushfire preparedness, looked at many aspects of our bushfire management and even looked into governance issues. The Auditor-General made many recommendations but the report did not recommend restructuring the ESA and creating an independent, stand-alone authority. Of all the recommendations that were in there—and some of them applied to TAMS as well—none said there was a fundamental structural problem, certainly not as I understood the report.

What may be of interest—and perhaps this is something that Mr Smyth does have some suggestions on—is the creation of new strategic and accountability indicators to ensure that government is on track annually to achieve the best emergency response possible. That would be something that I would certainly be prepared to look at.

I certainly had an exchange with Mr Smyth recently in annual reports hearings in my capacity as the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services around fire trail preparedness. I do not know whether Mr Smyth has received it yet, but I have just sent him a reply—it should be with him in the next day; I have signed it—which clarifies what was, unfortunately in annual reports hearings, not as crisp an answer as it should have been. But I think it is quite crisp now that it has been worked through. That is perhaps not the best indicator. I think that there was some uncertainty there, and the fact that the agency was not able to explain it clearly in the annual reports hearings does beg the question of whether we need a better indicator. They may be things that we need to look at.

Are there measures there that are not being delivered and that need to be delivered? Are there indicators that perhaps would be a clearer measure of preparedness for some of these emergencies? That is a discussion that I am certainly willing to have, and that might be a place we could look to go in the future.

However, as the motion stands, I am not persuaded that a structural change is what is needed for the Emergency Services Agency. I think that these are secondary questions to the one that I think is really important, which is: are we getting the emergency services that we need?

Mr Smyth has certainly highlighted concerns he has in some areas. We have seen media reports. But I think it is fair to observe that most agencies have operational issues that do occur within their agencies. I do not think that fundamentally goes to the question of structure of an agency, and on that basis I will not be supporting the motion today.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (12.13), in reply: I thank members for their varied responses to this issue. I think you have only got to look at the response that Mr Rattenbury made to this motion, as opposed to what Mr Corbell said. Mr Rattenbury was quite reasonable about his approach. He is not going to support it. I hear that. But the problem for Mr Corbell, as Mr Wall so accurately pointed out, is that he just ignored the issue.

Mr Rattenbury said there are often operational issues within departments. Yes, that is true. But has he ever heard such a litany of issues as those running in the last year that I have been able to bring to this place and that are happening currently in the ESA? We have a minister who fails, on all counts, to address those issues or take any responsibility for those things.

As I pointed out from *House of Reps Practice*, this is the place where ministers are held to account, on behalf of the public, for their administration and running of their departments. You are the person, Mr Corbell, who is allegedly responsible in this place but it is almost delusional the way that you just avoid answering any of the tough questions.

The fact is that this morning the ABC called it a scathing report from the Fair Work Ombudsman on an issue that has gone on for four years. I cannot believe, as minister, you were not aware of this. It has gone on for four years, and it got so bad the union had to take you to the Fair Work Ombudsman because you could not come up with a solution. You are responsible, minister.

The minister makes my case. He said, “We took it out of the Emergency Services Authority so that we could make savings on HR and personnel.” That worked for you, did it not? You have got complaints to WorkSafe on bullying, and you have got a scathing report from the Fair Work Ombudsman that the new administration failed—and not just failed, it broke the law for almost four years. You make my case for me, thank you very much.

It is typical. Minister Corbell, instead of taking ministerial responsibility and saying, “Yes, there have been some issues, we are working towards it,” did not once say, “I have directed my officials to fix these things so that I can go back into the Assembly and say it is fixed.” Instead, he deludes himself by delivering, again as Mr Wall said quite accurately, what sounded more like a valedictory speech. I think Mr Corbell sees

the writing on the wall that, when Ms Berry gets promoted over Dr Bourke, we will have the dynasty established at last. After Wayne Berry, Yvette Berry will now be running the ESA.

It did sound a lot like a valedictory speech. “I have done this, I have done that.” But what it did not do was take responsibility for the things that are affecting the human beings, the individuals, the things that are affecting the wellbeing of officers in Fire and Rescue, in the State Emergency Service, in the Rural Fire Service and in the ACT Ambulance Service. He just ignored those.

He said, “I built a great building at Fairbairn.” In fact, the Snow family and the Canberra International Airport built the great building. Their part of it was fantastic. Your part of it was appalling, because it will not meet the operational need of ESA into the future because it was built too small. We all know it was cut down. Yet again, it was another project you could not deliver on time and on budget, as just about your entire career is predicated on, Mr Corbell.

Since you first made that promise in about 2001 that the GDE would be delivered on time and on budget, you have failed, constantly. We asked you in estimates could you name one project, and you could not name one. And the list you gave back to me named mainly projects that had started in my term as the minister. Thanks for that validation of my efforts. But it does show that you cannot deliver.

The ESA, whether it is inside JACS or outside the government, will always have to pay for administration. It is a furphy to say it is cheaper to run it inside JACS. It has not proved cheaper for the individual who is taking you to WorkSafe. It has not proved cheaper to those—what is it, 56?—individuals who are now paying back because of the mismanagement. The improvement, which you said it was, has caused 56 individuals a great deal of stress and grief and will now cost them a great deal of money that they will have to pay back, money that they had a reasonable expectation to assume that they had earned fairly.

Because of your mismanagement, because you failed to direct your officers to deliver the services that you said your reforms would deliver, these people have suffered. That is why this should be back inside an emergency services authority.

ESA is being stifled in JACS. We know that JACS, in the 2012-13 budget, set up some draft terms of reference to look at capability but never followed through with it. We know that it is the JACS administration of ESA that has led certainly to a lot of the personnel problems that are occurring inside the Emergency Services Agency as it exists. Taking it outside JACS will give it greater operational independence and will give it greater access to you, minister.

Perhaps you do not want that. Perhaps you want the truth of what happens in the ESA filtered by your department so that you can throw up your hands and say, “Not me, I did not know.” You cannot do that. Ministerial responsibility says that you, minister, must make it your business to find out how your organisations are operating and make sure that they are operating well. And it is our business, as is clearly outlined in *House of Reps Practice*, to ask you the questions.

As I said, parliament is the correct forum, the only forum, to test or expose administrative competence or fitness to hold office. I would suspect that in this forum the test has exposed your lack of fitness to hold this office and your lack of administrative competence in the running of the Emergency Services Agency. The sooner the Chief Minister takes it off you, the better. And it would be better for a rookie to run it because they will do a better job than you are currently doing with it, minister.

You say that you have all these reforms that have been in place over the last half a decade. They have not delivered for the employees. It is not a safe workplace for the employees. I just go back to the defibrillator case where the commissioner said on the ABC that yes, it was adding to stress levels inside the ESA. But you said, “No, nothing wrong here.” And then you were the one who took the bushfire preparedness report from the Auditor-General and said it was a ringing endorsement. She said you broke the law. In answer to the questions I have asked about holding you accountable, you have said that tomorrow you will table the statement of capability that the strategic bushfire management plan has lacked for years—again, mismanagement from this minister of this incredibly essential service to the people of the ACT.

I think the employees deserve better. We did not hear a single word from the minister. No wonder the UFU dissociated themselves from the ACT ALP before the last election. We did not hear a single word about the concerns the staff, the fire and rescue staff, who work at the control centre have raised—not a word, just glossed over that. “I have put the new fire station somewhere else.”

Forget about what is going on now, forget about the damage that you are doing to individuals or allowing to occur to individuals, minister, because you have been reckless or irresponsible in performing your duties. This is why it should be outside the JACS portfolio. You have used JACS as a buffer. You have used JACS to distance yourself—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, could you address the chair please.

MR SMYTH: Through you, Madam Speaker, the minister has distanced himself from the ESA portfolio, and that is what is leading to these problems. These are not things that I just thought up, minister. I know you would like to have people think that this is some sort of illusion, that this is some sort of creation of mine. But these are issues that are brought to me—I say this through you, Madam Speaker—from the staff. It is the staff that have raised it. It is from members of Fire and Rescue, the Ambulance Service, the State Emergency Service and the RFS—and I will read the litany one more time—who have concerns about first responder medical pay and training, which the minister has not addressed, who want to know what the draft terms of reference for the capability review were and why it was never carried out, who have commented to me on the effectiveness of cross-crewing and who have told me they need a second Bronto. But no, he gets his filtered versions through JACS. And he says, “Not so.”

The post-incident debriefs are a big concern as, of course, is some of the equipment in the pods. In the Ambulance Service, it is the culture within the service. The Fair Work

Ombudsman report says today, pretty much, that—again I say this through you, Madam Speaker—the minister has let them down. We have got disciplinary problems, we have got complaints to WorkSafe, we have got the Fair Work Ombudsman, we have got officers not being replaced. There are driving issues in the SES. We have got funds for training in the Rural Fire Service. We have got movement of fire tankers. It is a long litany of failure from the minister. The way to fix this is to have a statutory authority and then to have a minister who actually cares and does the job. (*Time expired.*)

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 7

Noes 8

Mr Doszpot
Mrs Dunne
Mr Hanson
Mrs Jones

Ms Lawder
Mr Smyth
Mr Wall

Ms Berry
Dr Bourke
Ms Burch
Mr Corbell

Ms Gallagher
Mr Gentleman
Ms Porter
Mr Rattenbury

Question so resolved in the negative.

Sitting suspended from 12.27 to 2.30 pm.

Questions without notice

ACT Emergency Services Agency—management

MR HANSON: My question is to the minister for emergency services. Minister, an ABC report this morning noted that a Fair Work Ombudsman investigation has found that between 2008 and 2012 the ACT government broke the law by knowingly failing to keep accurate staff records of ACT Ambulance Service employees, leading to multiple breaches of the Fair Work Act and the workplace relations act. The ABC has characterised the Ombudsman’s report as “scathing”. Minister, when were you first made aware of these record-keeping practices?

MR CORBELL: I was made aware of the circumstances within the last 12 months. As to the exact date, I will take that on notice and advise Mr Hanson.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, a supplementary.

MR HANSON: Minister, when did you first take action to try and resolve these issues?

MR CORBELL: The moment it was brought to my attention.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: At the moment it was first brought to your attention, what action did you take to resolve these issues?

MR CORBELL: I instructed my directorate to cease taking collection action in relation to incorrectly paid leave allowances until the matter could be finalised and resolved in discussion with the Transport Workers Union representing ambulance officers. Those steps were subsequently superseded by the referral of the matter to Fair Work Australia.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, why were you unable to resolve this issue necessitating this matter being brought to the Fair Work Ombudsman?

MR CORBELL: The matter was referred to the Fair Work Ombudsman by the Transport Workers Union. That is not a matter over which I or the government had any control and it was within the rights of the union and its members to refer the matter. The government continued to work with the union on these matters—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Hanson!

MR CORBELL: and the government acted, as I have indicated. When the matter was brought to my attention and it was brought to my attention that the directorate proposed to take recovery action in relation to incorrectly paid leave allowances, I directed the directorate not to proceed further with such action and to seek to negotiate an appropriate outcome with the Transport Workers Union on behalf of the ambulance officers concerned.

ACT Emergency Services Agency—management

MR COE: My question is for the minister for emergency services. Minister, in light of the Ombudsman's findings of the ACT government's unsafe recordkeeping practices leading to 65 ambulance officers being asked to pay back leave with individual amounts ranging from approximately \$18 to \$56,000 and an average total of around \$6,000, how much of this has been paid back to the government?

MR CORBELL: Prior to action being taken to not pursue further outstanding amounts at the relevant time, a number of officers had voluntarily chosen to pay back leave. Others did not. The exact amounts are not immediately available to me, but I can make those available to members.

MR COE: Supplementary.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, what specific measures has the government put in place to help staff to repay the overpayments?

MR CORBELL: There are a range of options available to staff, including staged instalments over extended periods of time. All such arrangements would be done in accordance with the relevant industrial agreements in place between the government and the officers concerned.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, will you consider waiving or reducing the staff debts as a result of the government knowingly failing to keep accurate staff records?

MR CORBELL: It is worth putting some context around why this scenario arose, and then I will address directly the issue that Mr Smyth asked about. Before 2008 leave records were kept in paper form only and record keeping was, to be frank, antiquated. With the transfer to an electronic record, there were failings in the transfer of data from paper-based records to electronic-based records. This was exacerbated by the fact that responsibility for the maintenance of those records through Shared Services' HR functions and communication with my directorate was less than adequate in drawing to my directorate's attention failings in relation to record keeping. That said, this is a matter that the government must take responsibility for, and it does, and the government is taking all appropriate action.

I am sorry; I have forgotten the second part of your question, Mr Smyth, if you would like to ask it again.

Mr Smyth: Will you consider waiving or reducing?

MR CORBELL: Yes. In relation to the issue of waiver, that matter will be considered as appropriate and in accordance with the industrial arrangements in place between the government and the officers concerned.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, what work are you doing with the Transport Workers Union to resolve this issue, and what are they are asking for?

MR CORBELL: This is not a matter that I have discussed with the Transport Workers Union recently and certainly not today, but I have to say relations with the Transport Workers Union remain excellent. The union has not indicated to me any dissatisfaction with my handling of the matter. I thank them for their ongoing cooperation. The Transport Workers Union do an excellent job representing their members, and the government values the relationship it has with the union.

Visitors

MADAM SPEAKER: Before I call any other members, could I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of another group of staff from Canberra Connect. Welcome to your Assembly.

Questions without notice

Health—breast screening

DR BOURKE: My question is to the Minister for Health. Can the minister update the Assembly on the MOU with the New South Wales government for New South Wales women who work in the ACT to access breast screening services.

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Dr Bourke for his ongoing interest in the ACT health system. On 15 November, the New South Wales Minister for Health and I—

Mr Smyth interjecting—

MS GALLAGHER: Sorry, Mr Smyth; it is my turn now. We announced that our jurisdictions had signed an MOU which will see that New South Wales women who work in the ACT will once again be able to access breast screening services in the ACT.

New South Wales women had previously been able to access this service; however, in 2012 this arrangement came to an end and New South Wales women were redirected to services offered by BreastScreen NSW. We did get a number of representations from women who live in the neighbouring smaller communities abutting our border who work in the ACT. Based on those representations, I asked ACT Health to begin discussions with NSW Health to see whether or not a suitable arrangement could be put in place to allow these women to be screened in the ACT as these women indicated that they were finding it difficult to attend the mobile screening services that were offered in their own local communities or indeed attend the Queanbeyan service during business hours.

Over the last couple of months, BreastScreen ACT and the Cancer Institute of New South Wales have been working together to look at a solution to allow screening of women who reside on the ACT-NSW border. We have recently finalised an MOU. This allows women working in the ACT but living in New South Wales to book appointments with BreastScreen ACT. One thousand appointments have been allocated to New South Wales women, which equates to around 20 screening appointments a week.

It is great to see the New South Wales and ACT governments continue to look at ways to provide the health services to a regional community where the costs are shared fairly between both jurisdictions. This service, of course, is free to women, but it does come at a cost. The New South Wales government will cover the cost of these appointments.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, how is BreastScreen ACT also encouraging ACT women to have their breasts screened?

MS GALLAGHER: BreastScreen ACT use a number of different strategies to encourage women on to the program. They develop an annual recruitment plan, which

outlines the different strategies, the time lines and an evaluation of that plan. This includes invitation and reminder letters, referrals from GPs and other health professionals, community-based education, working with stakeholders and relevant peak bodies within and outside the health sector, developing, distributing and evaluating promotional resource material, and advertising and media campaigns.

Following an amendment to the regulation under the Electoral Act 1992 in June 2013, BreastScreen ACT is re-establishing access to data from the electoral roll to enable them to send ACT women direct invitations when they turn 50. BreastScreen ACT will be sending these invitations to women within the target group of 50 to 74 who have not previously attended the BreastScreen ACT program.

We have also been going back and looking at some of the lapsed attendees within the target age group, and they have been contacted—over 6,000 women. Three hundred women have been contacted by cold call to encourage them to attend the program, and letters have been sent to GPs to remind them to encourage women in the target group to have a breast screen and advise them that appointments are available.

So, again, it is a reminder out there for women in the target age group that there is a fantastic service—BreastScreen ACT—there are appointments available, and we would like to see our participation rate get to at least the target participation rate and then exceed it.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Minister, what other specialist services are available for people who have specific concerns about being at risk of breast cancer?

MS GALLAGHER: Around five per cent of women with breast cancer will develop their cancer due to an inherent predisposition. There are two major gene groups that contribute to an inherent predisposition to breast cancer, known as BRCA1 and BRCA2.

The ACT Genetics Service is a clinical genetic service based at the Canberra Hospital. It provides individuals and/or families from the ACT and surrounding region with an opportunity to discuss their family and personal history and genetic risk assessments about the possibility of an inherited predisposition to cancer can be provided if it is seen as suitable. These risk assessments are undertaken by genetic counsellors, with the aim of determining the likelihood of carrying the particular gene mutation. This testing is not covered by Medicare and has eligibility criteria for patients considered to be at high risk.

All of the attention on this gene that has come from Angelina Jolie certainly has raised interest in the local community around gene testing. We do have a service available but it is managed based on need.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, what support is available in the community to support people who may have breast cancer or who are at risk of developing the disease?

MS GALLAGHER: There are a number of different support services available for patients with cancer, which of course includes breast cancer. Canberra Hospital, as the major hospital, provides psychological, social and practical support and referrals for adult cancer patients, families and their carers. Support is also available through the fantastic work of Bosom Buddies ACT, a not-for-profit organisation of volunteers that provides personal support to breast cancer patients and their families in the ACT.

The Cancer Council also provides a free confidential telephone and support service with specially trained staff available to answer questions about all aspects of cancer, including prevention, early detection and treatment. Pink Hope also is a great organisation which offers a range of support services, including kits and tips, support groups and ambassadors.

Earlier this month I participated in the Pink Hope community fun run to raise awareness among those in the community that may have an inherited pre-disposition to breast cancer and ovarian cancer. The run was held at Forde. There were several hundred people who got out to do that fun run in support of a great cause.

Going back to the original question, I am very pleased that the New South Wales government and the ACT government continue to work together to provide regional solutions to a regional health community.

ACT Emergency Services Agency—management

MR SMYTH: My question is to the minister for emergency services. Minister, the Fair Work Ombudsman's statement of findings for the Fair Work Ombudsman's investigation of ACT government entities involved in the employment and payment of ACT Ambulance Service employees noted at least eight key findings, and noted that the ACT government had contravened the Fair Work Act and workplace regulations. Subsequent to this, the Ombudsman has given the government until September 2014 to bring its operations into compliance. Minister, what will the government be doing to comply with the record-keeping provisions of the Fair Work Act and the Fair Work Regulations, and by when?

MR CORBELL: My directorate has set out very clearly to the union representing ambulance officers all the steps it intends to take to abide by the Fair Work Ombudsman's decision. We note that the Fair Work Ombudsman did not find any deliberate intention on the part of the employer to deny employee entitlements and further recommended a series of steps to address issues around overpayment. Those steps will be followed in accordance with the specifics of the enterprise agreement in place between the government and ambulance officers.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, what will the government do to resolve the disputes relating to the recovery of overpayment of leave entitlements in accordance with the Fair Work Act and the agreement, and by when?

MR CORBELL: There is no specific time frame, but those steps have been initiated immediately by my director-general and will be in accordance with the enterprise agreement.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, what will the government do to investigate and resolve, within the 30 days, future complaints, including those referred to the Fair Work Ombudsman?

Mr Corbell: Would you say that again, please, Mr Coe. I did not quite hear it.

MR COE: Sure. I said: what will the government do to investigate and resolve, within the 30 days, future complaints, including those referred to the Fair Work Ombudsman?

MR CORBELL: I think the question is somewhat hypothetical, but Mr Coe is referring to the decision of the Fair Work Ombudsman that all future instances like this, should they arise, should be dealt with within 30 days. My directorate agrees with that advice from the Fair Work Ombudsman.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, will you guarantee that these issues will be resolved by the September 2014 deadline?

MR CORBELL: These issues will be resolved as soon as possible.

Gungahlin—community facilities

MS PORTER: My question is to the Minister for Economic Development. Could the minister update the Assembly on the construction of new community facilities in Gungahlin?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Porter for the question. I am sure members are aware that Gungahlin is the fastest growing region in our territory. That is why the government continues to deliver infrastructure and community services to this fastest growing region.

Over the past decade the Gungahlin town centre has been expanded with the delivery of the college, a CIT learning centre and the Gungahlin library. The town centre now also has a community health centre which was opened in September 2012 as part of the government's health infrastructure program. This is located in a precinct that also includes the Gungahlin child and family centre and a wide range of community services provided through Communities@Work.

All of these existing community facilities are to be co-located with more new infrastructure, all of which is currently under construction or in the planning phase.

This includes a new swimming pool and leisure centre and the Gungahlin enclosed oval to serve the recreation needs of the district, and a new cinema complex to give local residents more entertainment options.

The construction of the Gungahlin leisure centre is progressing well and is about 80 per cent complete. Work underway includes the exterior of the building, which is approaching completion, with the northern glass walls the main component remaining for construction. Detailed work is currently underway on the external roof and wall cladding. Tiling of both the 50 and 25-metre pools is well advanced.

The playing surface stage of the works at the Gungahlin enclosed oval is now complete, with the turf playing surface and surrounds consolidating, whilst the grandstand is under construction, work on which began earlier this year. Once completed, the grandstand will include coaches and announcers boxes, covered seating for around 550, uncovered seating for nearly 700, plus room for a further 130 on the concourse in front of the building. The building will also provide team and officials change rooms, public toilets, a canteen, storage and a clubroom for after-match functions and meetings.

These investments have not only created hundreds of jobs in the Gungahlin region but have also contributed to a flourishing and connected community. The ACT government's investment in social infrastructure is critical in helping local communities grow and develop, and demonstrates the government's long-term commitment to the continued growth of Gungahlin.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, when will the Gungahlin leisure centre and the Gungahlin enclosed oval open, and what activities are planned for the launch?

MR BARR: I am pleased to advise the Assembly that both the leisure centre and the enclosed oval will be opened in the first half of 2014. The management of the leisure centre will be engaged before the end of this year, leaving them time to plan and prepare for the centre's 2014 opening, which will involve an invitation to the entire Gungahlin community.

With the construction of the grandstand at the Gungahlin enclosed oval expected to be completed in February of next year, the facility will be ready for use for the 2014 winter sports season. Sport and Recreation Services are currently working with clubs, including the Gungahlin eagles, bulls, jets and Capital Football regarding a multi-sport community event to celebrate the official opening of the facility in March 2014.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, has there been any progress towards delivering a cinema in Gungahlin?

MR BARR: Yes. I am pleased to inform members that work will commence next year on a new seven-screen cinema complex in the Gungahlin town centre, on a site

bounded by Hibberson, Hinder, Efkarpidis and Kate Crace streets. The development will also include around 4,300 square metres for a major retailer, 1,450 square metres of other retail businesses, 1,500 square metres of commercial space and around 86 residential apartments. The development will also provide parking for more than 900 cars, of which more than 600 spaces will be underground.

