



Debates

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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.

Construction industry—regulation

MR COE (Ginninderra) (10.02): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the importance of the construction sector in Canberra;
- (b) that the ACT Government's excessive fees, charges, taxes and regulations are crippling the building industry; and
- (c) that much residential development activity has moved across the border to Queanbeyan and surrounds; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) repeal Territory Plan Variation 306 which puts unreasonable demands on solar aspect, unit complexes and estate plans;
- (b) significantly reduce the lease variation charge which contradicts the Government's infill policy and serves as a disincentive for investment;
- (c) put a hold on any further increases in levies for portable long service leave;
- (d) significantly reduce commence and complete fees for commercial properties;
- (e) abandon the Government's monopoly of land supply and commit to a land supply model which is accessible for builders of all business sizes;
- (f) improve ACTPLA's performance by minimising their demands and improving decision times; and
- (g) simplify the Territory Plan so that it is more easily comprehended by those in the building industry and residents.

The opposition supports the construction sector, wants the sector to thrive and wants the government to remove the barriers and disincentives they have put in place which are stifling the sector and in turn stifling the ACT economy. The construction sector always has been and always will be a key part of the capital's economy. Of course,

100 years ago it was a need to construct a capital which brought thousands of people here, often living in shoddy conditions but committed to the cause and opportunity of making a better life for themselves, their families and future generations of Australians that would call Canberra home.

Through the early years of the federal parliament, the World War II years, the Menzies era and since, construction has played a vital role in creating wealth, opportunities, education and training and heritage for us all to enjoy. Today, construction, alongside education and the public service, are three of our biggest sources of employment and investment. However, it is construction that stands out as the largest industry free of government competition but, as I will discuss, certainly not free of government interference.

Madam Speaker, only the most strident libertarians would say that there is never a role for government regulation or oversight. In Canberra there is a role for the government to safeguard certain rights and standards but that interference must be done carefully and with the best interests of all in mind. I believe that the government does not have the best interests of employees, employers or Canberra at large in mind when they make it harder and harder to invest in the capital.

Whilst there are many costs involved with the administration of the federation, one of the benefits is the ability for decisions to be made closer to the people they will affect. We are fortunate to have an Assembly and territory bureaucracy so close to every resident of the ACT. However, we have a Labor-Greens administration which is not making the most of that position. Instead, we have a government which has been hijacked by two extreme members—Simon Corbell and Shane Rattenbury. Their view is to make construction harder in the ACT and to limit growth in housing and population.

In contrast, the Queanbeyan City Council is doing exactly what it should: competing. In our competitive federal model, different jurisdictions have the ability to target their rules and regulations to suit their requirements. The Queanbeyan City Council under Mayor Tim Overall is doing what they should: competing. They are presenting an attractive option for investment which is luring investment away from Canberra.

However, as well as they are competing, beating the ACT is not very hard. We have got a government that is actively driving investment away from Canberra and Queanbeyan is the beneficiary. I think it is a tragedy that there are Canberrans who want to live in Canberra but who cannot afford it due to the excessive fees, charges, rates and costs placed on property in the ACT. The Canberra Liberals will fight this and do whatever we can to make Canberra a better place to invest and a place more available for people to live.

Madam Speaker, my motion calls for several items that this government could implement to make investment here in the ACT more likely. One such item would be to repeal territory plan variation 306. This variation puts unreasonable demands on property in the ACT. It has made construction harder and it has brought about many perverse outcomes that I do not think would be the underlying intention of the variation. It has put undue regulations in place and made it far too difficult to comprehend the territory plan and what exactly its objective is.

My motion also calls on the government to significantly reduce the lease variation charge. Whilst most people in the industry do welcome codification of variations, I think the level at which the variations are set is far too high. In actual fact, in the vast majority of instances the lease variation charge is contrary to the government's stated policy of increasing infill and increasing density in our town centres or inner suburbs.

I think the government also needs to put a hold on further increases in levies for the portable long service leave. Whilst there are many people that will say portable long service leave is a good thing, the fact is if it is going to reduce employment, if it is going to make it harder for employers to put on people, it is not helping the industry at all, nor is it helping Canberra families.

My motion also calls on the government to significantly reduce commence and complete fees for commercial properties. Whilst I think it is fair to say that we do want to have a system in place which encourages people to construct and not land bank, the fact is that the commence and complete fee structure we have at the moment is stifling investment so much that construction is not getting off the ground at any time and nobody is better off as a result of the system in place at present.

The government also must abandon their monopoly of land supply. At present it is simply too hard for builders, and especially smaller builders, to obtain land and to put their skills into practice. At present every builder that I speak to will say that they have a waiting list of people who want to build, who want land, who want to construct a family house, who want to invest in the ACT but who are not able to do so because of the lack of available land here in the ACT. As I was saying earlier, it is no wonder so many people are moving across the border to the Queanbeyan City Council's jurisdiction because they are simply making land available, whether it be Googong, Tralee or elsewhere.

Part (f) of my motion calls on the government to improve ACTPLA's performance by minimising their demands and improving their decision times. I think every builder, architect and others involved in the property sector has a horror story about dealing with ACTPLA. Unfortunately, it is not just one or two horror stories. We have got horror story after horror story. ACTPLA should be there to serve the industry. Instead, it seems that at times they are there to serve themselves, to create work for themselves and often, it seems, to drag the chain and make it harder and harder to invest here in here in the territory.

Finally, part (g) in my motion calls on the government to simplify the territory plan. As it stands at the moment, the territory plan is largely an inaccessible document. It is a document which is largely incomprehensible. It is impossible to work out which parts apply and to what extent they apply. This is not good for investment in the ACT. Anybody who has looked at the territory plan would know that that is a cumbersome document which does not clearly articulate to what extent parts of the territory plan apply to their relevant circumstances.

As it stands at the moment, the territory plan is in effect thousands of pages long and totally jumbled in terms of its structure, totally jumbled in terms of its layout regarding residential, commercial and other works. It seems to me that the

inaccessibility of the territory plan means that it is leading to more errors in construction. Therefore, it is actually having a perverse outcome whereby because the document is inaccessible, because it is all but impossible to actually adhere to the territory plan through building works, people will have apathy towards the plan. Therefore, we are going to get more and more problems on building sites, more and more problems with plans and with constructions, because it is largely impossible to follow. Therefore, people will not even attempt to comply with all sections of the territory plan.

It is like legislation in this place. Whilst some legislation may be well intentioned, the fact is that if the legislation is not going to be enforced, all it does is restrict the good guys and the bad guys keep on going. The same might be said of the territory plan. Many clauses are targeted at people who will never comply, but unless they are actually enforced, all you are doing is restricting the people that will always try and do the right thing, the people that are not the problem builders in the ACT, the people that are actually trying to deliver the best product possible and in complete accordance with the rules set out in the territory plan.

The red tape and green tape is crushing the construction sector here in the ACT. The construction sector should be our ticket to a better economy. Instead, the construction sector is ailing. I am concerned that we have a government that does not want to see the construction sector flourish. I am concerned that this is because of the extreme ideological views of just a couple of members who have, in effect, hijacked cabinet and hijacked government. I urge members to support this motion and to make employment and growth through the construction sector more likely here in Canberra.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Sport and Recreation, Minister for Tourism and Events and Minister for Community Services) (10.13): The government will not be supporting Mr Coe's motion today. I understand he is desperately trying to deflect every possible bit of attention from his federal colleagues' attempts to mug the ACT economy. I understand that the impending downturn in the construction sector is wholly as a result of reduced expectations of demand, both in commercial and residential activity, as a result of the impending mugging of the ACT economy. It is clearly evident that, regardless of what regulatory environment you operate within, if there is no demand for your product because your economy has been mugged by the federal government then you cannot build anything. You need tenants; you need purchasers in order to be able to construct new buildings and new houses. If all of the demand is stripped out of your economy by the biggest employer in the city sacking 12,000 people and significantly reducing its expenditure in your economy, that is going to impact on the commercial property market and it is going to impact on the residential market.

This government, however, is keenly aware of the role the construction sector plays in the territory economy, and we are going to take actions to support and encourage the growth of the sector. We will do that by progressing a number of major projects: the north side hospital, capital metro and city to the lake, as well as our support for the redevelopment of the Woden bus interchange and a range of other centre expansions, the construction of a new ACT office block in Gungahlin and a range of other significant capital works across the territory to support land release.

We are also going to further stimulate activity in new residential building through expanding the eligibility for homebuyer concessions. We are continuing to cut red tape through the ongoing work of the red tape reduction panel and we are cutting taxes on property, particularly phasing out stamp duty, which is the biggest inhibitor for those wanting to enter into the housing market. It will provide a significant long-term boost by reducing this insidious tax, a tax the Canberra Liberals want to increase.

The government has several development fronts underway across the city and we are looking at several more. We have launched Riverview in west Belconnen, Lawson in Belconnen and South Quay in the Tuggeranong town centre in addition to the balance of suburbs in Gungahlin, and of course the new releases in the Molonglo Valley.

It is important to note that developments in Queanbeyan and the surrounds have always been part of this region's construction sector and have in the long run contributed about 10 per cent of total residential development in the Canberra/Queanbeyan area. In recent years this ratio has dipped somewhat—that is, Queanbeyan has supplied less than 10 per cent of the total residential component within this region. However, with the addition of new estates in Tralee and Googong, that will help Queanbeyan get back to their long-run average of supplying about 10 per cent of housing to this region.

Turning to the specifics of Mr Coe's motion in relation to variation 306, only nine months ago the Assembly endorsed variation 306, which targeted significant improvement in residential amenity and the sustainability of development and subdivision quality. The changes to the territory plan proposed with variation 306 came into effect on 5 July. This introduced new provisions that protected the solar access of residential blocks, allowed secondary residences or granny flats with single dwellings, protected the neighbourhood character of RZ2 zones and enforced cohesive and consistent requirements in relation to estate development.

These changes are now an integral part of the territory plan, and variation 306 as a separate document no longer exists. Removing variation 306 provisions from the territory plan would now, of course, require a new territory plan variation which would introduce a new level of uncertainty for industry—hardly an action that we would be supporting in the industry at this time. Such an action would remove the ability for home owners to build a secondary residence on their blocks to support family members or others looking for a different form of housing. This housing form also provides a new market for the construction industry, and already architects, designers and builders are responding to the interest expressed in secondary residences.

Following industry feedback on the previous residential subdivision code, this code was enhanced to lock in the requirements of the other entities. The new development code now contains all of the requirements a developer needs to comply with in relation to the design of a subdivision. This gives clear direction and confidence that the requirements will be consistent from development to development.

One of the most important changes introduced with variation 306 is the solar access provisions. This adjusted the previous building envelope requirements to better protect the solar amenity of neighbouring blocks. The government is not denying that the introduction of the solar envelope will result in changes to the design of houses, particularly in greenfield areas. In fact, that is clearly the purpose. Rather than being an unintended consequence, this was a deliberate decision to improve the solar access of residences to address the serious issues of energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.

I think everyone acknowledges there are very strong views on this subject, and particularly in the technical detail around the definition of “northern boundaries”. Minister Corbell has indicated that the government is engaging in further talks with industry around this particular issue.

In relation to the lease variation charge, the opposition would be aware that the Chief Minister has publicly foreshadowed utilising the provisions within the lease variation charge legislation for stimulus around particular public policy outcomes, particularly in relation to the provisions within the lease variation charge legislative framework around improved environmental outcomes. That is a focus for the government. A further announcement around adjustments and changes to lease variation charge provisions will be made public shortly.

In relation to portable long service leave, the government will not commit to putting on hold future increases to the construction industry portable long service leave levy. Any proposal to increase the levy comes to the government as a recommendation from the Long Service Leave Authority Board and is based on independent actuarial advice about ensuring the ongoing viability of the scheme. It is important to note that this board is made up of independent members as well as members who represent employer and employee organisations. Whilst the government is always concerned about the cost to industry, it is obligated to fully consider any recommendation made by the board and in doing so must balance any increase in costs with the ongoing viability of the scheme.

In relation to commence and complete fees, the Chief Minister has recently announced that the government is considering changes to how the system operates to ensure that the policy framework is robust, responds to economic drivers, importantly, delivers equitable outcomes for individuals, companies and the community but, critically, also encourages timely development. Further announcements on that will be made in the near future.

In relation to the accusation of a government monopoly on land supply, no such monopoly exists. The Land Development Agency is currently looking at a variety of options to supply land directly to builders, including targeted belts with parcels of three to 10 dwelling sites for the smaller builders and many englobo sites of around 300 dwellings for larger builders. The LDA has held a series of meetings in recent weeks with the MBA, the HIA and the Property Council to determine the most appropriate process for these future releases. This type of approach, will give smaller and medium sized building firms better access to work in the territory.

In relation to the ACT Planning and Land Authority's performance, in the 2012-13 financial year ACTPLA performed better than the accountability indicator of 75 per cent of development applications determined within time. During the same period the median processing time for development applications was 30 working days. There are some councils in Sydney and Melbourne that take to five to seven times that period—so six to nine months—to deal with matters that ACTPLA deals with within 30 days. Further information on the development application is only requested where it is necessary to make a decision for the development application, and this should not be seen to be demanding. It is worth noting that in 2012-13 the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal upheld ACTPLA's original decision on 16 of the 17 matters that were reviewed.

In relation to the simplification of the territory plan, the review of the territory plan through such tools as variation 306 is an ongoing process. It aims to balance the requirements for an easy to use planning document that provides clear guidance on development within the territory whilst also being comprehensive enough to cover all possible development types and forms. The territory plan provides guidance on development across the city. These changes introduced through variation 306 mean it is better suited to responding to the needs of the community and industry today and, importantly, into the future. Variation 306 responded to submissions received by industry and by the community to ensure the final variation is legible and provides for the needs of the users of the document.

The government are committed to the strength and sustainability of the territory's economy. We are also committed to the territory's construction sector. Through the policies and programs I have outlined we will continue to support and work with the construction sector to contribute not only to the long-term success of the sector but of the ACT economy as a whole.

MR WALL (Brindabella) (10.24): It is ironic that the Treasurer stands here today and says the downturn in the construction industry is as a result of the federal government mugging the territory when largely the planning controls and the restrictions that are prohibiting and strangling the construction industry in this territory are run and administered by this government and many of which are creations of this government. Need I mention fees such as the commence and complete fees? In my electorate alone they are preventing the construction of a public swimming facility and a bulk-billing medical practice simply because these fees are out of tune with what the building and construction sector can afford at the moment.

The government claim the fees are to prevent land banking, yet at a time in the economy where commercial land values are going backwards and many purchases of commercial land in recent years now have negative equity in the property, developers who are unable to find tenants have been slugged with fines in excess of several hundreds of thousands of dollars simply because of the claim that they have been banking their land. It is unconscionable to expect a builder to take a hit on the value of the land, take another hit when government says, "You've taken too long to build," but still build the facility if it is going to grow the economy, grow the community and

provide benefit into the future through the creation of jobs in the construction phase and then once the facilities are established as well as providing, in my electorate particularly, much-needed-community accessible facilities.

Mr Coe's motion also talks to some of the issues in dealing with ACTPLA and the overcomplicated regulations. As many members in here would be aware, my time prior to entering the Assembly was spent in the construction industry running a small business locally. I remember a time when mum and dad home owners could put in their own development plans and applications in a simple, straightforward, easy to understand process. There was help available from the government, should they need it, to meet the criteria. When the introduction of this new incarnation of the territory plan came into effect in around about 2007, it went from a process that was easily accessible to most in the community to one that now requires specialised consultants to prepare and submit planning applications.

Not only has the planning system now become out of reach of most Canberrans to work their way through themselves independently but it now comes at a significant cost for a simple project. I will use the example of a deck and a carport—in excess of \$5,000 just to do the planning and assessment to get the plans approved, not to mention the build cost. In some instances the planning cost is in excess of half the cost of the actual construction. That is an illustration of a planning system that has overstepped its mark and is overreaching simply for a revenue grab.

The impact this is having on the ACT economy from a small business perspective is quite significant. Just in the last calendar year over 50 businesses based in the ACT that were in the construction or construction-related industries have closed their doors or gone into administration. That is not a sign of a federal government that has recently come in; these issues have been long established and have been running for quite a significant time under your watch. That is 50 businesses, not to mention the associated jobs and the debts that they may have had owing to other suppliers and the impact they will have flowing on to the future. The loss of employment and the loss of businesses as a result of the stifled planning and construction system are simply not acceptable.

Mr Coe's motion has significant merit and provides opportunities and solutions to open the way for construction, gives the territory an opportunity to insulate itself from the impact of some of the changes that are happening at the federal level and will ensure that the construction industry continues to grow and flourish into the future in a better way than it has in the past. I urge everyone to support the motion.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (10.29): On behalf of the Greens, I will not be supporting this motion today. I actually disagree with the substance of quite a few of the points that Mr Coe has raised. It is a grab bag of issues that have been cobbled together to try and paint a particular narrative. Whilst some of them warrant some discussion, a number of them are simply wrong.

It is interesting to think about what is impacting on the construction sector in the ACT. I was listening to Mr Wall's comments and thinking about where the industry is at, where it has been in the last few years and how much work it has got on. I talk to a lot

of construction sector people around town and ask them how it is going. A lot of them say they have had a strange 12 or 18 months because there was nervousness about the outcome of the federal election. People simply did not know which way it was going to go, so there has been a built-in hesitancy. That is not going so much to Mr Barr's comments, but is just a general observation, a non-political observation that people have been making around the fact that the federal election itself, the sheer uncertainty of it, has caused some downturn. But the other day I chatted to somebody in the building industry and said, "How is it going?" He said, "We are slowing down a bit, but we are coming to a point that is probably a long run average." He said: "The last decade has been crazy. There has been so much work on. It has been abnormal. It has been above the long run trend, and it has been hard to find workers."

So there are very different views out there about what the situation is in industry. We need to not be too general and say, "It is all the government's fault because of this, this and this."

Let me turn to some of the specifics in Mr Coe's motion. When it comes to variation 306, I think it is well known that the ACT Greens advocated for the solar access provisions that were brought forward in variation 306, protecting solar access rights for new dwellings. The solar provisions have been supported by many in the industry who design and build solar passive homes. We know that we can build houses to capture valuable sunlight. These provisions simply ensure that we do not build homes that block the sunlight of the neighbours.

Other benefits of DV306 include increasing the size of secondary dwellings, for example, making it easier for people to build granny flats, which also aids the increase in the diversity of the housing stock in our city. There has been a lot of debate about the detail of draft variation 306, and I agree that there were some unintended consequences, which the government has sought to address through further technical amendment. I was concerned recently about changes to the definition of "northern boundary" which would have come into effect through the recent amendment, TA2013-12, and was pleased that the government took community concerns on board and delayed the introduction of that change. Some of the technical amendments that have gone through have addressed some of the glitches, such as aligning the solar envelope with existing building setbacks.

The provisions in 306 came into early effect in the suburb of Wright. It is often the one that people cite as the example of poor design outcomes, such as houses being built into the side of hills and houses in the shape of wedding cakes. Let us remember that the solar access provisions do not force these outcomes; they simply prescribe a solar envelope. No-one is forcing people to build the biggest houses they possibly can within the available space, but that certainly seems to be the prevailing trend.

It is again important to reflect on the fact that that is not what everybody is doing in the community. Members may have noticed a letter to the editor in the *Canberra Times* just a few days ago, on 17 February, from a resident of Wright, who wrote:

... I am in full agreement with Caroline Le Couteur ... It would be a great shame for the laws to be rolled back. They could be a little more flexible but it has been a shameful thing that Canberrans/builders have been allowed to build homes with no thought for solar passive designs ...

He goes on to say in his letter to the editor:

We have built a “wedding cake” design, which we prefer to the “office block” style of homes, where the gutters almost touch. Our home lets the neighbours enjoy solar access, and we have the joy of winter sun warming our home.

We don't use airconditioning and are coping well with ceiling fans in the heatwave. It is a pleasure to live in and we rest easy knowing we are using less energy.

That letter to the editor absolutely underlines what is trying to be achieved here: if you are thoughtful about design, you can have a perfectly comfortable, quite enjoyable home without necessarily having a detrimental impact on your neighbours. As to the comments about the office block versus the wedding cake, I suggest they are a matter of taste for individuals. Nonetheless, the point remains the same.

I note Mr Coe's comments about the territory plan. I do not think anybody would argue that it is not complex. It is true that we have a planning system which is based on compliance with rules and regulations, sometimes at the expense of outcomes we want to achieve. I think it really comes down to the resourcing within ACTPLA, to have adequate staffing. I would welcome any moves to provide improved capacity to assess applications and have some flexibility in matching compliance with good design outcomes.