I am particularly pleased that the complex is to be built by the Krnc Group, a long-established Canberra company who have a long history of running successful businesses in our city. Their willingness to be involved in this major new phase of development in the Gungahlin town centre clearly demonstrates the confidence they have in the future of this part of our city. I am also delighted that Greater Union, who have been a major player in the entertainment industry in Australia for many years, are working with the Krncs to operate the cinema complex.

Construction of this cinema fulfils an election promise made by the government at the last election and is another example of our continued commitment to the growth of the Gungahlin town centre.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, given the construction and investment being discussed, would you consider releasing funds to Minister Rattenbury's department to have traffic lights put on the corner of Hinder and Hibberson Streets?

MR BARR: The Minister for Economic Development will consult with the Treasurer and the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services—

Mrs Jones: You have a split personality now.

MR BARR: Indeed, yes. And with the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services in relation to priorities in the minister's portfolio. I welcome the suggestion from Mrs Jones. I am sure it is one that has been made to the minister and I look forward—

Mr Doszpot: You should talk to yourself more often.

MR BARR: to those discussions. Just correct form, Mr Doszpot; as Minister for Economic Development, I do not make budget decisions.

Mr Smyth: Do you take minutes when you have conversations with yourself?

MR BARR: Even a mild attempt at humour demonstrates little capacity for fun on the other side of the chamber.

Mr Smyth interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Smyth! You do not have to take it personally.

Roads—Christmas light displays

MR DOSZPOT: My question is to the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services. I refer to a media release dated today from your department titled “Considerations for Christmas light displays”. It states:

Traffic management costs associated with Christmas light displays will generally be absorbed by Roads ACT, however, if costs exceed \$2,000 Roads ACT may seek to recover part, or all, of the amount from the event organiser.

If a Canberra household decorates their home with Christmas lights, how many cars must pass the front door before the government charges \$2,000 or more road tax?

MR RATTENBURY: Let us start with what the government’s approach is generally, and that is that the government believes that Christmas lights displays can be a great way for Canberrans to celebrate Christmas and boost community spirit. I think it is important to put that on the table before some other frame is attempted to be put on it. That said, there are—

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, members! This is a burning issue; everyone wants to be enlightened by it.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Bad joke.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order! No more dad jokes from the Speaker.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Sorry; we are actually biting into Mr Rattenbury’s time.

MR RATTENBURY: The government faces some serious questions around Christmas light displays. In most cases the traffic issues involved with Christmas light displays do not need any involvement from the government. But there are some events that become so large that they present issues with regard to traffic, parking and general safety implications. One can imagine the situation of a narrow suburban street in which many cars are turning up each night, there are excited young children running around between the cars and in some cases there are neighbours who do not appreciate the traffic inflow into their street.

The government has to try and balance all of these considerations. In order to try and facilitate that, Roads ACT has developed a set of guidelines to assist householders with these circumstances. Roads ACT does not go out; it is simply that in the case

where a complaint is made or an inquiry is received Roads ACT engages with the situation. Basically, as I said, for the smallest displays generally there is no involvement from the government. However, if a display becomes so large that it meets the special event definition under the Roads ACT rules, that is where the government works with a householder to develop a temporary traffic management plan. That may include measures such as making a street one way so that traffic can flow safely through the street and so that other neighbours might be able to access their households through the course of a busy evening.

They are the situations. There is not a specific cut-off point. There are particular definitions of what constitutes a special event. I am happy to go into that if members so desire.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, how many households decorated with Christmas lights were charged road taxes by this government in the last three years, and how much were they charged?

MR RATTENBURY: Do you mean special event fees, Mr Doszpot?

Mr Doszpot: I mean Christmas lights?

MR RATTENBURY: I will have to take that on notice for the last three years. What I can tell you is there are currently only two large Christmas light events where Roads ACT is assisting. One is in Kambah and the other is in Forrest. Roads ACT is liaising with the event organisers to identify the necessary management requirements to ensure safety at these locations.

Before there is too much excitement on the other side of the chamber, it is also very clear that government costs associated with Christmas light displays are generally absorbed by Roads ACT as a public service. As Mr Doszpot has rightly identified, the policy states that if costs exceed \$2,000 Roads ACT may seek to recover part or all of the amount from the event organiser. This will be at the discretion of the Director of Roads ACT and will depend on particular circumstances.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, how many households decorated with lights have been charged so far this year and, if any, how much have they been charged? Has the Green Grinch stolen Christmas?

MR RATTENBURY: The sweet irony is that Mrs Jones is about to bring forward a motion—and she has already issued the press release—where she is demanding fences around playgrounds in the ACT to protect children and make them safe but, somehow, trying to ensure safety in busy neighbourhood streets where excessive traffic—

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, members! Mr Rattenbury, the standing orders require you to be directly relevant. Mrs Jones asked you had any people been charged this year and, if so, how much. Can you be directly relevant.

MR RATTENBURY: I am not aware of any households that have been charged yet this year. What I might say is that I would be interested in where the opposition stands if somebody wanted to organise a music festival in their street. Would they expect Roads ACT to take measures?

MADAM SPEAKER: Sit down, Mr Rattenbury. You need to be relevant.
Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order members! A supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, will the government levy this fee when the lights display is a fundraising event for charity or a community group?

MR RATTENBURY: I have already answered Mrs Jones's question. I indicated that this is a matter of discretion for Roads ACT.

Disability services—respite care

MR WALL: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Children and Young People. Minister, recently a request for tender was released to provide respite services for people with a disability, specifically to take over the operation of Teen House, Kese House and Hughes House. At a recent information session, NGOs were informed that currently each house is costing the ACT government between \$1.2 million and \$1.5 million per year to run. However, the tender documents indicate an amount of \$627,000 per house as the total amount of block funding available for the successful provider in the first year of operations. It is also expected that block funding will reduce as the fee for service starts as a result of the NDIS. How was the first year block funding amount calculated?

MS BURCH: I will have to take that on notice. I am not aware of the specifications behind procurement and tender. A minister is not, nor should be, that closely involved—

Mr Wall: You are specifying the price.

MS BURCH: with procurement process. No, the minister does not specify procurement processes.

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Careful. Order, Mr Coe!

MS BURCH: I will take that question on notice. But what I will take on notice is the back part of your question—how is the first year of block funding to be calculated and paid? That is how I understood the back part.

Mr Wall: Yes, that was the question.

MS BURCH: Yes.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, why is the projected cost per house the same, given the varying demands on each service?

MS BURCH: Well, again, without constructing that myself, I assume it would be on the number of beds. Service provision and support is 24/7—seven days a week, 24 hours—on the number of beds, Mr Wall.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, how does the government expect an NGO service provider to operate these services for less than half the amount that the government currently spends?

MS BURCH: If you had been aware of some of the conversation, this is a new model of care, so the cost would be different.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, how important is it to provide support for these services?

MS BURCH: I thank Mr Gentleman for his question. Respite care is incredibly important for families. It gives them a break. It allows the young person or adult to have a break from families and it lets the families go away on holidays. So it is certainly a critical part of how we support individuals and families here in the ACT.

What we have done with this tender is to have made the decision to move from being a direct service provider. Madam Speaker, that was very much something you were in favour of—government moving out of service provision—prior to the election. We have taken that decision and we have put these three houses out to tender.

MADAM SPEAKER: Before I call another member for a question without notice, during Mrs Jones's supplementary she referred to Mr Rattenbury as "the Green Grinch". I would ask you to withdraw.

Mrs Jones: I withdraw.

Children and young people—care and protection

MS BERRY: My question is to the minister for children, youth and family support. The Community Services Directorate has recently released a discussion paper to assist in the development of the out-of-home care strategy 2015-2020. Can you provide the Assembly with some information about this discussion paper and future direction of out-of-home care services in the ACT?

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister Burch as the minister for children and young people. Is that right? Sorry, you said the minister for children, youth and family support, but there is not one. So is it the minister for children and young people?

Ms Berry: Yes.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Minister Burch.

MS BURCH: The Community Services Directorate has identified the need to review and refresh the current service provision of out-of-home care for children and young people who come into the out-of-home care area. The government is committed to supporting the best possible services and practice to children and young people in care. As such, the Community Services Directorate is currently developing a five-year out-of-home care strategy to guide the delivery of out-of-home care services from July 2015 through to June 2020.

The aim of the strategy is to ensure the supply and quality of out-of-home care placements for children and young people in the care of the director-general. The discussion paper has been released as one of a suite of consultative activities designed to support development of the strategy. The release of the paper signals the commencement of the second stage of a community-wide consultation. The first stage saw the delivery of an issues paper which was released in September of this year, and that noted a range of current challenges facing the ACT's out-of-home care system.

The Community Services Directorate is seeking to increase the flexibility of that out-of-home care system in response to an increase in demand and in the complexity of the needs of the children and young people in care.

The discussion paper also has a strong focus on strengthening support arrangements for children, young people and their carers in the out-of-home care system. We know that the role carers play in the lives of young people who come into care is a critical one, and the discussion paper seeks to solidify the valuable role carers play and the voices they have.

The next step in the out-of-home care strategy process is underway with the release of the discussion paper, and the community feedback will inform the options that will be put to government in the first half of next year.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Minister, what consultation options have stakeholders been provided to complement the development of this discussion paper and the future direction of out of home care in the ACT?

MS BURCH: I thank Ms Berry for her question. As mentioned, the discussion paper has been released as part of a consultative activity designed to support development of the strategy. The delivery of an issues paper, released in September of this year, aimed to identify the current challenges facing the ACT's out of home care system.

The issues paper identified issues, and some examples include: how do we ensure the continuing success of kinship care? How do we engage and recruit foster carers? How do we hear the voices of children and young people? And how do we hear the voices of carers? These are just a few of the themes that stakeholders have been encouraged to think about and to provide comment on.

The issues paper, which was available for community consultation throughout September, generated a robust discussion between stakeholders about the current state of the system. Feedback from the issues paper has been incorporated into the currently circulating discussion paper.

As part of the future direction of out of home care provision in the ACT, there are a number of options for stakeholders to provide feedback to the points in the discussion paper. The paper was released on 14 November, and the Community Services Directorate has facilitated a number of opportunities to hear the voice of the community.

On 21 November, a stakeholder engagement session with non-government agencies and community members was held. This was well attended, with agencies such as Richmond Fellowship and Barnardos attending. Last Thursday was the third ACT carers roundtable. This was attended by kinship carers, foster carers, permanent carers and focused on a number of key areas in the paper. On the 22nd of this month, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body facilitated a forum with interested community members on elements of the paper.

Tomorrow, the Children and Youth Services Council will be provided with a presentation on the key points and how people can respond. Additionally, the paper will be discussed—(*Time expired.*)

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, how has the out-of-home care system in the ACT changed over the past decade, and what are some of the recent changes that the ACT government has implemented?

MS BURCH: I thank Mr Gentleman for his interest. There has been some change over the last 10 years. For example, the total number of children coming into care has increased, and that is consistent with the national trend. Many of these children entering care will be able to return to their birth families. However, many will remain in the system until they turn 18 years.

The current care system was developed from outsourcing foster care and residential care in the year 2000. Over the past 13 years the system has matured significantly, with the stable of contracted non-government service providers remaining largely consistent through the period.

A new out-of-home care framework was introduced in 2010. As with any area of human services delivery, it is important that we continue to assess and review the

framework around which decisions are made to ensure we continue to meet best practice. The Children and Young People Act 2008, which commenced operation in 2009, is a large piece of legislation developed over several years. Whilst it is beyond the scope of the recently released discussion paper to describe the key features of the legislation, it is noteworthy that the ACT has reinforced the development of kinship care as a preferred option and strengthened the focus on early restoration and permanency.

The most significant development in recent times has been the steady growth in kinship care. This has increased the number of case management positions in Care and Protection.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, has the government looked at reviews and changes to the out-of-home care system in other jurisdictions?

MS BURCH: I thank Dr Bourke for his interest. The ACT is aware of several other jurisdictions that are currently reviewing their existing out-of-home care arrangements. The ACT has been in contact with other states and territories about various aspects of their out-of-home care development, including accreditation and monitoring, out-of-home care standards, assessment tools and other policy and practice areas.

At present, the New South Wales department of family and children's services are undergoing a review. On the 21st of this month, members of the New South Wales parliament announced sweeping reforms to existing legislation in order to strengthen the child protection system. New South Wales currently has 18,000 children in out-of-home care and, like every state in Australia, is looking to provide the best model of care to give their most vulnerable children the best chance of a better future.

Likewise, the Queensland commissioner, Tim Carmody, has released the *Taking responsibility: a roadmap for Queensland child protection* report. That report recommends a range of reforms to the system which, if accepted by government, would fundamentally alter the role of the state in the delivery of care and protection in Queensland.

Can I just say also that it is built on a partnership between government and non-government agencies. I will take this opportunity to thank all those involved across the agencies for the work they do with our vulnerable children.

Women—Women's Information and Referral Centre

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for Women. I refer to the recent announcement of the closure of the Women's Information and Referral Centre. Minister, have you formulated a plan as to how these services will be provided?

MS BURCH: I thank Mrs Jones for her question. We are certainly in active conversation with a number of women's groups. I have made the assumption that your question is about when we will release the What's on for women calendar for the first

six-months of 2014. That is being developed now and that is scheduled for release, as usual, early in the new year.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, who are you consulting with on this plan?

MS BURCH: Groups would include the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Women's Centre for Health Matters, the Women's Legal Centre as I understand it, and the Multicultural Women's Advocacy group. Those are just a few of the names that come readily to mind. Certainly, we are very open to any member of the community being in touch and providing comment on the development of the new arrangements.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, when will the plan be announced outlining the details of when the courses run by the women's referral centre will be available again?

MS BURCH: As I have said previously, the What's on for women calendar is being developed now. As planned, as it usually is, it is released at the very end of the year or very early in the new year, ready for the first six months.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, what are the aims of the plan and when will these services again be announced?

MS BURCH: The calendar will be available early in the new year. The plan is that the full range of offerings will be available for women across Canberra in various locations.

Visitor

MADAM SPEAKER: Before I call any further questions without notice, I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of the former Deputy Chief Minister, Mr Lamont. Welcome back to the Assembly.

Questions without notice

Housing—land rent scheme

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, a person without a lease prior to 1 October 2013 with a household income of more than \$94,500 per annum will pay land rent at four per cent per annum. A person who signed a lease after 1 October with an income of less than \$160,000 will pay two per cent. Government figures currently show there are 460 individuals under the land rent scheme at the four per cent rate. As a result of the government's changes to the land rent scheme with the implementation of the Land Rent (Amendment) Bill 2013, how many people on the four per cent rate would technically qualify for the two per cent rate under the new scheme?

MR BARR: I point Ms Lawder to the difference between an individual's income, which was the basis for the original scheme, and household income, which is the basis for the revision. What was happening under the original scheme was that, as long as one member of the household had an income below the threshold, they were eligible. We have now put in place a scheme that is consistent with access to other ACT government concessions in the housing arena where we are looking at the totality of household income—so looking at income earned by other members of the household. That difference is important in terms of the eligibility for the different rates of land rent.

But the principle behind the change that was put forward in the amendment bill was to ensure that the scheme was targeted to those on low to middle incomes and that it was not being accessed by builders in particular seeking to utilise the scheme to minimise their holding costs.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Treasurer, thank you for clarifying that. Could you explain the fairness, for the benefit of someone who may have signed a lease prior to 1 October and who may feel unfairly treated compared to someone who may have more recently signed under the land rent scheme?

MR BARR: If you accessed the scheme prior to the change, you are grandfathered or grandmothers into those arrangements. So you can move from the concessional rate of two per cent to the four per cent rate if your circumstances change. If you are on the four per cent rate that you have entered into, you are above the original threshold for access to the concessional rate. The changes now incorporate household income. They will ensure that the total financial situation of the household is recorded.

The circumstances of the scheme have changed, reflecting changes in the housing market, availability of affordable housing and the significant increase in supply of housing at the affordable end in the territory as the various phases of our affordable housing action plans have been implemented. What has happened over the last six years is that there has been a considerable boost in the supply of housing at our affordable housing thresholds and as we have increased supply, there have been changes in the demand mix for land rent.

We still believe it is an important part of an overall response to improving housing affordability, but what we are seeing in the housing market as a result of the increases in supply and other factors impacting on demand is an easing of house prices and an easing of rents across the city. That is a result of a number of supply and demand factors.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Given that you did not answer it, minister, how many individuals on the four per cent rate pre the changes would technically qualify for the two per cent rate under the new scheme?

MR BARR: I do not have that information in front of me. I would need to look at the individual circumstances of each of the applicants. I do not have that information in front of me and I am not in a position to answer the question today.

Mr Smyth: Will you take it on notice?

MADAM SPEAKER: Sorry, are you taking that on notice?

MR BARR: I have answered the question.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, what has been the feedback from those who have taken up the land rent scheme?

MR BARR: Overwhelmingly positive. People certainly appreciate the opportunity to take part in what is an innovative scheme designed to assist those on low and middle incomes into home ownership. It is a scheme, I note, that has been opposed by those opposite throughout. That is disappointing but does reflect a world view from those opposite that low and middle income earners do not deserve support into home ownership. We see this consistently with their approach not only to this policy issue but to the range of other interventions the government has undertaken in the marketplace in order to ensure that there are a range of housing options accessible to Canberrans on low and middle incomes. Their hostility to public housing, community housing, to the land rent scheme and to the various incentives that are put in place by the government to promote more affordable housing, their opposition to increases in supply of housing in particular locations, and the campaigns that have been run by those opposite in order to ensure that there are not new affordable housing properties built in certain areas of the city—

Mr Hanson: That is misleading.

MADAM SPEAKER: Withdraw that, Mr Hanson.

MR BARR: are noted and recognised—

MADAM SPEAKER: Stop the clock. Mr Hanson, could you withdraw the accusation of “misleading”.

Mr Hanson: I withdraw.

MR BARR: The opposition from the Liberal Party to a wide range of initiatives is well known and understood by all of those who advocate for an increase in supply. Whether that is in public housing or community housing, or whether that is in tax reform to make housing more affordable by getting rid of stamp duty, those opposite are doing everything they can to increase the price of housing in this city, to make it more and more unaffordable. They want to see stamp duty triple over the next two decades. That is what would happen with their policies. *(Time expired.)*

Environment—climate change

MR GENTLEMAN: My question is to the Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development. Minister, last week you released the results of a survey on the views of ACT residents on climate change and mitigation actions. Can you please tell the Assembly about this survey and its results?

Mr Coe interjecting—

MR CORBELL: I am sure that Mr Coe is looking forward to these facts, Madam Speaker.

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order!

MR CORBELL: Earlier this year my directorate commissioned a survey to research community attitudes and opinions about climate change in the ACT. The survey was undertaken by Piazza Research between 20 August and 11 September this year—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Hanson!

MR CORBELL: using a combination of focus groups and desktop research to develop a questionnaire and a telephone survey by trained interviewers surveying a total sample size of 1,197 respondents. The survey is statistically reliable and representative. The results show that there is a high awareness of climate change in the ACT community, a willingness to commit to reducing individual household emissions and a mandate for the government to continue to tackle—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR CORBELL: A mandate; a mandate—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, members!

MR CORBELL: for the government to continue to tackle the issue—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, members!

MR CORBELL: on a territory-wide scale. Almost 90 per cent of the nearly 2,000 households surveyed believed that climate change is a genuine problem; 68 per cent accept that their own lifestyle contributes to the adverse effects of climate change; 84 per cent believe that actions at a household level can help make a difference.

Just over three-quarters of those surveyed believe that it is moderately or very urgent that the ACT government take action to tackle climate change and over 80 per cent want the ACT government to take a leadership role in supporting the community in tackling climate change.

These are very welcome results, Madam Speaker. They are very welcome results. They are an endorsement of this government's strong policy agenda to reduce the city's greenhouse gas emissions and they are clearly consistent with the expectations and views of an overwhelming majority of Canberrans.

Support for the government's plans to reduce carbon emissions and tackle climate change was very high—between 73 per cent and—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR CORBELL: I know they do not like it, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, members!

MR CORBELL: I know they keep saying that climate change is not a problem for the ACT government but that is not what the people of Canberra think. That is not what the people of Canberra think. Between 73 per cent and 95 per cent of residents surveyed support each of the 10 plans outlined in the survey based on the government's action plan 2. Eight of the 10 plans tested in the survey enjoyed the support of more than 80 per cent of those surveyed.

Interestingly, when asked about the government initiatives respondents were aware of, solar farms came out at the top of the list. Fifty per cent of respondents nominated those projects, with the other projects including household solar, wind farms and incentives for green power.

These are very strong and encouraging survey results. They have been done on a scientific basis, on a representative sample basis. What they tell us is that contrary to the claims from those opposite, this government does have very strong support from the Canberra community to reduce the city's greenhouse gas emissions and to take proactive action to implement policies that will help make our city a more sustainable city.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, given that your score for each of the government's initiatives in AP2 was extremely high, what are some of these initiatives?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Gentleman for his supplementary. Yes, the survey highlights that Canberrans support a range of measures as outlined in action plan 2. We know that 63 per cent of the city's greenhouse gas emissions come from the use of stationary energy, predominantly the use of electricity and gas in buildings, and a further 22 per cent come from the use of transport fuels. So action plan 2 focuses overwhelmingly on these two key areas of emissions reduction.

The types of steps we are taking include measures like the energy efficiency program, the energy efficiency cost of living reduction scheme, a scheme opposed by those opposite, a scheme that delivers savings per household off their electricity bill of approximately \$300—opposed by the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party is not interested in saving households money on their electricity bills, let alone reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Of course, there are measures like the implementation of the solar auction program which is, right now, seeing the development of the largest solar power plant yet to be developed in Australia, right here in the ACT, right here in Mr Gentleman's electorate, which is going to deliver emissions savings equivalent to the production out of households of about 4½ thousand Canberra households.

These are the types of measures that Canberrans surveyed overwhelmingly support. We are not just talking about 60 or 70 per cent; we are talking about 80 or 90 per cent of those Canberrans surveyed supporting these types of measures. The lesson here for those opposite who continue to assert that this is not the business of the ACT government is to think again and listen to the people of Canberra and their aspirations for a more sustainable city.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, how many survey participants were supportive of large-scale solar generation being constructed opposite residential areas?

MR CORBELL: That particular matter was not surveyed. It was not surveyed, and nor should it be, because issues about location are appropriately dealt with through the Planning and Development Act. That is what that law is there for. We have a law that spells out how land should be used and how those proposals should be assessed. Those opposite seem to think that when it is convenient the law should be ignored. "Let's just throw the Planning and Development Act out the window. Let's just throw the territory plan out the window. When it doesn't suit us, the law doesn't apply." Well, I am sorry—the law does apply. The Planning and Development Act applies. The territory plan applies. Solar farm proposals will be assessed in accordance with the territory plan. They will be assessed in accordance with the Planning and Development Act. All development proposals in this city should be treated equally and fairly under the law, and that is the way these matters will be handled.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, how much did the government spend on the survey, and do you agree that the federal government has a mandate to repeal the carbon tax?

MR CORBELL: In relation to the cost of the survey, I am happy to take the question on notice and provide an answer to the member. In relation to the issue of the carbon tax, whilst it is clearly the case that Mr Abbott is prepared to implement a commitment he has made to the Australian community to repeal the carbon tax, my Labor colleagues, representing the views of those who voted for them to maintain a price on carbon and—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR CORBELL: a well-informed and feasible plan to reduce our nation's carbon emissions. The failure of Mr Abbott is to not have a credible alternative to reduce this nation's carbon emissions. All we have got from Mr Abbott is soil magic, magic dust, and nothing else.

It is not good enough to repeal the price on carbon and have no credible alternative. It is selling our nation short. It is selling future generations short. And it is selling our nation down the drain at a time when we are one of the most vulnerable economies and one of the most vulnerable communities in the world when it comes to the implications of greenhouse gas emissions and global warming. Do you want to live in a nation where the average—

MADAM SPEAKER: Address the chair, Mr Corbell.

MR CORBELL: Do those opposite, Madam Speaker, want to live in a nation where the average temperature increases by two, three or four per cent, with all of the consequences that arise from that; that sees more serious heat wave events; that sees the potential for more serious bushfire events? That is not the nation I want to live in. *(Time expired.)*

Mr Smyth: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, could we expand the time limit so that Mr Corbell can keep going?

MADAM SPEAKER: No, you cannot. That is not a point of order. It is just frivolous, Mr Smyth.

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

Supplementary answer to questions without notice Roads—Christmas light displays

MR RATTENBURY: In response to questions I was asked earlier about matters regarding Roads ACT, I can confirm for the chamber that nobody has been charged fees this year. As I indicated in my answer, Roads ACT is in discussion with two households in order to work out how to manage traffic arrangements given the size of their events. With regard to previous years, my initial advice is that Roads ACT has not charged anyone, but they are going to double-check the records to confirm that.

What is certain, though, is that Roads ACT has absorbed considerable costs associated with mitigating risks and management of Christmas light events, including \$15,000 for one specific residence. And on one occasion one householder closed the road themselves unilaterally. This underlines the challenges government faces in trying to deal with this issue in a sensitive way that enables celebration of the Christmas spirit whilst at the same time managing the safety issues that arise from this level of traffic on suburban streets.

Children and young people—neighbourhood playgrounds

MRS JONES (Molonglo) (3.36): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the importance of local suburban playgrounds to families;
- (b) that they are a core municipal service and maintenance is paramount; and
- (c) that they promote active lifestyles for children and adults; and

(2) calls on the Government to publish progress of the playground upgrade strategy and the criteria used to assess playgrounds.

Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak on the motion that I have put about the importance of local suburban playgrounds to families, the benefit to the lifestyles of children and families and the importance of their maintenance as a core municipal service.

Playgrounds are vital to mental health for many parents, carers and young children and to the development of networks for people across Canberra. Some playgrounds are in need of an upgrade, and at least a few should be properly fenced so that mums, dad and carers can have a chance to put their burdens to one side and take a break while watching their children play in safety.

What these playgrounds need is a mum's touch, and I am happy to assist. We do have a lot of children's parks in Canberra. Many of them are really good. Canberra was designed to have these playgrounds in the centre of suburbs so that families could easily walk to them. A local suburban playground should be designed to be easy to walk to where possible. A local suburban playground should be a place of fun for the family—a place that a mum or dad can walk to with their kids; where the kids can play freely, where they can swing, climb and slide; where kids can develop important skills like self-confidence as they are learning to balance and learning to develop strength and agility; and, of course, where kids can conquer fears as they take on the slide for the first time.

However, there are three key issues I would like to address. The first is that some playgrounds may seem unimportant because they are small, but they are no longer a community benefit if they have peeling paint, if they are looking run down, if they have a neglected feel. I am constantly talking about the dilapidated look of some of our suburban areas. It is not just children's activities that are encouraged by well-designed playgrounds but parents' and carers' mental health and their ability to cope with what is sometimes a very challenging role. I am aware that the ACT government carefully monitors the safety of equipment, and I am not complaining about issues of safety. But peeling paint or inadequate equipment can leave people less inclined to visit playgrounds as they have a tired and neglected feel or are somewhat sad looking.

A few playgrounds have been brought to my attention in particular in needing some work. The really fantastic new pod playground at the arboretum needs gates in the fence, as I have mentioned before. There are two small playgrounds in Rivett that both suffer from neglect, aged equipment and peeling paint. One is on the square surrounded by Salsola Street and Yate Gardens and another on the corner of Carbeen Street and Santalum Street.

In Ngunnawal near the shops there is a park that is generally old and run down. The equipment is a little high for children to reach and some minor repairs have been attempted. Amaroo has a park that is directly next to one of Amaroo's ghost houses, which has 41 panes of broken glass and several other windows that have been boarded up. It is certainly not the place you would take your children for a fun afternoon of play. The park itself has a bit of graffiti. I think I have mentioned before in this place the four phallic symbols that have been spray-painted on a metal tunnel, and that is not very nice. Some of the safety cushioning has been ripped off one of the pieces of equipment, leaving exposed hard edges.

Campbell also has an aged playground that is not suitable for younger kids and is need of some general maintenance. It is very difficult for small children to climb on chain ladders or inclining horizontal bars, because their legs are just not long enough.

In the Gungahlin town centre—and I believe Gungahlin is still one of the biggest area for under-five-year-olds in Canberra—there is only one extremely small playground, in the actual town centre. This playground would benefit from some well-planned additional equipment as well as a fence, as it sits between two relatively busy roads, Gungahlin Place West and Gungahlin Place East. I wrote to the minister about this playground; his response was: “The partial fencing of the site is a design feature intended to provide some increased level of security and safety which is balanced against an open environment so that children who are accompanying their parents in the town centre are able to spontaneously utilise the play equipment.” I would like the minister to have a think about spontaneous play, because between two roads is not necessarily the best outcome. Imagine for a moment your two hands holding onto three children going for a play at the park and trying to stop them from running across a busy road. No, indeed; spontaneous play is not desirable at this particular playground.

I wonder if we can all try and imagine getting to the park after doing three-hourly feeds during the night, unloading the children and finding that the baby needs feeding. You get ready to feed, you get the baby feeding, and the other child you are looking after, the toddler, wanders out of the playground area. Actually it is very important that there are some parks that are fenced so that mums who are breastfeeding can go to the park as well.

What parents and carers need to be able to do is to let their children learn in a suitable environment. Some kids do run; some are adventurers; some are born with no fear. Some mums, as I have said, have to feed, and to watch a couple of active toddlers at the same time can be difficult. Some parents and grandparents are at the end of their nervous ability to cope by the time they have made it around the supermarket. Our playgrounds should serve the whole spectrum of children and carers.

I really implore the minister to put a proper playground in Gungahlin town centre or at least improve the one that is there. Residents really need a place for respite, a moment to relax, a place to gather their thoughts before loading the kids back into the car. It is a big job, and we should support parents and families who are investing in our future.

I thank the minister for displaying vigilance regarding safety. I do appreciate the work and the money that goes into this outcome. However, the final point is that we really do, as I say, need a few children's playgrounds that are completely fenced. I am not asking the government to spend millions of dollars on fencing all playgrounds in Canberra, but one properly fenced playground in each zone of the city would be a real asset—one in the north, one in the south, one in the east, one in the west.

There are playgrounds with child safety fences all across Australia. For example, many of us would be aware of the children's playground at Holbrook on the drive to Melbourne, next to the toilet block. In Hobart there is a fully fenced park at Marieville Esplanade that I have taken the kids to. It has a larger playground that is fully fenced, and inside that playground is a toddler playground which is completely fenced separately. In Sydney, there are large, fully fenced playgrounds in Annandale, Birchgrove and Mosman.

These are places where mums groups can meet. Knowing that their children are safe, they can relax, network, help each other, have a picnic. A well-fenced and organised children's playground can tangibly improve the mental health and social wellbeing of mums and carers at a time when we are very focused on postnatal depression and mental health. I implore the minister to make this outcome a priority.

In conclusion, good local playgrounds in our local suburbs are a huge benefit to our community. I implore the government to support this motion, support local suburban playgrounds, support the benefits they bring through active lifestyles for our children and respite for adults, and improve this core municipal service by maintaining and enhancing our playgrounds.

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) (3.44): I welcome the opportunity today to speak about the importance of local suburban playgrounds to families of Canberra and I thank Mrs Jones for raising this issue for discussion. Play spaces, playgrounds and parks are a very significant part of Canberra's open space network. They have been since the creation of the city and continue to be one of the things that Canberrans love about living here.

The National Capital Development Commission created a hierarchy for parks many decades ago as part of the concept of creating a "model city". This resulted in parks and playgrounds being located within a 400-metre radius of each and every house in Canberra. The design, size and diversity of the parks and their associated playgrounds uses a three-tiered model that includes small parks at local or suburban centres, larger parks at a neighbourhood level and the largest parks being district parks such as Kambah district park—better known as Kambah adventure playground—John Knight

memorial park in Belconnen, which has just had an upgrade of the popular “snake house”, and Yerrabi district park in Gungahlin, which has just had its flying fox repaired. In addition, the National Arboretum opened its fantastic pod playground this winter, with giant acorns and banksia cone cubbyhouses. This playground has quickly become one of the most popular spots in town on the weekend with many of Canberra’s families. All reports are that it is, frankly, hard to get in there as it is so popular.

This park hierarchy has culminated in the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate currently managing 507 playgrounds. However, TAMS is not the only directorate to build and manage playgrounds in the ACT. The Economic Development Directorate also design and manage recreational spaces and have created a new model of recreational space referred to as community irrigated recreational parks. These community parks are a smaller park, generally containing barbecues, a half-size basketball court and seating. The first of these parks is located in Crace, with the next one being constructed in Franklin.

The education directorate also manages playgrounds within schools and the Community Services Directorate also has some playgrounds on some of its Housing ACT properties. I also note that TAMS has a number of playgrounds which cater for children of all abilities. Of course, there is major fundraising going on to create Boundless, a purpose-built, all-abilities playground which will be in Grevillea park and will be designed for a range of ages and developmental stages.

The ACT government has consistently provided for playgrounds across Canberra in new suburbs and by maintaining playgrounds built long before self-government. I think we all agree that suburban playgrounds are important to families in Canberra. Of course they are—that is what many people love about Canberra compared to highly industrialised cities. It is one of the reasons people always say that Canberra is a great place to bring up children.

TAMS has a regular program of playground safety inspections which incorporate assessing maintenance, vandalism or cleanliness issues across the 507 playgrounds. All ACT public spaces were designed and built in line with the Australian and ACT standards for play spaces in effect at the time of building. Regular routine maintenance checks are undertaken on all play spaces to make sure they are safe and fit for play. These inspections are done on three levels: weekly checks in high use areas and fortnightly checks in low use areas; monthly or bimonthly mechanical soundness checks; and biannual independent safety audits. Any problems found during the regular checks are dealt with accordingly. There is also a rigorous response system for complaints through Canberra Connect and fix my street.

Playground renewals occur through the playground safety program. The program is an ongoing capital works program that renews ACT public play spaces in line with current Australian and ACT standards. It uses best practice contemporary play space design to ensure the renewed play spaces are safe yet fun and modern, to suit the children that they target.

Community input is the other main contributing factor that determines the end result of a playground renewal. Community consultation is routinely undertaken each time a

renewal is planned. Community feedback guides the design of each play space and may be sought on a range of issues, such as type of equipment, artwork and design theme. Each community is different and each play space is individually designed to meet the needs of the community wherever possible.

The TAMS website already shows details of ACT playground upgrades. That is something that I believe Mrs Jones referred to in her motion—making sure that TAMS does have that information available.

The other thing that I would go to is the scope of the discussion. I note that Mrs Jones has issued a press release today about this issue. I am actually unsure now what Mrs Jones is after, because the original motion simply called on the government to publish progress on playground upgrade strategy and criteria used to assess playgrounds. As I have indicated, both in my remarks and in the information available on the TAMS website, I believe many of those things are addressed. I will come to my amendment shortly but I think it picks up that point.

In her press release, and in her speech, Mrs Jones has now started talking about calling on the government to fence a series of playgrounds across the ACT. She actually tells the community:

I'm calling on the government to fence a series of playgrounds across the ACT ...

It actually does not appear in the motion. I think it is always important that members put out accurate press releases, but that is for each of the parties to decide for themselves. The press release also says:

... I'm also calling on the government to paint dilapidated equipment and remove graffiti from playgrounds, which often includes crude images.

Again, that is not actually in the motion, but let us not get too caught up in the details. What I would say—and this has been made very clear in this chamber by both me and, I am sure, previous ministers—is that if there is crude imagery on a playground, it simply needs to be reported. I have indicated that TAMS prioritises those sorts of things, particularly if they are crude. I think that would be amplified if they are in a children's play space. So if somebody reports that, it will be cleaned up as quickly as practicable. I have not brought the number with me, but if I recall correctly, I have said in this place before that there is a 24 to 48-hour turnaround for those kinds of crude or offensive images or words. I think that is quite appropriate. I do not think any parent wants to see that sort of image in a playground location.

When it comes to the fencing of playgrounds, I can inform the Assembly that TAMS do provide partial fencing if the playground is less than 20 metres from a road. This is the Australian standard. This can be seen at Oaks Estate, for example, at the playground in Gillespie park, and also behind O'Connor shops, where the playground is adjacent to a wetland, with the obvious safety issues that that involves.

The broader question of fencing playgrounds more generally is something that requires a bit of further consideration. There are issues around thinking about where

playgrounds are placed in the ACT. Most playgrounds are placed in locations that are in quiet areas. The actual playground is often in a broader open space and they are designed to be placed further from the road. In the design phase, that is the way the playgrounds have generally been set up.

I note Mrs Jones cited a couple of examples of fenced playgrounds. One was in Holbrook. If I am thinking of the right location, it is right next to the Hume Highway. That would be a good reason to fence a playground. Where trucks are rolling through the town and there are large volumes of traffic, yes, I think that would be an appropriate example. The other example she gave was from Sydney. I do not know the site referred to but I suspect, again, there are similar high volume and perhaps even high speed traffic considerations. So the first issue is that in the ACT generally most of the playgrounds are in areas that are away from main roads.

This will be a more challenging conversation and I am going to frame my words very carefully here so that they are not twisted in some way. We need to think about what sort of space we want to create and where we want the onus of responsibility to lie. There are some issues around how risk is addressed and whether, in providing a play space, TAMS is also expected to provide a child minding service. It is important to think about balancing—and it goes to the comments I made in the earlier letter to Mrs Jones—that ability for freedom, that ability for children to play spontaneously, the ability for a child to perhaps get away if they are being bullied by another child and whether a fenced enclosure could present some problems in that regard. I think there are a range of subtle issues where people would hold different views about the suitability of fencing in a playground.

If there are specific locations where members feel there is a particular concern, they should raise that with TAMS, through Canberra Connect or with me. Mrs Jones has done that with respect to the Gungahlin place and received an answer on that occasion. Certainly, there is scope to examine individual locations where there may be particular exposure to a busy or perhaps a higher speed road, and quite appropriately so.

I have, as I indicated, prepared an amendment to Mrs Jones's motion which outlines the work that the ACT government continues to do to manage and develop playgrounds in our ACT parks. There is a clear focus by the government, and especially by TAMS, on ensuring that playgrounds are kept at as high a standard as possible and are safe for public use at all times. That does remind me: Mrs Jones in her press release talked about dilapidated paint. Again—and it goes to the graffiti issue as well—where there are matters, people should simply call Canberra Connect. That is why it is there. As I have said in this place before, the government has a great advantage in that there are a couple of hundred thousand extra sets of eyes in the ACT that can help the government to identify these problems, rather than necessarily needing to have staff wandering around looking for maintenance issues.

Returning to my amendment, it is, I think, quite self-explanatory. I do not think it is particularly contradictory to the motion that Mrs Jones has moved. It simply builds on it. It acknowledges the work that is being done and notes that the government will continue to publish updates on the playground safety program and publish further

detail on the audits and inspection programs undertaken by the government on playgrounds and play spaces. I am very comfortable with that. I am quite happy for the community to have that information. That is why the amendment reflects that provision.

As the minister, I do receive quite a few requests from people across Canberra for playgrounds to be installed in their street or for the equipment at people's local parks to be upgraded, often because their children have grown up to the next stage and they do not consider the equipment to be suitable for their child anymore. However, it is very important, given the high level of safety checks and maintenance, that we do not install more equipment than we are able to maintain. As I have said, the focus at the moment is on keeping the 500-odd existing playgrounds at a good, safe standard and ensuring that we are able to provide playgrounds which cater for the broad range of ages that use them.

I will leave my remarks there. This is one area on which there is, to some extent, a large amount of agreement—the value of playgrounds, the fact that parents do make good use of them. We are very lucky in Canberra to have so many of them, and to have them in most cases within walking distance of the family home. Perhaps in a family where you are out in the suburbs, dad has to take the car to go to work for the day and mum is left without the car, having that playground within walking distance is particularly valuable so that people can get out of the house, get some sunshine and get a break from perhaps the home environment. I think we all know that those things are very important.

I have spelled out the clear maintenance regime to which there is a commitment. Getting the playgrounds upgraded is a challenge for government. The cost is in the hundreds of thousands of dollars to take an old one and turn it into a new one. There is a steady program. However, with 500, you can imagine it is going to take some time to work through that complete list. In some ways, an old playground is not necessarily a bad one. Some of them are still great. They are fun and kids like them. So we do not necessarily need to say that an old playground is a bad playground in terms simply of age. It is about safety. I now move the amendment circulated in my name:

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

- “(d) that ACT playgrounds are inspected on a regular program consistent with Australian Standards which define requirements for maintenance inspections of playgrounds;
- (e) that the ACT continues to manage and develop playgrounds that respond to diverse needs; and
- (f) there is an on-going capital works program aligned with an asset management strategy that focuses on improving ACT play spaces, in line with Australian and ACT standards and best practice contemporary play space design, which aims to improve health and recreational outcomes; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) continue to publish updates on the Playground Safety Program; and
- (b) publish further detail on the audits and inspection programs undertaken by the ACT Government on ACT playgrounds and play spaces.”.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (3.57): I would like to commend Mrs Jones for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. Playgrounds are core to our community, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak on the topic. I also acknowledge many of the good points Minister Rattenbury has made; as he said, I think most of us are in agreement that we are lucky to have so many and such good quality playgrounds in the ACT.

Playgrounds are more than just a place for kids to have fun. They play an essential role in the development of our children from early childhood: they build on their social, emotional, cognitive and physical wellbeing; they expand a child’s imagination and assist them in becoming more creative. And in today’s society, one of the most important aspects of playgrounds in our community is the need to keep our children active. It appears that kids today are not as active as they used to be, and this can manifest itself through obesity or other issues. It is important that in our role we continue to provide the greatest opportunities to encourage children to be active and provide safe and clean environments where parents and carers are happy to take their children.

In order to encourage children to go to playgrounds, and encourage parents, grandparents and carers to take their children to those playgrounds, we do need to ensure they are safe. We need to make sure there is not broken glass or graffiti, make sure they are fixed when they are broken and make sure they are maintained to keep them safe. And we do need some playgrounds to be fenced and sunshaded.

Today, I would like to provide the example of Point Hut Pond District Park in Gordon. The Point Hut Pond can be traced back to the construction in the 1980s of a water pollution control pond to protect the quality of the waters of the Murrumbidgee River. As part of this development, wetland conservation areas were provided and an area set aside for recreation on the eastern shore. I, for one, think that was a fantastic idea. The Point Hut Pond District Park has picnic areas, electric barbecues, public toilets and an adventure recreation facility which includes flying foxes and a basketball court. Unfortunately, the flying fox, which is the main attraction, is frequently closed off and unable to be used, and the park only has shade over the barbecues and a couple of picnic tables. In a society where skin cancer is a prominent concern, there is little shade for children and families. And Point Hut Pond District Park needs a few pathways so that it is not always muddy or dirty underfoot and you can move easily around the park, especially if you have mobility issues or you have a pram or stroller with you and you want to stay near your child or grandchild as they play.

There are also playgrounds in some Tuggeranong suburbs in the parklands which I have had a number of representations about recently, which face problems with motorbikes and other unauthorised vehicles entering the area. For example, in the Chisholm and Richardson areas, there are playgrounds in the parklands where children play which are unfenced, and children are being put at risk by motorists illegally accessing the parks.

Also, just in recent weeks, I have received concerns from residents in Gowrie about a playground that was removed because it was no longer safe. It has not been replaced. We should be increasing the number of playgrounds and outdoor places our children have to play in the suburbs, not taking them away. And while we need to make sure those places are safe, taking them down and not replacing them should not be the answer.

There are many great playgrounds in the ACT. As we all agree, the maintenance needs to be kept up. Fencing so that parents and carers with more than one child have some peace of mind and some shade could be part of the ongoing upgrade strategies and capital works.

I know that the directorate spend a lot of time and effort on checking and maintaining playgrounds and parks. I commend them for their work and thank them for their ongoing efforts. I also acknowledge that the minister is very receptive to complaints, comments and suggestions about improvement, and I thank him for his commitment too.

I support the call today for the continued publishing of progress of the playground upgrade strategy and the audit and inspection programs undertaken by the ACT government.

MRS JONES (Molonglo) (4.02): I will deal with the amendment and sum up at the same time.

Regarding the amendment, we will support the amendment. I would like to draw the minister's attention to the fact that in the amendment he says that playgrounds should respond to diverse needs. Some people's children are much more active than others; fencing some playgrounds gives those who have more active children an opportunity to have a place that is appropriate for those children. Do children have to be defined as having ADHD or another condition before the government will consider what it is like to take those children to the park? Nobody is asking the government to provide a childminding service. It is a bit—I will choose my words very carefully as well—of a misunderstanding to suggest that it is not reasonable for a few parks to be fenced. Even the pet parks in Canberra are fenced.

This shows that it is difficult for some people to understand what it is like to be at the park with two or three children at once or to be feeding a baby while looking after a toddler. It is difficult—I admit it is difficult—to understand. That is why I have brought it up here. I think it is very important, because there are mums out there who are not coping very well, and this would really assist them. I can tell you it is true. At the same time, I invite the minister to come with me to the park. I will take you to the park; I will show you. I will bring some other mums; I would be more than happy to do that. I am not being ironic; I am being really very serious here, because this can make a big difference to someone's daily life.

I have put some requests into my speech that were not detailed in the original motion. I thank the minister for his guidance. I will endeavour to put more detail into motions.

However, I think I have made it very clear in my speech that a few fully fenced parks would make a big difference.

Regarding the graffiti, I wonder if it is good enough for me to report here in the Assembly that there are phallic symbols on the playground at Amaroo. And I wonder whether the minister would be able to have his department go and inspect the park, which is at the north end of the lake where the bridge goes across Yerrabi Pond, next door to one of the Amaroo ghost houses. I am sure Minister Corbell will be able to tell you where that is.