I note the comments Mr Barr made about the performance of the agency against the benchmarks it achieves in other jurisdictions. They are comments that are well worth taking on board as well.

When it comes to the lease variation charge, it is premised on the idea that developers should pay for the rights they are being granted by the community. The Greens very much agree with this principle, and believe there should be a balance between commercial realities and achieving a fair return for the community.

Greens' amendments to the Planning and Development (Lease Variation Charges) Amendment Bill in 2011 were introduced to encourage development in strategic locations such as transport corridors and to encourage sustainable designs through exemptions and reductions to charges to act as a financial incentive for developments with sustainability outcomes. I think that is the way it should work. There needs to be a return to the community. If somebody is changing a lease purpose clause, it should not just be about windfall gains; there should be acknowledgement that the community should get a return from that. But the amendments we brought forward in 2011 were also about saying, “Let us be strategic about this and acknowledge that where there are particular benefits that we want, a discount is quite relevant.”

Let me turn to the issue of portable long service leave. I do not support Mr Coe's call for a hold on any increases to the portable long service leave levy. In fact, I remain rather concerned the Liberal Party continually fails to support the concept of portable long service leave. And I am sure we all remember that they are also on the record as attacking the concept of long service leave generally; they are on the record as saying that long service leave schemes are "a pain to industry".

I am pleased to say that I support long service leave, and I also support portable long service leave for those in the industries that need it. There are some industries characterised by high levels of brief employment and mobility. Someone working in Canberra as, for example, a cleaner might spend 20 years doing the same job but move between different employers. Usually these changes would prevent that person being able to receive long service leave entitlements, but portable long service leave ensures that such persons still receive long service leave that they are entitled to.

As Mr Barr pointed out, the scheme is managed by the Long Service Leave Authority board. Just last year, we passed legislation to improve the administration of those schemes. The board uses actuarial data to recommend appropriate long service leave levies, and it regularly reviews the levies applied to the various industries. Denying any increase to the levies, even though they may have been examined and recommended by the authority board, would simply take away entitlements from workers who need and deserve them. Why would we say that people who work in building and construction, or cleaning, security or the community sector, should be denied appropriate long service leave? And I wonder how long this moratorium on long service leave levies was to stay in place. Is that a suggestion for a permanent moratorium or something rather less?

When it comes to commence and complete fees, we debated that in this place in October last year, when Mr Wall brought forward his motion calling on the Treasurer to waive all commence and complete fees for the Kingswim centre in Calwell. Members will recall that I put forward an amendment at that time calling on the government to review the scheme and to report to the Assembly by the end of this financial year. That was agreed to.

I agree that there are issues with the scheme. It was intended to prevent land banking, but we have seen cases where developers legitimately get caught in delays. I will be interested to see the report when it is tabled in June and whether the scheme meets the purpose for which it was set up while still giving a good outcome for the businesses that are operating in good faith but are subject to delays for various reasons. With that in mind, I think debate about reducing the fees or any changes to the scheme should wait until that review is available. That is why we have set it up—to take a detailed look at it, rather than simply taking a pre-emptive move as this motion suggests we should do.

I guess that what Mr Coe's motion is getting at overall, and he has certainly made this clear in his comments, is a sense of overregulation and interference. I often hear concerns raised about excessive government regulations in relation to development in various places. I can understand that people do get frustrated at times, but at the same time most of these regulations are there for a good reason, such as ensuring building safety and quality.

Over the past decade we have heard many complaints from all sorts of constituents—I am sure members of the Liberal Party have received these emails and letters as well—about shoddy building construction. It is precisely these government regulations that we need to ensure are in place to prevent this. They talk about people who have moved into new buildings where the developing company has perhaps disappeared, there is no remedy available, and people are facing very significant financial bills to repair the shoddy work that was done in the construction process. These are the sorts of things that we need to guard against, and that is the role for government.

One process the government is currently undertaking is to review the design standards which all developers need to adhere to—to ensure that they are best practice in delivering sustainability long into the future and also that they align with the territory plan.

This piece of work is being done with red tape reduction in mind. We are aiming for a high level of infrastructure development while at the same time creating a clear and certain environment so that developers know clearly what the rules are. TAMS are working closely with industry stakeholders to ensure that this review takes their views into account. I have had the feedback from people in the industry, and they have raised legitimate concerns in places. That is why, certainly in this case, my agency is working with them to identify where we can remove some of those restrictions or ease the way for people to get things done more readily whilst at the same time ensuring we get the outcomes that all Canberrans need and want.

Having made those observations, I think it is quite clear there are a number of elements of this motion that I disagree with. I will not be supporting it today.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (10.40), in reply: Madam Speaker, in closing, let me start by saying that we have heard an interesting admission from both Minister Barr and Minister Rattenbury. That admission is that for almost each of these points there are serious problems. The government has said that there are problems with territory plan variation 306 and that there are problems with the lease variation charge. There are problems with the commence and complete fees, there are problems with ACTPLA and there are problems with access to the territory plan. Each of these is a baby of this government, Madam Speaker. Each of these is a problem that this government created.

It is all very well for Mr Rattenbury to come and say: “There are some issues here. We are going to take a considered review. We are going to take our time. We are going to get it right.” The fact is that all these problems were foreshadowed before each of these problems was created.

With regard to variation 306, all the problems which we have seen today, all the problems which have been touted as needing to be fixed through technical amendments, were foreshadowed in this place by the Canberra Liberals, the Institute of Architects, the Institute of Landscape Architects, the Property Institute, the Property Council, the Planning Institute, the HIA, the MBA and others. All these problems with variation 306 were very clearly articulated before variation 306 came into effect. The government said that they had consultation, but it was not consultation. As put by one witness to the committee inquiry, it was a talkfest. The decisions were made beforehand.

With regard to the lease variation charge, these are problems that the opposition has been talking about for years. Minister Barr can try and say that this is a Tony Abbott problem, but these are problems that we have been talking about in the Assembly for years. Only now are they starting to flag that there might be some changes coming.

With regard to commence and complete fees, there is a review happening, but again these are things that we have been talking about for years. This is hardly a Tony Abbott creation; this is hardly a federal coalition problem. This is a problem created by this government. It has its genesis with this Labor government.

ACTPLA does have real performance issues. Mr Rattenbury in effect admitted that and said they needed to be resourced better. I have got a lot of sympathy with ACTPLA staff, because trying to assess some of these DAs based on the territory planning that we have at the moment is very tricky. I think we owe it to ACTPLA staff to simplify the territory plan to make their job easier and to make planners' jobs easier. Therefore we might actually get some intended outcomes here.

As it stands at the moment, the plan is so complex that when a builder submits their plan it is hit and miss as to whether they will get the green light, the red light or, as happens so often, the amber light, which means they just wait and wait and wait. That is not good enough. There is, of course, a cost to waiting—the cost of capital, the cost of missed opportunities and other costs. All the problems and uncertainty which we have in the building sector—whether it be through variation 306, the lease variation charge, commence and complete fees, ACTPLA's performance, the government's inoperative land supply or the complexity of the territory plan—are problems of this government's creation. They all have their genesis here.

Madam Speaker, we owe it to all Canberrans, and we certainly owe it to those employed in the construction sector, to make it easier for them to do their business here in the ACT. I urge members of this place to support our motion.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 6

Mr Coe
Mr Doszpot
Mrs Dunne
Mr Hanson

Ms Lawder
Mr Wall

Noes 7

Mr Barr
Ms Berry
Dr Bourke
Ms Burch

Ms Gallagher
Ms Porter
Mr Rattenbury

Question so resolved in the negative.

Environment—proposed nature conservation agency

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (10.48): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the current structure of the ACT Government, where conservation functions are divided between the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate and the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate;
- (b) the importance of our local environment to the wellbeing of the people of the ACT;
- (c) that the Assembly voted on 20 March 2013 for the Government to establish a single nature conservation agency; and
- (d) the support for a single nature conservation agency from environmental organisations in the ACT; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to establish a nature conservation agency, located within the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate, which will be responsible for all conservation services in the ACT by the financial year beginning on 1 July 2014.

A single nature conservation agency is about creating an administrative structure that can deliver improved nature conservation outcomes through integration of all parts of biodiversity policy and research. It is about providing the best structure to protect and manage our environment. We want the best resourced service delivery. We want coordination of policy and legal requirements. We want a department that is on the same page when it comes to monitoring and recording. Overall, we want better environmental outcomes. These appear to me to be things that all of us in this place want irrespective of what side of politics we are on. So it makes me wonder why action has not yet taken place. On March 20 last year a motion was passed in the ACT Legislative Assembly which stated:

That this Assembly notes:

- (a) the ACT Labor-Greens Parliamentary Agreement commits the ACT Government to establishing a single conservation agency to achieve better integration of biodiversity policy planning, research and management; and
- (b) implementation of the proposal is currently under consideration by government.

Madam Speaker, 482 days have passed since that parliamentary agreement was signed, and almost a year has passed since the motion was agreed to in the Assembly which confirmed this proposal was under consideration by the government. Yet there has still been no action. Why has it taking so long?

I am sure everyone can see that the sooner this occurs the better it is—for the ministers, for the public, for the environment and for stakeholders. What this motion today simply says is that by 30 June, the end of the financial year, 126 days away, the government will implement what they have already agreed on. This is one of the very rare policies which would have tripartisan support in this place.

Not only is it supported here, Madam Speaker, but stakeholders such as conservation and environmental groups have also indicated that this is their preferred model. It should be relatively straightforward. I ask members to see that we all have a chance to show our commitment to the environment, to support the rangers and other staff and to ensure we have stronger environmental outcomes.

On March 20 last year Minister Rattenbury stated, “Mr Smyth’s suggestion that it should have been done by now is, I think, unwarranted and not in fact the case.” So I ask Minister Rattenbury: what about now? It is another 344 days into the term. It has been almost 500 days since the parliamentary agreement was signed. Why have we still seen no action on this agreement? Minister Rattenbury said that he looked forward to an announcement in the near future about how this was going to be most appropriately delivered. I would have thought “near future” would have been by now or close to it. Mr Hanson stated in the same debate last year that the government would drift if no specific time frame was set and that we would be waiting months or even years for action to be taken. Sadly, this appears to be the case.

I do not want to see another motion passed which simply acknowledges once more the Labor-Greens agreement. We want actions and outcomes. It is a reasonable motion. It supports effective and efficient governance to improve conservation management. It gives a reasonable time frame and I look to members for their support to make it happen so that we can stop talking about it, make it happen for the benefit of all, and improve our environmental management. I commend the motion.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Health and Minister for Higher Education) (10.52): The government will not be supporting Ms Lawder’s motion this morning, although I do welcome the opposition’s interest in and support for measures to bring together the ACT’s nature conservation functions.

I think that when you reflect on the debate that was had in March last year, a number of the comments made by contributing members still stand. I think there is agreement that a single conservation agency and how that is shaped needs detailed consideration on a range of issues, and we are continuing this work. Our work on it needs to be guided by a clear set of principles and benefits. The timing for administrative and structural changes in the way we administer the public service, and in this case the nature conservation area, are at the discretion of the Chief Minister and not the Assembly.

On the day of the debate back in March, I think Mr Rattenbury pointed out that the opposition has itself had a couple of different positions on this. They have argued that a single agency should both be in ESDD and in TAMS. This illustrates that there are

merits to both approaches. So rather than to add to speculation, we will continue to look at this from an evidence-based point of view, from the options to determine the best course of action to ensure strong nature conservation principles and also efficient, effective and streamlined delivery of services to the community through the ACT public service.

The task brings together a large array of expertise in environmental management across the ACT. We would need to make sure we get the best result. That means shaping the organisational structure and functions of the agency around the key objectives of integration, efficiency and environmental outcomes. As I think Minister Corbell said in March, it would be irresponsible to rush the establishment of an agency by setting an arbitrary time frame or pre-determining the best organisational arrangement and hosting directorate.

I am at the moment, as I look to appoint a sixth minister, taking this opportunity to look at administrative structures right across the ACT public service. I do not think it is the best way of dealing with changes to the administrative orders to change them a bit here and then a few months later change them a bit there. The approach I have taken is that this work falls into the broader work we are looking at across government because there are, outside the environment and nature conservation, other areas in which I believe some administrative changes need to be made.

We would need be doing all of that work at the same time led by the head of the service, the newly appointed Kathy Leigh. I have already had a number of meetings with her about those broader structural changes. This is something that the government is looking at. It is one of the very few prerogatives of the Chief Minister. One of the perks of the job is actually to set the administrative orders in consultation with my colleagues. I do welcome Ms Lawder's interest in and support for ensuring that we get the best arrangements in place, whatever model that may be, how that is structured and who may be the host of those functions.

I will continue my discussions with Mr Rattenbury. We meet frequently to discuss all matters relating to the parliamentary agreement. I think both of us remain very committed to ensuring that we deliver on the commitments that were outlined in that agreement with an overlay of more practical implementation being at the forefront of our minds. Do I need to seek leave, Madam Speaker, to move the amendment circulated in my name?

MADAM SPEAKER: No, just move the amendment. It is only one amendment.

MS GALLAGHER: I move the amendment circulated in my name:

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

"notes:

- (1) the debate in the Assembly on 20 March 2013 in relation to the government's consideration of establishing a single conservation agency to achieve better integration of biodiversity policy, planning, research and management;

- (2) the implementation of the proposal continues to be currently under consideration by government; and
- (3) that the timing for administrative changes is at the discretion of the Chief Minister.”.

The amendment notes that the debate in the Assembly occurred, that the implementation of the proposal continues to be considered by government and that the timing for any administrative changes is at the discretion of the Chief Minister. But I will tell the Assembly that I am looking to align that with the appointment of the sixth minister.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Housing, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and Minister for Ageing) (10.57): I will make my remarks brief. I largely want to observe that, as is obviously the case, I still support the notion of a single conservation agency. Ms Lawder touched on some of the reasons why that is a good idea. Certainly in the debate last year I spoke about the relative benefits of it. Having a single or integrated conservation agency will deliver better outcomes for the environment. It will see a better sharing of expertise and, I believe, better use of resources. That is why it is in the parliamentary agreement. That is why, when I spoke with the Labor Party about that, we agreed that this is the right outcome.

It has taken some time and some discussion, but it is also quite a complicated conversation. What I can assure members of is that even when staff are currently formally sitting in different agencies, I know that there is a strong working relationship there. That the staff from, for example, Parks and Conservation Service in the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate as well as the staff in Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate speak regularly. I note they have close working relationships.

I think we can improve that and we can achieve that through a single conservation agency, but there is work going on to work out what that will best look like and to delineate some of the responsibilities. I have seen some of the work that has been done on that. It is actually very detailed. I am comfortable with the Chief Minister’s view that she has just put that this will be resolved as part of the realignment of administrative arrangements with the appointment of the sixth minister.

I think it does make sense to do these things in one go rather than by some sort of trickle effect. So I am supportive of that view that she has just put. I look forward to the Assembly being provided with an update on exactly what this is going to look like, but I will be supporting the Chief Minister’s amendment today.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lawder, are you rising to speak on the amendment, to close the debate, or both?

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (10.59): Both, Madam Speaker. As the Chief Minister mentioned, we all support the principle of a single nature conservation agency. As

Mr Rattenbury has pointed out, it has taken some time. I refer back to the debate in March last year and would like to point out that in less time than we are asking for this to be created, the government has created the Capital Metro Agency, including hiring staff, setting up a website, and issuing a whole lot of material associated with that. If they had wanted to do this back after the debate in March last year, they certainly could have done so. That was well before we had the discussion about the sixth minister.

Having said that, I welcome the Chief Minister and Minister Rattenbury's reaffirmation of their commitment to a single nature conservation agency. I reiterate that the Canberra Liberals support that and that many of our stakeholders support that. At this point we will support the government's amendment, taking very seriously their commitment to look at the single nature conservation agency in line with the appointment of the sixth minister.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Employment—government support

MS BERRY (Ginninderra) (11.01): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that employment in the ACT has grown to an all-time high of 213 300 positions in January 2014 from 172 600 positions in October 2001;
- (b) the recent growth in the Australian Public Service from 56 648 Canberra based positions in 2007 to 65 353 in 2013;
- (c) the ACT unemployment rate in January 2014 was 3.8% and the lowest in the country;
- (d) the impacts that 12 000 job cuts from the Australian Public Service will have on the economy;
- (e) the infrastructure investments of the ACT Government in the 2013 2014 Budget; and
- (f) the ongoing work of business, unions and government to strengthen the ACT economy; and

(2) calls on the Government to continue to:

- (a) invest in infrastructure projects that provide high quality employment opportunities in the ACT;
- (b) work with business and unions to create new economic and employment opportunities;

- (c) support the growth of key sectors such as education, information and communication technology and professional services;
- (d) support the growth of exports from the Territory; and
- (e) continue to work with local business to seek transitional support from the Federal Government to offset the negative impact caused to the ACT economy by cuts to the Australian public sector.

Around the country we are witnessing a decline in employment opportunities, whether they are in Victoria or South Australia, through the pending withdrawal of Ford, Toyota and Holden, or Qantas reportedly looking to dismiss 5,000 workers. There are employment and economic challenges right across Australia. Here in Canberra, the federal government has promised to cut the jobs of many thousands of Australian public servants. Whilst they argue the reduction will be through natural attrition, nonetheless, a decline in employees will have a direct impact on the ACT economy and community. The 1996 experience of radical cuts, and the associated downturn of our economy, is an experience that is still fresh in Canberra's collective consciousness.

It is in this context that I speak to the motion on the importance of protecting jobs in the ACT. As I have said before in this chamber, defending jobs is not just a matter of political or economic expediency. In Australia, the best way for a person or household to participate fully in our society is to be in work. This government has a proud record of proactive policies and responsible budgeting to support jobs. First and foremost, we have ensured that the ACT economy has grown strongly. Economic growth in the ACT has remained robust, despite the challenges posed by the commonwealth's contraction.

The ACT government will facilitate employment, both as an employer and as a driver of economic growth. The ACT government is committed to supporting sustained growth and development of the ACT economy. We will work with the region, businesses, institutions and the wider community to increase economic opportunity and activity. Prudent financial management, a commitment to reform, as well as investment in our people and technology, will create the right conditions to support business and consumer confidence in the local economy and, therefore, create jobs.

The ACT government is facilitating jobs growth in the ACT by supporting a connected, technology-savvy city that takes advantage of strong ICT skills, strengthening links with the surrounding region to drive better services, economic growth and opportunity, building on the groundbreaking tax reforms and achieving a sustainable financial future for the ACT, and supporting the development of emerging enterprises, entrepreneurs and sectors.

We need to position Canberra to attract business, tourism and investment by fostering growth, economic diversification and job creation, attracting foreign investment and skilled and business migrants, building on the legacy of the Canberra centenary by investing in events that provide economic benefits to the city, promoting Canberra as a place to visit and to do business, and growing our export capabilities, including partnering with our universities.

We will promote excellence in education by attracting students, researchers and academics to the city and its world-class education institutions by promoting Canberra as a destination of choice for domestic and international students, enhancing productivity through targeted vocational education and training opportunities, continuing to foster high performance and achievement in our schools through implementing the national education reforms, providing Canberrans every chance to learn, and being a city renowned for excellent educational institutions.

We will deliver infrastructure to support future growth by investing in sustainable and adaptable infrastructure, getting value for money by optimising the use of our existing assets and exploring innovative partnerships for future infrastructure, continuing long-term infrastructure planning to support sustained economic growth of the city, and building the capital metro and developing the central land corridor.

Joblessness imposes not just an economic cost on the person and their family; it has an emotional and social cost. Keeping people in work always helps alleviate pressure on community services and charity organisations, and on people seeking help from government. A strong employment base helps create a vibrant city. More people in work means more economic activity—more people spending in our local businesses, using services, visiting restaurants and shops. Meanwhile, joblessness imposes a high social cost—on the person, on their sense of self-worth, their family and their connections to their community.

A full-time job is one of the most dependable pathways out of poverty. The ACT has high participation rates and low unemployment compared to other jurisdictions. However, there are still people in the ACT who are long-term unemployed and find it difficult to access entry-level jobs. Education and training are important for employment outcomes. The targeted assistance strategy from 2012 reports that people with these higher level qualifications have far better employment outcomes and a more positive economic return.

The commonwealth government is responsible for job services, which work with people to match them with jobs, and the ACT government runs many of the support services used by people who are unemployed. Finding ways to coordinate across jurisdictions will continue to improve the services that assist people to find work. The ACT government has trialled a coordinated approach with the home-to-work initiative using commonwealth innovation fund funding that showed the benefits that can be achieved and also demonstrated people's commitment to finding work.

The *Detecting Disadvantage in the ACT* report, which uses 2006 census data, shows that the ACT has diverse suburbs, with highly advantaged households in close proximity to highly disadvantaged households. This means that disadvantage that comes with not having a job may not be visible in the ACT and poses service delivery challenges. Understanding the implications of job losses and the implications for members of our community will continue to focus this government's efforts in developing support measures for members of our community that require assistance.

The ACT government, through its annual budget, supports a range of initiatives which contribute to the economic activity of the ACT economy. The last ACT budget allocated \$1.7 billion for capital works in the territory. This is funding the new facilities such as roads, schools and health infrastructure that our community needs. It is not only creating thousands of construction jobs but also bringing health and education jobs into the suburbs as new schools and health centres are built. This spending has helped maintain employment and economic activity in the face of the commonwealth's contraction.

In the last budget we cut payroll tax. The ACT now has the most competitive taxation regime for small and medium sized businesses. Due to the cut to payroll tax, the ACT has the highest payroll tax threshold in the nation and is the lowest taxing jurisdiction for businesses with a payroll of up to \$4.7 million. Importantly, businesses can now employ more people before paying tax.

Our business development strategy, "growth, diversification and jobs", is helping the private sector to create jobs by providing targeted support, programs and funding to local businesses. The 2012-13 budget included \$20 million for innovative programs to further boost our private sector. Initiatives include supporting early stage business innovation, building new funding for clean technology and sustainability oriented companies and creating a program to act as a single portal for trade development activities. In addition, we are making it easier for business to move through the processes to set up or expand their operations here. All these initiatives will support the ACT private sector and help it to grow and create jobs.

The government's vision for Canberra is that of a vibrant and liveable city. We will continue to grow and change to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future to become Australia's most liveable city. Given the pronouncements by the federal government of a contracting Australian public service, we are facing a major challenge. But, as we saw in 1996, a lot of opportunities presented themselves as well. Canberra is well placed to again take advantage of these opportunities, but paramount is the need to protect jobs in the ACT. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Health and Minister for Higher Education) (11.11): I thank Ms Berry for moving the motion today—it is an important motion—and for detailing for us a picture of employment in the ACT. She is very right to emphasise that there is nothing more important to self-efficiency, self-esteem, mental and physical health and family stability than staying in work. She also illustrated the government's fundamental commitment to protect and create jobs in our economy. As Chief Minister, this priority is a constant in my leadership of the government and, as this motion illustrates, it is also at the heart of the policies across government portfolios.

The resilience the ACT has shown so far in the face of contracting federal spending is something that we should be proud of. We have arrived at this challenge with better fundamentals than we had in 1996 and, so far, our economy remains in good health: employment at a record 213,300 jobs—keeping unemployment the lowest in Australia—low interest rates, steady economic growth, a strong budgetary position with a AAA credit rating, and an ongoing economic reform program underway which is widely supported by our business community.

Our private sector is also stronger and more established and has shown a strong willingness to work with government in supporting local jobs and growth. We have been in regular discussions with the business community. The Treasurer and I have had several roundtables with them in the last few months, and there have been public forums such as the Gungahlin Community Council business breakfast, which was put on early last week. We are looking at how we respond with short-term measures and shared priorities through working with business leaders. We are also working on regional priorities. Last week I met again with all of the regional mayors to talk about priorities for the capital region. There have also been joint representations to the federal government.

We remain extremely vigilant about federal spending and employment cuts. While the projections in the recent ACT budget review show steady gains across key indicators, deep federal cuts will threaten our economy. As 31 per cent of the ACT workforce, the commonwealth's importance in our economy remains high and the threat of thousands of jobs looms large. Modelling across the ACT public service shows the impact of these costs running to hundreds of millions of dollars in lost economic output. While the ACT government is maintaining our employment levels, our workforce is a much smaller proportion at just 11 per cent.

On Monday I held a second meeting with the federal minister, Jamie Briggs, about measures to support adjustment in the ACT economy, including looking at options around the convention centre, looking for support for business, looking at ways the federal government, the ACT government and indeed the New South Wales government and the local councils can work together in the capital region. We also discussed the issue of international flights and the desire, certainly of the ACT government and Canberra Airport, to have international flights connecting our city, looking to the commonwealth to support us with that objective.

The government is progressing significant measures to attract investment and stimulate private sector employment growth. Recently started projects, such as the Hindmarsh Creswell development on Constitution Avenue and the Rock Development Group's the loop in Belconnen, are a vote of confidence from the private sector.

The ACT government is also investing in public infrastructure in capital works to help maintain local employment as other major projects are completed. These are projects with a huge multiplying potential over the longer term. We look to projects like Majura parkway—a major source of investment during construction and a huge enabler for the regional transport network in the economy once completed, a \$288 million project, but the long-term economic, social and environmental benefits were estimated in the business case at almost \$1 billion. Capital metro is an investment drawcard and a job creator as well as a transport solution and a guide for future development opportunities across the cities.

In residential development the government has more than \$500 million of greenfield and infill works in the pipeline, delivering the vital infrastructure which allows the housing industry to maintain its activity. In health, the government's \$1 billion-plus investment in health infrastructure is also delivering for employment in our economy. Recent progress in the University of Canberra public hospital is an important step on this major project, which is currently allocated \$8.2 million for planning and design.

New health infrastructure is being staffed by a growing health workforce. Some examples of the jobs that flow on from the 2013-14 budget decision include 38 full-time equivalents at Calvary and Canberra hospitals to staff the new inpatient beds, 17 more staff for the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, 18 staff for enhanced services at the Belconnen health and walk-in centre, the expansion of emergency medicine and rapid assessment in the emergency department with an additional 15 staff, and eight additional staff to deal with the growth in outpatient services.

Just as the health infrastructure program is vital to meeting the future demands of the health system, it is also providing an important pillar of support for the economy as it is delivered. As the economic effects of the federal contraction flow through the ACT, we will continue to be proactive in our efforts to protect local jobs. The government has reviewed the stimulus measures around commence and complete fees and lease variation charges and we will announce our intentions on that soon.

We have already brought other measures forward—for example, the framework to boost private sector investment, which has been led by the Treasurer and announced by him last week. Diversification also remains a central objective, including growth in the digital economy. In the \$76 million sale of Lithicon, we have seen what our local entrepreneurs are capable of creating.

We are already the lowest taxing jurisdiction in Australia for small business with the payroll tax threshold. As our digital strategy continues to roll out, we are looking to create the conditions for more innovation and business growth in line with the business diversification strategy—for example, with the mobile Canberra app, the free public wi-fi that we are currently working on, pursuing innovation in government interactions with our customers and with business, with our investment in NICTA and with some of the highly successful business development programs.

I think that over the next couple of years it is going to be a pretty challenging time for Canberra. Everyone in the Assembly should be united in our efforts to support the Canberra economy and spare our community the cost of widespread joblessness. We are realistic about the forces which are affecting our economy but, from the ACT government's point of view, we will do whatever we can to protect local jobs and support the economy through what will be a pretty challenging time.

In relation to some of our discussions with the federal government, we will be continuing those. One of the outcomes from the meeting with Minister Briggs last week was to reconvene after the federal budget. I think it is very difficult, in the last few months of uncertainty about what the budget is going to bring. I think once we can see the budget and what the plans are for Canberra as they are outlined in that budget then we will be in a better position to respond. It will be important that we keep that dialogue up with the commonwealth government.

I would hope that we would have broad Assembly support for our efforts in making sure that the federal coalition government understands that Canberra is just the same as everywhere else—full of families who are working hard to pay off their mortgage and bring up their kids, just as they are in other parts of Australia. We should not be seen as anything different from that. Where those communities look to the federal

government for leadership and support at times, our community expects us to be lobbying for the same treatment from the federal coalition government. In my discussions with the Prime Minister to date, he has confirmed that he does not want to cause economic harm to the territory and that he will work with us to make sure that support is provided. We will see what the budget brings.

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (11.22): As the Chief Minister just talked about, a couple of weeks ago a Canberra company based here and born at the ANU was acquired by an American company for \$76 million. The company, Lithicon, deals in digital imaging and estimation of fluids in rocks, which is of special interest in oil and gas exploration. Why Canberra and what has it got to do with this motion about supporting jobs? This company grew out of collaboration in world-leading research between ANU scientists with others from the University of NSW in 2009.

Why Canberra? Because here we have some of the world's best scientists. We have some of the best programs to support research and innovation and bring the ideas to the commercial world. The company began life as Digitalcore and was assisted in its evolution by the ACT government's Canberra business development fund and the ANU connect ventures discovery translation and equity fund—a hand up, not a handout. The company now exports its services around the world. It employs 18 Canberrans in a new field of expertise building on the intellectual strength we have in clever Canberra, with the best educated population of any Australian capital city. A large share of the money from the company sale is coming back here to the ANU.

It is a story that illustrates the success of Canberra businesses in creating jobs and this government's commitment to business innovation support and investing in our strengths, notably knowledge-based fields, to create further jobs and to diversify our economy.

Today my federal colleague, Andrew Leigh, is launching Peter Dawson's new book, *Creative Capital: Bureaucrats, Boffins, Businessmen*. Indeed, Andrew Leigh wrote the forward to the book that Mr Smyth borrowed from in his adjournment speech last night. I will quote some of that forward too. Mr Leigh says:

Ask a non-Canberran what words they associate with "Canberra", and it's London to a brick that they'll come back with "politics" or "government". Yet as those of us who live here know, this is a city that's considerably more than the seat of government. If I had to devise a single notion that sums up smart bureaucrats, connected academics and innovative start-ups, it would be that Canberra is an "ideas city".

Mr Leigh continues:

Beyond getting education right, government should be modest about its ability to redress problems such as Australia's comparatively low patenting rates (by OECD standards). To the credit of the Gallagher Government, it has trialed a variety of solutions, including the newly formed innovation space Entry 29. Like a good start-up in the private sector, it's wise for governments not to think they have all the answers in solving a challenging problem such as the disconnect between Canberra's universities and local businesses. Experiment, experiment, experiment.

And he goes on:

Peter Dawson – and his wife Elizabeth – are immersed in Canberra’s social and intellectual life. But the story he tells has relevance outside the 2300 square kilometres that make up the ACT. Canberra isn’t perfect, but it’s a beautiful city in which to live. And as Peter Dawson teaches us, it has produced not just clever bureaucrats, but innovative boffins and creative businesspeople too.

The ACT government’s business development strategy launched in April 2012 has a huge range of initiatives to support and build the ACT’s private sector and employment in that sector. Other members today are highlighting the proactive way this government is supporting jobs. These include our own employment practices, creating the appropriate conditions for local businesses, eradicating red tape, reducing and removing outdated taxes, transitioning to online services, undertaking major infrastructure projects from the city plan, the city to the lake, the capital metro and smaller projects such as the new north side hospital, the Calvary car park, the Belconnen high upgrade, new land releases, major road projects such as the Majura parkway, new fire stations, shopping centre upgrades, school upgrades and works in our parks and public places. These are just a few examples of what the ACT government is doing to support or maintain our economy. This is being done in the face of massive cuts in Canberra being imposed by our single largest employer and funder—the federal government. The ACT government in comparison has limited resources and ability to lessen the effects of these federal cuts and to maintain jobs.

However, today I want to talk about some of the success stories of ACT government grants to micro and small businesses. These often go unnoticed and unappreciated except by the recipients, for whom the grants can be an essential stepping stone to take them to the next level or to explore new directions. These grants lead to small business becoming larger and employing more Canberrans whilst diversifying our economy and the range of skills Canberrans enjoy. Many of these jobs are in new service industries especially around IT and high-tech areas outside our day-to-day interaction with small businesses such as the corner shop and the garage or the cafe. Indeed, some of our city’s greatest exports are through small businesses that have grown with a little government grant assistance into medium enterprises selling services overseas.

I will talk about just some of the initiatives between Canberra business and this government which are ensuring good business ideas can benefit from a little government assistance when needed—examples of businesses that have benefitted from government assistance within the 26 initiatives that fall under the ACT government’s growth, diversification and jobs business development strategy, a strategy that aims to make the most of Canberra’s unique strengths and advantages for business.

The Canberra BusinessPoint awards launched by Minister Barr and the Canberra Business Council recognise businesses assisted by government’s business point advice through workshops and clinics and grants to grow. Jigsaw Housing, specialising in energy efficient housing design and construction, was the 2012 Canberra BusinessPoint business of the year. In addition to receiving business point

advice it also worked with the Lighthouse Business Innovation Centre and benefitted from the entrepreneur development fund which offers grants up to \$20,000 on a matched funding basis.

Another Canberra company, Cloud Central, won the 2012 Canberra BusinessPoint award in the web and mobile category. As well as business point and Lighthouse Business Innovation Centre advice it too received a \$50,000 ACT government innovation connect grant. Innovation connect grants are awarded up to \$50,000 as matched funding with payments made after agreed milestones are reached. Cloud Central started in Canberra in 2009 and it says it is Australia's first provider dedicated solely to delivering the best cloud infrastructure solutions, offering a complete cloud computing environment to serve the needs of Australian enterprises and government agencies.

Sports Wizard is another Canberra company that has benefitted from a business development grant in its early days a few years ago allowing it to build on the type of sports expertise developed through the Canberra-based Australian Institute of Sports in my electorate of Ginninderra, of course. Sports scientists and people like Carrie Graf, coach of the Canberra Capitals, are working with Sports Wizard. The company describes itself as the world leader in qualitative research, analysis and measurement. Through its own research and development, Sports Wizard has made a global breakthrough into a new field of measuring elite sports performance using qualitative analysis and measurement alongside a unique methodology known as behavioural analytics.

I think we can agree that it is not the role of governments to distort a competitive market that is operating well except to protect the public's interests through consumer, food, health and safety protections for example. The ACT government are not large enough to provide for major industry assistance even if we wanted to. What we can do is ensure that businesses enjoy a fairly regulated economy and we can support innovation and creativity of businesses with strategic investments, giving businesses, as I said, a hand up, not a handout, supporting business expansion, employment and diversification of our economy.

Another example of business support is the ACT government's microcredit program, helping marginalised people or social enterprises who might not be able to get the support of banks or other investors to get a business idea off the ground. Just this week Mr Barr opened the entrepreneurial hub, Entry 29 in Childers Street, an idea driven by enthusiasts wanting a community co-working space and backed by the ACT government. It is encouraging technology development by bringing start-up operators together to mingle and collaborate. It has meeting facilities and access to mentors including business advisers and financiers. Who knows what start-ups or ideas whose time has come might emerge from Childers Street and sweep the world?

These are just some of the initiatives that demonstrate we want more jobs, more jobs in the private sector and a diversified economy. We can proudly say that this city and this government are open for business

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) (11.31): I thank Ms Berry for bringing forward this motion today, because creating jobs and protecting jobs are at the heart of what this government is about. As a Labor government, we are proudly committed to doing all we can to ensure that as many territory residents as possible participate in the workforce to the best of their ability. That is why we are very proud of the fact that we have now set an all-time high level of employment in this city at 213,300 positions and that we have the lowest unemployment rate in the nation.

We are committed to implementing policies and programs that create jobs and which help our residents prepare for entering or re-entering the workforce. We are committed to doing all we can to protect jobs, to ensure we keep as many people as possible in work and that we mitigate as much as we can the impact of job cuts from the Liberals.

As I have mentioned before in this place, there is no immutable law of economics that states an economy or a region will continue growing as Canberra has done in recent years. What is needed is far-sighted and responsible assistance and support from government to help the private sector grow and to help the private sector create jobs, particularly the knowledge-based jobs that are an increasingly important part of our economy.

In responding to Ms Berry's motion I would like to discuss some of the ways in which the Gallagher government is creating employment opportunities and supporting key sectors of our economy. To help ensure that our economy continues to create jobs, the government is focusing on creating the right conditions to allow the private sector to grow and to continue to employ.

The government's growth, diversification and jobs business development strategy focuses on creating jobs by building strength in areas where our city has demonstrated comparative advantage and distinctiveness. The strategy has 26 separate initiatives across three strategic imperatives: creating the right business environment, supporting business investment and accelerating business innovation. The strategy needs to be and is a living document that aligns with various election commitments of the government and government responses to other developments in the economy, initiatives such as the digital city strategy and study Canberra, to mention but two.

We also seek to make it easier to do business in the city through cutting red tape and the continued work of the government's red tape reduction panel. We continue our nation-leading program of taxation reform which abolishes inefficient taxes such as conveyance duties and duty on insurance, taxes that impact directly on business investment.

As both the Chief Minister and Dr Bourke have indicated—it is worth dwelling on again—just a few weeks ago we celebrated one of the success stories of innovation in the territory with the Canberra-based digital imaging company Lithicon achieving a sale for \$76 million. The acquisition will see Lithicon increase their research and

development footprint in the territory as their research relationship with the ANU continues to expand. Lithicon is but one example of how the government's ongoing support for innovation and start-up companies is paying dividends, and it is outcomes like this that drive the diversification of the territory's economic base. The equity investments that have been made in Lithicon by both the Canberra business development fund and ANU connect ventures deliver a significant direct financial return to our economy.

The territory represents around two per cent of the Australian economy and Australia represents around two per cent of the world economy, so it is vital for businesses in the ACT to look beyond the borders of the territory for growth and for investment. That is why the government has established Invest Canberra, the ACT government's investment agency which promotes and attracts national and international direct investment. It creates a clear focus for potential and existing investors alike and will play a key role in the coming years in driving further growth in the territory economy.

The government also recognises that there are ideas and investment opportunities that sit wholly within the private sector. This is why last week I launched the investment proposal guidelines for investors. To put it simply, if the private sector has a faster, smarter or more efficient way of delivering a service or product, then the ACT government, through Invest Canberra, wants to hear from them. These guidelines provide clear pathways for investors wishing to set up or expand their business in Canberra. We are particularly looking forward to the unique and innovative ideas to solve the range of economic and social challenges presented to Canberra and the region.

In addition, the government is supporting our private sector to continue the expansion of its exporting activities. This is paying dividends for the territory economy. As I noted in question time yesterday, the territory's exports of services were worth \$1.28 billion in the last financial year, a growth of 3.4 per cent. To put this in some perspective, the ACT's share of our national population is about 1.6 per cent, but this territory is delivering nearly 2.5 per cent of the nation's exports. It is encouraging to have seen the recent growth in exports, and we look forward to working with the Exporters Network to continue that growth.

The 2013-14 territory budget included funding for global connect, which consists of a range of programs to raise awareness amongst territory businesses about exporting opportunities, to promote even greater collaboration amongst our already very collaborative group of local exporters, to increase the number of firms exporting and to help them to access new markets.

We are particularly pleased to be able to work with Minister Andrew Robb at a national level in relation to investment and trade. I congratulate Minister Robb for convening a meeting of state and territory trade and investment ministers in Canberra earlier this month and for what appears to be a bipartisan continuation of support for free trade agreements and for opportunities for growth in exports out of the capital region. It was a good opportunity to discuss the strength of exports from the ACT with the federal minister. We look forward to working closely with him and his agencies, particularly Austrade, in the coming years. That relationship is important to

us because, unlike larger states, the ACT is not in a position to finance trade offices in major cities overseas. We need the support of Austrade to facilitate that work, and we are very grateful for their support.

We will continue to invest in infrastructure with the commonwealth's contraction of spending set to have a big impact on the private sector. The government acknowledges that we will need to take a leading role in fostering economic growth in the city in coming years. Fortunately, the territory's low levels of debt allow for the government to continue a program of infrastructure investment. This has two key effects: firstly, it provides the important facilities our city needs in health, education and transport for example, but, secondly, the investment helps our economy to keep ticking over, taking up some of the slack caused by the commonwealth's lower spending.

Our tourism and events sector will be a key focus to help our economy grow in coming years. Tourism contributes \$1.65 billion to the territory economy and is one of our largest private sector employers, supporting around 16,000 jobs. In December of last year the government launched its 2020 tourism strategy in consultation with the local tourism industry. This strategy sets a target of increasing the value of tourism to the territory economy to \$2.5 billion by 2020.

Some of the areas the government will focus on in conjunction with our tourism industry include attracting direct international flights and new low cost domestic carriers to Canberra, investing in destination marketing activities that boost visitation from domestic and international target markets and, importantly, growing the digital capacity of the industry. Much of this work is under way, particularly leveraging off the \$480 million investment in upgrading facilities at the Canberra Airport. We will also continue our special event fund and support new festivals and events in the territory. Across a range of sectors the government is making targeted investments that will support our economy and create jobs.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (11.42): I thank Ms Berry for bringing this motion before us today. As ever, the Canberra Liberals want to talk about job creation and our economy and making sure that we have a strong, vibrant business sector in the ACT. That is something that is very dear to our hearts.