I am disappointed that the minister is, in essence, saying that it might not be a possibility to have some playgrounds fenced. I would like some attention given to the particular playgrounds that I have mentioned if that is possible. I understand that money is an issue, and maintenance costs money too. I think there is quite a lot of work being done in that area. But I remind the government that playgrounds are simply a core municipal service. If more money is required, maybe more money should be requested for this area. This is more important to many people than other projects that are on the government's agenda. People pay their rates in the suburbs all across the city—which, I might add, are increasing under this government—yet these basic services are not really keeping up with the changes in our suburbs.

As I stated earlier, playgrounds may seem unimportant to some, because they are small, but they are vital for the mental health of mums, dads and carers. A walk to the park in the fresh air can be the highlight of the day for many at-home parents. Children also benefit hugely from being able to walk or ride a bike to their local playground, where they develop confidence, keep active and spend some pent-up energy. These playgrounds are vital for their health and wellbeing.

There are 507 public playgrounds across the ACT. I would really appreciate knowing how often they are assessed for the changing needs of growing children in the area or if there is a range of age groups catered to within parks within a given geographical area. And I would like some consideration given to a limited number of parks being fenced, and advertised as such, so that parents who need to find that are able to find it.

In conclusion, I urge the government to remember that it is a core service and it is very important in promoting active lifestyles for children.

I want to also put on the record thanks to all the mums, dads and carers who do the hard work of raising children, for their selfless contribution to our future. I know how tough your day can be; I will continue to do all I can, from where I sit on the opposition benches, to see infrastructure that eases your day and gives you the rest you and your children deserve.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

University of Canberra—sports hub

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (4.08): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT Government delivered \$5 million in the 2013-2014 Budget to accommodate community sport within the University of Canberra (UC) Sports Commons project;
- (b) this commitment was joined by funding from UC and the Brumbies to bring stage one of the UC Sports Commons project to \$15 million;
- (c) \$10 million from the Commonwealth's Regional Development Fund was committed in August to accommodate regional sports infrastructure and health programs within the UC Sports Commons;
- (d) this grant was budget funded; and
- (e) the incoming Commonwealth Government has said that it will not honour Regional Development Fund commitments made by the former Government; and

(2) supports the UC Sports Common project and continues to lobby the Federal Government to honour the Regional Development Fund commitment.

The motion I am putting forward to the Assembly today raises important issues about the sports commons project at the University of Canberra. The UC sports commons project will give students the opportunity to learn about fitness, sports, healthy eating and obesity, as well as sports administration and managing volunteers in sport and coaching. It will also provide new sporting facilities for the community and allow community sporting organisations to leverage sports science and sports management opportunities within the UC campus. It is about the delivery of new approaches that drive innovation and investment in research in Canberra, whilst creating job growth in the region.

This motion is about ensuring that all members of the Assembly are doing all they can to ensure that the new federal government is honouring the funding commitments made by the former government on infrastructure projects in the ACT that are, in effect, already underway. What I am talking about is a second whack so far by the Abbott government on the University of Canberra in Bruce.

The first was dropping Bruce from the next suburbs to get broadband in the NBN rollout. Arguably, there was also a hit at universities, not just the University of Canberra, within a fortnight of Christopher Pyne becoming education minister and reviving the old student service fee debate. However, he was soon put back in his box by Tony Abbott. Members will already be aware that last year the University of Canberra announced a new sports hub to be established on their campus at Belconnen, dubbed the UC sports commons.

The ACT government provided \$5 million in funding through the 2013-14 budget to accommodate community sport within the sports commons project. This commitment will see ACT sport as well as a number of community sport operators housed within the facility. The expected benefits of co-locating community sport with elite sport and the university are opportunities to link students with the sports industry, enhance student learning and industry resources, and building economies of scale through co-location of organisations.

These benefits could include internship placements, organisational and event-based research, current industry case studies integrated into student learning, and shared administrative endeavours. This is essentially a reinvigoration of the sports house incubator concept for smaller community sports that benefit from co-location with other sporting organisations and cooperative opportunities.

In addition, through the strategic opportunities funding program, the ACT government has also provided \$150,000 for the establishment of an environmental chamber in the sports hub building. The air pressure in the five square metre environmental chamber can be adjusted to support recuperation or simulate high altitudes. This has leveraged a further \$100,000 in investment from the Australian Institute of Sport towards the facility. It is a great example of the great opportunities in Bruce for cooperation between the nearby institutions there, such as the UC sports hub, the AIS or the new University of Canberra public hospital and Calvary hospital, amongst others.

I have spoken before of the dynamic east Belconnen hub in Bruce. It encompasses education, sports, health and hi-tech institutions that also include the CIT Bruce campus, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Fern Hill technology park. As I mentioned this morning, I also look forward to the day, once the Gungahlin-Civic line is in operation, to the next capital metro line running through Bruce on the rapid transport route. Bruce is one of our most densely populated suburbs with one of the youngest demographics in Canberra and it is just ripe for light rail.

I am very pleased by the ACT government's commitment to the sports commons project and also that this new sporting infrastructure is to be built in my electorate of Ginninderra. These funding commitments have been joined by commitments from the University of Canberra and the ACT Brumbies to bring stage 1 of the UC sports commons project to \$15 million in funding and make it a reality.

Construction has now begun on stage 1 of the sports commons. If you have been past UC in the last couple of weeks, you would have also noticed that construction is well underway. In August the former federal government committed \$10 million from the commonwealth's regional development fund to the project. This funding formed stage 2 of the sports commons project and was to accommodate regional sports infrastructure and health programs within the UC sports commons.

This stage will include new mobile sports fitness and health clinics that will help the project to deliver benefits to the ACT as well as the region. These clinics would reach out to local communities and bring the benefits of adopting a healthy lifestyle, particularly with young people. This funding would also go towards building new

sport infrastructure at UC, which is available to students, organised sport and the community.

Unfortunately, in what is becoming a trend, upon coming into office the Abbott government said that it will not honour the commitments made by the former government under regional development funding. This is very disappointing considering the obvious benefits that this project would have, not only to Canberra but also to the entire south-east region of New South Wales.

Just think about Eden-Monaro and the multitude of small town sporting clubs with aspiring young athletes. They are looking to take the next step with the professional coaches, advanced sports medicine and fitness training that stage 2 the sports commons project could offer them. That is why it is critical all members of the Legislative Assembly do what they can to lobby our federal counterparts here, and perhaps more influentially in Eden-Monaro, to honour the commonwealth commitment on this project.

I imagine the new member for Eden-Monaro, Dr Hendy, is already under siege from local New South Wales state members about the broken schools funding promise from the no-surprises Gonski comb-over Abbott government. I notice the *Canberra Times* today is saying, "Mr Pyne is now refusing to repeat his pre-election assurance that 'you can vote Liberal or Labor and you will get exactly the same amount of funding for your school.'"

However, the UC sports commons is a brilliant opportunity for community sport and recreation in the ACT and New South Wales. There should be bipartisan support to ensure both stages of the project are delivered. The UC sports commons will also be home to elite sporting organisations such as the Brumbies.

It will undertake other activities such as skills development for officials and volunteers; development of education, fitness and skills programs for schools and community-based delivery; placement of student interns with elite and community sporting organisations, thus increasing the resources available to sport in the territory and leveraging the capacity of our university sector; development of further collaborations within existing partnerships between the University of Canberra and the Australian Institute of Sport, other elite sports and the business sector; and fostering the development of research and marketing programs at all levels of sport in Canberra and the region to increase sports participation and promote healthy lifestyles.

The University of Canberra aims to become regarded as Australia's leading university for sports education and research. It wants to be internationally regarded for its collaborations and innovation, which will increase our sports people's performance. In order to do this, it is vital that the UC sports commons project not only attracts more students in the sports and sports medicines fields but also that it builds collaboration between the university, community sport and business.

This is why this motion today is so important. Without the funding commitment for future stages of the UC sports commons by the federal government this project is at risk of not being able to fully realise the potential to become the model sports facility in Australia. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (4.17): I welcome the opportunity to discuss the issue of funding for the University of Canberra sports commons project which Dr Bourke has brought on in his motion today. I welcome it because when you look at the substance of this motion, it is in fact quite unique—and unique on a number of levels. For a start, I would have thought it somewhat inappropriate that the substance of this motion goes to the actions of a federal government. When I last looked, we were the ACT Legislative Assembly, and in this place we have no binding controls over anything done or said further up the road from here.

As to the points raised, I think that in nearly all of its five parts this motion has errors of fact. I will go through these directly. I am sure Dr Bourke will be disappointed to realise his motion is so flawed, because he is clearly trying to show that he is a great party line supporter, ready to go into the trenches to defend Labor at all levels and to demonstrate to his leader that it should be he that is chosen to join the others on the frontbench in the Gallagher government ministry. However, I do not think this is the issue that will do it.

When you go to the first part of the motion, it says:

... the ACT Government delivered \$5 million in the 2013-2014 Budget to accommodate community sport within the University of Canberra (UC) Sports Commons project ...

Well, it has not delivered anything yet. If Dr Bourke had seen the many non-delivered sports projects claimed to be funded in various Labor budgets, he would know that nothing is certain until the ribbon-cutting opening ceremony, and even then you cannot count on it. Just look at the Alexander Maconochie Centre as one example.

What we saw in the ACT budget was a commitment over the next four years to deliver \$5 million. So it has not delivered anything yet. The forward estimates can and do change from year to year, and there is nothing to prevent this commitment being modified up or down, or even deleted, in the outyears. So that is Dr Bourke's first technical slip.

The second part is actually correct, so one out of two thus far. But by the time we get to the third part of this motion we are really starting to move to the domain of fantasy and fiction. To suggest that an election announcement made by local federal MPs towards the end of August constituted a commitment is a little far-fetched. It was a statement delivered from local Labor MPs who knew only too well by that stage that their side of politics was not likely to win the election. In fact, the announcement was made on 18 August, well inside the conventional caretaker period. It was the big ticket item in the federal Labor Party's official campaign launch in the ACT. As the media report at the time said:

The Federal Labor Government has committed \$10 million for the next stage of the University of Canberra sports hub project.

The funding has been announced as part of the Federal Labor Party's official campaign launch in the ACT.

The money has been allocated under the Regional Development Australia Program.

On any measure, this election commitment, made days before the election, can hardly constitute a commitment by the current federal government. It was part of an ACT federal Labor election launch—nothing more. So how Dr Bourke can possibly claim, as he does in part (d) of this motion, that the money was “budget funded” is somewhat fanciful. How could it have been budget funded?

Paragraph (e) of this motion says:

... the incoming Commonwealth Government has said that it will not honour Regional Development Fund commitments made by the former Government ...

Surely Dr Bourke is not seriously suggesting that every whimsical pork-barrel exercise that formed part of the federal Labor election panic attack should now be accepted and honoured by the current government. Surely Dr Bourke is not suggesting that. And if he is seriously suggesting that this pre-election thought bubble should be treated differently, let me highlight that this thought bubble is not an isolated case.

The new Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, Deputy Prime Minister Warren Truss, said this in a statement in late October:

LABOR has promised hundreds of communities across the country money for local projects based on funding from a mining tax that failed to deliver the promised revenue ...

For many communities Labor’s Regional Development Australia Fund and Regional Infrastructure Fund have been another cruel con. Right up to election day, Labor was announcing projects using money it knew did not exist.

It is astonishing that, even now, Labor continues to spruik its hollow projects when, in government, it failed to fund them. Hundreds of projects were announced that had not even received cursory departmental assessments, yet Labor was promising anyone who would listen that these were somehow a done deal.

The Coalition Government will, of course, honour signed contracts undertaken by the previous government. However, non-contracted announcements made by the Labor government have the status of election promises and do not bind an alternative government.

Labor was unable to deliver RDAF and RIF projects it already had on its books because those projects depended on a mining tax that, as we all now know, raised virtually no money.”

As the minister said, signed contracts will be honoured. So if the UC sports commons is not being funded, it is because there was no agreement and there was no commitment; there was just a quick headline for local consumption. Might I suggest that this is a well-used and well-worn tactic of Labor governments, local and federal,

as we have seen all too often. The Gungahlin pool has had more launches than Halvorsen; motor sports have had more promises than an alcoholic's wife.

The UC sports common is a project that I have every confidence is one worthy of support. It is a great pity that the former Labor government used the infrastructure fund so blatantly for pork-barrelling purposes—its own bag of funds, able to be raided when the occasion called for a bit of berley to prop up some sick federal seats.

As a piece in the *Sydney Morning Herald* said earlier this year:

It is a sad indictment on a government that returned to power in 2007 promising to rebuild the nation and lift productivity using infrastructure as the centrepiece ...

As the 2013 federal election looms and pressure mounts on the Labor Party to preserve as many seats as it can, backflips on infrastructure policy are becoming more blatant—and desperate.

And so it came to pass that when then Prime Minister Julia Gillard had her week-long visit to Rooty Hill, she invited western Sydney councils to reapply for millions of dollars in regional development grants despite some having been previously rejected. And quite unsurprisingly, all 19 projects that were submitted were moved to the next stage of the approval process, compared with a maximum of three from other regional areas. So much for the promise made by Julia Gillard in 2007 that in future this fund would have science behind its approval processes, that only projects with demonstrated merit would be approved.

Dr Bourke would have us accept that anything that was promised or encouraged by way of increasing Labor chances in otherwise shaky seats should now be honoured, irrespective of whether they had economic merit or not. That goes against the regional development Australia fund's own criteria. The application process set out clearly the commonwealth government's priorities. It said: "Projects must support at least one of the following national priorities: skilling Australia; lifting productivity; maximising the opportunity of broadband; sustaining our environment; social inclusion; and water and energy efficiency." Perhaps social inclusion is code for protecting Labor seats.

And let us not forget the funding arrangements for this big bucket of money. In the program introduction it states:

The RDAF is an umbrella program which comprises \$450 million from the Priority Regional Infrastructure Program and \$573 million from the Regional Infrastructure Fund, which is subject to the passage of the Mineral Resource Rent Tax.

So, typically of Labor, they were going around the country promising money for projects they had no real intention of delivering and with no way of paying for them if they did. Is that what Dr Bourke meant when he said that the UC sports common federal grant was budget funded?

As I have said, the UC sports common will be a wonderful addition to the university campus; it will be a great resource for the further development of sports science in the

ACT. I have every confidence in the competency of the University of Canberra and its vice-chancellor, Professor Stephen Parker. He has created some marvellous business opportunities for the university and I have no doubt that his innovative business skills will see him overcome this minor setback.

When the massive budget blowouts that are being dealt with at the federal level are addressed—as they will be, as only Liberal governments can do—such projects as the UC sports common might have a chance to be funded. Until then, it is farcical, and fiscally and factually irresponsible, for Dr Bourke to come into this chamber and demand that the current federal coalition government take up and pay for every favour, fantasy and pork barrel that his party threw around like confetti in the lead-up to the election. If the UC sports common grant is not to be delivered, it is because it was not one that had been finalised before the election.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Sport and Recreation, Minister for Tourism and Events and Minister for Community Services) (4.27): I have got to say that in this place you will hear a lot of contributions and you will find out whether someone is for the city or for their party. And what we have just heard from Mr Dospot is that Canberra comes a very distant second to the interests of his federal colleagues.

Let us be very clear. The UC sports commons project is an important infrastructure project for Canberra and for the University of Canberra. And you would have hoped that would be something we could get universal agreement on and that we could see support for this motion today—a unanimous position from the Assembly that this is an important project for the ACT, an important project for the University of Canberra, a project that creates jobs in our economy, a project that supports our local sporting organisations, a project that enhances learning for the university and for school students in the ACT and indeed in the broader region, and a project that builds on the University of Canberra's reputation as Australia's leading university for sport education. I would have thought that was something that was worthy of support this afternoon.

As Dr Bourke has pointed out, the federal government has indicated it will renege on funding commitments made to the University of Canberra, and it puts the project at risk of not being completed. It also calls into question the potential growth of physical literacy research in our local region, private sector investment in that research, scholarships and the work-integrated learning placements for UC students that were part of this proposal.

The University of Canberra is delivering new approaches that are driving innovation and jobs growth in Canberra's economy. And the ACT government's commitment and partnership with the University of Canberra through the UC's allied health facility has directly led to the development of the University of Canberra public hospital, the headquartering of NICTA's e-health living laboratory at UC and the establishment of the university sports commons.

As I have said in this place before, it is important to see these approaches as more than investment just in research opportunities, because, ultimately, they are much

more than that. What they are about is investing in new knowledge capability, knowledge that attracts talented students and researchers, knowledge that attracts outside investment and the creation of intellectual property that has a commercial value that can also form new businesses.

These strengths contained within the UC sports commons project were recognised by the former federal government in two ways. The first was the establishment of the sports technology partnership under the industry innovation partnership program. And whilst this was not headquartered in Canberra, the presence of the University of Canberra as a core partner and the proximity to the AIS and the Sports Commission ensured that many benefits would flow to our local community from this particular element of the project. Secondly, the funding commitment of \$10 million from the regional development Australia fund to build the next phase of the sports commons project involved not only the construction of the building itself but the development of the various other elements that I have outlined.

It also involved one of the most critical components of the UC sports commons project, which is the inclusion of the centre for regional physical literacy development to further develop UC as a central hub for grassroots and elite sport in the ACT and southern New South Wales. The centre for regional physical literacy development is also about facilitating partnerships as well as learning and research opportunities between local and regional tertiary education institutions, regional communities, schools and the wider sporting industry. And that is why the decision by the new federal government to scrap this funding commitment from RDA to the UC sports commons is very disappointing, locally and regionally.

However, it must be said, given recent announcements, it is not at all surprising. Just this week we have seen the backflip on school funding that was taken to the election in September.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: I know they are very sensitive on this issue, and they rightly should be. They rightly should be, because the federal education minister has floundered from interview to interview complaining that journalists and the public do not understand, it is all too complex and only he knows and he is too busy to even meet with Katherine Greiner and others from the Gonski review panel—

Mr Hanson: Mr Assistant Speaker, on a point of order of relevance, the motion relates to sporting facilities at the University of Canberra, and I think that this sort of dabbling in the federal minister's press conferences about a different issue is not relevant to this debate.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Gentleman): Albeit it was off the back of your interjection, but I remind the minister to keep to the motion.

Mr Rattenbury: On the point of order, I do note that Mr Hanson regularly digresses to provide free commentary on whatever he likes about members of other sides of politics during his speeches, and in that context I find the point of order taken by Mr Hanson somewhat surprising.

Mr Hanson: On that point of order, I would—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: It is not a debate, Mr Hanson.

MR BARR: Can we stop the clock?

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Stop the clock please, Clerk. Mr Hanson, you have one more opportunity to relate to your point of order.

Mr Hanson: I was just responding to that point. That is quite clearly not true. I do not think I come into this place and have long speeches about—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: That is not to do with the point of order. So take your seat. Mr Barr.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker. From a government that reassured voters that they would be a government of no surprises, we have seen quite a few surprises. This decision on UC is just one example. It will certainly hurt the ACT and the region, and it will hurt our capability to increase student and community sport participation. It will hurt our capacity to promote physical literacy and active lifestyles in our city. The opportunity for community sport to connect with other disciplines of the university, including business, teaching and sports science would have created synergies that would enhance the administrative and operational functions of community sporting organisations.

The ACT government's active 2020 strategy is recognised by the sport and recreation industry as the blueprint upon which the economic and social value of sport and recreation will be nurtured and promoted in the territory. The seven fundamental goals of the active 2020 strategy—and the UC sports commons precinct touches on a number of these—include maximising community engagement, promoting greater acknowledgement of the health, education and social benefits of sport and recreation, increasing the capacity and capability of sport and active recreation to provide quality opportunities in the ACT, maximising opportunities for outstanding individual success, creating Canberra's image as the national sporting capital and maximising sporting infrastructure and resources. One of the key focuses of the model being applied to the UC sports commons to reinvigorate the incubator concept for smaller community sports that benefit from co-location with other sporting organisations, the alignment between the goals of the active 2020 strategy and the vision of the UC sports commons are quite clear.

I would like to thank Dr Bourke for bringing the motion to the Assembly and echo his remarks about how critical it is that all members of this place give their support to this project at UC, do what they can to lobby the federal government to honour the commitment that was made in relation to this project. There is no question that a bipartisan effort here on behalf of the University of Canberra and community sport and recreation would go a long way to support the viability of the project into the future.

I commend the motion to the Assembly and note that it is an opportunity for something that is good for Canberra, an opportunity for all members to get behind it and vote for it today. Maybe that is the only thing you contribute to supporting the project, but at least that very little symbol of support by voting for this motion today will be important in the case that we take in partnership with UC to the federal government for this very worthy project.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (4.37): I would like to thank Dr Bourke for raising this issue today. I think it is an important issue and one that does warrant a discussion in the Assembly. The regional development fund was established by the former Labor minister Simon Crean to provide funding to regions in a way that attempted to immunise the program against the manipulation of allocations that had existed under previous governments. The regional development fund was one of Simon Crean's great successes, and I think it is a pity that that good work will now go to waste.

The Abbott government has announced that it will abolish the fund and set up its own version in 2015. I certainly hope that that new version will contain the same rigorous approach to allocation of funds that was taken with the first five rounds of the regional development fund. We also have to hope that the Abbott government recognises the ACT is very much part of a region and that there are advantages to the wider region through facilities, programs and projects located within the territory.

In terms of the UC sporting commons, it certainly is disappointing to learn that the federal government will not be funding further development of this project at this time. \$10 million was announced by the former government in August 2013. However, it was not signed off before the election was called. Unfortunately, Warren Truss, the federal Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, has indicated that the federal government will not be honouring the previous government's commitment unless signed contracts are in place. I think this is another example of the Abbott government renegeing on their previous commitments, as they have done with Gonski, which represents a major breach of trust with the states and territories that had signed up to these important education reforms.

The announced federal government funding would have provided funding for future stages of the sporting commons, a state-of-the-art facility that merges high-performance sport, community sport, educational opportunities and community engagement programs for Canberra and southern New South Wales. The funding would have allowed for the development of a mobile sports fitness and health clinic that would work to promote the benefits of an active lifestyle through community engagement and participation for students from the ACT and region.

Work has recently commenced on the first stage of the UC sports commons to which the ACT government has committed a \$5 million grant over four years to accommodate community sport within the precinct. The University of Canberra and the Brumbies have also kicked in \$5 million each. The commons is designed to include an ACT sports hall of fame, a new headquarters for the Brumbies, sports studies, teaching and research facilities, a bocce court and new student sports facilities.

It is also going to accommodate Special Olympics and ACTSport, local sports' peak representational body. As part of that, Sports House will be relocated from their current premises in Hackett so that they can continue their role as an incubator for smaller, developing sporting organisations. And having had this conversation with ACTSport, I know they are very excited about this prospective move. I think all members who have had some issue with this portfolio in recent years will know that ACTSport have been lobbying for a move of venues. I feel that the current location they have in Hackett is out of date and they need something more modern.

I know that this is a very welcome move and one that will benefit a lot of smaller sports. Certainly the sports hosted by ACTSport currently in Hackett are some of the more obscure sports and that incubator effect I was just describing is very true, where they get a chance to move from perhaps operating off someone's kitchen table to having a small office and then ultimately potentially becoming more self-reliant from there. But I think having an organisation like Special Olympics and ACTSport at the new hub will give community sports a high-profile location.