I wanted to hear what those opposite had to say before I spoke because the myth is continuing, the deceit is continuing. It is a myth that has been put forward by those opposite, it was put forward by the Greens in the lead-up to the last federal election and it has been put forward by the union mates of those opposite; that is, the good old Labor Party do not cut any federal public service jobs—that they never do that—and it is only done by those nasty Liberals.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when you actually look at the facts of the matter, what you find out is that the job cuts to the federal public service, 14,500 of them, are Labor Party cuts and Labor Party decisions. What we have seen collectively from sections of the unions, from those opposite and from Labor Party members on the hill is deceit, in that they hid that there were any jobs being cut, and then denials that this was happening—and repeated denials.

I appreciate, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you might not take my word for that. You might be sceptical. But I would hope that you would trust the Secretary to the Department of Finance, Mr David Tune. He is an apolitical public servant doing his job, and he has appeared before estimates committees on the hill. I would like to quote from his evidence under questioning by a number of senators, including, I believe, Senator Wong. Let me quote:

... there are three parts to this. Let's start with the easy one, probably; that is the simplest way. The simplest one is the most efficient management structures, where the estimate is 846 reduction in staffing over three years. That basically falls out of the costing that was done for the climate change package. That is a net costing, so that was assuming inherently that there would be 800 redundancies required. An allowance was made for that in the costings. That was done prior to the election being called.

I say it again:

That was done prior to the election being called.

He goes on to say:

The second one is the efficiency dividend; and, as I said, the assumption there was—it is just a mechanical process to add in the extra efficiency dividend to the departmental costs—4,808. As I said earlier, 55 per cent of that would apply to staff costs and 45 per cent to non-staff costs ...

The third one is the other one we have been talking about, which is the implicit decrease in staffing contained within the forward estimates. As I started to describe earlier, with that one we forecast some projections of staff salary and wage costs plus superannuation on-costs in aggregate, which are reported in the budget papers. Using the base of the ASL numbers that were also reported in the last budget, we then started to project forward about how many staff we could afford with that amount of dollars for wages and salaries. We applied an indexation factor of three per cent around that for the out years. If you divide all that up, that gives you a figure of 8,819 ...

When you add those figures together, Madam Deputy Speaker—decisions of the previous Labor government that are embedded in the forward estimates—the figure for jobs being cut, based on evidence from the Secretary to the Department of Finance, Mr David Tune, is 14,500 job cuts under Labor. That is what it is. I notice those opposite are all studiously trying to avoid any eye contact because they know that they and their federal colleagues have been out there peddling untruths. They have been denying that that was happening, just as we have seen—

Mr Barr interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Barr, you can speak to the amendment later, if you wish.

MR HANSON: In further evidence, Senator Wong was asking questions. In response, this was said:

The impact of your funding cuts on Public Service jobs was never made explicit before the election.

They hid it. Let me repeat that:

The impact of your funding cuts on Public Service ... was never made explicit before the election.

If those opposite look at the evidence given by the Parliamentary Budget Office yesterday, they made that point as well:

The Parliamentary Budget Office did not know the impact of your funding cuts on Public Service ...

So the previous Labor government that you lot are the cheer squad for was cutting jobs and hiding it, and the evidence comes from the departmental secretary and from the Parliamentary Budget Office. He goes on to say:

The advice that the government has received is that, over the forward estimates, the funding profile that you determined—

you—

translated into 8,819 fewer Public Service jobs, and that that reduction combined with another 846 jobs from so-called more efficient management structures and 4,808 jobs through the additional efficiency dividend to 2.25 ... takes the total reduction in public sector staff to 14,473—as a result of decisions that you made ...

that is the previous Labor government, addressing Senator Wong—

before the last election—that were never publicly disclosed.

The decisions made before the election to cut 14,473 jobs were never publicly disclosed. What a grand deceit on the people of Australia. What a grand deceit on the people of Canberra. This mob at the last election, their mates in the CFMEU and Mr Sheikh were saying, “Watch out for the Liberals. Watch out for the nasty Mr Abbott. He’s going to cut the public service,” when, behind everybody’s back, this mob was cutting 14,500 jobs and deceitfully hiding that from the public. That is evidence given by a federal public servant, the head of the Department of Finance, in estimates, saying that the Labor Party, the Greens, the CFMEU and their mob—

Mr Barr: The CFMEU?

MR HANSON: Yes. Mr Barr interjects, but in the last election Mr Hall was out there—

Mr Barr: I think you mean the CPSU.

MR HANSON: No, I am talking about the CFMEU—was out there. Mr Hall was out there saying, “We can protect Canberra,”—I can give you some quotes if you would like them—and running a campaign against the Liberals because he was scared that Mr Abbott was going to come in and cut jobs. All along, it was the Labor Party cutting 14,500 public servants and lying to the people of Canberra about it, hiding it deceitfully. Madam Deputy Speaker, if you do not believe me, go and have a look at the transcripts. I would be very happy to provide them. I have already shown Mr Rattenbury. What Mr Tune said makes it very clear that that was what was happening.

Mr Barr interjecting—

MR HANSON: Mr Barr does not like this. Ms Gallagher is trying to look the other way. She does not think I am so polite now, does she? No, not so polite now that I point out the deceitful conduct—

Members interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

MR HANSON: of your mob up there, and the fact that all of you lot locally have been trying to run this myth about the nasty Mr Abbott. “Abbott-proof the Senate”: remember that one? Let us remember that it should have been, “Don’t vote for Labor because they’re already cutting your job and they’re lying about it.”

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order members! Could you sit down, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Certainly.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, you are in danger of losing your voice in a minute. I can hear you quite adequately.

Members interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, this is not a laughing matter. It is definitely not a laughing matter. I can hear you quite adequately, and I think other members can too. Can we lower the tone a little bit?

MR HANSON: Certainly, Madam Deputy Speaker, but you can imagine that I am somewhat agitated by the fact that the previous Labor government was hiding so much deceit from the Canberra public, and that those opposite and their federal colleagues in the Labor Party and the Greens think it is all a big joke and continue to perpetuate the myth, and that a number of their union mates have been out there funding campaigns that are not based on the truth. You can understand how outraged I am, and certainly understand how outraged the people of Canberra will be as that evidence is rolled out and it becomes clear to them, and the message gets through.

At this stage I would like to commend Senator Seselja, who has participated in a number of hearings and who has been a very strong advocate for the people of

Canberra and has been very strong in articulating the truth. He has been very up-front and very honest, as the Canberra Liberals and the federal Liberals have been before elections, and particularly in the lead-up to the last federal election, where there was no attempt to hide what Mr Abbott was saying—no attempt at all. It was an honest position. On the contrary, as has been pointed out in evidence given by public servants regarding the Labor Party, there has been a reduction of 14,473 jobs as a result of decisions made before the last election that were never publicly disclosed.

I think that is absolutely outrageous. There are any number of quotes from Andrew Leigh, from Gai Brodtmann, from Kate Lundy, from this mob opposite, from the Greens and from sections of the unions that were telling a very different story. Now that the truth is out there, I hope that you will show balance, Chief Minister. I hope that now that the truth has been exposed you will acknowledge that and stop trying to play politics. What I hear from you lot is just one side of the story, and you are trying to present some myths and some untruths.

This perhaps should not be a surprise to any of us, because if we go back to 2007 and what Mr Rudd said, he said that he was dead serious about trimming the size of the public service. I quote:

It just strikes me as passing strange that this Howard government that supposedly belongs to the conservative side of politics has not systematically applied the meat axe to its own administrative bloating for the better part of a decade.

What we know is that Kevin Rudd did that. He, because of decisions made by the previous government, is responsible for the loss of 14,500 jobs. It leaves the federal coalition in a very difficult position. They have inherited a budget catastrophe on the hill. I do not think anyone is in dispute about that. They have inherited this figure of 14,500 job cuts from the public service, embedded in the forward estimates, and they have got to untangle this mess. They are in the middle of doing that, and they have not imposed any cuts on any department. There has not yet been a budget under this government, so it is abject and rank hypocrisy for anybody to be claiming that cuts occurring in the federal public service are not the creation of the Labor Party.

I have circulated an amendment, which I will move shortly, that is not attempting to do anything other than lay out the truth. It indicates quite clearly, as I have said, based on evidence from the departmental secretary, what impacts federal Labor's 14,500 job cuts from the Australian public service will have on the ACT economy. It goes on to state a number of other very reasonable positions. It is all in front of you to be read.

If we are going to have a serious conversation about business and jobs, we need to stop playing the one side of the political game that we hear from those opposite, from the Greens and from their union mates, which is a myth. The more you do and the more you say, the more discredit you bring on yourselves. Now that the truth is out there, now that it is in black and white, the more you continue to perpetuate the myth, the more it can be said that you are simply peddling untruths for your own political gain and that you care very little about the consequences of job cuts and you care very little about getting this economy moving. Based on the debate that we had earlier today, when Mr Coe called for some initiatives to support the construction sector, you

lot opposite voted down some practical, reasonable measures, some tangible things that we can do right now to help with job creation, to help get this economy going, yet you voted it down.

Yes, there will be some rhetoric; yes, you will use opportunities to exploit the political gain that you think there is because of the disaster that Mr Abbott has inherited, but when you get to the truth of the matter, you care very little about it. You just see the opportunity for political gain. We will continue to point that out, and I am sure my colleague Senator Seselja will continue to point that out—that you have done very little for this economy and that the federal Labor government has done very little for it and has caused damage. I now move the amendment circulated in my name:

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

“(d) the impacts that Federal Labor’s 14,500 job cuts from the Australian Public Service will have on the ACT economy;

(e) the infrastructure investments of the ACT Government in the 2013-2014 Budget; and

(f) the ongoing work of business and government to strengthen the ACT economy; and

(2) calls on the Government to continue to:

(a) invest in infrastructure projects that provide high quality employment opportunities in the ACT;

(b) work to create new economic and employment opportunities;

(c) support the growth of key sectors such as education, information and communication technology and professional services;

(d) support the growth of exports from the Territory; and

(e) support the diversification of the territory’s economy.”.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (11.58): Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order before I start; I seek your advice on whether frequently referring to members opposite in the chamber as “you lot” is considered parliamentary language.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will get some advice.

Ms Gallagher: It is appropriate to refer to people by their name.

Mr Hanson: But it is a collective.

Mr Barr: Okay, so “The Muppet Show”?

Mr Hanson: What would you rather be called?

Mr Barr: Everyone else, is that—

Mr Doszpot: Are you saying you do not want to be associated with them? Is that what you are saying?

Mr Hanson: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order. Mr Barr has just said that we refer to members on our side as “The Muppet Show”. I would say that that would be unparliamentary and I would ask them to withdraw those comments.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think that as a general rule the standing orders state that one should address members by their name or, if you want to talk in general, you should refer to the opposition, to the government or to the crossbenches, if it is the crossbenches you are talking about. So I would prefer that members did adhere to that for the rest of the debate. Thank you very much. Mr Rattenbury.

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I thank Ms Berry for introducing this motion, which focuses on the economy, employment and infrastructure opportunities in the ACT. I have said before that the Greens agree that a strong local economy is important for our present and future prosperity. We have a particular interest, of course, in how we can successfully transition to a low emission green economy.

This means maintaining our success, happiness and productivity as a society while significantly reducing the cost we have on our natural environment. It is simply not sustainable or logical to pretend that our prosperity depends on destroying our natural environment and depleting our natural resources, pushing the planet towards irreversible tipping points and stealing a sustainable future from generations to come.

Our economy is a subset of the environment, not the reverse. The Greens have a view that taking environmental sustainability seriously goes hand in hand with a sustainable economy. It leads to new jobs, to new industries, and to economic creativity and prosperity. There are many ways to develop the green economy. These are becoming more refined as more jurisdictions embrace them. The United Nations has placed a specific focus on green economy, green growth and low carbon and climate resilient policy instruments in recent years in response to the global financial crisis of 2008.

The feed-in tariff is an example of action that merges the environment and the economy. Feed-in tariffs have driven the uptake of renewable energy. They have also driven the expansion of the renewable energy industry. Another example is labour market policies which support training and support people transitioning from old industries like fossil fuels into green industries such as renewable energy.

There has been some discussion about public service job cuts this morning. Ms Berry has noted in her motion that there are set to be significant job cuts in the ACT. Mr Hanson was very animated about this. When it comes to the topic of the amendment, I think I am actually going to prefer the language that Ms Berry put forward, because I note she simply observes that there will be 12,000 job cuts from the Australian public service. She has not actually ascribed them to any political party. Perhaps we can just settle on the fact, because I think this is going to be a long-held topic in this place and people are going to argue about it for a long time.

The reality is that public service job cuts, no matter where they come from, are going to have a detrimental impact on the ACT economy. I think for the sake of the record it is worth noting that the Greens went to the federal election opposing job cuts across the board in the public service. We actually hold the view that we—

Mr Hanson: Abbott-proof the Senate.

MR RATTENBURY: That is a different matter. Abbott-proofing the Senate is a whole different matter, because there is a whole—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Rattenbury, please do not engage in conversation.

MR RATTENBURY: Yes, but let me touch on this point, because Abbott-proofing the Senate is about a whole range of frankly abhorrent policy initiatives that the Abbott government intends to bring forward, including removing the price on carbon, which is actually a policy that will drive new clean, green jobs in this economy. So it is actually a much broader agenda.

Before the interjection I was talking about public sector job cuts and acknowledging the fact that they will have a detrimental impact on the ACT economy no matter who does them. The Greens hold the view that this sort of ideological beating up on the public service, which is certainly the approach the Abbott government has taken, is one that is thoughtless and short-sighted. I think there is a nasty political edge to it that suggests that public servants do not do enough work, that there are too many of them and that there is plenty of room to cut them. I do not believe that is true.

The jobs that will be cut are real jobs. They are held by real people with real families. Many of them will come from Canberra-based agencies. Undoubtedly, this will hurt Canberra, no matter which side of politics cuts the jobs. What we have seen already is that the new federal government has said they will cut up to 600 jobs from the CSIRO alone. One of Canberra's greatest industries is education. It is one of those industries that has helped in diversifying our economy.

We will often hear from Mr Smyth in particular that we have got to diversify the economy. I think that education is one of those key sectors in which we can diversify the economy. So to see the sorts of cuts that are taking place in organisations like the CSIRO or NICTA, which are actually about driving our education economy, is very disappointing when it comes to actually trying to have some diversification of the economy here in the territory.

On a more positive note, I would like to talk about the impacts that Canberra's light rail project could have on the economy and on jobs in Canberra. For starters, the light rail project is partly a strategy to address the growing congestion on Northbourne Avenue. Reducing congestion, of course, plays an important part in improving our economy's productivity and capacity. Letting Northbourne Avenue grow into gridlock is a sure-fire way to degrade Canberra's economy.

This is one of the reasons that other congested cities are looking at light rail as well. The economic appraisal of Sydney's CBD and south-east light rail project, for example, shows an expected \$4 billion worth of benefits to be generated by the project over 30 years. That equates to a benefit-cost ratio of 2.5 or, put more simply, \$2.50 worth of benefits for each dollar invested.

The assessment of the Canberra light rail project achieved a similar cost-benefit ratio, 2.34, or \$2.34, in benefits for every dollar invested. It is important to note that this economic assessment only assesses traditional transport benefits, things like travel time savings, carbon emission reductions, vehicle operating costs and road accident costs.

Consultants specifically point out that intangible or newer economic benefits are not included in the assessment, but they note that these kinds of improvements will produce significant benefits to the Canberra community. So in fact the benefits are even greater than those that are acknowledged in this conservative assessment. There is a lot of work occurring around Australia right now amongst transport analysts and economists to try and properly monetise some of the more intangible benefits of light rail projects. As these are becoming clearer, light rail is starting to appeal to governments around the country, including to politicians of all persuasions.

Particularly appealing are the economy-wide productivity benefits such as those provided by agglomeration economies. Agglomeration economies occur when a city takes advantage of the productive advantages that arise from a spatial concentration of economic activity. This includes through benefits such as knowledge sharing and labour market pooling. These are benefits that arise as a side-effect of building a light rail corridor that is effective in increasing density and accessibility.

Put more simply, it means that around the light rail corridor we get a density of businesses. There are special economic advantages that arise from this, as the businesses all benefit from each other, use each other's resources and skills, and share knowledge. It is now a well-documented economic advantage that can be quantified, but as I said, it is still not being used often in cost-benefit analyses in Australia.

The corollary to economic agglomeration is the fact that building a city with a focus on car use tends to damage the economy. It becomes more spread out, more difficult to service with infrastructure, there is less connection between businesses, less foot traffic to enliven public spaces and encourage small businesses, and more valuable land consumed with roads and car parks.

The light rail project of course will create jobs in Canberra both directly and indirectly. There are direct jobs, people who will work directly on the project like engineers and construction workers. On top of this there are what you would call indirect and induced jobs, people who supply materials for the project, for example. Light rail is of course an economic attractor. It will help attract opportunities like major conferences to Canberra. A first class public transport system is certainly something that is expected in a city hosting major forums or conferences.

On this note, I reference the approach of the Abbott government towards infrastructure. Mr Abbott has been very clear that his focus is on building roads, not rail. I think this is a very backward-looking approach to transport and to building the economy. I do not seek to be ideological in saying this, but when I say that the future of Australia lies more in sustainable transport infrastructure than it does in road building, I think this is something that there is plenty of evidence for, including economic analyses. If any members are interested I am certainly happy to send them through some of the further information.

On that front, I note some interesting research from December last year which assesses the potential savings for workers in the CBD if they were to travel by public transport instead of driving. This is more about the benefits to individual households, but this does relate to the wider Canberra economy, because if people are saving money on their individual transport costs, they certainly have that money to spend in other places and to drive other elements of the economy.

The research showed that by leaving their car at home and travelling by public transport to work five days a week, the average commuter travelling to work in the Canberra CBD would save \$3,516 annually. That is an average. The range depends on what type of car the person uses and the distance they commute, from anywhere between five and 25 kilometres. The actual full range is \$2,429 to \$5,449.

The average annual savings a commuter can achieve by not owning a car at all—and I think this particularly goes to families not needing to purchase a second car—and commuting with public transport is \$7,348 annually, the range there being \$3,140 to \$15,367. These are very significant differences. They are significant cost of living savings. But they are also significant when it comes to thinking about what drives the economy in the ACT.

If those individuals who made those savings were to spend them in restaurants, on various services that are offered in the community or in other ways, that would all be recycled through the economy in a way that can only be beneficial. Interestingly, even if a Canberra commuter chooses to catch a taxi occasionally, where he or she might expect to pay, say, \$27 to travel 15 kilometres one way to the CBD, there are still savings. Were the frequency of taxi use to increase to an average of one or two taxis a week, the annual taxi costs would amount to \$1,263 or \$2,526 respectively. That is still a saving per year of several thousand dollars per household.

In conclusion, I would say that I am happy to support the motion. I think there are extensive opportunities for our economy in sustainability and green initiatives. There are great opportunities in sustainable transport infrastructure, and certainly in my role as a Greens minister I will be continuing to try to move the territory in this direction.

When it comes to Mr Hanson's amendment, as I said earlier I think I prefer the wording that Ms Berry has put forward. We have had the discussion about public service cuts but there are just a couple of other ideological warrior-type things going on in Mr Hanson's amendment. I note, for example, in Ms Berry's motion at

paragraph 1(f) she notes, “The ongoing work of business, unions and government to strengthen the ACT economy.” Yet Mr Hanson has deliberately omitted the word “unions” in that sentence. I think that is simply unbalanced.

Ms Berry’s initial motion acknowledges that all of those groupings have a role to play in the economic prosperity in the ACT. Yet Mr Hanson has gone out of his way to remove one of those groups who, on the face of it on any argument, have a role to play in the ACT economy. Similarly, in a later part of the motion he has, again, removed references to the unions and I think that is unfortunate. It can only be an ideologically driven approach. On that basis I will be supporting the motion as moved.

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) (12.11): I thank Ms Berry for moving this important motion here today in the Assembly. Governments of all persuasions and at all levels have a responsibility to ensure that they do all they can to support the employment of members of the community.

I find it interesting that so far we have only had Mr Hanson speak from the Canberra Liberals on this. This is a very important motion brought by Ms Berry before the Assembly. I look forward to the afternoon session to see how the Canberra Liberals will respond to this. This motion is—

Mr Doszpot interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Doszpot!

MS BURCH: Excuse me, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: I was not talking to you, Ms Burch.

MS BURCH: No, but I was just interested in what you—

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Burch, if you want to speak to the topic, speak to the topic; otherwise, sit down.

MS BURCH: Well, you made a comment.

MADAM SPEAKER: No, I did not make a comment. I called Mr Doszpot to order.

MS BURCH: That is what I just wanted to clarify.

MADAM SPEAKER: No; that is not your job. Your job is not to clarify. Your job is to speak to the question of whether the amendments be agreed to—not to second-guess, like some teenager, how the Speaker does her job. I called Mr Doszpot to order. That is my job. Your job is to address the question of whether the amendments should be agreed to.

MS BURCH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am sorry. I just did not hear what you said. I was not second-guessing or calling your comments into question.

Yesterday we had every single member of the Canberra Liberals talk in this place on the Fringe Festival. Every single member of the Canberra Liberals had an obsession and mentioned the Fringe Festival. Three members were more concerned around strippers in this Assembly. Here today we have a motion on employment—a motion on employment, jobs, growth of jobs and the impact of loss of jobs in the community.

Ms Lawder: Point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lawder, you have a point of order?

Ms Lawder: I think perhaps Ms Burch has inadvertently misled the Assembly. Not everyone did mention the Fringe Festival.

MS BURCH: I said three.

Ms Lawder: No; you said everyone.

Mr Barr: Madam Speaker, I ask that you stop the clock.

MS BURCH: Three speakers, everyone at the fringe.

MADAM SPEAKER: Would you stop the clock, please. Ms Lawder has raised an issue which is a point of order. Can you just repeat what you said, please.

Ms Lawder: Madam Speaker, I believe I said Ms Burch may have inadvertently misled the Assembly by saying everyone mentioned the Fringe Festival yesterday—every speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lawder, normally with a point of order like that I would rule it out of order because it is more a debating point. If you wanted to address the issue of whether someone said something in a debate, that is a debating point and not a point of order. I have a bit of concern about the language that you used by saying that maybe Minister Burch has misled the Assembly, because you cannot do that except by substantive motion. It is not a point of order to dispute what was said in a debate yesterday. I rule it out of order and I ask you to be a little careful about the way that you phrase those things, because an issue of misleading the Assembly can only be addressed by a substantive motion.

MS BURCH: If I may, Madam Speaker, I am quite happy to withdraw that.

MADAM SPEAKER: Is this on the point of order?

MS BURCH: On the point of order, thank you. But I will. Madam Speaker, can I continue?

MADAM SPEAKER: I am sorry. You were speaking on the point of order?

MS BURCH: I am. I am just offering to clarify things if I used the words “all spoke on the fringe”. If you did not speak on the Fringe Festival, I am quite happy to correct that, withdraw or whatever is the most appropriate.

MADAM SPEAKER: Great.

MS BURCH: This is a very important topic. This is employment and jobs here in the ACT. I am not aware of any family or individual in the ACT that does not think about jobs and does not want to ensure that there is jobs growth and employment opportunities in this city. But the point remains that yesterday we had two hours in this place with a good lot of the Canberra Liberals obsessed with the Fringe Festival and the creative director of that, yet they are not prepared to stand and make comment about the importance of job opportunities here in the ACT. I think that is telling in more ways than one.

Having a job is a central part of a person’s identity. It provides not only means to support oneself but also a purpose and confidence. This is why, as minister, I am committed to ensuring that every young Canberran can get access to the education and training that they need to get meaningful employment.

One way the government can support strong employment growth is by having a high-performance education system, which is what this government has done since 2001 and what we will continue to do. Ensuring the successful completion of a year 12 certificate or its equivalent is important for the successful transition of young people from school to employment and further education and training. A successful move from school to work or to further study is important for full-time participation in the workforce in later years. We also know that ensuring that students leave school with strong literacy and numeracy skills is essential.

It is pleasing, therefore, to note that the proportion of ACT 15 to 74-year-olds with literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills at level 3 or above is slightly higher than the general Australian population. In 2013 the average scores in NAPLAN testing for ACT students were the highest or equal highest in the nation across all of the 20 areas tested. The ACT continues to excel in reading and has been the highest performing jurisdiction in Australia since 2008. This has meant that almost all young Canberrans are well positioned to transition from school to work.

ACT youth have thrived in recent years, achieving exceptional outcomes in education and employment. Youth aged between 20 and 24 years are more likely than youth in the rest of the nation to have a year 12 certificate or equivalent or at least a cert II. The ACT is the only jurisdiction to exceed the COAG target of a national attainment rate of 90 per cent for 20 to 24-year-olds with a year 12 certificate or equivalent or a certificate II.

Full-time participation in education or work after leaving school is an important step in establishing a young person’s employment path through the working years. A 17 to 24-year-old in the ACT is more likely to be in full-time employment, full-time education or training or a mixture of part-time employment and part-time education

and training than in other jurisdictions. A rate of full-time engagement at work or further study among the 17 to 24-year-olds in the ACT is the highest in the country. Indeed, 93 per cent of year 12 graduates in 2012 were employed or studying in 2013.

The challenge now confronts the ACT to sustain and improve on the high attainment levels of our youth. Young people are especially vulnerable to changes in economic conditions. Youth who are not fully engaged after leaving school are at a greater risk of an insecure future. Those unable to find a job or who are made redundant are at risk of remaining unemployed for a significant time. Vocational education and training programs contribute to many young Canberrans making successful transitions from school to work, further education and training.

Most early school leavers undertake some form of vocational education and training study. Vocational qualifications allow for better employment opportunities, higher wages, and the prospects of achieving higher skills and qualifications. Higher level qualifications help meet the demands of the changing ACT economy. These qualifications provide skills for new and emerging jobs.

A measure of how effectively the ACT VET system is responding to the skills requirement of the ACT economy is the level of employer satisfaction with training as a way of meeting their skills needs.

The ACT has also maintained consistently higher rates of 20 to 24-year-olds achieving or studying towards non-school qualifications than in the rest of Australia.

In the ACT the proportion of VET students gaining qualification at a higher level than their previous education level has been increasing rapidly in recent years. The great benefit of an apprenticeship or traineeship is the opportunity to combine training with paid workforce experience. The ACT government directly employs over 500 apprentices and trainees. Even more are employed through group training arrangements, including over 100 school-based apprentices.

The ACT government ensures that publicly funded VET opportunities can be accessed by people from groups that traditionally experience some disadvantage. The gap between the proportion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous 20 to 64-year-olds with or working towards a non-school qualification is smaller in the ACT than in the rest of the nation. Working age Canberrans in the most socioeconomically disadvantaged areas are also more likely to have or be accessing education or training towards a non-school qualification than the same disadvantaged cohort across the rest of Australia.

At the heart of the ACT government's planning and priorities for vocational education and training in the ACT is the strong commitment to supporting the participation of those who have traditionally been outside the workforce and increasing the productivity of those already working.

Quality VET outcomes for Canberra's youth and social equity groups is the foundation for further improvements in overall education levels and employment participation. We are committed to a strong ACT VET sector that will drive higher productivity; contribute to social and cultural welfare; encourage investment, creativity and innovation; and respond to the changing needs of the ACT economy.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (12.23): Madam Speaker, I start by apologising to the Assembly. Apparently Ms Burch is upset that nobody from the Liberal Party spoke earlier. I will apologise. I was at a funeral. I went to Brendon Morrison's funeral. I tried to get back as quickly as I could to speak on this issue. When we get from a minister puerile attacks of that nature about why people are not speaking, it really does ruin the tenor of this place.

It is interesting that, I am informed, members opposite do not seem to be inclined to support the amendment that accurately portrays what is going on in the federal public service. It is a shame that they will not. We do now have the evidence of the impact of the Labor years on the ACT economy—something that those opposite have denied. The Treasurer calls it “fiscal consolidation”. As you lose your job from a federal Labor cut, you can be pleased that you are part of the fiscal consolidation of the Labor program in the Australian economy. And we still have an amazing statement from Senator Lundy which is not recanted or apologised for. In a press release on 1 February 2012, she said:

The Government expects agencies to continue to meet the efficiency dividend without resorting to forced redundancies.”

They continue to expect.

We had all those lines from Labor members before the last election, including one from Mr Leigh:

The efficiency dividend has been in place for a long time and I'm confident that it shouldn't lead to job losses.

Well, Mr Leigh, the cumulative effect is that now 14,473 jobs are going from the Australian federal public service as a result of those decisions that you made.

It is interesting to read some of the *Hansard*. I understand Mr Hanson has read it, but there is one particular paragraph where the public servant says that the job cuts are “implicitly built into the base”, that it is implicit. When you make cuts of this nature, you are cutting jobs.

Senator Wong says:

Sure.

The public servant comes back and says:

And the emphasis here is on the word “implicitly”. The impact—
meaning the impact of Labor's cuts—

of your funding cuts on Public Service jobs was never made explicit before the election. If you look at the evidence from the Parliamentary Budget Office yesterday, they made that point as well. The Parliamentary Budget Office did not know the impact of your funding cuts on Public Service jobs ...

The same officer says:

The advice that the government has received is that, over the forward estimates, the funding profile that you—

federal Labor—

determined translated into 8,819 fewer Public Service jobs, and that the reduction combined with another 846 jobs from so-called more efficient management structures and 4,808 jobs through additional efficiency dividend to 2.25 per cent takes the total reduction in public sector staff to 14,473—as a result of decisions that you—

Senator Wong—

made before the last election—that were never publicly disclosed.

I do not see the difficulty in changing that number from the supposed 12,000 to the 14,500 job cuts—the approximately 14,500 job cuts that will be cut from the Australian public service and the impact that they would have on the ACT economy. I am not sure why you would object to that statement of fact.

Either this place is now saying that the evidence given was wrong, or they have just got their heads in the sand and run this denial route that Labor never cuts public service jobs. Well, it is 14,473 jobs. I say to those opposite, Madam Speaker, that I do not recall any one of them standing up to their federal colleagues to stop those job cuts. That is unlike this side, who will take on all comers on any occasion to defend the ACT—as we have done proudly for many years and as we will continue to do, because we understand the importance of the jobs. It is bigger, sometimes, than party politics; it is a shame that those opposite do not have that same view.

This is an important motion, because it finishes with something that I have been going on about for quite some time, something the government has failed to achieve—to support the diversification of the territory's economy. When Labor came to office in 2001, 60 per cent of the employment in the ACT was in the private sector. Sixty per cent! The latest ABS stats say that it is down to 49 per cent.

Mr Barr interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Barr. You can contribute to the debate in the normal way.

MR SMYTH: It is 49 per cent. It is the same as when the Carnell government came to office in 1995, when 60 per cent of the employment was in the public sector. They changed that. There were certainly difficulties in the Howard years, but they managed to change the nature of Canberra for all time.

It is interesting that in the book that, oddly enough, Mr Leigh has just launched, the book called *Creative Capital*, many of the projects cited started under the previous Liberal government. We saw the opportunity here; we saw the potential. We saw the

need to build the city so that we broke the cycle of boom and bust. It happens under all governments. It is particularly caused by Labor governments and their spending practices at the federal level, where they cannot control their spending. It is normally cleaned up by Liberal governments who get elected on a mood of the public that they are sick of the profligate waste from federal Labor and their inability to deliver anything.

Going to the diversification of the territory's economy, it will be interesting to get the report from the Treasurer as to how his plan is going. Again, like so many plans that the Treasurer puts forward, it seems to be a rehash, a remake, a rename, a rebadge—a conflation of things that were already happening. There was not much original work in the report that purports to be their plan to diversify the territory's economy.

It would be interesting to see what they have actually achieved. It would be interesting to get some statistics. The latest ABS stats say that we are now down to 49 per cent of employment in the ACT being in the private sector. It goes against the 60 per cent that this government inherited, and it shows the basic failure of Labor to deliver a diversified economy in the ACT.

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

Sitting suspended from 12.29 to 2.30 pm.

Questions without notice Canberra Hospital—cancer centre

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Last year the almost completed cancer centre at TCH was extensively damaged by water after a plumbing fault. It has already been announced that the new cancer building will not be opened until sometime in the middle of 2014. For cancer patients concerned about their treatments, minister, do you have any information about the new opening date for this vital health facility?

MS GALLAGHER: We are hoping to open in the first half of this year. It will certainly be after April—between April and June. That is due to the extensive nature of the remediation that has to happen at the cancer centre.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: How are patients currently needing cancer treatment being accommodated while they wait for the new centre to open?

MS GALLAGHER: As the new centre is a completely separate facility, the existing arrangements in radiation oncology and the cancer area at the hospital are fully operational. In fact, you will see from the quarterly performance reports just how well the Capital Region Cancer Service is operating, meeting all of the benchmark times for 100 per cent of patients. The care is actually being provided within the existing older part of the hospital. When the remediation works are complete, we will start a commissioning period, moving those services into the new building.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, are there any cancer patients who would otherwise be treated in the ACT in 2014 now having to travel interstate for their treatment and, if so, how many?

MS GALLAGHER: There would be no patients that would be having to have treatment interstate because of the new cancer centre building being delayed but there would at times be patients of the Capital Region Cancer Service who would need to travel interstate for a particular treatment, but not linked at all to the infrastructure project of the new cancer centre. Sometimes it is about the fact that we do not offer that particular type of treatment here but, in terms of meeting all the benchmarks in terms of people's access to radiation oncology, all patients are being seen within recommended time frames.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: When the new centre is finally opened, how long will it be until it is fully operational with the full complement of specialist doctors, nurses and allied staff?

MS GALLAGHER: All of the service in the existing part of the hospital in the cancer stream will move into the new building. It will probably be commissioned over a short period of time, as we did with the women's and children's hospital when we moved paediatrics in over a period of days. There should be no significant delay once the remediation works are complete.

Uriarra Village—land purchase

MR WALL: My question is to the Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development. Minister, did you ever investigate personally purchasing land at Uriarra while you have been minister for the environment?

MR CORBELL: To the best of my knowledge, no. I did have an interest in purchasing at Uriarra Village around 2008. That interest was appropriately declared on the members' register at the time. The purchase did not proceed. I forfeited my deposit as a result and I no longer have any interest in relation to that parcel of land.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, was it the intention for the purchase of the land for you to move there personally?

MADAM SPEAKER: Sorry, Mr Wall, I did not hear that.

MR WALL: May I rephrase it?

MADAM SPEAKER: I did not hear the initial question.

MR WALL: The question was: minister, did you intend to purchase the land for the purpose of living there personally?

Ms Gallagher: Madam Speaker, I ask for your ruling on whether this relates to Minister Corbell's portfolio responsibilities?

MADAM SPEAKER: I think you are right and that it does not relate to Mr Corbell's portfolio responsibilities. I have to rule the question out of order.

Mr Coe, have you got a supplementary question?

Mr Coe: If I may, as to your ruling, is there not relevance in asking the minister for environment whether he has an interest in an area which is subject to a reasonable degree of debate in this place?

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe, I think the first question Mr Wall asked was in that space and that Mr Corbell answered that. He said it was subject to his recollection, and I think he answered that question.

The second question was about whether he intended to live there personally, and I cannot see a connection between whether or not the minister intended to live at a place that he does not live at is relevant to the minister's ministerial responsibility.

Do you have a supplementary question, Mr Coe?

MR COE: Yes. Minister, on what date did you place a deposit and on what date did you relinquish that deposit?

Mr Corbell: It is not relevant to my ministerial responsibilities, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: If it relates to the first question, the first question was about whether you as a minister ever had an interest in that property. I allowed that question, and I will allow this question.

Mr Corbell: Am I allowed to be asked next when I opened a particular bank account, Madam Speaker?

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Corbell, I have ruled on this. If somebody asked that question, you would be entitled to take a point of order, and on the basis of the circumstances at the time, I would rule whether or not it was in order.

MR CORBELL: Madam Speaker, I will accept your ruling only to put this question completely beyond doubt, because I am aware that some people are asserting that I had an interest in land at Uriarra Village and I sold that land or did not proceed with that purchase because of the solar auction. That claim is false. It is absolutely false. Yes, I entered into a contract, with my now wife, to purchase a block of land at Uriarra Village. I did so in approximately 2008. As to the exact dates, I will have to check the record. I declared that interest at the time I entered into that contract, and it

was placed on the register of members' interests. It was removed from the register of members' interests when that contract was cancelled due to a decision I made, and my now wife made, that we did not wish to proceed with that purchase for personal reasons. As a result of that decision I forfeited the balance of my deposit on that land.

Those decisions were all taken prior to the establishment of any process for a solar auction. Those decisions were taken prior to any policy decision on the part of the government to enter into arrangements to procure renewable energy facilities through a solar auction. And those decisions were particularly made before there was ever any prospect or suggestion or any knowledge to anybody that there would be a renewable energy plant proposed at Uriarra. The connection between the two is without any substance, without any basis in fact, and I have acted appropriately in all the circumstances. (*Time expired.*)

ACT public service—executive contracts

MR COE: My question is to the Chief Minister and it relates to executive salaries in the ACT public service. Chief Minister, the contract tabled for the Director-General of the Capital Metro Agency included an annual salary of \$325,239. Of that, \$89,066 is a special payment personally approved by you, which means that the Director-General of Capital Metro is paid an identical amount to the new head of the ACT public service. Chief Minister, why did you approve the special payment and what criteria were used to conclude that this role was worth the same as the head of the ACT public service?

MS GALLAGHER: I was provided with advice about the preferred candidate of Capital Metro after going through a rigorous merit selection process. As part of that there was advice provided to me about appropriate salaries, including allowances that can be made to supplement the Remuneration Tribunal's designation of salary, and I accepted the advice I received.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Chief Minister, what criteria was used to conclude that the Director-General of the Capital Metro Agency was worth more than the Director-General of the Health Directorate, the biggest directorate in the territory and responsible for a quarter of the ACT's budget?

MS GALLAGHER: I will concentrate on the salary for the capital metro. Again, I have been asked questions in this place. The jobs are very different, and appropriate remuneration is provided to all directors-general in relation to the work that the government asks them to do. In relation to capital metro, it was around the skills, capabilities and the right person for the job. It was supported by advice to me from officials who had been involved in the merit selection process and the ability, within the law, within the public sector management standards, to provide additional remuneration where appropriate for a particular purpose. I accepted that advice.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Chief Minister, what benefits will the capital metro project bring to Canberra?

MADAM SPEAKER: I am not sure. Is that within your portfolio? Yes, it probably is.

MS GALLAGHER: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank Dr Bourke for the question. This is one of the major—

Mr Hanson: Madam Speaker, I ask on a point of order whether this is relevant. The question was very specifically about the salary being paid to the director-general of the Capital Metro Agency. It was quite a specific question. It did not go to the relative merits or not of capital metro. I just ask whether it is relevant to the specific question that was asked, and I can repeat that for you if it helps: Chief Minister, why did you approve a special payment of \$89,000 and what criteria were used to conclude that this role was worth the same as the head of the entire service?

MADAM SPEAKER: Standing order 113B says, amongst other things:

... provided that the supplementary question is relevant to the original question or arises out of the answer given, contains no preamble ... The Speaker may allow two further supplementary questions ...

I would say that there was passing mention of the value of capital metro in the Chief Minister's first two answers and therefore they are in order. Chief Minister.

MS GALLAGHER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Capital metro is one of the priority projects for this government. It is a massive undertaking and it will transform the city from what we see today. It will address traffic congestion on the most congested corridor in the city and it will also assist us to change the way Canberra develops over time. I think this is a project that is supported by the community. It is not supported by the Canberra Liberals. It is appropriate that we employ the best candidates possible for this job. Why shouldn't we? The best candidate was found during a merit selection process and we needed to pay the appropriate remuneration to secure that official's taking up that position in Canberra.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Chief Minister, what is the importance of providing appropriate remuneration for ACT government directorates and agencies?

MS GALLAGHER: It is essential to provide appropriate remuneration for all employees of the territory. We are a big employer in town and we as a government have always sought to provide appropriate salary increases for our public servants and to make sure, as much as we can in an area where the commonwealth government is a larger employer, that we are able to remain competitive with other public sector salaries. At times, that will mean paying large and high salaries for people to do particular work. That is something that all governments make decisions on from time to time, and the ACT government is no different. What is different is perhaps the

focus, the scrutiny and the preparedness to identify individuals and their salaries and then pass judgements on that. That probably occurs more in Canberra than it does anywhere else.

Planning—Canberra Raiders lease change

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services. Minister, you have been quoted in support of the North Canberra Community Council in the *Canberra Times* on 18 February as characterising the Canberra Raiders lease change case currently before ACAT by saying, “I think the proposal is really absurd.” Minister, why did you describe the Raiders lease change proposal as “really absurd” given that ACTPLA approved it in July?

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, before there is a point of order, can you repeat the question?