It improves the opportunities for cross-pollination with high-performance sports and the expertise and resources within the university, all in all creating a potential for a real centre of excellence, one in which all of the organisations gain some advantage. The idea behind the commons is to create a vibrant precinct where innovation can flourish and where sporting organisations, researchers, students and elite athletes can come together. That is something that, again, I think all members of the Assembly, certainly knowing the views of quite a few members on sport and the opportunity that it brings to our community, would support.

I have circulated an amendment in my name. I do have a slightly different understanding of the way that the regional development funds works and I have just sought to clarify that. I do agree with the essence of Dr Bourke's motion. I think it is important that he brings this topic forward today, given the change of position by the new federal government. I think that is a shame because I think this is a valuable project for Canberra. I simply have brought forward an amendment that I think better reflects my understanding of the situation and how the regional development fund worked in the past and where things stand now.

I think it is important that this Assembly continues to lobby the federal government to fund the project. This is not about whether the federal government is Labor or Liberal. It is not about the local politics. It is simply about saying that this is a good development for Canberra. People have gone forward with the project on an understanding that funds would be available. Those initiatives, I think, are initiatives that would be good for Canberra, and that is where I think this Assembly does need to share a common view that we would like to urge the federal government to support this project. I think that is the essence of Dr Bourke's motion today and that is certainly the spirit in which my amendment comes forward and one that I would commend to the Assembly.

I move the amendment circulated in my name:

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

“(c) \$10 million from the Commonwealth’s Regional Development Fund was announced in August to accommodate regional sports infrastructure and health programs within the UC Sports Commons; and

(d) the Commonwealth Government has said that it will not honour Regional Development Fund commitments made by the former Government where the contractual arrangements have not been finalised; and

(2) supports the UC Sports Commons and continues to lobby the Federal Government to fund this project.”.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Sport and Recreation, Minister for Tourism and Events and Minister for Community Services) (4.44): I signal agreement with the amendment. It reflects perhaps a slight difference of view between the former and current federal governments as to what was contained within the 2013-14 federal budget. But my understanding from the former government was that an allocation was made and that the parliament has appropriated funds for the purpose of this round of the regional development fund. The question of the individual contract for this proposal not being signed off, means, unfortunately, it was not allocated to the individual project, but the overall global allocation for RDAF was provided for in the budget.

Mr Hanson: I don’t think it was. The parliament didn’t sit.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

MR BARR: The parliament passed the budget. The budget contained an allocation for—

Mr Hanson: No, not for this.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, I warn you.

MR BARR: So the issue largely relates to a position that, as Mr Doszpot indicated in his contribution, somehow allocations made here were pork-barrelling. I think Dr Bourke was right in saying by interjection that if the seat of Fraser is considered a marginal constituency worthy of pork-barrelling he would be greatly surprised, and I would be greatly surprised if the ACT Senate contest was somehow seen as being swayed on the basis of this project. I think it is a very worthy project and one that deserves support of the Assembly. The amendment, such as it provides comfort and allows for that support, is worthy of support this afternoon.

The interesting question will be what the opposition does. Are they prepared to put the interests of the city first and interests of this project and the University of Canberra ahead of partisan political pointscoring in this place this afternoon. We await with interest.

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (4.46): We have had a very interesting speech from Dr Doszpot. Clearly he is confused. He does not know whether he should be supporting his city or his party. He has got form on this. During the election campaign last year, he was busy running around town telling parents of children in private schools that they should be scared of the Gonski bogeyman who is going to come and take their money away. Well, that did not happen. What happened was that Catholic and independent school systems are wholeheartedly behind these Gonski reforms and they are shocked and appalled by the latest developments of Mr Pyne to slash—

Mr Doszpot: On a point of order, Mr Assistant Speaker, I bring your attention to relevance.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I think Dr Bourke is referring to your speech, Mr Doszpot.

Mr Doszpot: He is referring to something I did not touch on.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Dr Bourke, will you remain relevant to the debate.

DR BOURKE: On the point of order, Mr Assistant Speaker, I am referring to Mr Doszpot's form on this and trying to draw members' attention to the historic inconsistencies Mr Doszpot has in putting his city or his party first.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker. I repeat what the *Canberra Times* said today that Mr Pyne is now refusing to repeat his pre-election assurances that you can vote Liberal or Labor and you will get exactly the same amount of funding for your school. Another broken promise. The kind of broken promise where we have seen the NBN pipeline to Bruce, where the University of Canberra is placed, cut off. So, does Mr Doszpot want this project for our community or not? He seems confused. He seems to want to concur with a federal government ripping funding out of our community. He wants to concur with that. And then he confused his metaphors, wanting to use berley to prop up an argument. I think you need to go and do a bit more fishing, Mr Doszpot, and you might understand that berley is something you throw out to attract fish, not to prop things up.

Then he launched off into some obscure discussion about what the former Prime Minister was doing in Rooty Hill. That is not in Canberra. Rooty Hill, the last time I looked in an atlas, was up in Sydney. It is up in Sydney, Mr Doszpot; not here in Canberra. What we have here is a great deal of confusion on Mr Doszpot's part. He is not sure what jurisdiction he is in. He does not know the name of the city that he is in, and now he does not know what to support. Does he support the federal government ripping money out of our community or does he support his city and get behind this motion to tell his federal colleagues that we need this funding for the UC sports commons hub? Or does he just want to be an apologist for the Abbott government?

Then Mr Doszpot alluded to propping up seats. Well, golly, I think Fraser has got to be the safest federal Labor seat in Australia. I think he has got his geography confused again. Then he started to talk about maximising broadband opportunities, and I reflect on what I have just said about the federal government slashing the NBN pipeline to Bruce, where this very project is going to be in place, disadvantaging students, disadvantaging staff and harming the kind of research that the University of Canberra is attempting to do to try and bring that research-based focus to our economy in the ACT.

Then Mr Doszpot switched over and started praising the sports commons and called a \$10 million cut—a \$10 million cut—a minor setback. Golly, who does he think he is? Clive Palmer? He says—

Mr Doszpot interjecting—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot, you are warned.

DR BOURKE: He says the university might have a chance. Well, the way this federal government is going, it would be a snowball's chance—no chance at all. Buckley's!

Mr Assistant Speaker, I commend this motion to the Assembly. I call upon the opposition to back it up, to demand of their federal colleagues that they bring back this \$10 million of absolutely essential funding for the development of a sports commons at the University of Canberra at Bruce in my electorate of Ginninderra.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Health—elective surgery waiting lists

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (4.52): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) in 2010 the Government denied that elective surgery lists were being manipulated after an elective surgery patient complained his priority was downgraded;
- (b) as a result of an Assembly motion, the Auditor-General conducted a performance audit into elective surgery waiting lists and released a damning report in early 2011 that found "... considerable doubts about the reliability and appropriateness of the clinical classifications for patients on the waiting lists"; and

- (c) doctors have recently raised concerns in the media that some patients are being ignored on elective surgery waiting lists while priority is given to others in order to make lists appear better; and
- (2) calls on the Health Minister to immediately initiate an independent inquiry into the allegations raised by the doctors that elective surgery waiting lists are being manipulated.

It is a bit of a shame that we are back here talking about a similar issue to what we have talked about before. We were in this place in 2010 when it first came to light that there was inappropriate management of elective surgery waiting lists. It was raised by patients. David Wentworth had his surgery downgraded, and the allegation was backed up by surgeons. It was denied by the government, and it was shown, by a subsequent motion in this place that brought on an Auditor-General's review, that, indeed, patients were being inappropriately downgraded.

We have seen the fabrication of data in our emergency departments, and we have seen before this government deny things like the bullying in obstetrics which was proved to be true after there was an inquiry.

I come here today because doctors have again raised concerns that elective surgery data or waiting lists are being manipulated to make the data look good. I will go through what has been said by those doctors, by those surgeons. This first came to light in the *Canberra Times* on 13 November. I will quote from an article entitled "Hospitals fiddling surgery waiting lists, say doctors":

The ACT government has been accused of allowing some patients to languish on elective surgery waiting lists while others jump the queue to improve health performance data.

Peter Hughes, president of the ACT Visiting Medical Officers Association, said performance data at Canberra's two public hospitals was being "manipulated" through a system in which recent entries to category two and three waiting lists were prioritised over patients overdue for elective surgery ...

Dr Hughes said the system was in effect "manipulating surgical waiting lists, to try to make the statistics look better".

He said some patients entering the category two waiting list were operated on within a few weeks, while others who had been waiting longer than the 90-day benchmark just kept waiting.

One Canberra surgeon, who did not want to be named, said patients who had waited the longest might "never be operated on in the public system".

"They're doing this to make things look better than they are, rather than making things better," he said.

Another surgeon said he had an "unfair" situation where category two patients who had waited less than two months were treated before those who had waited more than a year.

The government has responded. The article continues:

Health director-general Peggy Brown rejected the suggestion that the queuing system had been altered to improve ... statistics.

“This isn’t just about meeting targets,” Dr Brown said.

She said that this was actually about overall trying to reduce the number of people on lists. Further, she put out a press release on 13 November, saying that the comments made by the doctors were “misleading and false”. It is pretty strong stuff to say that the doctors’ comments are misleading and false, essentially accusing the doctors of lying. I can quote from correspondence from Calvary Health Care, from a letter that was distributed by their director of medical services regarding national elective surgery targets. It says:

Calvary Health Care ACT has received an unequivocal directive—
an unequivocal directive—

from the Director-General of ACT Health Directorate requiring us to make urgent, radical changes to the current approach undertaken by Calvary in the management of category 2 patients accessing surgery to reflect the model implemented at the Canberra Hospital.

He goes on to explain what that is, in particular:

In the scheduling of category 2 elective surgery patients, priority will be given to scheduling “in time” category 2 patients between 45 and 90 days of their time on the wait list.

He goes on to say:

The ACT Health Directorate had indicated that funding will be put aside for the 2013-14 year to specifically reduce those patients on wait times over the elective surgery wait list targets.

Essentially, the situation here is that doctors are saying that they are being told to target patients who have not gone over the category period—in this case, for category 2, to 90 days. So if you come on to the list and you have not exceeded that 90-day mark, “Get that person operated on now,” so that it meets the performance measures that you have met a certain number of patients being operated on within the time frame for category 2. If you have got a patient that has exceeded category 2, so they are determined as a category 2 patient but they have already exceeded their 90 days, operating on that person does not make any difference to the data. It does not improve the lists. So let that person rot. Let that person languish on the list because they do not help to make the data look better.

The doctors have a problem with this. The doctors, quite rightly, ethically and morally believe that if someone has come on to a waiting list, if they are due for surgery, they

should get that based on the priority of when they came on to the list. So with a hip replacement or whatever the procedure is, you have a situation where one patient, because they happen to be someone that can help them to make the list look better, will be operated on within a short time frame, while another patient, who has exactly the same procedure that they need, but because they have ticked over that 90-day mark and no longer will make the lists look better, can languish on that list indefinitely because they are no longer a priority for surgery. That is what is specified in the letter from Calvary and is being alleged by a number of surgeons.

The minister's representative is denying that but there seems to be this difference in approach, in that surgeons are concerned about their patients and about targeting patients that need surgery in the priority in which they came on the list, whereas ACT Health is concerned about targeting patients who make the lists look better.

You have got two sides to this argument now, because Peggy Brown has come out with a press release which essentially has accused the doctors of lying, saying that the comments are misleading and false. But we have got two surgeons alleging it, we have got a letter from Calvary, from their director of medical services, saying that this is so.

We have a very unfortunate situation where very senior representatives of Calvary and surgeons and doctors' groups are saying one thing and the Director-General of ACT Health is saying, "That's not true; they're lying." That is a situation that cannot be allowed to continue. This needs clarification. It needs the truth to be told.

If it is the case that people who have been on lists for a period of time and essentially will not make a difference to the data are being left to languish, the minister needs to stand up in this place and say, "Yes, that is true, and I'm doing it deliberately because I do want to make the lists look better because it's related to funding." And she needs to defend that. If it is true that this has been done to make the lists look better but the government is denying it, is essentially lying, and then is accusing the doctors of lying, then that is an extraordinary situation.

Sadly, this government has form. This is not the first time that we have raised issues in this place. We have had representations from doctors, patients and doctors' groups who say something is happening, and the minister and her representatives swear black and blue that that is not the case. They say, "This is simply not the case." They deny it. When we then get a subsequent investigation, it turns out that the doctors were right and that the minister was wrong, despite her denials.

We saw this in 2010 when we had a patient, Mr David Wentworth, who came forward and said, "I've been downgraded from urgent to semi-urgent, and I've been told that if you're not operated on within 30 days the hospital downgrades you." Doctors then backed that up, but the minister, when these allegations were raised, said, and I will quote from a question on notice in June 2010:

... there has never been any evidence to say that the data collection processes have ever been doctored or tampered with to deliver some unknown benefit.

She said:

... I do know the policy that is in place is that ultimately it is the clinician that is the decision maker. The clinician is the only person that is able to downgrade if a downgrade is to be made of the clinical category of their patients on the elective surgery waiting list.

“It is only done by their treating doctor. That is it.” She said:

... can I stand here and say that that is simply untrue and there is no evidence to say that that is a practice that is employed by ACT Health ... I was asked a number of times whether or not I think admin staff approach doctors and ask that their patients be downgraded, or that pressure was put on doctors, I think, to downgrade their clients; and I can absolutely say that that is not the case.

These are quotes from the minister. And on and on, the quotes contain categorical denials. But when the Auditor-General provided her report, the story was very different. The story was:

... the classification of clinical urgency categories did not always reflect ACT Health’s policy and procedures, and therefore raised doubts on the reliability and appropriateness of the clinical classifications for patients ...

The report said:

... in 2009-10, 250 patients—250 patients in Category 1 were reclassified and a significant number of these reclassifications (97 percent) occurred without documented clinical reasons;

The report continued:

Audit identified 55 reclassifications (or 32 percent) that had no evidence of having been approved by a doctor.

It also stated that it was:

... consistent practice by some doctors to ‘stage’ (downgrade) patients’ clinical urgency category close to the clinical recommended timeframes for these patients. This often followed a request for review by the hospitals.

So with respect to what the doctors and the patients alleged, and what Katy Gallagher in this place categorically denied, the Auditor-General found to be true. It is all in black and white. It is all in the *Hansard* or in the Auditor-General’s report of 2011:

... downgrades of patients’ urgency category, often without documented clinical reasons, raised considerable doubts about the reliability and appropriateness of the clinical classifications for patients on the waiting lists.

We also know that there was a problem in the emergency department where data was fabricated. The Auditor-General found:

There is evidence to indicate that hospital records relating to Emergency Department performance were manipulated between 2009 and early 2012. It is likely that up to 11,700 records in relation to Emergency Department presentations were manipulated during this period.

There were a range of other issues as well, Mr Assistant Speaker. You might recall that in, I think, 2010 there were allegations raised by another group of doctors that there was bullying in the obstetrics department. Again the minister denied this. “Stop throwing stones and damaging the unit.” “All I’ve seen is a lot of mud being slung and no substantiation,” she said on 18 February in the *Canberra Times*.

They went on to attack the doctors and threaten them with an audit of all complaints to the medical boards over the last 10 years that involved obstetricians. Quite rightly, the AMA came out and saw that as a witch-hunt. So there were these categorical denials about allegations raised by doctors. Again, when the clinical review came out, it said:

The review panel identified an apparent systemic and long-standing reticence by management to address disruptive or inappropriate behaviour ... medical and midwifery staff reported they had discussed their concerns about disruptive behaviour within the unit with their line manager and with various executive team members; however they did not believe these issues were addressed.

We have a situation where doctors, doctors’ groups and a letter from Calvary raised very serious concerns about the manipulation of the procedures that allow patients who have been waiting on elective surgery waiting lists to wait longer than they should. The government have denied this, and they have attacked the doctors, accusing them of lying. And we have seen from, because when an investigation is then conducted we find out what the truth is. Given this government’s form, until we have such an independent investigation there will be no satisfaction for me, for the doctors, for the community, or importantly, for those waiting on the lists, that they are not again being lied to by this government.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Health and Minister for Higher Education) (5.07): The government will not be supporting the motion, but I have circulated an amendment. I move the amendment that has been circulated in my name:

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

“(1) notes that:

- (a) the report of the Auditor-General in January 2011 *Waiting Lists for Elective surgery and Medical Treatment* concluded that:

‘management of the waiting lists for elective surgery and medical treatments is a complex process that be influenced by practices of various parties within the system, including doctors, and by a number of factors, some of which are outside the control of ACT Health’;

- (b) in early 2012, The Canberra Hospital (TCH) and ACT Health reviewed the process used by TCH to schedule and manage its elective surgery waiting lists—to maximise the number of people who have their surgery on time, whilst continuing to reduce the number of people who wait too long for their surgery; and
 - (c) to ensure consistency across the public hospital system, Calvary has recently implemented the same elective surgery waiting list scheduling and management process as that that has been used by TCH since 2012;
- (2) further notes that:
- (a) in the 2012 reporting year, the ACT met all three components of the National Elective Surgery Targets (NEST) under the National Health Reform Agreement;
 - (b) in 2012-2013 ACT public hospitals performed 11,579 elective surgery procedures, the highest number of elective surgery procedures ever performed; and
 - (c) at the end of October 2013, the number of people waiting too long for their operation was the lowest on record with 618 patients—down from 922 recorded earlier this year; and
- (3) acknowledges the complexity involved in delivering elective and emergency surgery services in major tertiary hospitals such as TCH and Calvary Hospital;
- (4) notes the role that Canberra’s public hospitals play in delivering complex surgical services to not only ACT residents, but also the residents of the southern NSW region; and
- (5) supports the continuing work of the ACT Government in meeting elective surgery targets under the National Health Reform agenda, and delivering high quality health services to the ACT and region.”.

Anyone listening to Mr Hanson’s speech will know that it is a speech he has given in this place many, many times before. It is his stump speech about health; that the conspiracy theorists are alive and well; that there is an evil health department that sets up special programs designed to accuse doctors of lying; that that is the intent of whatever Health does. It is just so far from the truth it is not funny.

Mr Hanson spends a lot of his time criticising the Health Directorate in this place but not to their face. When he goes on visits to the health system he is always as nice and friendly to everybody as he can be. But in this place he calls into question the reputation of thousands of people that work across the health system because he always chooses one voice as the only voice of reason and truth. Every time he picks one of the sides in these issues, he picks the side of one voice. That must be 100 per cent right and everyone else is 100 per cent wrong.

In early 2012 work was undertaken by Canberra Hospital to review the way that schedules and management of their elective surgery waiting lists were done, with the principal intent being to maximise—this is information for Mr Hanson—the number of people who have their surgery on time, something he has also criticised the health department for, and to reduce the number of people waiting too long for surgery, another thing he has criticised year-in, year-out the Health Directorate for.

So a new system was put in place. In Canberra Hospital, more category 2 patients are having their surgery within 70 days; so one would think that that is a good thing. They are actually stopping patients becoming long waits; another good thing. This approach has reduced the number of category 2 patients on the waiting list who are waiting too long for their procedure. The method and results at Canberra Hospital are in keeping with the objectives of national health reform and the ACT's objectives for management of elective surgery.

However, Calvary had continued to manage the waiting list by always booking the longest waiting patients to receive their surgery first. The evidence shows that as fewer people have their surgeries on time, the number of long-waiting patients remains static. This is because an approach of this nature means that there is a concentrated effort only on moving long-wait patients. Then as they are removed for surgery, other patients on the list become long waits.

The management of the health system and health care should be dynamic and should require continual evaluation and realignment based on evidence. The evidence we have shows that an approach that has a more concentrated focus on increasing the numbers of patients who have their surgery on time actually greatly assists in also reducing the number of patients who wait too long for their surgery.

Despite what some of the conspiracy theorists are actually arguing, it is not borne out by the facts. The facts are that the number of people waiting too long for their surgery—I think Mr Hanson just said, “Waiting on the waiting list forever”—is actually the lowest it has been in several years both at Canberra and Calvary hospitals.

Calvary were directed to implement this change, because we have one public health system. We contract Calvary to provide public health services. Without a letter from the Director-General of Health, they were not going to implement this change. The letter went to them in August. It actually took two months for the VMOA to raise this issue. I had been expecting it to raise its head in August, but it took two months for it to come out, by which time the changes had been put in place.

Indeed, performance against the targets has improved and the numbers of people waiting too long for care continues to decline. This is what is not well understood. The longer you just focus on removing the long-wait patients off the list, the more long-wait patients you get because the people who have just joined the list never get access to surgery. This is actually providing that balance to the management of the list.

Prior to putting the changes in, Calvary was recording monthly timeliness results for category 2 patients of 41 per cent to 54 per cent. Since implementing the change,

Calvary is now recording results of 75 per cent to 81 per cent. What that actually means is that almost twice the number of category 2 patients access elective surgery within the clinically recommended time frame. So there is a tick for that. One would assume that you would actually get a tick for that. At the same time, the number of long-wait patients on Calvary's elective surgery waiting list has dropped by 20 per cent, with just 169 long-wait patients on their list at the end of October 2013.

Across both hospitals, this has resulted in a 33 per cent reduction in just seven months of the numbers of people waiting too long for their surgery. It is now the lowest on record, with 618 patients waiting extended time for their surgery. When this process began in March, there were 922 long-wait patients. In addition to this, we have already appointed a director of territory-wide surgical services, Dr Andrew Mitchell, to further improve how our surgical services are delivered across the ACT public health system.

The role of the director is to establish a territory-wide surgical services framework for the ACT. This will require changes to what both hospitals do. I expect that there will be more concerns raised from doctors as those changes are implemented. But this is all about making sure we have got the most efficient and effectively run elective surgery program in the territory, which means we have to make sure that our hospitals undergo some role delineation about who does what and where it is done.

In relation to the concerns raised by the VMOA—I think this is the only health association in my time as health minister that has called for my sacking—

Mr Hanson: Hear, hear!

MS GALLAGHER: You had your shot at that, Mr Hanson, during the election. The VMO association—so let us just see this in that context—have then come out without any of the information that I have just provided to the Assembly. They have accused Health of manipulating surgical waiting lists. I have spoken to more than two doctors who are also members of the VMOA who have rejected that entirely. They have sent me messages to say that the VMOA does not speak for them on this, that these matters had been discussed at length at the surgical services task force with individual surgeons and with the staff in theatres so that everybody understood what was being achieved and why changes were being put in place.

In relation to our targets, they are linked to funding. The results that we achieved in 2012 mean that the ACT will be eligible for the full reward funding of \$680,000. But it is also important to note that over the last full financial year 2012-13, 11,579 elective surgery procedures were performed, which is the highest number performed on record. This was almost 600 above the target and the third consecutive year that we have provided over 11,000 elective surgery procedures.

I would have some sympathy for what the VMOA were saying if we were reducing elective surgery overall, if we had implemented the cuts to a budget that resulted in less elective surgery being done. But is it not interesting that the more we ramp up elective surgery, the more additions we get on the elective surgery waiting list? It is just an insatiable area of health care. We could do an extra 2,000 next year and I can

bet you that there would be more than 2,000 additional people put on the elective surgery waiting list.