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services. Minister, you have been quoted in support of the North Canberra Community Council in the *Canberra Times* on 18 February as characterising the Canberra Raiders lease change case before ACAT by saying, “I think the proposal is really absurd.” Minister, why did you describe the Raiders lease change proposal as “really absurd” given that ACTPLA approved it in July?

The issue here is that he is the minister for services. The Raiders want to change the lease to provide additional services to the people of the inner north, and I think there are no claims against it.

Mr Corbell: On a point of order, the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services is not the minister responsible—

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Coe! Stop!

Mr Corbell: The Minister for Territory and Municipal Services is not the minister responsible for matters involving proposals for decisions to vary leases; those matters fall within my portfolio responsibilities.

Mr Coe: On the point of order, in and amongst other things which the article and the issue are about is the provision of car parking, which is on site at the moment. As much of the provision of parking services is provided by TAMS, I therefore argue that the question is relevant in going to Minister Rattenbury.

MADAM SPEAKER: I see the point, but I do not believe this complies with the standing order that says that questions may be put to ministers relating to public affairs with which that minister is officially connected or proceedings in the Assembly or matters of administration for which that minister is responsible. The approval of a DA or a lease variation is clearly not within the purview of the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services.

Mr Smyth: I will rephrase it, if you like, or redirect it. If it is a matter of who it has gone to, I will rephrase it for the other minister.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, I have ruled the question out of order, so I think we will go on.

Mr Coe: On a point of order, if we were to ask a minister on any other subject a question, there is a fair chance the other minister would step up and say, "I'm actually responsible for that. I'll take that question." I wonder why we are getting a different response in that scenario versus this one.

MADAM SPEAKER: I suspect it is because the minister responsible does not want to answer for the member's private comments. I think that is probably the reason. I can only apply the standing orders. I ruled the question out of order. It was a good try, Mr Coe.

Tourism—government support

DR BOURKE: My question is to the Minister for Economic Development. Could the Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Events update the Assembly on why the government's investment in the ACT's tourism attractions and events is important for the local economy?

MR BARR: I thank Dr Bourke for the question. As I am sure members will have heard me say before in this place, tourism is a vital part of the ACT's economy and currently contributes \$1.65 billion to the territory economy. It is one of the territory's largest private sector employers, supporting around 16,000 jobs.

I am pleased to be able to advise the Assembly that our centenary year proved to be, as was anticipated, a very big year for the tourism industry. Particularly the range of big events played a big part in bringing very large numbers of interstate and international visitors to Canberra. The latest available national visitor survey statistics for the first three-quarters of the centenary year showed domestic overnight visitors were up by nearly seven per cent on the 2012 figures. The number of domestic overnight visitors recorded in terms of the ACT's results was the most significant since the *Masterpieces from Paris* exhibition in 2010. Particularly pleasing was a sharp 39 per cent rise in the ACT's holiday visitation for the quarter July through September. These figures have certainly helped to demonstrate the value that events play in providing reasons for people to visit our city.

The National Gallery of Australia staging three blockbuster exhibitions over the course of the centenary year, supported by the ACT government's special events fund, has certainly paid dividends. The *Toulouse-Lautrec: Paris & the Moulin Rouge* exhibition, which concluded in April 2013, attracted a total audience of just over 172,000, with 80 per cent of those coming from interstate or overseas, contributing around \$37 million to the territory economy. The winter exhibition, *Turner from the Tate*, attracted 153,627 visitors, with around 70 per cent of those travelling from interstate and overseas, contributing \$34 million to the territory economy.

In 2013, Floriade, again, brought in excess of 400,000 visitors through the gates of Commonwealth Park, and NightFest had one of its most successful years to date, attracting over 33,000 attendees, a 30 per cent increase on the 2012 event.

Visit Canberra, our tourism promotion area, has done an outstanding job of promoting the city's attractions and events to a very wide range of potential visitors through innovative campaigns like the human brochure campaign. The human brochure was a world-first tourism advocacy campaign that brought 500 social media savvy people to Canberra and used social media as a communications platform to promote the region's attractions and experience.

Consumer research consistently shows that negative perceptions about our city are a travel barrier, but the human brochure ultimately let the destination and its tourism products speak for themselves. With the support of more than 60 industry partners, the human brochure was an outstanding success, and this can be measured on a number of levels. However, the three key objectives of the campaign were to increase the volume and sentiment of social media about Canberra, to build a community of advocates for our city to communicate with during the centenary year and beyond, and to increase the visitation to and yield for Canberra during our centenary year and beyond.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Could the minister outline what industry recognition Visit Canberra's human brochure campaign has received?

MR BARR: I am pleased to advise the Assembly that the human brochure campaign has received the high possible recognition in the Australian tourism industry by winning the 2013 Qantas Australian tourism award for destination marketing. Visit Canberra's human brochure campaign beat entrants from all other states and territories in a category that is open to all tourism businesses and suppliers in the tourism industry. This particular recognition is, I think, timely because it shows how a small marketing agency like Visit Canberra can lead the tourism industry, can work with the tourism industry, to showcase the vibrancy of the tourism experience in Canberra.

The human brochure has also been recognised by receiving the silver award for the best use of social marketing and the bronze award for the most innovative idea and concept category in the Australasian Promotional Marketing Association's star awards. It was highly commended at the mUmBRELLA CommsCon PR awards. It won the best tourism initiative at the Australian Hotels Association ACT hospitality awards and it was a finalist in four of the Association for Data-driven Marketing and Advertising awards in social media, brand experience, travel and hospitality and public relations categories.

It was an innovative campaign. It was risky, but the risk came off. It was a good result for the ACT and I encourage further innovation from Visit Canberra, particularly in the use of social media, to promote our city.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Minister, were there any other ACT tourism and events industry representatives recognised at the Australian tourism awards?

MR BARR: Yes. I am pleased to advise that the ACT was well represented at the national awards. There were eight other finalists representing the territory in addition to the human brochure campaign—the National Gallery of Australia in the major tourist attractions category; Questacon in the tourist attractions category; Floriade in the major festivals and events category; the National Folk Festival in the festivals and events category; the National Botanic Gardens in the ecotourism category; Elm Cottage in the unique accommodation category; the Hyatt Hotel Canberra in the luxury accommodation category; and the Novotel Canberra, which was recognised locally, won the excellence and sustainable tourism category and went on to represent the territory nationally. This is a great result for the Canberra tourism industry, which, all acknowledge, contributes enormously to our economy. All of those finalists represented the territory proudly and well. We look forward to more entrants in the 2014 awards.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, could you outline the tourism initiatives and events that the government will invest in during 2014?

MADAM SPEAKER: I presume that you have already announced this somewhere else, Mr Barr. I call Mr Barr.

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The future direction of growing the value of the visitor economy is informed by the government's 2020 tourism strategy which I launched in December last year. Importantly, the intent of this strategy is for tourism to be viewed as a business that adds diversity and broadens the ACT economy, a point at times I wish the chamber of commerce would support too.

In 2014 the ACT government will provide financial assistance to 22 events through the ACT event fund, as well as delivering a range of other events for the city, including Floriade and Floriade NightFest, New Year's Eve and Australia Day celebrations, the lighting of the Christmas tree, the Canberra Nara candle festival, the balloon spectacular—I know the shadow tourism minister is very fond of the balloon spectacular—symphony in the park, the Canberra Day celebrations, and, this weekend, an event that I am very pleased is going from strength to strength, the Enlighten festival, which starts this weekend. Last year a total of 115,000 people attended Enlighten events. This was a significant growth on the 2012 figure, which was of course impacted by two days of torrential rain.

In 2014 the Enlighten festival will feature projections onto six buildings within the parliamentary zone, as well as a range of exhibitions, film screenings, live music and performances, stand-up comedy, tours of national institutions, pop-up dining experiences and much more. Members are encouraged to attend. I look forward to seeing a very strong turnout for Enlighten 2014.

Planning—Canberra Raiders lease variation

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development. Minister, Minister Rattenbury was quoted in the *Canberra Times* of 18 February as characterising the Canberra Raiders lease change case currently before ACAT, by saying, “I think the proposal is really absurd.” Is the Raiders lease change proposal really absurd?

MR CORBELL: This matter is currently before the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal. It is the subject of litigation at the moment in that tribunal with a number of groups seeking to have the decision of the Planning and Land Authority overturned by the tribunal. Cognisant of the importance of not commenting on matters that are before courts and tribunals, I do not propose to make further comment on it.

Mr Rattenbury: Madam Speaker, before—

MADAM SPEAKER: Do you have a point of order, Mr Rattenbury?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes, under standing order 46, I am actually being misquoted by Mrs Jones.

MADAM SPEAKER: Do you claim to be misrepresented?

Mr Rattenbury: I do.

MADAM SPEAKER: You have leave to make a brief explanation.

Mr Rattenbury: Thank you. The comments I did make were of a personal nature. They were not made under my portfolio responsibilities, further to the earlier discussion. But the thing that I said was absurd was the construction of a new surface car park in the inner north and the Braddon area. I did not refer to the deconcessionalisation as absurd.

MADAM SPEAKER: Your personal explanation is noted. Supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, what representations have you received from Minister Rattenbury on this issue?

MR CORBELL: I cannot recall any, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, given your response to the substantial question, would it be appropriate to comment on the case before ACAT to a newspaper?

MR CORBELL: When matters are before courts or tribunals, it is always preferable not to comment on those matters in any substantive detail.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, will you take on notice the request to find out whether you have received any representations from Mr Rattenbury?

MR CORBELL: I am happy to take the question on notice.

Canberra—centenary

MR DOSZPOT: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, in the half-yearly performance reports for the Chief Minister and Treasury Directorate it states that there was \$822,000 expenditure on the centenary which has been rolled over from the previous year. What centenary of Canberra costings were required to be rolled forward and why?

MS GALLAGHER: I will be able to provide that detail to you on notice, but there will be the wrapping up of staffing arrangements. The centenary team unit is almost, from my understanding, completely wound down now, but there is some ongoing evaluation that is being done of the centenary that would flow into the next calendar year and probably the next financial year, if it is not completely finalised by then. But I am happy to provide that detail to you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: While you are checking those factors, Chief Minister, could you also check when you were made aware of the need to roll forward the \$822,000?

MS GALLAGHER: Yes, I will.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Chief Minister, could you tell us about some of the benefits that have been brought to the territory from the expenditure on the centenary program?

Mr Coe: I thought that was the point of the evaluation.

MS GALLAGHER: There is the detailed evaluation that we are having, Mr Coe, and then there is the evaluation that we all do as citizens of this place, as people who have attended numerous centenary events. Indeed some of the statistics that the Deputy Chief Minister just informed the Assembly of in the previous answer, around the very strong year for tourism that the centenary was, show that for a relatively modest expenditure in a year of celebration the community got a good return on that investment. In the end it was about \$24 million spread throughout the year over a number of different projects that provided us as local citizens with the opportunity to celebrate the centenary year and also, as the nation's capital, to promote Canberra to the rest of the country and indeed beyond Australia. Some of the early evaluation has been very positive. The final evaluations will be completed, and I am happy to inform the Assembly when those are done.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Chief Minister, would there be an equivalent saving in the 2012-13 financial year, and what other unbudgeted costs for the centenary year are yet to be paid in the coming financial year?

MS GALLAGHER: There is no additional funding going into the centenary program over and above what has been passed through this place. I think the issue is one of timing and when perhaps some of the invoices and accounts are being paid. But I am very happy to provide that information to the Assembly.

University of Canberra—public hospital

MS PORTER: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, can you update the Assembly on progress with the University of Canberra public hospital and any milestones that have been reached since the Assembly last met?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Ms Porter for her interest in the University of Canberra public hospital. The University of Canberra public hospital will continue our expansion of health and hospital services across the ACT. We know that we need to continue to grow these services to meet future health demands created by an ageing and growing population and from consumer expectations.

The UCPH will respond to this demand as well as allowing the transfer of adult rehabilitation and subacute facilities of the Canberra Hospital and Calvary hospital to the new north side hospital. The UCPH will provide rehabilitation, subacute aged care and mental health rehabilitation services for the population of the capital region as well as providing clinical teaching, research and education facilities.

The heads of agreement to build the new subacute hospital was signed back in September 2012. The hospital will be located on a 4.8 hectare site within the campus on the corner of Ginninderra Drive and Aikman Drive.

Since June last year we have brought on the principal consultant. The draft services delivery plan was completed and in December a workforce innovation forum was held. It included a range of stakeholders exploring questions for the subacute facility workforce planning.

Following detailed negotiations, just recently we have signed the acquisition and development deed, which was executed by the territory and the university. This deed will facilitate and regulate the grant of the executive crown lease to the territory, the design and construction of the hospital, the physical and other interfaces between the campus and the hospital and entry into the collaboration deed and the sublease.

The parties have entered into this deed to, amongst other reasons, create a framework to realise the mutual benefits to the university and the territory arising from co-locating this facility on the university campus and manage the use and occupancy of areas of the facility. The signing of these deeds—that is, the acquisition and

development deed and the collaboration and precinct deed—means that we can progress the design work on the new hospital. The signing of the deeds marks the transition formally to the design phase of the project.

On 15 January, the principal consultant request tender was released to four shortlisted principal consultants. It is expected that they will be engaged early in the second quarter of 2014 and will start the preliminary sketch plan or design phase.

So it is all going pretty well at this point in time. There is a lot of work underway and we really do appreciate the support and assistance of the University of Canberra in working with us on some quite complex, technical, legal matters around how we acquired the land to build this hospital. But we have reached agreement on that and the design phase will now commence.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, what role will the hospital play in the broader health system for the ACT and region?

MS GALLAGHER: The University of Canberra public hospital will provide a centre of rehabilitation excellence for the ACT and surrounding region. It will facilitate the consolidation of inpatient rehabilitation services from both Canberra and Calvary hospitals and will provide the opportunity to develop new service delivery models in a purpose-built facility. This will have the added benefit of freeing up bed capacity at both Canberra and Calvary hospitals. Currently patients can experience delay in accessing specialty rehabilitation beds if they need to go interstate or if they are seeking to access the inpatient beds currently available in our hospitals.

This new hospital will provide a purpose-built, state-of-the-art teaching hospital which will allow students to get firsthand experience of studying and learning and having work experience in a facility of excellence. I think it will also help us attract students and more research dollars to the University of Canberra, which will help us deliver on some of the objectives we have set out in our business development strategy and, indeed, through study Canberra.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, what services will be provided at the hospital? Can you tell us some more?

MS GALLAGHER: The hospital will comprise 140 overnight inpatient beds made up of 20 mental health rehabilitation and 120 rehabilitation beds. In addition to the overnight beds, the hospital will comprise 75 day places, or 30 bed equivalents, made up of 25 mental health, 25 rehabilitation and 25 aged care places.

The services will be available to a range of adult, aged care and mental health patients in a supportive and therapeutic environment. There will be a range of allied health services such as hydrotherapy, psychiatric rehabilitation services, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology, exercise pathology, social work and structured psychological therapies.

A range of community services and outpatient services will also be provided, including memory assessment, nurse practitioner services, falls injury prevention, continence, podiatry and driver and vocational rehabilitation services. Adult mental health day services will also be available to people requiring intensive assessment, treatment therapy and rehabilitation and recovery services.

As the University of Canberra currently trains the majority of our allied health professionals who receive work through ACT Health and our nursing students, I think the accessibility of a hospital on campus will deliver for students, it will deliver for that research arm of the University of Canberra, and ultimately it will deliver for patients receiving care in that facility.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Chief Minister, can you advise the Assembly what currently is the planned opening date for the hospital and what is the estimate of the total budget for the hospital.

MS GALLAGHER: I will be happy to do that when, firstly, the date is determined and when the final budget is determined. I expect that we will be in a position relatively shortly to finalise the expected budget. The opening date is dependent on the financing and procurement methodology that will be attached to that hospital. Those decisions have not been taken.

Schools—capital works

MR GENTLEMAN: My question is to the Minister for Education and Training. Minister, with schools back a few weeks ago, can you provide the Assembly with an update on improvements made to schools during the summer break, especially in relation to the reopening of the Taylor Primary School?

MS BURCH: I thank Mr Gentleman for his interest. A number of capital works projects have recently been completed for ACT public schools, ready for the start of this school year. The most significant project was the rectification of Taylor Primary School in Kambah. This was a full upgrade of the school, including safe removal of the external asbestos wall cladding, the construction of a new external façade, internal refurbishments, and play area and landscape improvements. The school reopened at the beginning of the 2014 school year. In addition to creating a new school for students in Kambah, a larger, 65-place childcare centre has been integrated into the school site, which will improve the transition of children from child care through to school.

In addition to Taylor primary, both Majura and Macgregor primary schools underwent expansions and refurbishment works to existing classrooms to create four-stream schools—that is, four classes per year group. This is a result of the strong enrolments for these schools.

Seven new modular relocatable classrooms were assembled at Duffy Primary School and will support the enrolment growth in the Weston Creek area, as well as students moving into the Molonglo district. These classrooms have the look and feel of permanent classrooms. However, they can be relocated to another school should enrolments at Duffy Primary School decrease at a later time. The classrooms were manufactured off-site, which meant that any disruption to the school was minimised.

School upgrades were also completed at Hughes and Yarralumla primary schools, which now provide 21st century learning spaces for students at those schools. I had the pleasure of visiting Yarralumla Primary School on Friday and was impressed by the changes and the new learning environment for students there. Several other significant projects at ACT public schools were also completed for the start of this school year. They include a new hospitality trade training facility and cafe at Erindale College, a new library and classroom at Malkara special needs school, car park expansions and traffic improvements at Weetangera and Curtin, and painting and carpeting work at Turner, at Alfred Deakin and Calwell high schools and at Arawang, Gordon, Macquarie and Richardson primary schools.

Overall, the investment by ACT Labor in the recently completed works was around \$35 million, which has been money well spent, creating vibrant and up-to-date learning spaces for our students.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, how will the expanded on-site childcare at Taylor Primary School assist residents of Kambah and Tuggeranong?

MS BURCH: The newly rebuilt Taylor childcare and education centre is located within the grounds of the Taylor Primary School. The centre has increased enrolment capacity—up from its original 23 places to 65 places, giving more Kambah and Tuggeranong families and children the opportunity to benefit from the centre's program. The service provides education and care for children aged six weeks to five years. The new facility has been designed and constructed in line with the national regulations and national quality standard with a vision of providing children with an engaging multi-purpose environment.

The spacious new outdoor playgrounds have been designed to provide opportunities for children to engage in physical challenge in a natural environment. I am pleased that the rebuilding process has incorporated innovative sustainability ideas such as recycling centres into everyday play space. Environmental awareness and sustainability will be a feature of the educational program. This new facility will also importantly provide some warm and comfortable meeting areas for families and educators. Also, I am actually very keen to do everything possible to bring our local community organisations into school. That particular site is managed by Communities@Work, which has a long and proud reputation of serving the people of Tuggeranong well.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, how has the Taylor Primary School community responded to the new facilities?

MS BURCH: I thank Ms Porter for her question. The successful relocation to Namadgi School from Taylor and then the move back to Taylor this year were possible because of the strength and the resilience of the Taylor community and the professionalism and the high level of communication from the school principal and staff.

The school has experienced unwavering support to rebuild the community school. The principal, Simon Smith, advised me that the community has been extremely positive in responding to the new facilities, with over 600 members of the community attending the community open day on Saturday, 1 February. Whilst I was on leave at the time, I could not resist the opportunity to go in and be part of that community. I saw Mr Gentleman there as well, and I think he would attest that it is a fabulous new school. It is virtually a new school and I commend the architects and the builders for the work that they have done. Many of the Canberra families have commented on the landscaped grounds and the inclusion of the preschool in the mainstream primary school. Parents have also commented on how quickly the students have settled back in to the new classroom spaces. Parents and students are very impressed with the inviting spaces at the rebuilt school.

Taylor Primary School has a positive, inclusive culture which the community highly values. The teachers were equally impressed with their new teachers space. I think the enthusiasm and the regard that the community held for Taylor was reinforced on that community open day. Families, students and teachers alike are looking forward to this year.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, in your summary of schools where there have been various levels of refurbishment, was it deemed appropriate or necessary for any of these schools to have any air conditioning?

MS BURCH: I do not believe so. We have a principle of making sure that we have appropriate building design in the new schools. Where there are refurbishments we certainly have an eye to environmental design. That takes matters of climate control in schools into account.

Hospitals—performance

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Health. This week the AMA released its 2014 report card on Australian public hospitals. Canberra's public hospitals got an f for fail. Canberra public hospitals had the fewest patients seen on time in the emergency department and, when they were seen, the lowest number completing their treatment on time. Canberrans had the longest wait time for elective surgery and lowest seen within recommended times. Canberra public hospitals had the lowest targets for improvement, in short, the worst public hospital results in the country. Minister, how much longer will Canberrans have to have public hospitals that record the worst results in the country?