In the first four months of this year there have been 4,094 elective surgery procedures, which is five per cent above the result for the same period last year. This shows that we are on track to exceed 11,000 procedures again. If we put all of that in perspective, in our first full year of government, the elective surgery procedures were at 7,661. We have increased that by 44 per cent over 10 years. Despite there being only a 17 per cent increase in population, we have ramped up our elective surgery by 44 per cent to deal with the demand that is being generated. We are also looking at private sector partners and at Queanbeyan to improve the way we provide elective surgery. Indeed, the appointment of Dr Mitchell will help us look at those arrangements and advise us on the most efficient way of cementing those arrangements.

Overall, I think that the Leader of the Opposition has to work out whether he is going to beat up the ACT government for not meeting targets, for not improving the median wait time, for not meeting category 1 or 2 or 3 or for not dealing with the long waits or he is going to listen to the voice of the VMOA. He cannot have it both ways. He cannot criticise the government for not delivering results that are equal to other jurisdictions and then when we do implement the systems that deliver those results, systems that are used across Australia, we are then criticised for doing that. He then says that the focus should actually be on just allowing the people waiting longest on the list to be removed and only them, which actually drives poorer performance and poorer outcomes for more people on the list.

In relation to the allegation that there has been a history of manipulating and doctoring data and tampering with data, that is simply not correct. There is one case where I think you can accuse me of that where it has been proven to be true. That is in the emergency department. In relation to the audit that was done by the Auditor-General around the re-categorisation of patients on the elective surgery waiting list, contrary to what Mr Hanson has just argued, where he said that there was evidence that essentially that lists were being manipulated and categories were being manipulated, the Auditor-General did not find that. She did find that the paperwork was not in order. She did not find an example where a doctor had not approved a downgrade or an upgrade.

I notice you do not use the information in the audit report about the upgrades that occurred. What she did say is that the paperwork was not in order. That has been fixed to the degree that it can be. Most of that is about doctors signing forms. That audit did not deliver one extra operation and it did not prove what Mr Hanson alleges in his speech, that there was manipulation, doctoring and tampering of the elective surgery waiting list. It is simply not true.

I will accept the allegation that there has been an issue in the emergency department where the timeliness data was tampered with. We are fully aware of that case. But I will not accept it across any other area in health because it is simply not true. When you look at the range of data and the assessment and the quality assurance process that goes around that data, we provide data to the AIHW, the National Health Performance Authority, the National Health Preventative Agency, the Independent Hospital Pricing

Authority, the NIPA, the IPA, the my hospitals website and the COAG reform council. We are probably reporting data to at least eight different organisations at the moment who then go through their own process of checking that data.

To call that into question in a general sense, as Mr Hanson consistently does and has done in the media release he issued today, further demeans the work of the Health Directorate. The Health Directorate is not just two doctors or three doctors; it is actually a whole range of staff who work very hard to instil a sense of pride and, I think, confidence in the public health system that Mr Hanson consistently seeks to undermine.

That is the most unfortunate thing about all of the motions that Mr Hanson brings to this Assembly on health. While he is trying to get to me, it is a much broader point he is making. He is calling into question the accuracy and the quality of the data in a very important area of government service delivery. He has no evidence to back up the claims he makes other than in the emergency department. I simply will not accept that broad-brush approach. It is not fair. It is not fair on lots and lots of people who work very hard. The results are being seen in the elective surgery performance.

We are meeting our targets. In fact, we are exceeding our targets in categories 1 and 3 and we are one per cent off our target in category 2. We are performing more operations than ever before. More people are being seen than ever before. More people are being seen on time than ever before. And the number of people who are waiting too long for care is the lowest it has ever been.

Instead of dealing with a motion like this, there should actually be a motion that congratulates all of these people. It should not congratulate me. I do not want any congratulations and I do not seek any. But there should be a motion that congratulates the Health Directorate for the work that they have done, the way they have approached the job that the government has asked them to do and the results that they are delivering.

That would be a more appropriate use of the Assembly's time and, frankly, it would provide the community with some sense that people in the Assembly are genuinely trying to improve the health system in an area that matters, which is operations. That is what matters in elective surgery.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (5.22): The opposition will not be supporting the amendment. As much as the minister would accuse me of making a stump speech, she has just delivered one of her own. Her stump speech essentially goes along these lines: "Jeremy hates you all. He's only got bad things to say. It's not true. There's nothing to see here. There's nothing going wrong. This isn't fair. It isn't true." But as has been shown in respect of a number of issues that have been litigated in this place, many of the issues that have been raised in the community by patients, by surgeons and by doctors' groups have proved to be correct.

The Auditor-General's review of 2011 was nothing but scathing. I stood up to speak to this before Mr Rattenbury does to make the point that there were allegations made in 2010. There was significant doubt in the community about what was happening

with waiting lists. There were genuine concerns amongst a broad number of people. I raised those in the Assembly. This was back in 2010.

Amanda Bresnan supported me. She said, “Yep, there’s enough to look at here.” The Greens back then said, “Okay, let’s refer this to the Auditor-General. Let’s have her look at it.” As a result of that, she made a number of findings that I referred to before. She talked about the appropriateness of clinical classification for patients on waiting lists. She noted that patients were downgraded following requests from hospitals. She had considerable doubts about reliability and so on.

But more importantly as a result of that review, it was found that the strategies implemented by ACT Health had not been adequate to address the increased demand and reduce waiting lists for elective surgery. The Auditor-General provided 11 recommendations, which have been adopted by ACT Health. I do note that there have been improvements in the waiting times. I commend that. I welcome that. But that is not the issue we are debating here today.

The issue we are debating here today is not whether there has been an improvement in the lists or not—and I acknowledge where there has been. I accept that. I think it is fair to say that I have been pushing for that for some time through various reviews and the media. I think it would be unfair if the minister did not acknowledge that when I have applied pressure to get that done. As she acknowledges in her speech, I have talked about this endlessly.

But as Amanda Bresnan and the Greens recognised back in 2010, before the Greens joined the ministry, when there is such confusion, when the government has track form of saying one thing in this place—denying, denying, denying—and it turns out to be true, let us have a look at it, let us have an independent look at it, and clear it up. If the government has nothing to hide and if what Katy Gallagher says is true, then shine a light.

Mr Rattenbury is talking about shining a light with FOI and a bunch of other things, but we have very specific allegations. We have evidence in terms of letters from Calvary. We have surgeons saying that this is so. We have track form from the government. So why do we not have this investigation? I do not think it would take long. We could bring someone in, have a look at it and then maybe the minister can come into this place, wave the report at me and say, “Look, Jeremy, you were wrong.”

But the last couple of times we had an issue like this and we raised it, the problem was that the minister was wrong. The minister was proven to have been false in her denials. Either she did not know what was going on or she was deliberately misleading. I will leave that to people to determine. But that happened with the issue of elective surgery statistics and manipulation and it occurred with the obstetrics. Allegations were made. When the report came in, it was very clear that over a long period complaints had been made and they were systemically ignored by ACT Health, despite the fact that the minister said in this place there had been no complaints.

We will not be supporting this amendment because what it is trying to do is put the problem under the carpet. I do not know whether the allegations, the concerns raised

by the doctors, are true or not. How could I know? But what I do know is that this needs to be cleared up, otherwise people waiting on our elective surgery waiting lists right now will have no confidence that they are being operated on based on the fact that they are due to be operated on, that they have been waiting long enough and that there is a priority list rather than their being operated on because it makes the books look better. I think that that is a problem that needs to be addressed.

I will not be supporting this. I would say to the Greens minister: follow what your party did back before you joined government. Accept that there is a problem here. Accept that we need an independent look at this. Let us do it. It does not mean if you support this motion that you are accepting the case. But what you would be saying, Mr Rattenbury—through you, Mr Assistant Speaker—is, “Okay, these are pretty serious concerns that have been raised. The government has got form. Let’s clear it up. And if the minister is right, that’s great. If she’s not, let’s fix it up,” as we have done before. That then led to significant improvements in elective surgery.

I would ask that the Greens minister consider that and reflect on the way his party once behaved, once conducted themselves and once did, to a small extent, act as a genuine crossbench.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (5.28): I thank Mr Hanson for raising this issue today, and I acknowledge the importance of delivering high quality elective surgery here in the ACT. However, I do not believe this is an issue that warrants an inquiry. In fact, despite the accusations put quite vocally in some circumstances, upon further research on the part of my office, it seems this is an area which deserves recognition for significant improvement.

Elective surgery, along with emergency department waiting times, has been one of the areas which has had plenty of focus and attention over the past few years. As a result, there has actually been some action to improve on those areas which were consistently coming back with poor results. As the Minister for Health has outlined, in March this year a new practice of scheduling was introduced at the Canberra Hospital to ensure that a maximum number of people get their surgery on time, and there was a focus on how to reduce the number of those who are overdue. However, Calvary hospital was not meeting its targets for category 2 patients—those that need surgery within between 30 and 90 days. So it was asked to introduce the same practices as at Canberra Hospital.

I understand Calvary started this new practice in September this year and in the first month they already have shown significant improvements by bringing their year-to-date figures of people getting surgery on time from 55 per cent to 73 per cent. This new practice has meant an increase in the number of people getting surgery done on time and, as Ms Gallagher’s amendment notes, has reduced the number of people who were not having surgery in time from 922 across all three categories last March down to 618 people in October.

There have been suggestions queue jumping is going on and that the hospitals are manipulating the waiting list data by not operating on people in the order that they were put on the list but, instead, are focusing on people who are at risk of being

overdue and people who have only been on the list for a short while. This may well partially be the case. But surely we want surgeons to focus on those people who have been on the list for a long time and who are at risk of being overdue. It does not actually make any sense that surgeons would take people who have just arrived on their lists in order to minimise the number of people who are overdue. In any case, there are reporting requirements for people who are overdue—how many and why—thus it is in everybody's interest to minimise this number. Is this not actually the aim of the improvements in the scheduling practice? It certainly strikes me that that is the case.

It is certainly possible that some surgeons are choosing to operate on patients in a different order to them being put on the waiting list, even within each category. Perhaps the circumstances around this could be looked into. However, it would not seem that this would be done in order to manipulate the data. If individual surgeons have a significant number of people who are overdue on a regular basis, then I agree this should be looked into by ACT Health. It should probably be noted that some surgeons have more patients than others, and this would depend completely on what kinds of surgeons they are, whether they practice in a number of places, on their mix of public and private patients and other matters like that. However, this does not seem like a systemic issue and, therefore, I do not believe it warrants an inquiry.

There has also been a suggestion that there should be a central waiting list for surgery, and it has been said that there once was. However, I argue that this current system of having separate waiting lists for each surgeon seems more logical. There are certainly central waiting lists for each hospital—Canberra Hospital and Calvary—and each hospital manages the patients on their books once the surgeon has referred them. There are a few key reasons why a central list would not really work. Firstly, around 76 surgeons provide services for elective surgery here in the territory and they provide these services across 13 specialist areas. Those areas range from ear, nose and throat to neurosurgery to gynaecology to ophthalmology. The idea of having a centralised list for these surgeons does not seem to make any sense at all.

Even if you could create 13 separate lists for each range of specialist areas, patients generally already have a relationship with their particular doctor and surgeon through the consultation and diagnosis process, so most patients probably do not want another surgeon they have no relationship with and who has no background on their medical history. There is also a process of post-surgery follow-ups with consultations and check-ups. So, again, it really makes sense to keep the consistency and relationship with the individual surgeon and patient.

I note that ACT Health is also doing work to refer some patients to programs that will improve their health and reduce the pressure on the elective surgery lists. This is, of course, only useful in cases where patients have preventable health issues caused by lack of exercise, the need for particular physiotherapy or movement, improvements in diet or perhaps even reducing or stopping smoking or drug or alcohol intake.

In conclusion, I think that overall we have a high quality elective surgery system in the ACT, and despite people sometimes having to wait longer than they should, I believe surgeons are doing their best to ensure that this is not having a significant negative health impact.

Having made those remarks on my understanding of the situation, I want to reflect on how this debate is perhaps about to proceed. I think Mr Hanson should reflect on both what he has already said and probably what he is about to say. The fact I and my office have researched this matter and come to a different conclusion to Mr Hanson is simply a different understanding of the facts and it does not mean I am not interested in holding the government to account; it does not mean I am not concerned about these issues. But a range of scenarios have been put forward here, and the information I have been able to ascertain is contained in my speech. That is the information that has been available to me and on which I have based my view with the assistance of my staff in looking at this issue. Having seen the motion on the notice paper yesterday, I had no contact from Mr Hanson until about 20 minutes ago, and to then try to characterise that along the lines of "Now I'm in the ministry I don't take these issues seriously" is not true. It simply reflects the fact that I have drawn a different conclusion, which I am perfectly entitled to do.

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.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (5.39): Ms Gallagher accused me of making a stump speech and I accused her of making a stump speech, and I think we also heard one from Mr Rattenbury. Mr Rattenbury's stump speech is, "I've looked at the issue. My office has looked at the issue, but I'm going to side with the government." Regardless of what the issue is, that is, unfortunately, what we are seeing now from Mr Rattenbury. There was an opportunity here to put this issue to rest and to say that, regardless of whether you think the lists are being managed appropriately or not, there is sufficient evidence, sufficient concern, that this issue needs to be looked at. I do not think this would be a particularly extensive investigation or inquiry. I do not think it would take long and it would not take many resources, but it would certainly put this issue to rest. The fact that the government is so keen for this not to occur probably adds weight to the view that there is a genuine issue here at stake.

The issue that has been raised by the surgeons is that patients are being left to languish on lists waiting for surgery longer than they should while other patients, in essence, jump the queue because that makes the books look better. That is what has been alleged by surgeons. That is what has been alleged by the doctors group. And

that is the evidence that is contained in the letter from Calvary that says it has received an unequivocal directive from the Director-General of ACT Health to make urgent and radical changes. It explains what those urgent and radical changes are, and it is quite clear that they reflect the concerns raised by the surgeons.

If I were perhaps more naive and if I had more trust in the minister, perhaps I would take her denials at face value and say, “Okay, when your director-general accuses the doctors of lying, when she accuses them of having their baseless allegations, well, she’s the director-general, she must know, though it’s pretty strong stuff to say that their allegations are misleading and false and accuse the doctors of lying.” We want to trust our Chief Minister. But the problem is, as I outlined in my speech, that on so many other occasions it has been proved that it is the minister’s denials that are false and misleading.

Dr Bourke: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, I believe the opposition leader has been using unparliamentary language in implying that the Chief Minister has been misleading.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, I ask you to withdraw, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: On the point of order, I am paraphrasing the language being used by the director-general directed at the doctors when she has accused them of being misleading and false. I was just paraphrasing what the Chief Minister’s own director-general is accusing the doctors of.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: You are not allowed to impugn the reputation of a member. Dr Bourke.

Dr Bourke: On the point of order, this is a complete travesty of what Mr Hanson was saying. He was calling the Chief Minister misleading, and that is unparliamentary.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I ask you to withdraw, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: I withdraw. But what will not be withdrawn, sadly, is the fact that the director-general is out there accusing the surgeons who have raised these concerns of being misleading and false. So, I make the point that what—

Ms Burch: Do you withdraw or not?

MR HANSON: I did withdraw. I make the point that Minister Burch and Dr Bourke have raised points of order and said, “It’s so unparliamentary. It’s so unfair. Don’t dare say this about anybody. Don’t dare accuse anyone of being misleading and false.” Unfortunately, however, it is okay for the director-general to accuse the doctors of that. Let us have a look at what is happening where we have the Director-General of ACT Health accusing the doctors of doing something we are being told is not acceptable behaviour. There seems to be a bit of a double standard going on here where, if doctors raise concerns, they will be accused of saying something we are not allowed to say in this place—and rightly so. But I have real concerns that doctors who raise concerns are then accused essentially of lying when we know that when doctors

have raised concerns before and those concerns were denied—be it about elective surgery, be it about obstetricians—those concerns were proven valid, despite the denials, despite the attacks on doctors.

We are seeing a repeat of form. Because I tell you that when the concerns were raised by the obstetricians, the attack on those obstetricians by this minister, Ms Gallagher, and her then Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, was disgusting. Because they dared raise concerns that were proved correct, the then Chief Minister and the then health minister, Ms Gallagher, went out and threatened to have obstetricians' cases relitigated by the medical board to dredge for trouble, to scare those doctors off. The minister was essentially accused of a witch-hunt, and that is what it was. So coming in here all pious and telling us that we should not talk about things that are misleading when that is what this government is doing to their own doctors is disgraceful. The behaviour of this government over a protracted period in its response to serious allegations that are made and that in all cases have been proved to be correct is to immediately deny and to attack those doctors and to do everything to bury the response, and that is disgusting.

We will continue to dig on this. We will continue to hold this government to account. It is not as if Ms Gallagher can allege some attack by me on the hardworking health staff. The people who are attacking the health staff right here and right now are the people who are saying to the doctors that they are liars, the people who are saying to the doctors that they are false and misleading when they have raised these concerns. Then they have the contradiction in their argument to accuse me of the same thing—and rightly so, because it is unparliamentary. I will leave this issue now by saying that we will not let this rest. We will continue to dig on this issue. I will continue to call for this investigation to clarify what is happening here, because a denial from the Chief Minister, as we have seen in this place, means absolutely nothing.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Alexander Maconochie Centre—capacity

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (5.47): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) in 2006, due to budget blowouts, the ACT Labor Government cut the capacity of the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) to 300;
- (b) in 2007, the ACT Labor Government assured the community and the Assembly the AMC would have capacity for 25 years with 300 beds;
- (c) four years after its opening in 2009, the AMC is overcrowded despite the retrofitting of additional beds; and
- (d) the ACT Government was advised on a number of occasions prior to cutting the capacity to 300, that the capacity of the AMC would need to be significantly more than 300; and

(2) condemns the ACT Labor Government for:

- (a) misleading the community about the true capacity requirements of the AMC; and
- (b) building a jail that they knew was too small.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we kick off where we left off with the last motion, because when it comes to the AMC—

Mr Coe: There seems to be a trend developing here.

MR HANSON: Yes, there is a trend. There is no question—and I will explain it as I go through, point out the evidence as I did in the last motion—that the government have been deliberately deceitful about the prison's planning. They have tried to obscure what is going on by using phrases like “maximum capacity”, “actual bed numbers”, “prisoner numbers”, “operational capacity”, “actual daily numbers” and “raw accommodation numbers”. They are all different quotes. And there is “capacity” as well. It has been a monumental distortion of the normal usage of the English language, and it is deliberately designed to mislead.

There is no doubt that confusion has reigned around the planning. I do not think that we have been told the truth. We have been misled. The truth has been lost in this case. I have litigated this case a bit before, as you would be aware, through questions and so on. But what is the consequence of this? I think it is worth looking at what this all means. People will say, “Oh, yeah; we've just got to build more accommodation.” Or they will say: “So what? So what if we were lied to about the bed capacity at the jail? So what?”

Let me tell you so what, and why this is an important issue. On 13 November, the Official Visitor to the jail appeared before the JACS committee. We talked about the issue of the overcrowding at the AMC. I want to go through that, because the case that the government lied, the government misled, the government delivered a jail that is too small, is probably already—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, I would like you to watch your phraseology with regard to the government. It is quite unparliamentary to say the government lied. I would like you to withdraw that and to rephrase it.

MR HANSON: Sure. The government fabricated data—can I say that? The government did not provide all the information? The government said things that were untrue.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: In your opinion. Perhaps you would like to phrase it as being in your opinion.

MR HANSON: Sure. I will endeavour to do so, Madam Deputy Speaker.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

MR HANSON: Let me quote some of the extracts from the evidence from the Official Visitor. He said:

What happens quite often is that detainees are locked down more than they used to be because of the various categories of detainees ... The problem is: where do you house people? Of course, double bunks have been installed in the cells, and then there are difficulties about who shares with whom ...

... the real problem is that quite often there are particular detainees who just cannot be housed in certain parts of the jail ...

There are many prisoners who live in fear of being mixed with other prisoners.

Basically, in some cases they cannot get to programs when they ought to be able to ... Other detainees have to be locked in while one group is allowed out. So the overcrowding has contributed to the difficulty of handling these people.

This is a quote from the Official Visitor. I asked the Official Visitor a question about lockdowns. He talked about the issue of lockdowns by saying:

It happens on a fairly regular basis, particularly since some of the blocks have had two regimes, which means one group of detainees is allowed out in that block while another will be locked in because they cannot mix. You can see that you are actually halving the time out.

He went on to say:

I would say now, with overcrowding, it is becoming fairly restrictive, more so than originally intended.

Then we get onto the very disturbing aspects of the evidence that he provided:

Unfortunately, with the overcrowding, there is more tension in the jail and obviously people are being locked down and they might resent that, and so there may be a little more tension, I would say, than in the past.

He goes on:

But, you see, the big problem with the ACT is that there is only one jail, and we are putting mixing categories. That makes it very, very difficult ...

Remand detainees are mixed with sentenced prisoners now. That is a no-no. I mean, you do not do that.

This is the Official Visitor. Let me say that again:

Remand detainees are mixed with sentenced prisoners now. That is a no-no. I mean, you do not do that.

This is the wonderful human rights compliant jail that was boasted of—remember: the jail that was going to be delivered by the Labor government. It is not me saying this, Madam Deputy Speaker; it is the Official Visitor saying this—that it is a no-no, that you do not mix remanded and sentenced. You do not do it in any way. Let me go on:

... it is the overcrowding that troubles me. I think that is the number one issue at the moment. The growing tension between prisoners and officers, you can feel it. There is a tension there, and, obviously, the more people you squeeze into a place that is only built for a certain capacity, the greater is the potential for dysfunction or trouble.

When I have been talking about the prison capacity, I have been doing so because I do not like being misled and I do not like the community being misled. I have been making the case very strongly that we were misled; I think we have been able to prove that, and I will go through that later in my speech.

But perhaps the more important point, and the more important point going forward, is that this government has wilfully created a situation where the Official Visitor is talking about the potential for dysfunction and trouble, the growing tension between prisoners and officers. He says that you can feel it, the tension, with people being squeezed into a place that is only built for a certain capacity. That is the legacy of this utopian jail that this mob said that they were going to deliver and that Minister Corbell has flick-passed to his Green mate Mr Rattenbury.

That is the legacy when they are out there boasting about their human rights compliant jail. The reason is that they knowingly built a jail that was too small. They had the advice; they had the evidence. They said that this jail would be big enough, and they knew it would not be. They had the Rengain report from 2002 that said: “You will need a prison of 480 beds. You are going to need that.” He understood all of the implications of what the growth was going to be in prisoners and the complexity of male and female, sentenced and remand, maximum security and minimum security, and protected prisoners. He said, “You will need 480 beds.”

Walker had a look at this and said, “You might get away with 326 or 348.” On another scenario, he referred to 414. So you have got Rengain and Walker saying you will need over 400 beds. It looks as though they were on the money, but they were ignored.

There was then Treasury analysis from 2003. That has a figure in it of 374. We know that set the figure where the government said, “Okay; we will do 374.” So they got a bunch of projections—480, 414 and a Treasury one that said 374. And they went for the lower one to get 374.

There was further information that was provided in a question on notice that was received earlier this year. That had different projections, but essentially 374 was the number. Mr Stanhope, when he talked about building the jail in 2004, said, “That is what we are going to build.” He said:

The Alexander Maconochie Centre—

this is Stanhope in 2004—

will include a new 139-bed remand centre to replace the Belconnen Remand Centre and the Symonston Temporary Remand Centre. It will include a 175-bed facility for sentenced prisoners and a 60-bed transitional release centre for low-risk prisoners ...

So they have said, “Right; these are the bed numbers you are going to need—374.” He said: “The way this is going to be built, the way it is going to be designed, you are going to have a remand centre, you are going to have somewhere for sentenced prisoners, and you are going to have somewhere for transitional release.” That sounded pretty reasonable. It was probably at the lower estimate, but it sounded pretty reasonable.

But what happened? The project ran into trouble. This mob were desperate to get it open on the day before the caretaker period, I think on 11 September 2008. They were desperate to get it open. The budget blew out. It went from the \$110 million that had been promised to \$130 million. The budget was blowing out. They said: “What are we going to do? Let us make it 300 beds.” They cut the capacity to 300 beds when all the advice said it was too small. We have heard the consequence of that. We have just heard it from the Official Visitor.

So they have built this jail, with 300 beds. Was that going to be big enough? Clearly it was not, and the government knew that. But when the minister, Simon Corbell, was asked about whether this jail was going to be big enough, he said, “This jail will have capacity for 25 years in its existing bed configuration.” Why is it that the minister got all this advice that said you need a jail that is going to have 374 as a minimum and then, because of budget blowouts and so on, he is in this place saying, “No; for 25 years it is going to be big enough.” We know it was not big enough, because it was full almost the day it opened. They have been cramming in bunk beds to the point where, as I understand it, no more bunk beds can be actually fitted into the place. It is bursting at its seams.

What to do about it? What about the suggestions so far from Minister Rattenbury? We have heard one concept of bracelets for prisoners, and that they would be released into the community. I reject that as a proposal, because if the judiciary decides someone needs a custodial sentence, they should be in the jail; we should not be saying, “Let’s get some prisoners out of here simply because it is overcrowded.” That is not an appropriate response. The other thing that we can do, of course, is send prisoners to New South Wales. I think there is some good evidence that that would work. We did it before; it was a lot cheaper. And there is some real—

Mr Rattenbury interjecting—

MR HANSON: You get all this stuff from Mr Rattenbury and the government saying, “Oh, you can’t send them to New South Wales. It will be terrible. It’s the dark ages in Goulburn jail.” But the reality is that when you have a situation where sentenced prisoners are mixed with remand, which the Official Visitor says is a no-no, and you have got protected prisoners, male, female, maximum, minimum, what you can actually do is send people to particular jails which have—

At 6 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly having been put and negatived, the debate was resumed.

MR HANSON: It was in the Official Visitor's evidence as well. He said that we hear about Long Bay and that ACT prisoners will be sent to Goulburn or Long Bay. But he says:

... if you go to somewhere like Long Bay, you will find that it is really a complex of jails. Obviously, they have economies of scale. You can put all the sex offenders into one area and then do some intensive rehabilitation. Here you have got a mix of people and you have got to cater for all categories. It really makes it difficult to do.

That is a very good point. There are jails in New South Wales that, because of their economies of scale, can provide essentially niche capabilities for sex offenders, drug rehabilitation, maximum security prisoners and so on. There are prison farms. But at this stage, you have got remandees, sentenced and all the rest of it crammed, squeezed, in this potential powder keg.

I make the point, Madam Speaker, that if something does happen out there and it is the result of the overcrowding—and the Official Visitor is warning that it will—and this government has failed to respond adequately, then this government will be culpable. This government will be culpable. And in any subsequent investigation or, God forbid, a coronial inquest, the blame for this situation is to be sheeted home to Minister Corbell, who instigated this, and Minister Rattenbury, who has failed to act.

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) (6.03): I move the amendment circulated in my name:

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

“(1) notes:

- (a) that the built capacity of the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) was 300 when it opened in 2009;
- (b) that several detainee population projections were considered in the design of the AMC;
- (c) that population forecasting/modelling is an extremely difficult task, with all which jurisdictions struggle;
- (d) that the detainee population of the AMC has increased by approximately 40 percent in the past 10 months;
- (e) that an increase of this proportion in this timeframe is unprecedented;

- (f) that the ACT Government allocated design funding for the expansion of the AMC in the 2013-2014 Budget; and
 - (g) the recent roundtable the Minister for Corrections held with representatives of the criminal justice system to better understand the significant and unexpected increase in detainees.
- (2) Commends the exceptional professionalism and commitment of the ACT Corrective Services in responding to these increased pressures.
 - (3) Calls on the Minister for Corrections to keep the Assembly informed regarding developments at the AMC.”.

I have circulated the amendment because certainly Mr Hanson has taken a rather historical approach to his motion. He has sought to prosecute something that has been prosecuted on a number of occasions here. And my amendment really seeks to focus on some of the current situation.

Let me speak to that. I think what is true—Mr Hanson has spoken about this in his motion—is that the Alexander Maconochie Centre was built with a capacity of 300 when it opened in 2009. I think that is known and understood. What really goes to the heart of, I think, the points that Mr Hanson is seeking to make in this motion and has just prosecuted in his speech is really the question of what capacity should it have been built to. I think it is fair to observe—and I will put the caveat on this that I was not in these discussions, but having looked at it now that I have become the minister I draw some conclusions—that the government had before it a number of scenarios, a number of projections on what prisoner populations would be over a time series. I think members have those. I have certainly provided them in answer to a question on notice by Mr Smyth. Members can readily look through those, see which companies provided them and the various projections that they made.

What one can see from looking at that is that there was a wide variety of scenarios from which the government was required to choose—scenarios from a range of criminal consultants and from Treasury ACT. What I think that shows is that prisoner population forecasting is a very difficult task. It is one for which there is no easy pathway and one in which clearly people have strong, different views about what the actual answer might be.

The government had before it a number of scenarios, and I think hindsight now shows that the Treasury forecast did not match what has actually happened. It is simple fact. No-one can deny it. The Treasury numbers are there, and the prison population has been greater than that. I think that needs to be acknowledged. History shows it. It is certainly easy, in hindsight—and we can all sit here and say it—to say that is now the case. Treasury officials at the time, I am sure, based their scenario on what they thought was the right outcome. And clearly that was not the case.

But what is true is that the government had to choose one of those scenarios, and they chose one. What has happened since then is the prisoner numbers have been higher than the scenario that they chose. Others may choose to comment on that, but I think

that is where we find ourselves. We can re-prosecute that all day—and Mr Hanson undoubtedly will continue to do so—but they are the cold, hard facts of the matter.

We now find ourselves in a situation where the population of the AMC has increased by approximately 40 per cent in the past 10 months, from around 240 detainees in January this year to around 330, 340 currently. The population was 334 last night. We take a daily count. Certainly, an increase of this proportion in this time frame is unprecedented. It certainly was not forecast. It has brought us to a set of numbers that match with some of the forecasts—there is no doubt about that—but the increase that we saw in a short time frame, I think, nobody anticipated. And it has certainly placed some pressure on the AMC. I acknowledge the comments of the Official Visitor. I think he is describing the situation that we have. But that is, again, the reality that we find ourselves with.

The question now is: what is being done about that? I can report to the Assembly that a number of steps have been taken. Firstly, a range of operational steps have been put in place within the AMC to deal with those pressures—increased prisoner escorts, greater attention to who can be housed with whom, significant work to minimise the sorts of risks that the Official Visitor was describing. The management of the AMC are well aware of those risks and they are working to ameliorate those pressures and those risks as much as possible.

Additional capacity has been added to the Alexander Maconochie Centre, as I have previously reported to the Assembly. The capacity of the AMC now stands at 366. That, of course, is not the necessary prisoner population. I have explained in detail before why that is the case, depending on issues such as whether the beds are available in the women's section or in other parts of the jail. But the actual capacity—and the definition of that is clearly understood—is now 366, through the implementation of bunk beds and the like. So the capacity has been increased to deal with that extra pressure.

I also recently held a round table with a range of key stakeholders in the criminal justice system to actually talk about getting a clearer understanding amongst all those stakeholders of why we have seen the rapid increase and what steps might be put in place to counteract that. I know Mr Hanson was somewhat derogatory about that—of sitting down and actually talking to people—but these are the key stakeholders. Directors-general of key ACT government agencies, ACT Policing, the Director of Public Prosecutions, ACT Legal Aid—these are the people who came, and we had a very good discussion.

I think it is important the leaders in the justice community are having that conversation and continue to have that conversation. I never professed this would be some silver bullet, but certainly putting all the right people in the room and having the conversation is an important thing to do. And that is where some of the suggestions came from that Mr Hanson has spoken on, and I will come back to those in a moment.

The other thing is that since I became minister, I put a proposal to cabinet, and the government agreed in the 2013-14 budget, to allocate design funding for the expansion of the AMC. And that work is now underway. There is an

acknowledgement that history has proven that we needed greater capacity at the AMC, and that work is now underway and is being pushed forward as expeditiously as it can, in acknowledgement of the fact that there is pressure. Of course, it is a challenging project in an operating custodial environment to build more cell space. It is a challenging job, but I am confident that JACS are very focused on it and they are moving as quickly as they can to ensure that that is put in place. And I will be interested to hear Mr Hanson's views on what that capacity should be, whether he supports the increase in capacity, and the expenditure that will be necessary for that.

Mr Hanson did raise some issues around suggestions that came out of the recent roundtable. He cited one. There were a number of issues that were raised, and I have provided those in media comment, including where the bracelets came up. But the observation I made to the *Canberra Times* when I was asked about the outcomes of that roundtable was that a range of issues were discussed; some were more immediate, others were longer term. For example, people said, "We need to increase capacity." The government has already moved to do that.

Other issues were raised about the need to keep focusing on the through care program in order to reduce recidivism. There is strong support for that piece of work. There is a sense that that enhanced through care program and the extended support that former detainees receive have real potential for impact on recidivism figures. They were some of the other ideas that came out.

There were longer term discussions about the need for a focus earlier in life by children and young people's support services. The directors-general and senior staff from those parts of the ACT government who were there spoke about perhaps the longer term issue being that if we intervene earlier in a child's life we may ultimately avoid them going to the AMC, but that becomes a sort of a decade-long response mechanism.

Yes, certainly the issue of electronic tagging bracelets was raised at that meeting. At the start of the meeting that day, the roundtable, I undertook that JACS would look at all of the options that were raised and canvass whether they were viable for the ACT. On the specific issue of bracelets, I have indicated already that the potential for that in the ACT is limited. Because of other factors, they can generally only be applied in lower risk cases. There is a particular cohort of detainees for whom electronic tagging would be suitable, and there is a sense that in the ACT we have a very limited number of people in that group. But what I can assure Mr Hanson is that it will not simply be me or the superintendent of the AMC deciding that some individual prisoner is suitable.

I think electronic tagging would need to be a sentencing option that is available to the judiciary. The judiciary sets the sentences. That is how it works. So it is not simply going to be the way Mr Hanson suggested it might be, and I hope that clarification assists. That said, I have asked JACS to look at the viability of the bracelet option, to look at, for example, the cost effectiveness in the ACT, given the smallness of our jurisdiction. Could we tag onto a New South Wales system? One should ask these questions. The answer may prove to be that it is not suitable for the ACT. But I would be remiss, as the minister, to not be ensuring that these options were being investigated.

In terms of sending prisoners to New South Wales, I have indicated that I am willing to send prisoners to New South Wales where there is a benefit for the detainee, whether it is through access to a particular program that is not available at the AMC or perhaps one that is better delivered, or some other permutation, in New South Wales or where, for example, somebody requests to be sent to New South Wales to be closer to their family. I think the issue of the wholesale sending of people to New South Wales is not a path that I want to go down.

The whole purpose of having a detention facility in the ACT is that detainees might be close to their families. Their support network is there. They have that contact—and that is why we have the visits program—or that potential to be in contact with their families. Certainly from discussions with some of the detainees I have talked to in my time as minister, one of the key things that motivate them not to go back to the AMC is the fact that they have left their families behind, that they have let their families down, that they want to be there to support their wife in raising the kids. I think that constant connection to family is an important key motivator in the rehabilitative process.

We send people to jail for a number of reasons, including punishment and rehabilitation. Deprivation of liberty is the punishment, but the connection to family, I think, is an important part of rehabilitation. So the option of sending people to New South Wales is not off the table but it is one for which I think there is limited scope. Frankly, members will be aware, no doubt, that other jurisdictions are having significant prisoner population issues as well. And to be honest, neither New South Wales nor Victoria is particularly keen on just taking random additional prisoners from the ACT.

At the end of my amendment, I have added two further paragraphs. One is to commend the exceptional professionalism and commitment of ACT Corrections staff in responding to the increased pressures. I think considerable pressure has been put on the staff, and they have responded incredibly well. They have been innovative in thinking about how to deal with it, and they have been flexible in working with the superintendent of the AMC to deliver adjustments to the way the centre operates, in order to deal with those pressures.

Finally, I have noted that I will continue to keep the Assembly informed regarding developments at the AMC. I am quite open to coming in and making a series of ongoing ministerial statements as there are developments, along the lines of the one I made recently in which I informed the Assembly of the prison population issues and a range of other matters. I will continue to do that, as and when the opportunity arises.

That is why I have moved the amendment I have, and I commend that amendment to the Assembly.

MADAM SPEAKER: Before we proceed, Mr Rattenbury, could I draw your attention to paragraph 1(c) which says “with all which jurisdictions”. Could I suggest that you may wish to move, with the agreement of the Assembly, that “all” and “which” be transposed.

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I seek leave to move that amendment.

Leave granted.

MR RATTENBURY: With the indulgence of the Assembly, I move, in paragraph 1(c):

Omit “with all which”, substitute: “with which all”.

Amendment to proposed amendment agreed to.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Health and Minister for Higher Education) (6.16): The government will be supporting Mr Rattenbury’s amendment, as amended.

Mr Coe: Isn’t he the government?

Mr Hanson: He is the minister.

MS GALLAGHER: Well, in this case he is the minister responsible. The government is supporting the amendment. I think it is a good opportunity to—

Mrs Jones: It’s a bit like Andrew’s two personalities.

MS GALLAGHER: I am speaking as Chief Minister and because of the issues that have been raised about the history of this facility. I think it is at a high level. It is important for the Assembly to reflect on the fact that the Canberra Liberals, since Bill Stefaniak’s days, have never supported the ACT having a jail.

Mr Coe: The management of your prison.

MS GALLAGHER: It predates your time, Mr Coe, because there was an election—

Mr Doszpot: Quite right.

MS GALLAGHER: It is. I think it was the 2004 election where it was such a successful strategy that we actually won majority government. But all of the money that had been allocated to build the jail was going to be taken out of the jail and used in the health system. I remember the ads vividly. They had sirens going off about what a waste of money constructing a jail in the ACT was and how it should not be done, and that the Canberra Liberals did not support the project.

We have to look at this motion while keeping in mind the fact that the Canberra Liberals have not supported the ACT looking after their own prisoner population, and what they did support was the continuation of farming prisoners out to New South Wales and detaining people for long periods of time at a completely inappropriate Belconnen Remand Centre.

For anyone who visited that centre and saw people being remanded there, if it was any one of our families, any one of our children that was spending time in that place, you would have fought long and hard to have a more appropriate facility constructed in the ACT so that people could go and visit, in an appropriate environment, their loved one who was spending time in custody.

That is the history of this project. The Labor government is guilty of fighting for the rights of those people who were being sent interstate. My involvement with this goes back way beyond that. My father used to be an advocate for prisoner families who were transferred to New South Wales. He used to come home and tell me the stories of the families he worked with. Many of them were disadvantaged families, families that had multiple problems going on. He would have to go and arrange transport and funding for them to have even one visit with their loved one in New South Wales.

Yes, we were guilty of saying we wanted to have our own jail. We then had to fight against some political response which argued against having the AMC. There was a whole range of arguments about the Hilton at Jerrabomberra and how luxurious and over the top it was, and that it was going to be all about human rights. We had to argue against and defend that, to ensure that it was built to a suitable standard. The Canberra Liberals, at every opportunity, have criticised this facility, have sought to make political hay with any issue that goes on—and there will be multiple issues that continue to go on in a jail; that is the nature of the business.

But we have a facility now. It is housing more people than we had expected and what had been predicted on a range of different modelling that was presented to the cabinet. The cabinet did have to take some decisions about scope and size at the point in time when we were getting updates about the budget. There were different projections that were presented to the cabinet. There were low-end projections and there were high-end projections from Treasury, and there was analysis done in 2002 and an updated analysis that came through after that.

When you look at this rationally, I think Mr Hanson said the jail was full when it opened, and that is not true. In 2009 there were 154 prisoners. It was actually less than what had been expected by some of the Treasury projections. So that is not true. It then tracked, until 2011, pretty well against the Treasury projections. It was not until 2012, and certainly in the last 10 months with a 40 per cent increase in numbers in the jail, that we saw the population exceed the Treasury projections that had been provided to the cabinet and that ultimately had informed some of the decision making we took about keeping the jail within the approved budget.

That is the reality. There has been a significant change in the last 10 months and the government has had to deal with that. I would say, from my discussions with other first ministers, that this is not something unique to the ACT. In other jurisdictions they are under even more pressure than we are with our jail, as they are looking for other accommodation options for people who have been sentenced or held on remand. So this is not unique to the ACT. All jurisdictions are seeking to find ways of managing increasing prisoner populations.

In that respect I do acknowledge the effort that has gone into this by the portfolio minister in having a round table, in talking with everybody about what could have led to this increase in population, and subsequently what to do about it. The round table—I think the first one has been held—from the brief back to me was extremely informative about some of the pressures that the system is under and there was a commitment from all stakeholders to work together to look for solutions.

The cabinet has had this issue presented to them a number of times by Mr Rattenbury and we have agreed to some work being done to look at increasing the capacity beyond what it currently is, at 366. The government has allocated \$3 million for design works on the prison expansion. This will enable the development of plans for new accommodation to respond to further increases in prisoner numbers.

This is a situation that is being actively managed. I think it is reflective that, again, the stump speech being rolled out by Mr Hanson—

Mr Coe: This is turning into a stump speech yourself.

MS GALLAGHER: There is never any looking forward or any solutions; it is going back to issues that were being well examined and argued over in the previous electoral term and not wanting to give anyone advice. But the government has been measured on those. We have been measured on them and the community has had a say. Now, this is about dealing with the new issues that have arisen really in the last 10 months, with the significant increase in population that has been seen at the AMC. There are never any solutions or policy thinking. There is never any acknowledgement of the reality with which services are provided in the AMC, and the fact that the staff in corrections and in justice have done a tremendous job in managing what can only be described as an unforeseen increase in the prisoner population.

I know people will go to one set of projections that supports the numbers at the time, but when you go back, the Treasury projection in 2009 was for 226 prisoners; we had 154. They have jumped around. The prison was not full when it opened; it was under all of the projections that had been indicated. I think the Walker projections for 2009 were that there would be 314 prisoners. There were half that many. And they have tracked along at a reasonable rate of increase until about February this year, when we saw a very significant increase in prison population, and that has been somewhat maintained. I think the last figure I saw was 334 prisoners in custody at the moment.

I think the amendment is a sensible one. It acknowledges the decisions that are being taken. It acknowledges that the population has increased and it commends the staff for their work and how they have responded to these pressures. It also allows for the Minister for Corrections to continually update the Assembly regarding developments at the AMC. We can spend the next three years going on about what projections were right and what ones should have been used to inform the building of the jail or we can look forward and work out the practical response to the prison population we have now. The government will choose the second one of those.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (6.26): I will close the debate as well. I am glad that the government are supporting their own amendments. Turning to a couple of issues raised by the Chief Minister and Mr Rattenbury, the point is that there is significant new information that has come to light on this issue. We have now seen more of the advice that was provided to the government in the period leading up to the design—quite clearly, why the government announced that it would be 374 beds, and it adds much greater weight to the fact that we were deceived. When we were told that there would be sufficient capacity, the government knew that that would not be the case.

The other significant thing is that the Official Visitor has provided some very disturbing evidence about what the overcrowding means. I think it is important that we as the opposition maintain pressure on this issue, so that the government does respond, and responds in a timely manner. It is quite clear, based on the Official Visitor's advice, that, in essence, it is a powder keg out there and if this government does not act quickly the consequences could be quite catastrophic.

We will not be supporting the amendment but I do note that paragraph (2) commends the exceptional professionalism and commitment of the ACT Corrective Services in responding to these increased pressures, and I would support that element of it. I think it is a very difficult job that the staff have. They have been put in an almost impossible position in trying to manage this situation. I certainly do commend them. So although we will not be supporting the amendment, that should not be seen as a sign of anything but unanimous support for the staff. It is only a shame that this government did not show the same support for Doug Buchanan when he questioned the government's NSP.

Looking back at the history, when we said in 2004 that we would rather put the money into health than the prison, that, in retrospect, appears quite wise. We would not have allowed the Belconnen Remand Centre to remain. It is clear that that did need upgrading. But as Jon Stanhope said in 2004, in the design of the jail it would be a remand centre, there would be a space for sentenced prisoners and there would be transitional accommodation. He adhered to the very important principle when he was talking then, and as the Official Visitor has said, that it is a no-no. You do not put sentenced prisoners with remandees.

I would like to put on the record that I am extremely disturbed by that ongoing situation where young remandees find themselves in a position where they are mixing with hardened sentenced prisoners. I do not understand how this government, who purport to be the champions of human rights, have allowed that situation to unfold. In the words of the Official Visitor, it is a no-no; you do not do it. But this government continue to do it and say that this is somehow in accordance with their human rights philosophy.

It is not true that no-one anticipated the numbers in the jail. The government anticipated them, and that is why the government said they would build a jail for 374. The reason that they then wound back was because they ran out of money. So let us not pretend that this was unanticipated and that 300 was an oversight. It was based on

the best advice. They got the advice. They started following it, and then they did a backflip because they ran out of money. Now the prisoners, the staff and everybody out there at the AMC are paying the price. I just hope that the price will not be too high. We know there have been some significant incidents, some very serious incidents, at the AMC. I just hope that there will not be any more.

I reiterate my comments. I call on this minister to act, to take the New South Wales option seriously. As the Official Visitor said, there are good jails in New South Wales. There are a suite of jails that can better fit the needs of prisoners in many cases, and that option should be taken. That is a far better situation than prisoners squeezed in, as the Official Visitor said, with tensions rising amongst everybody. He has warned of potential dire consequences.

I will leave it there. We will continue to maintain pressure. I welcome the fact that the minister will provide us with regular updates. But I do want to hear updates about action that is being taken and not just simply an update on another round table and what the numbers to date happen to be.