MS GALLAGHER: They do not. They do not record the worst results of any public hospital system in the country. There are two areas, in relation to the emergency department and, I think, one area of elective surgery, where we fall behind other jurisdictions. And there are some very good reasons for that, particularly in relation to the emergency department.

I just cannot understand why it gives the Liberal Party so much pleasure to go out and talk down our public hospital system and the people who work in it. That is what you are doing. You have swallowed it hook, line and sinker and just started chanting the Liberal mantra. Does it give you a sense of pride to say that our hospitals got an f? I do not even think they did get an f, in the AMA report card I saw. They got three ticks out of six categories. They got the most ticks out of any jurisdiction in the country. I did not see an f anywhere in the document that I read. I do not know whether that is something that you have just added to add a bit of flavour to the talking down that you do of the health system.

We have some particular challenges. If anyone had a rational look at the performance of other small jurisdictions where there are only two hospitals servicing a large population, they would see—and I have taken the time; I have gone around to the major metropolitan hospitals around the country to have a look and guess what?—they perform largely in line with the Canberra Hospital because of the nature of the work they do.

Yes, when you have them forming part of your hospital system and you have a hundred hospitals, your results can look different. But if you go to any major metropolitan hospital in this country, any tertiary teaching hospital doing trauma in this country, you will see that Canberra Hospital is either on par or performs better than any of them. And that is what we should be talking up.

I am very proud to be Health Minister. I am very proud of the work that is done in our hospitals and I am even prouder of the outcomes that are achieved through that hospital system. And all of us should be.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Minister, could you then update the Assembly on your plans for improving emergency department waiting times?

MS GALLAGHER: The latest results I have seen in terms of seeing patients on time at Canberra Hospital is that we are about 59 per cent for the year. There is an incredible amount of work going on at both hospitals. Part of it has been the expansion of the emergency departments at Canberra and at Calvary hospitals. This has allowed additional treatment space. It is also about employing more staff. Earlier in the debate on another matter in the Assembly today I spoke of the additional staff that have gone into emergency departments at both hospitals.

It is about increasing our bed capacity within the public hospitals. That is underway, as members would know from the budget appropriation. It is also about changing the

way we operate our hospitals to make sure that those people who are able to be discharged from hospital are discharged quickly. That means we are working with the doctors around discharge practices to ensure that people who are able to go home can go home, freeing up beds for people to be able to move out of the emergency department.

I will also be hosting an aged care roundtable with Minister Rattenbury, I think in the next ten days. As we have seen, the closure of Ginninderra Gardens has had a very, very big impact on our inpatient beds being used by nursing home-type patients—more than we have had in the past. You can see how a decision of one organisation then flows on and impacts the public health system.

There are a range of things underway. The results fluctuate in terms of improvement in reaching the NEAT target, but overall we are heading in the right direction, and that is a credit to the staff who are working very, very hard to deliver those results.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Minister, can you advise the Assembly of what ongoing action you have been taking to ensure there has been no further fabrication of emergency department results since the scandal of 2012?

MS GALLAGHER: I provided a full update to the public accounts committee recently. Perhaps I can provide the same update on the recommendations coming out of the Auditor-General's report. There have been some changes in relation to the data management and data integrity systems within Health. We now have a senior officer who is managing the data integrity. I get those reports regularly. There has been no other suggestion that there is anything wrong with the quality of the data coming through the hospital.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Minister, could you advise what the current bed occupancy percentage is at TCH?

MS GALLAGHER: It fluctuated during the year. From the beginning of the year it was in the mid- to high 80s. The last week has been incredibly busy and it is in the order of around 95 per cent.

Environment—water quality

MS BERRY: My question is to the Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development. Minister, you made an announcement today about a major funding boost to improve water quality in the ACT. Can you tell the Assembly more about this funding and what it will be used for?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms Berry for the question. I am very pleased to advise the Assembly that the government has secured an agreement with the federal government that will see up to \$85 million worth of funding to help clean up Canberra's lakes and waterways.

This is a very important funding commitment and agreement between the two governments. It will see funding deployed to improve water quality across the ACT in a range of subcatchments. It is designed to improve the long-term water quality of our much-valued lakes, ponds and waterways. It is part of a funding agreement that has been struck through the ACT's participation in the Murray-Darling Basin agreement negotiations that have now stretched out over the past three to four years.

This funding is being delivered through a basin priority project. It recognises the commitment of both levels of government to improving the health of our waterways and therefore improving the quality of water that is discharged from our stormwater systems, urban creeks and waterways into the Murrumbidgee River. It recognises that we are the largest urban centre in the Murray-Darling Basin. We have a particular responsibility—and a very different responsibility from other parts of the basin, because of our highly urbanised nature—to manage the quality of water that is discharged from our urban environment into the Murrumbidgee River and therefore the basin as a whole.

We are, of course, very privileged to be at the top of the basin in so many ways and to draw down high quality water for our drinking water and other use. Therefore it is incumbent on us, given the quality of water that we draw upon, that we return water into the basin of a similar quality.

That is what this new project is all about. I was delighted to be joined by the federal parliamentary secretary for the environment, Senator Simon Birmingham, today at lunchtime to make the announcement jointly. It is an important commitment on the part of both governments. The commonwealth will provide funding of up to \$85 million. The territory has committed to equivalent funding, to approximately 10 per cent of the total value of the commonwealth funding, in related and associated works. The intention behind that is a partnership—a partnership to improve water quality in our waterways, in our urban creeks, in our urban water bodies, lakes, ponds and so on.

The project is an important one because it will, first and foremost, facilitate the deployment, for the first time, of an ACT-wide monitoring and research regime to help us understand where the pollutant loads are across all of our subcatchments; to undertake the research and monitoring, and get the data set needed, to establish a clear baseline of how our waterways are performing; and then to target the problem areas with interventions that will improve and address the problems we see in those waterways. We expect to see a range of measures put in place through that—measures such as sedimentation ponds, off-line urban wetlands, gross pollutant traps, swales and so on—which are going to help improve water quality.

I know that already there is very strong interest across the community in this funding. Residents are keen to see constructed wetlands and other measures put in place. I look forward to progressing these issues with the community, with interested organisations and with the commonwealth to improve water quality here in the ACT.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Minister, which areas of the ACT are likely to benefit from this funding?

MR CORBELL: As part of the agreement between the two levels of government, there are six priority subcatchments within the ACT that are the focus of this funding. The first is Yarralumla Creek. Obviously Yarralumla Creek flows through the Woden valley, and was constructed at a time when not a lot of attention was paid to urban water quality and the discharges into the broader river system.

There is also Fyshwick, to deal with the flows that come from a commercial and light industrial area into areas such as the Jerrabomberra wetlands; the new development areas in the lower Molonglo and west Belconnen; and Lake Tuggeranong. We know there are a range of critical water quality issues for Lake Tuggeranong, and I am pleased to advise my colleagues from Brindabella that there will clearly be a focus on those areas. I refer also to the upper Molonglo, recognising that there are areas upstream and in New South Wales, such as areas around Captains Flat and Queanbeyan, which need to be addressed as well to improve water quality in lower parts of the Molonglo.

This is very welcome funding. As members can see, it is a comprehensive look at a range of areas across the ACT. I know that there are many community organisations, many residents, who are keen to see work start in these areas. We will work with them in developing the baseline data, doing the research and monitoring, and then working with the commonwealth to deploy the funding that has now been agreed, to make a real difference when it comes to water quality in these subcatchments.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, why is the ACT contributing money towards this important initiative?

MR CORBELL: The ACT government will be making a contribution as part of this joint funding arrangement. Whilst the bulk of the funding is from the commonwealth, recognising the ACT's participation and agreement to the national water reforms and the entering into of the intergovernmental agreements in regard to the Murray-Darling basin, we will continue to make our own contributions.

The ACT's contributions can be in kind but must still be new moneys allocated specifically to these projects. The government already spends a significant amount of money in investing in better water quality treatments, particularly in new urban areas as they are expanded and developed, such as, for example, Molonglo. These will be able to be taken into account, recognising that this is a joint responsibility between the two levels of government.

As I have previously said, the first two years of funding will be focused on data gathering and research. We need to make sure that we have a targeted program of future infrastructure works. For that we need a comprehensive water quality monitoring and data analysis program to be implemented. That funding will better inform infrastructure spending. It will build the business case further with the commonwealth in relation to individual projects within the \$85 million envelope.

I know that Senator Birmingham is keen to see that work occur, as am I. It will give us the evidence base we need to really tackle those hot spots when it comes to pollution and poor water quality across our urban waterways and will make a real and practical difference. I think it would be fair to say that this funding agreement marks a turning point in the way we manage our urban waterways and a turning point towards better water health for the ACT's catchments.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Minister, could you explain why this very welcome agreement has taken a number of years to sign with the federal government?

MR CORBELL: Yes, I can. Originally this funding was allocated for a basin priority project which was focused on reducing salt loads from the lower Molonglo water quality treatment facility. Salt is a by-product of treatment in those facilities and there was concern about the level of salt that was being discharged into the lower Molonglo at that time.

That funding was contingent on the development of a satisfactory business case. The business case developed between the two levels of government demonstrated that the cost-benefit analysis did not stack up. Both governments agreed not to proceed with that project, firstly, because the salt loads issue did not continue in a permanent manner and, secondly, the business case did not stack up.

Since that time the government has been in negotiations with the commonwealth to utilise this funding in other ways that will be to the benefit of water and the environment here in the ACT. The allocation of this funding has been contingent, firstly, on the finalisation of the Murray-Darling Basin agreement, which was settled last year, and, secondly, on the agreement of the new federal government. I am very pleased that the new federal government has honoured the commitments in this case made by the previous federal government. That certainly means that we are in a strong position now to proceed in a real partnership on this issue and improve water health here in the ACT.

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

Supplementary answer to question without notice ACTION bus service—free services

MR RATTENBURY: Yesterday I was asked by Mr Coe and Mr Doszpot about travel on ACTION buses to Brumbies and GWS games. I would like to now provide some further information to that which I gave after question time yesterday.

After question time I noted that the Brumbies, Raiders and GWS pay for the chartered services to the games. In the case of GWS, they also pay for extended free travel on the network. I would like to clarify that by saying that it is actually territory venues and events within the Economic Development Directorate that charters ACTION to

provide the bus services to the games. Territory venues and events pays ACTION and then it recovers 50 per cent of the costs from the hirers. This is consistent across rugby union, rugby league, the Australian Football League and cricket.

In addition, I note that clubs and pubs also hire services from ACTION to attend these events. They are outside this arrangement and are invoiced directly by ACTION to the hirer.

Mr Coe, through interjection, asked me with reference to the GWS arrangements how the free travel is recorded for people who are using the entire network. The answer is that GWS patronage and travel on route services can be tracked using the MyWay driver console.

Employment—government support

Debate resumed.

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (3.29): I welcome the opportunity to speak on this very important topic, and I thank my colleague Ms Berry for her motion. This Labor government is always happy to speak about jobs; our record is there for communities to see and we are proud of it. Our vision for Canberra is that of a vibrant, liveable city that continues to grow and change to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future and to continue to live up to its reputation as Australia's most liveable city.

As a government, we strongly believe Canberrans deserve the best and, more so, they deserve a government that understands this. The Labor government, in partnership with the Canberra community—employees and businesses—have worked very hard to achieve the prosperity and stability we enjoy today. This is in spite of the devastating global financial crisis, and who can forget the hardship the federal coalition under John Howard imposed on Canberra through its austerity measures?

Economic figures have constantly shown that Canberra's economy continues to be strong and with very low unemployment. In fact, our unemployment base is one of the lowest in the country. A paper outlining the overview of employment in the ACT shows that participation rates have not only been consistently amongst the highest nationally but also close to 10 per cent above the national rate. The paper also shows that trend unemployment in the ACT has not risen above four per cent since 2004. As of January this year it was 3.8 per cent, the lowest in the country.

This government was left to pick up the pieces after the Howard years and transform the ACT to the strong economy it is today. But this prosperity is once again in jeopardy. We are faced once again with another coalition slash and burn attack on Canberra. We are seeing an immense loss of jobs right across the country since the federal coalition was elected in September last year. It seems every day when you turn on the ABC—or any news—you hear about another loss of jobs.

We know that the then opposition leader, now Prime Minister, was quoted as saying that as many public service jobs as possible should be relocated outside of Canberra.

It is well and truly on the record that the then shadow treasurer, now the Treasurer, on numerous occasions made statements to the effect that the federal coalition will abolish up to 12,000 public service jobs if elected. We now believe this figure is forecast to be well above this—up to 17,000 jobs.

Every unemployed person is obviously deeply affected and, of course, it has a devastating impact on families. Sometimes it can have a devastating effect on the neighbourhood and of course it has a similar effect on the economy of the ACT and region. But it is not all doom and gloom. Like the Treasurer said yesterday during question time and again today, this government will do everything in its power to protect jobs in the ACT. It will do what it can to facilitate employment both as an employer and as a driver of economic growth.

The Treasurer has given us many examples of success in doing so thus far. As we saw in the 2013-14 ACT budget, a lot of focus was placed on building a stronger economy through the creation of jobs and opportunity of fairness for all Canberrans. The government is achieving this through investment in major infrastructure programs by its support of innovation and research and in private sector and the growing education sector.

In my electorate of Ginninderra, for example, the government funded several such projects that have created and continued to sustain both direct and indirect jobs. Minister Corbell highlighted earlier last year the positive impact of the emergency services station upgrades and relocation project. That was evident with the establishment of the new west Belconnen joint ambulance and fire rescue station which benefited from the project and created jobs during the construction phase. Even though it was completed in October last year, this facility continues to generate employment post completion. I await news on the progress of the proposed Aranda facility.

Health care and social services is the third largest industry in the ACT, employing nearly 20,000 people. That is why the building of the University of Canberra public hospital is very important to the people of the ACT and is keenly awaited by the people of Ginninderra, as we were talking about before. As members are aware, last year the government invested \$8.3 million to complete planning and forward design of the new hospital, which, as you all know, when completed will mean an extra 200 beds plus aged care, mental health and subacute services. This means more economic opportunity in the local economy.

The completed project has the potential of promoting excellence in education and attracting more students and researchers and academics to the city and our world-class educational institutions such as the University of Canberra and the Bruce CIT campus. We heard on the ABC news last night that our tertiary institutions are predicting continued growth in enrolments, particularly students from overseas but also domestic growth.

As I stated earlier, the ACT government cannot stop the commonwealth cuts, but it can and will play a role in ensuring that we emerge out of this period as soon as possible and in a stronger position.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (3.46): I rise today to discuss the importance of jobs in the ACT. As we sit here today in the chamber we know from recent news reports that the federal Liberal government is actively working towards removing the powers and rights of workers. With the introduction of new workplace laws, the undermining of unions and current conditions and, as we have previously heard in this chamber this morning, a commission of audit into the public service, the main aim of which is to force out 12,000 employees, catastrophic consequences will be created for our local economy.

We can all remember what happened to the ACT economy during the Howard era. I saw the creation of the departure lounge for the department of admin services staff at the government printing office. I witnessed also what was known as “death by PowerPoint”, where hundreds of defence public servants were taken into a room and a PowerPoint was displayed showing as available in the future only half the number of positions. If your name was not there you were no longer employed. Then there was the Comcar interview where you were sat down, read three lines and left the room without a job, provided only with a cab fare home. Some 120 permanent drivers were made redundant.

I quote my federal parliamentary colleagues Senator Lundy, Dr Leigh and Ms Brodtmann, who last year reminded us that from 1996 federal ongoing staffing levels decreased by 8.1 per cent across the ACT. That was just the beginning. In the *Canberra Times* on 3 April last year it was shown that between 1996 and 2000 the Howard Liberal government cut around 32,000 jobs from the APS. The impact of the 20,000 job cuts flagged by Tony Abbott will be far greater as it is just the beginning. Currently we have no idea how far the Abbot coalition government will go.

I recall an answer to a question without notice in this place from then Chief Minister Kate Carnell stating that comments about 30,000 job losses and so on were way off the side of the graph and certainly not in line with the budget papers themselves. But that is, in fact, what we saw as those jobs left our economy, and not just one by one but by thousands.

Once again I refer to my federal parliamentary colleagues last year stating that as a result of the Howard cuts in 1996-97, the APS in Canberra shrank to its smallest size since 1984. In 1996-97 private sector employment in the ACT declined by 5.2 per cent or 4,700 jobs for our ACT residents, the same residents who elected us to serve them. This impact was far worse than what the territory experienced during the global financial crisis. The ACT's unemployment rate rose to a record level of 7.9 per cent in 1996-97. The Real Estate Institute of Australia stated the median house price decreased by four per cent between March 1995 and March 1998, while we saw the average for capital cities and Australia as a whole grow by 17 and 15 per cent respectively.

This is a stark comparison to the work the Gallagher government will do to continue to ensure jobs are retained in our local community. Through the last several years the construction industry in the ACT has seen steady growth with various government programs at both the federal and territory levels. The ACT construction sector has

increased its share in the employment market by approximately two per cent in the last decade, and this activity is aimed at stimulating this sector. With the projected cuts to the APS and the resulting rise in unemployment caused by the federal government's cuts this growth may not be sustainable and there will be less demand for housing construction. This will then leave many construction workers unemployed and directly affected by the attack on workers by the Liberal government.

These examples of growth that I have spoken of can be attributed to this ACT government's ongoing commitment to growing the territory's economy, creating employment and strengthening the jobs market. The ACT government will continue to facilitate employment as an employer but also as a stimulating force for the economy and economic growth. We will do our best to combat the effects of the cuts to the APS made by the Liberal government.

Another example of this growth in the ACT is in the professional, scientific and technical sectors of our economy. Through government investment in education, research and technology, ABS stats show that this sector has grown over the last several years and thousands of jobs have been created during this period. This now gives the sector some 10 per cent of the territory employment market.

This growth is greatly added to by the ACT government's commitment to investment in technology to reduce our carbon footprint on the environment through our climate change strategy and action plan. Not only is this plan beneficial to the environment and the future of the territory but also to the present job market as it creates opportunities for training and employment in this up and coming sector which requires high levels of research and expertise.

If we need an example of an industry which will be affected by federal government cuts we need look no further. The fact that the federal government no longer has a minister for science gives light to the lack of interest in this sector from the Abbott government. Not only have we already seen cuts to jobs at CSIRO there is now talk of removing the renewable energy target.

Let us just think about the opportunities the renewable energy target has provided over the last few years. A recent report from Clean Energy Council states that in 2012 renewable energy targets contributed to \$244 billion of expenditure through 137 countries into the global economy creating massive amounts of jobs through the investment in a clean energy future. Madam Assistant Speaker, I assure you that this ACT government is committed to the advancement of science and technology in the ACT, to the employees of this sector and to creating employment opportunities through the climate change strategy and action plan.

The various efforts across the board by the ACT government have resulted in the lowest unemployment rate for any state and territory in Australia. The unemployment rate dropped from 3.9 per cent in December to 3.8 per cent in January, and we are committed to maintaining these figures in the face of federal government cuts and their effects on the workers in the ACT.

I want to take some time to congratulate the efforts of our union colleges across our workforce, because none of the opportunities we see in the workplace would have

been possible, especially on OH&S grounds, without the continuous work on safety and wages by the union movement. Through the implementation of safer environments we have continued to see job growth. Continued consumer confidence in the community will be impacted as the conditions currently enjoyed by workers across the board, such as penalty rates and overtime loadings, are on Mr Abetz's chopping block. These working conditions are the main reason I as a shift worker was able to support my family on a single income. Those rates rewarded me for working hours that meant I was not around the family at times many of us take for granted.

This sentiment is also displayed by business owners such as Clive Palmer MP, who put rather eloquently on *Q&A* on Monday night:

Well, I'll just say at peak times the employer has got an opportunity to make more money because there's more people coming in and you can charge higher prices for what you're selling. So it seems reasonable, if you want to trade at that time, that the people that work for you should also benefit from that. I employ a lot of people in the resort industries and I know a lot of times I make more money on the weekend paying penalty rates than I do during the week. I don't begrudge paying people that because it's their talent and their ability that allows me to trade.

To sum up, in the face of the Liberal government cuts to the public service and the proven effect that this will have on many, many sectors of ACT workers, the ACT government is committed to continuing our work to safeguard jobs in the territory for all Canberrans and to attempt to avoid the disastrous effects we saw with the election of the Howard government in 1996. In this endeavour I call on those opposite to work with us to protect the conditions and employment of working families across the territory.