Question put:

That the amendment, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 7

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

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Adjournment

Motion by **Mr Barr** proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Canberra Critics Circle arts awards

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (6.35): Yesterday I had the pleasure, along with Dr Bourke, Ms Porter and Mr Smyth, to attend the Canberra Critics Circle arts awards and the announcement of the artist of the year, sponsored by *Canberra City News*. It was a very happy occasion held at the Canberra Museum and Gallery and attended by many of the leading lights in the ACT's arts community.

Twenty-nine Critics Circle awards were given with citations underscoring the high level of expertise and passion that our artists have for their craft. In film, Clare Young was honoured for her film *Bottom of the Lake*. Awards for dance went to Liz Lea and Elizabeth Cameron Dalman. In writing, awards went to Lesley Lebkowicz, Irma Gold, the Scissors Paper Pen Collective and Robert Macklin. Visual arts awards were given to Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Anita McIntyre, G W Bott, Wendy Teakel, Jenny Kemarre Martiniello, Eleanor Gates Stuart, Jo Hollier, Luna Ryan, Jock Puautjimi and Valerie Kirk.

Mr Assistant Speaker, let me pause for a moment to acknowledge the work of Valerie Kirk in the context of the centenary tapestry, which I understand is going to be called the great centenary tapestry. Ms Kirk coordinated this work as a community collaboration extending over 18 months. The finished product now hangs in the Assembly's exhibition room and will formally be handed over to the Assembly next Wednesday, 4 December. All members have been invited and I encourage them to attend.

In the category of musicals, awards went to producer Jeff Wayne for *War of the Worlds* by Supa Productions; Anne Somes for Free Rain Theatre's production of *The Phantom of the Opera*; and to Dave Smith in the role of Jean Valjean in Canberra Philharmonic's production of *Les Miserables*.

In theatre: Chrissie Shaw received an award for *Bijou*; Jenna Roberts was honoured for her performance as Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; and Duncan Ley got a gong for directing *Under Milkwood* for Canberra Repertory Society. Canberra rep itself got an award for their production of *The Book of Everything*, and another award went to the production *Pea* performed at the Street Theatre during their Made in Canberra season.

In music, awards went to composer Sandra France and librettist Helen Nourse for their opera *From a Black Sky*; guitarists Matt Withers and Bradley Kunda also received awards; vocalist Leisa Keen; pianist and composer Adam Cook; and director of the Griffyn Ensemble, Michael Sollis. Awards also went to the Musical Offering, about which Mr Smyth spoke yesterday in the discussion on the matter of public importance, and to Mr Christopher Latham, as director of the Canberra International Music Festival, which Mr Smyth also discussed yesterday in his remarks.

The Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance gave two awards, as they have done for the past 20 years. Their green room performer of the year award went to Chrissie Shaw. That was her second gong for the evening. And their peer recognition award went to playwright Peter Matheson.

The award of the evening—that is, the Canberra artist of the year award—was given, well deservedly, to Christopher Latham. His citation reads:

For his visionary directing of the Canberra International Music Festival, particularly for his extraordinary ability to identify the archetypal features of Canberra's design and lifestyle, then to construct a festival program that complements those qualities and broadens the audience appeal. For fully

engaging young and emerging music performers in the Festival program, enabling them to progress their careers by working in collaboration with respected composers and performers.

I commend the Canberra Critics Circle, of which my senior adviser Clinton White is a member, as well as the MEAA and *Canberra City News* for honouring Canberra's talent in this way.

Mr Assistant Speaker, I want to finish by noting that there was a common theme through all the acceptance speeches. That was that Canberra is a great place to live and work as an artist. Many of the awardees remarked that if it were not for Canberra, they would not be working as they do, nor would they be receiving the accolades that these awards represent. We in Canberra are the beneficiaries of the tremendous talent that we cultivate here. I congratulate all the award winners.

Healthcare awards

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (6.39): I rise tonight to speak about the ACT "Quality in healthcare awards" that I attended on behalf of the Chief Minister on the 13th of this month. The annual awards night is one that is consistently well attended by the staff that work within the ACT healthcare system, whose exceptional work in innovation drive our healthcare system to be the best it can be.

On the night I discussed the popular story of Daniel Paton and Ashlea Hanson, who were married at Calvary hospital in July during the last days of Daniel's battle with cancer. The Calvary staff did an extraordinary job to put together a very memorable and moving ceremony in the space of about 18 hours. After Daniel passed away, Ashlea wrote to the Chief Minister and asked her to thank the staff on her behalf. She said:

My family cannot express the overwhelming feeling of gratitude we have for the medical, pastoral and administrative staff at Calvary who provided caring and compassionate support to Daniel and our families ... In addition to the nursing staff, I would like to express our thanks to all the ancillary staff such as the cleaning staff who offered many kind words and the catering staff who supplied sandwiches to the floor when we were outside Daniel's room.

This is one of the more high profile examples of the incredible lengths health and hospital staff will go to for people in their care.

On the awards, there were 18 finalists across the six categories. Each demonstrated a commitment to exploring innovative ways to enhance current systems and practices to improve patient outcomes and continue to increase the quality of care provided. The winners of each category were as follows: access and safety award, ACT Health Renal Service, "Use of regional citrate anticoagulation (RCT) in haemodialysis"; consumer participation award, neonatal intensive care unit, "Parents participation in clinical bedside rounds: a randomised cross-over control trial"; innovative models of care award, allied health advisor's office, "Extended scope physiotherapy: reducing patient waiting times and improving patient access to orthopaedic outpatient appointments and musculoskeletal ED services"; safety award, Community Care

Program, “Improving documentation of clinical interventions”; systems support award, “MyMeal: the right meal to the right patient at the right time: implementing an innovative and collaborative business solution”; and student of the year award, ANU Medical School, “ACT Health green hospital project: sorting it out”.

I would also like to take a moment to congratulate the allied health advisor’s office on being the overall winner this year. The Office of the Chief Allied Health Officer provides high-level policy advice to government and develops, as well as implements, policies relating to allied health professionals and their practices. The staff members in this office are not people you would normally meet on your visits to the healthcare system. However, they do exceptional work in that field through leadership and communication with those involved.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge several VIP members of the ACT healthcare community whose attendance was welcome. They included Professor Debora Picone, CEO of the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. Professor Picone set the tone of the evening with her amusing speech paying homage to the ACT health workforce and the achievements of a “service” town while inspiring the workforce. There was also Dr Peggy Brown, director-general; Ray Dennis from Calvary Health Care; Elizabeth Porritt, the General Manager of National Capital Private Hospital; Mr Ian Thompson, deputy director-general; Stephen Goggs, deputy director-general; Ms Elizabeth Trickett, Executive Director, Quality and Safety Branch; and Darlene Cox, chief executive of the ACT Health Care Consumers Association.

Congratulations to all of the finalists and winners for their consistent exceptional work in their respective fields. I wish them all the best for the future.

Centenary 2020 vision project

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (6.44): The centenary 2020 vision project has been run by the local sustainability group SEE-Change. It was a project that was piloted in 2011 and then rolled out over the past two years, coming to a conclusion over two days at the beginning of November. The centenary 2020 vision sustainability project asked Canberra’s young people to imagine a sustainable Canberra and to come up with their own proposals for how to achieve that future. The project aimed to engage the imagination of young people on new sources of energy, different modes of transport, new approaches to food and different ways of thinking about our world. Importantly, it was also about children and youth being optimistic about their future.

Students from 27 primary and high schools and colleges were involved in a study of one of 19 sustainability topics in the context of the broad question: how will Canberra reach the ACT government’s 2020 greenhouse gas emission reduction target of a reduction of 40 per cent on 1990 levels by the year 2020? At the 2020 vision parliament of youth on sustainability in November, students presented their ideas on how we can meet our emission reduction target and achieve a more sustainable Canberra. In preparation, college students were invited to write green papers on specific sustainability topics. And high schools and primary schools were invited to prepare one-page topic responses on a sustainability issue.

I was pleased to be involved in a panel discussion and take questions from the young people on sustainability topics. I can assure you they are some fairly tough questions. I was also happy to attend the 2020 vision competition awards ceremony on 13 November to help present awards and meet more of the young people and their families who had been involved.

I must say that both in the discussions at the youth sustainability parliament and at the awards, the calibre of work undertaken by the students was extremely high. Their work was very impressive, their passion for taking on the topics was impressive, and the support of the parents and the teachers was equally impressive. Overall it was a great project for the centenary year and also for the future of Canberra.

I would like to thank Anne Quinn, the 2020 project coordinator, and the rest of the SEE-Change team, for their work in bringing the project together and successfully engaging so many different schools across Canberra. The project was made possible with support from the ACT government via the Economic and Sustainable Development Directorate, the ACT government community centenary initiatives fund and bankmecu.

I know that this particular project is very much the brainchild of Bob Douglas, the founder of SEE-Change, and that it is something he has been working toward for some time. I would like to congratulate him for the success of the project and wish him all the best in his efforts to keep it going into the future, to build on the work that has already been done with Canberra's young people.

I would also like to take this opportunity to mention the work of Anne Clarke in her role as executive officer of SEE-Change. Anne is moving on to other things, but I would very much like to thank her for the hard work and dedication she has contributed to the role. I know that she will keep her connections with the inner north SEE-Change group and I wish her all the best in her future endeavours. But I particularly take this moment to thank the energy and commitment she has put into helping SEE-Change grow into what is a very effective and very popular grassroots community organisation.

Lu Rees Archives of Australian Children's Literature

MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (6.47): On Friday, 1 November I was the guest of the Deputy Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia, Justice John Faulks in his role as board chairman of the Lu Rees Archives. He introduced me to Dr Belle Alderman AM, Emeritus Professor of Children's Literature, who is the director of the Lu Rees Archives of Australian Children's Literature located in the Library of the University of Canberra.

The Lu Rees archives is a treasure trove initially started as a collection of biographical files about Australian children's authors and illustrators along with the collection of their books. Today the archives hold over 25,000 books featuring multiple editions, reprints and translations. There are over 420 research files and all major authors and illustrators, as well as critics and publishers. The University of Canberra Library

provides in-kind support such as facilities, cataloguing, printing, consumables and expertise.

Dr Alderman has been a major contributor as a volunteer and director of the Lu Rees archives over many years and she very much appreciates the over 130 volunteers who have contributed their skills and interest. But she is in need of more volunteers and financial support.

As Dr Alderman informed me, the Lu Rees Archives of Australian Children's Literature's vision is to collect, document and preserve Australian children's literature and in so doing to be the nation's most comprehensive children's literature archive in the country. The archive aims to provide educational programs, research and study fellowships, seminars, book renderings, workshops, exhibitions and other activities to engage communities of all ages.

In addition to our discussions, I received a detailed history of the Lu Rees archives from Dr Alderman and I would like to include some of that history tonight. In 1974 the commonwealth government granted \$500 to each branch of the Children's Book Council of Australia, CBCA. Lu Rees, who was then president of the ACT branch, proposed developing a collection of biographical files about Australian children's authors and illustrators, along with a collection of their books. All the branches agreed.

In 1979 to celebrate the International Year of the Child, Lu Rees proposed that the collection should also include translations. By then the collection had grown to some 1,000 books and 60 files. A more public location was needed to provide wider access. Dr Belle Alderman, a member of the ACT branch and academic of the Canberra College of Advanced Education, suggested the college as a home for the collection.

Victor Crittenden, the foundation librarian at the college, now the University of Canberra, accepted the collection in 1980 and on this retirement in 1986 the ACT branch of the Children's Book Council took over managing the collection.

In 1990 Dr Belle Alderman, Australia's first professor of children's literature, agreed to direct the collection. Upon her retirement in 2005 she took over managing the archives' development as its part-time director. Since then she has pursued an outreach program of events, enhanced the artwork and manuscript collections, developed collaborative ventures and created a strong volunteer base. She ensured the archives pursued its strategic plan and annual action plans. In 2011 the archives was independently assessed as unique and significant. Replacement value in 2012 was \$6 million.

The archives offers outreach services and specialises in serving academic, vocational and general needs and interests both within the university community and externally. Its clients come from all parts of Australia and overseas. They include tertiary staff and students, embassy and consular staff, researchers in a wide range of disciplines as well as writers, illustrators and publishers.

The archives staff have an in-depth knowledge of and experience in researching Australian children's literature. Their services include designing educational programs

for all ages, indexing Australian children's literature for an international database, creating guides to unpublished material and a range of other activities. There is no comparable collection or organisation within Australia. Its book collection equals that of the National Library and Australia's state libraries and includes 2,000 titles not held by any other Australian library.

Its collection of translations is one of Australia's strongest, including over 3,000 editions in 53 languages. The archives' funding group established in 2009 sources grants and seeks sponsorships. This has enabled the archives to digitise and preserve part of its collection and also to engage in festivals and exhibitions. Securing ongoing funding is the major priority of the board and lack of funds is a major impediment to Australian expansions.

While the archives has greatly benefited from partial funding by the Children's Book Council national body, small grants from the local branch and its own project grants, more is needed. I would encourage anyone with a love of books and an interest in children's literature to consider visiting the Lu Rees archives and perhaps consider making a bequest or donation to this very worthwhile collection—the Lu Rees Archives.

Young women's forum

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (6.52): I take this opportunity to report briefly on the young women's forum that I attended on Sunday and Monday this week as the ACT representative on the commonwealth women parliamentarians steering committee. This forum followed on from the very first successful forum in 2011 and the Northern Territory forum in 2010. Young women from every state and territory and Norfolk Island attended, as they did on the first occasion.

This time, due to other funds available to us to support the work with women in the Pacific, we were joined by five young women from Samoa, Cook Islands, Kiribati and Fiji. Additionally, sitting women members from Samoa, Bougainville, Cook Islands and Kiribati joined us along with a former woman member of the Papua New Guinea parliament. These particular funds were sourced through the Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnership and the UN Women Pacific Region Centre.

A young woman from the ANU, Hannah Wood, was the ACT's selected nominee. From my conversations with her over those two days I believe she gained much, both from the forum and from the contact and sharing with the other women. In fact, all of us found it extremely beneficial, I believe.

The forum is an opportunity for young women to meet and talk with parliamentarians from across Australia, including the federal government and also the Pacific region. It also gives them a chance to hear from women involved in lobbying, from the media, from the not-for-profit sector as well as young women in sport. It is the chance to test assumptions, participate in discussions and to debate critical questions.

I trust that the funds will continue to be available that will enable our young women leaders of the future from all around Australia and in the Pacific to be mentored,

encouraged and supported. I perceive a very real danger—for example, as demonstrated by the gender balance of the current federal government, of the Queensland parliament and also of parliaments across the Pacific nations—that we will go backwards in relation to the contribution of at least 50 per cent of our population being represented by women in our parliaments unless we can encourage and mentor our young women.

I would like to thank all my fellow members of the steering committee for their hard work, particularly the current chair, Lisa Baker, and the secretariat for their support and organisation of the forum. I would also like to thank the Women's College of Sydney University and the staff there for their support, the Hon Robyn Parker MP of the New South Wales parliament and the clerk of the New South Wales parliament for making us so welcome there on the second day.

I would also like to recognise that Monday was White Ribbon Day and as a survivor of domestic violence myself in a previous relationship I implore all of us to speak up and to say that violence against women and girls is never acceptable.

Canberra City Band

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (6.55): I rise this evening to pay tribute to a group which is well and truly part of Canberra's history—the Canberra City Band, which made its first public appearance in November 1928. The band has been involved in many of the moments to remember in Canberra's history. In 1926 the band played at Australia's first public Anzac Day service on Camp Hill at the rear of the Old Parliament House construction site, and it gave what it refers to as its first public concert at the newly constructed Albert Hall on 16 October 1928.

When Charles Kingsford Smith was on an Australian tour in 1928 following his trans-Pacific record-breaking flight, he landed in a paddock at Duntroon, and the Canberra City Band was there to greet him playing *For He's a Jolly Good Fellow*. During the great depression the band played concerts at Albert Hall to raise money for the Canberra Unemployment Relief Society.

The band was reinvigorated under Bill Hoffman OAM in 1947, who then held the baton for the band for 30 years. The band has also played at every Anzac day ceremony since 1948. The Canberra City Band were also there to play *God Save the Queen* on the day of Queen Elizabeth II's accession to the throne in 1952. In fact, they were the first band since federation to officially play *God Save the Queen* rather than *God Save the King*.

Just last week I attended the band's 88th anniversary concert at Albert Hall. It was a great and varied performance including vocalists and dancers—a group called the Jumptown Swing—and it showcased the talents of many local musicians. I had a wonderful toe-tapping time. I also note that the band have made it through to the national competition next year for the first time in a number of years, so congratulations and best of luck to them for that competition next year.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge those who are part of the band and who performed at the anniversary concert: Geoff Grey, Keith Helgesen, Michael Kamen, Malcolm Arnold, Paul Lavender, Paul Hart, Chris Claoue-Long, Amy Barker, John Wickerson, Michael Gill, Clare Banks, Stephanie Hillman, Mirja Mclean-Engstrom, Stefanie Watts, Sarah Pfeiffer, Nicola Kovacs, Anita Scherrer, Gerhard Reubel, Neil Woodhams, Keydan Bruce, Gerard Sloan, Brooke Gale, Grace Brayshaw, Dom Galloway, Peter Palmer, Mark O’Leary, Steve Weller, Liz Royal, Scott Levers, Tim Benson, Anna Doukakis, Brooke Zotti, Manning Fell, Simon Hukin, Michael Jackson—not that Michael Jackson—Mark Anderson, Simon Mitchell, Thomas Manley, Emily Pollnitz, Sandra Cruikshank, Lucy Merritt, Bob Wood, Sharon Robinson, Paul Goldsbrough, Jason Henderson, Bruce Smyth, James Baldwin, Jessica Moya, Paul Parolo, Bernie Evans, Sandra Nielsen, Allen Phillips, Rebecca Gibbs, Caitlin McAnulty, Stephanie Hally-Burton, Thomas Manley, Mami Iwashita, Sue Bailey, Caroline Christenson, Jono O’Rourke, Natalie Walker, David Johnson, LynJess Steward, Gemma Cook, Sarah Watson, Wang Woody, Jordan London, Carly Brown, Helen Rodgers, Jarod Esposito, Katherine Power, Julie Watson, Mike Butler, Jenny Geldart, John-Henry Te Hira, Mike Hauptmann, Tony Sillcock, Andrew Pengilley, Jason Henderson, Alicia Perritt, Vince Tee and Jenna Hinton. I guess that is why it is called a big band.

I pay tribute to all the band members and supporters who have been a part of this wonderful group for the past 88 years. It takes hours, indeed, years of practice, dedication and passion to be an ongoing part of our community in this way for so long. Congratulations to the Canberra City Band.

Capital Arts Patrons Organisation

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (6.59): The Capital Arts Patrons Organisation—CAPO—is a non-profit group of volunteers that has supported Canberra and regional arts for 30 years. CAPO is essentially about Canberra business people coming together to support our artists. Before coming to this place I had been a CAPO board member and had been attending CAPO events for many years. I was very pleased on Saturday night to present the 2013 fellowship at the 30th CAPO fine art exhibition and auction at the new venue of the Canberra Museum and Gallery.

In its 30 years CAPO has distributed over \$1.8 million in arts scholarships and awards raised from the Canberra business and arts communities. Goods and services donated to CAPO by Canberra businesses and artworks donated by Canberra artists are sold at the annual CAPO auction, and it is certainly an event I recommend to anyone who wants to survey the Canberra arts scene to see what is happening here and now.

The CAPO board brings together expertise, as I said, from business, the arts sector and marketing to support our arts community. The CAPO fellowship is CAPO’s most prestigious award and comprises a substantial grant enabling an artist to work independently on a work or body of works for an extended period. In 2011 Heather Burness used her grant to visit Yirrkala and continue a collaboration with Yolngu artist, Naminapu Maymuru White. Last year, Bob Boynes used his fellowship to

undertake new work as he continues his exploration of pictorial language to convey social and environmental concerns. Of course, I note that both these artists reside in my electorate of Ginninderra. Another claim for Belco pride!

The CAPO fellow for 2014 is glass artist Matthew Curtis. He intends to work collaboratively with Jock Puautjimi from the Tiwi Islands, incorporating Jock's designs in a series of glass objections where multiple and precisely moulded components are reheated and then fused as a complex whole.

CAPO is a wonderful bringing together of artists and appreciators of art who want to give something back to our artists and the Canberra community. It has proven success over the last 30 years, and I would recommend it to anybody.

Uriarra Village—proposed solar farm

MR WALL (Brindabella) (7.01): This morning I tabled in the Assembly a petition signed by 156 residents of the Uriarra Village. It sought to draw attention to the issue of the solar farm proposed to be built opposite their community. This petition is signed by more than 147 enrolled voters of the Uriarra Village, and signatures were only sought from residents of the village itself. The petition does not include any signatures from anyone who resides outside of the village. This was done on purpose to highlight the degree of support for the proposal by Uriarra residents and because Simon Corbell has publicly stated that only a “noisy minority” want the proposed solar farm switched to another site.

Madam Speaker, it must be said that the level of solid support for this view within the Uriarra Village is in contrast to the primary vote obtained by Simon Corbell in the 2012 territory election. In stark contrast, Mr Corbell failed to attract any more than 2.1 per cent of enrolled voters in Molonglo to vote for him. Just 1,909 voters out of the 108,194 eligible voters sought to see him in this job, yet he has the hide to accuse 100 per cent of Uriarra residents of being a noisy minority. To put that noisy minority into perspective, it equates to 7.7 per cent of Mr Corbell's primary vote.

I would like again to place on record the firm view that the current proposed site for this solar project is the wrong one. I maintain my support for the community in their endeavours to shift the site and continue to pursue every option available to them.

UnitingCare Christmas appeal

MS BERRY (Ginninderra) (7.03): I rise tonight to speak about the UnitingCare Christmas appeal. Each year UnitingCare Kippax collects and distributes gifts and Christmas hampers for more than 600 people across Canberra, and whilst it is nice at Christmas to be able to help out those in our community who are doing it tough, I believe the work UnitingCare Kippax does every day of the year to address the structural causes of poverty and social exclusion is just as important.

Last year I had the opportunity to distribute hampers with the team at UnitingCare. The people I met on the day are a reminder that there is real need in our sometimes-

described “affluent city”. The items UnitingCare distribute are not luxury goods; they are the very basics of a Christmas dinner—a chook, some canned vegies, chips or nuts, soft drinks, a few odds and ends and a box of shortbread.

The kind of poverty that means people are not able to provide the basics at Christmas involves many complex issues, but I know more needs to be done. UnitingCare Kippax plays a significant role in helping disadvantaged Canberrans identify and articulate the issues that impede their participation in our city. They also work with those people to overcome the structural disadvantage they experience and to achieve changes that will make their lives just a little bit easier.

The work UnitingCare Kippax does throughout the year means their Christmas hampers and gifts are much more than faceless charity or a quick fix; they are a chance for the whole community to continue their work for a fairer Canberra by ensuring that everyone has a chance to relax and enjoy the holiday season. All of the officers of the Assembly have been provided with a hamper bag to help with collecting useful donations, and I was very pleased this morning—(*Time expired.*)

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 7.04 pm.