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) (3.55): The government will not be supporting Mr Hanson's amendment.

Mr Smyth: Not supporting truth?

MR BARR: I am pleased that the shadow treasurer has taken the opportunity to interject on this question of truth because in his comments prior to the luncheon break the Leader of the Opposition spent a deal of time quoting from the Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee Senate estimates hearing of 19 November last year. During that hearing particular attention was paid, during the appearance of Mr David Tune, the Secretary of the Department of Finance, and officers from his department, to questions of efficiency dividends and their impacts upon levels of employment within the public sector.

During his contribution prior to lunch the Leader of the Opposition undertook some quite selective quoting of the transcript of that particular hearing. So I thought I would take the opportunity this afternoon to put some of the other elements of that hearing onto the public record to ensure that those who read this debate in future have a balanced understanding of that hearing and also have an understanding of the highly politicised approach that the incoming government has taken in relation to this matter.

I will begin by quoting from page 15 of the transcript. Senator Wong indicated to the committee that the minister, Senator Cormann, had made a number of political statements on the basis of the finance department's advice. Senator Wong says:

Obviously that puts the department and you—

that is, Mr Tune—

personally in a very difficult situation—your advice—

that is, Dr Tune's advice—

being used in this way.

Senator Wong went on to say that the hearing presents:

... an opportunity for us to make sure we are clear about what the facts are. Obviously the political rhetoric is a matter for the minister but not for you. Let's go back to the start and remind ourselves what was in fact announced in the economic statement and the budget.

Senator Wong asked Mr Tune to remind the committee and the Australian people, in terms of the policies and measures that affected the public service, what was in the 2013-14 budget. Mr Tune replied:

In the budget there were two measures of relevance. One was a targeted reduction in staff in the APS, and that was directed at certain groups inside the APS, by level rather than by agency. The second one was a reduction in the square meterage that we allow in our costings for property—a reduction from 16 square metres to 14 square metres over time as leases expired. That was the budget.

Senator Wong asked the question:

...it is the case, that the former government had a redeployment policy, which was issued by the Public Service Commissioner and also reflected in public statements from the then minister. It had been in place since 2011 and it made clear that the first priority in approaching savings measures was non-staff savings, whether they were an efficiency dividend or otherwise, and that compulsory retrenchment should be avoided. Is that correct?

Mr Tune replied:

That is broadly correct, yes.

Senator Wong followed up:

But the first priority was non-staff cuts in terms of the policy of the previous government.

Mr Tune:

In terms of the ED, yes, that is true.

Senator Wong went on to imply and outline that all of the announcements that the previous government made were published statements by the former government. Mr Tune replied:

Correct.

So they were not very secret. They were public, published statements, so there was no hidden agenda.

The committee then went on to examine the question of the public sector job losses. Mr Tune stated that the 14,500 figure that the Liberal Party nationally have put into the public arena is the reduction in the size. It is different from the number of redundancies. Senator Wong asked:

So it is a reduction in the total size of the Public Service, which might include non-ongoing, staffing freeze—

Mr Tune replied:

Correct.

Senator Wong said:

So it is not actually redundancies.

Mr Tune replied:

No—you have a whole series of other variables you have to take into account when you move from staff reduction to redundancies.

Senator Wong later in the hearing went on to outline that the efficiency dividend would have to have been managed in a manner that was consistent with the previous Labor government's policy. Mr Tune replied:

It was always made clear to agencies that there was an order of preference...that was the decision tree: you focused first on non-staff costs; you focused then on staff costs through natural attrition; then you focused on voluntary redundancies.

In the implementation of any of the previous efficiency dividends, the previous government indicated what the priority was, and non-staffing savings were first. What has happened is that the current government is considering a change to that policy. So Senator Wong directly asked:

So there has not been a change to the policy as yet, but there is one contemplated and currently being considered?

Let us just focus on this. Is the new government going to change its policy and focus on staff cuts ahead of savings in other areas? Mr Tune responded, “Yes, yes, they are.” The previous government, the Labor government, had an approach that job reductions were the last resort. This government, this new Liberal government, has them as the first resort. All of this was not reported by the Leader of the Opposition in his commentary in relation to these hearings. I think it is indeed a point that is worth making.

The final point I want to make in relation to the particular exchange with this committee is that, in order to arrive at this figure of 14,500 that has been put into the public arena by the Liberal Party, there were a series of significant assumptions that had to be made. Mr Tune went to the detail of that. They go to the extent that they were having to project forward and make assumptions about wage costs over the next four years. They take the base and then they assume. These are figures that have to have some form of assumption applied to them, Mr Tune said. They then asked how many people would leave the service voluntarily over the period, and 26,000 was the answer.

So 26,000 people are anticipated to leave the service over the next four years, and this Liberal government has put out a view that the previous government had put in train a process where 14,500 people would be sacked under the previous government’s policies—simply not true, and entirely possible, according to the finance department, for there to be an achievement of that sort of outcome through natural attrition. That question was raised. This in fact was the policy position that the Liberal Party took to the last election, that they would achieve 12,000 through natural attrition, and now apparently they are backing away from that.

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Lawder): Order, Mr Coe!

MR BARR: I am simply going, Mr Coe—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: There is no need to address Mr Coe.

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker. I am simply repeating what the federal minister has said in this hearing and, when pressed, what the secretary of the finance department has said. Prior to the election we were going to have 12,000 jobs go by natural attrition. That was the Liberal Party’s policy. Now, after the election, that has changed. That has changed on the basis of a large number of dodgy assumptions. When pressed, the finance department officials have indicated that they were required to provide a series of numbers to the new government based on a series of unrealistic assumptions. So it is entirely disingenuous of the Leader of the Opposition to suggest that the previous government had an agenda to cut 14,500 jobs from the commonwealth public service. That certainly was not the case. If there has been a change in policy since the election, that change in policy has come from the new government. It relates now to staff cuts first, not staff cuts last, and the number of positions appears to be increasing. We will see in the budget just how bad it is going to be for this city.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra) (4.06): In speaking to the amendment and closing the debate, I thank everyone who has contributed to this important debate today. The Chief Minister highlighted the work that this government is doing in all of its capacities—as facilitators, working with our businesses, regional partners and the federal government to encourage economic investment in the ACT and, as investors, with our commitment to light rail, major construction projects in the city, and investments in our tertiary education and health sectors. Compared to the federal government, the ACT government is a relatively small player in our community but, as the elected local representatives of this territory, we have a responsibility to do as much as we can to protect jobs and defend our economy.

Dr Bourke spoke passionately about the need for governments of all levels and persuasions to invest in jobs in the ACT, because the ACT has a great track record in encouraging smart, driven and creative entrepreneurs. We are indeed an ideas city. I am not sure what the opposition think about that. Dr Bourke also touched on the role that government can play—and I quote him—in creating the appropriate conditions for local businesses, eradicating red tape, reducing and removing outdated taxes, transitioning to online services, undertaking major infrastructure projects from the city plan, the city to the lake, the capital metro and smaller projects such as the new north side hospital, the Calvary car park, the Belconnen high upgrade, new land releases, major road projects such as the Majura parkway, new fire stations, shopping centre upgrades, school upgrades and works in our parks and public places.

Mr Barr, the Treasurer, showed the importance of this government's role in promoting a diverse economy. Mr Barr showed how this government has played a role in promoting our export industry, our tourism industry and our IT and communication and research sectors. We also have a positive story to tell in relation to the diversification of our economy. I thank the Treasurer for his contribution. I also thank the Treasurer for telling the whole truth and not just engaging in selective quoting as the other side of the chamber did today during this debate. Mr Hanson went on his usual tirade based on division and fear. He showed yet again that he has no plan for protecting jobs and no plan for Canberra's economy.

This government has always been concerned by any cuts to the public service. I do not think anyone likes to see APS jobs cut in our city. But we know from decades of experience that the Liberal Party in Canberra is the party of recession. It is mere politics to compare what the last federal government did in the face of a global financial crisis with the current Liberal government's plan to go on some ideological campaign and cut indiscriminately.

Mr Hanson and the Liberal Party in Canberra have no plans and no ideas for looking after jobs and our economy. They cannot tell us what they will do to help families and communities who are affected by the cuts. Essentially, on this side of the chamber we believe in the role of active government. We believe the government, where possible and where it can, should be a positive player in our society, giving people a hand up at every opportunity.

As Mr Barr said, what is needed is farsighted and responsible assistance and guidance from government to help the private sector to grow and create jobs and, in particular, the knowledge-based jobs that are increasingly important in our economy. The other side, the opposition, want government to walk away from its responsibilities. They do not want anyone to work together.

Mr Rattenbury talked about the importance of involving unions in our conversations on how to strengthen our economy. Thousands of workers across the ACT are members of their relevant union and many of them are about to lose their jobs. They absolutely should be involved in these conversations. They absolutely should be involved in discussing how to create new economic opportunities and new employment opportunities.

Ms Burch referred to the 2012 *ACT year 12 graduates: Where are they now?* report, where 93 per cent of 2012 year 12 graduates were employed or studying in 2013. The ACT has the highest rate of retention from year 7 through to year 12, at 89.8 per cent in 2012. This was well above the rate for the nation, at 79.9 per cent. Not only are more students staying at school through to year 12 in the ACT but also more and more are receiving their year 12 qualification than anywhere else in the country.

In 2012, the proportion of 20 to 24-year-olds in the ACT with a year 12 qualification was 91 per cent—again, much higher than the national rate of 85 per cent. In 2013, over 3,300 work experience placements were coordinated for students. The ACT is the only jurisdiction to exceed the COAG target of a national attainment rate of 90 per cent for 20 to 24-year-olds with a year 12 equivalent certificate or certificate II.

Ms Porter talked about the flow-on job losses mean across the ACT, and not just the public sector. Not once did we hear any concern from across the chamber about what effects these would have on people in the ACT.

My motion reflects the work the ACT government is already doing and will continue to do. I am concerned to note that Mr Hanson, in his amendment, does not want to be part of the conversation. He does not want to work with business, unions and the community. He talked about having a strong and vibrant business sector, but he is not the one that wants to reach out to his mates up at the federal government and ask them for a helping hand under what could be some very challenging circumstances for the ACT. It is the ACT government that has a plan, not those on the other side of the chamber.

Those nasty Liberals—if I can quote Mr Hanson—want to pit business against government and business against workers. That is not how you run a successful economy and achieve a thriving society. You do it by encouraging everybody to work together, to work in partnership. To be clear, you do not get to have a successful economy and achieve a thriving society without working together. We do this by encouraging everybody to work together in partnership—government, workers and businesses all on the same page. I do not support the amendment and I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 9

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

Question so resolved in the negative.

Motion agreed to.

Housing—land rent scheme

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (4.18): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the Government's changes to its Land Rent Scheme as of 1 October 2013 by discontinuing the four per cent rate and increasing the household income threshold by \$65 000; and
- (b) the new initiative's perverse outcome, whereby lessees who earn less money under the pre 1 October 2013 scheme are paying double the land rent rate than lessees in the new scheme; and

(2) calls on the Government to amend the Land Rent Act 2008 to include an option for qualifying lessees under the pre 1 October 2013 Land Rent Scheme to change their leases to reflect post 1 October 2013 conditions.

Madam Assistant Speaker, it is common knowledge that the Canberra Liberals have never supported the government's land rent scheme. As has been presented in the past, the government's land rent scheme misleads low income families about home ownership. The Canberra Liberals have always maintained our concern that homeowners under this scheme bear the risk of home ownership but have not the associated benefits of land ownership. In other words, the scheme is structured in such a way that homeowners would be subjected to negative equity. To flesh this out further, the government would be holding an appreciating asset—the land—while the homeowner would be holding the potentially depreciating component of the property—the house.

Here is some interesting data for members: in 2008-09, of the 58 contracts exchanged, none was handed back. In 2009-10, 434 contracts were exchanged and 22 were handed back, a ratio of 20 to one. In 2010-11, 805 contracts were exchanged and 115 were handed back; so the ratio drops to seven to one. In 2011-12, 623 contracts were exchanged and 321 were handed back—a two to one ratio. In 2012-13, 373 contracts were exchanged and 222 were handed back, or a 1.7 to one ratio. That is less than a two for one. I recall earlier this month where a house in Wright worth approximately \$1.3 million was advertised as available under the four per cent, and indeed under the discounted two per cent, land rent rates.

We have a new scheme. The Canberra Liberals opposed Mr Barr's changes to the new scheme of 19 September last year. At the time of the debate we noted the following changes to take effect from 1 October 2013 in this scheme: the land rent scheme would only be available to new entrants who were eligible for the discounted land rent rate of two per cent; the income threshold would be increased and would include the income of a lessee and their domestic partner; lessees who were no longer eligible for the discount rate would be obliged to transition out of the scheme by transferring their land rent crown lease to a nominal crown lease or transferring the block to another eligible applicant; lessees entering the scheme on or after 1 October 2013 would only be able to transfer their land rent crown lease to a purchaser who was also eligible for the discounted rate; and this legislation amended the calculation of interest on an outstanding land rent debt from a simple monthly rate to a compounding rate.

One of the key points for opposing it was the fact that the details on the threshold were not available at the time of the debate. We sought a briefing on this matter. A briefing was granted. The briefing was given and we were none the wiser at the end. The issue was only made clear on 30 September. Remember that the new scheme started on 1 October 2013. The matter was only made clear on 30 September, the day before, in 2013 when the Treasurer issued the government's Taxation Administration (Amounts Payable Land Rent) Determination 2013 (No 2). In it income thresholds for the new two per cent scheme are \$65,000 higher than the two per cent threshold for the old scheme.

This has some interesting outcomes. It will come as no surprise then that families who fall within the threshold for the new scheme, but who signed up a lease in the old scheme at four per cent, would feel somewhat cheated by the government. In effect, those who qualified for the new scheme who are paying the four per cent under the old scheme were, in effect, paying double what they would be paying if they signed a lease after 1 October 2013.

But let us tease that out a little bit. A person who took out a lease prior to 1 October last year with a household income of more than \$94,500 per annum will pay rent at four per cent per annum. Contrast this to the new scheme where a person who signed a lease post 1 October with an income of less than \$160,000—so up to \$160,000 and after \$94,500—will only pay two per cent.

I will give some examples. A constituent affected by this change rightly noted:

To be paying double the rent rate simply because of the time the lease was entered into defies logic and is a complete disgrace.

Another affected constituent expressed the following:

I struggle to comprehend that a family with one child can earn up to \$65,500 per year more than our family and qualify for the discounted rate. The bank would not give us the loan if we hadn't put both our names on the land title as lessees. We have complied, been honest and now we have been financially disadvantaged.

A constituent who is part of a single income household with one dependant provided the following illustration of their situation:

My block UV is \$246,000. The 2% discount rate is \$4,920. The 4% discount rate is \$9,840. On my current income of, say, \$100,000 where I have to pay the 4% rate, this equates to approximately 10% of my gross income.

Contrast this with a family with one dependant on the same value block in the new scheme with a \$163,330 threshold and that is only about three per cent of their gross income. As one constituent noted:

My calculations indicate that I could have saved in the order of \$195,000.

Because of the government's changes to its land rent scheme, families who qualify under the new scheme currently paying the four per cent rate are having to deal with the fact that they are now paying 100 per cent more than those who sign on after 1 October 2013. Madam Assistant Speaker, as you can imagine, this is not fair. When it comes to home affordability, fairness is a valid argument. This may be an unintended consequence of Mr Barr's changes, as when we posed the question of how many households under the four per cent rate would qualify for the two per cent new scheme, the government's response was this:

Information about the household income is not collected from lessees paying at the standard four per cent rate, so it is not possible to provide the number of applicants who would qualify for the new scheme at the two per cent rate if they entered into a lease on 1 October or after.

That is a quotation from question 180 taken on notice on 31 October last year. The truth is that when the government made these changes they did not see this issue coming. My motion seeks to address the government's oversight.

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) (4.26): The government will not be supporting the motion presented by Mr Smyth. We do not intend to amend the Land Rent Act to include an option for qualifying lessees to move from the old scheme to the new scheme. The land rent scheme is a practical measure to increase housing affordability in the territory. It reduces mortgage payments and entry costs to those in the housing market, thus helping families who may not otherwise have been able to buy a house to achieve the dream of living in their own home.

There are a number of reasons why the government decided to change the income eligibility criteria in the new scheme. Under the old scheme eligibility was determined on the income of the lessee. As Mr Smyth has indicated in his comments, this could exclude the income of domestic partners depending, of course, on who was named on the crown lease.

In changing the system, the government increased the income threshold to a household income of \$160,000 per annum to bring it into line with provisions in the homebuyer concession scheme. This is more reflective of applicant income, it ensures that the scheme remains targeted at those who need it most and it allows an appropriate assessment of capacity to finance the arrangement.

In reviewing the scheme, the government considered the issues related to changing the eligibility criteria. However, the decision was taken not to apply these changes retrospectively to contracts entered into prior to the new regime starting on 1 October last year. Changes in public policy do alter from time to time the benefits available to and obligations imposed upon citizens. I suspect that the best contemporary example in the housing market to illustrate this is that from time to time governments have changed the level of the first homeowners grant.

At various points in time that grant has been \$7,000, \$14,000 and \$21,000. To apply the principle that Mr Smyth is suggesting would require the government to go back and give everyone who got a \$7,000 first homeowner grant or a \$14,000 first homeowner grant a \$21,000 because at one point in time that was the public policy arrangement and the people who got in at that time benefited from that particular arrangement. People who came on later did not. That is the nature of change in government policy.

I think the important thing to stress here is that governments have an obligation to ensure the changes do not retrospectively disadvantage people, and no-one is retrospectively disadvantaged. It is not possible, nor is it desirable, for the government to commit that citizens who have entered into a particular incentive scheme at a particular point in time are able to access benefits from changes in the future should a new scheme be introduced.

I understand that there are some concerns about changes in the eligibility criteria and that some existing land rent lessees who do not qualify for the discount rate in the old regime could potentially qualify for the discount rate in the new regime. But I think it is important to note that there are a number of important differences between the two schemes and that those who are utilising the old scheme have a range of additional benefits that those in the new scheme do not have.

For example, lessees in the old scheme are able to move freely between the four per cent rate and the discount two per cent rate while lessees in the new scheme who cease to qualify for the discount rate are required to transition out of the scheme altogether, either by selling their property or by purchasing their land. Land rent leases in the old scheme can be transferred to any purchaser, while land rent leases in the new scheme can only be transferred to parties who meet the eligibility criteria for the discount rate.

Further, in respect of land rent blocks sold by the Land Development Agency after 1 October, lessees whose household income exceeds the threshold for two consecutive years will be required to either convert to a standard crown lease—that is, to pay out the lease—or sell the property to an eligible purchaser within another two years.

Lessees under the old land rent scheme are able to continue to benefit from the scheme for as long as they wish, regardless of changes in their income or changes in the income of other household members. Their land rent lease is also transferrable, which means if they wish to sell their property they are able to offer it on the open market as a land rent lease.

Lessees in the new scheme are only able to sell their property under the land rent scheme to others who meet the household income eligibility requirements. So there are significant and different obligations for people entering the new scheme. As a basic principle, it is not desirable for the government to allow entrants to a particular regulatory or legal regime to access the advantages of a new scheme but presumably under Mr Smyth's model suffer none of the disadvantages of the new scheme.

Doing so would be extremely difficult to administer and it would be prohibitively expensive. I will also point out this afternoon that the creation of the new land rent scheme has not made any participant worse off. Their benefits and their obligations remain entirely unchanged. All people in the land rent scheme prior to 1 October last year will continue under the previous regime. No person who entered the previous land rent scheme is paying any extra charges.

There is no need for this change. The principle is wrong. I have provided the analogy with the first homeowner grant. If Mr Smyth were serious about this as a public policy proposition he would come in and suggest that anyone who ever received a first homeowner grant over the history of that program should be entitled to receive the best possible outcome that they could. At one point in history, that was a \$21,000 grant. I do not think Mr Smyth is suggesting that the principle he is advocating this afternoon should be extended across all government programs.

There will from time to time be changes in government incentives and government programs reflecting changing circumstances in the economy, changing budgetary circumstances, changing priorities of the community and the government. That is part and parcel of public policy decision making, and part and parcel of governments changing arising from elections and different economic circumstances.

There are of course always opportunities for schemes to be changed, enhanced, amended, retracted or altered. That will always be the case in public policy. But I think the important principle here to reiterate is that no-one should be retrospectively disadvantaged, and no-one is here. So the government will not be supporting Mr Smyth's motion.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (4.34): The land rent scheme which was introduced in 2008 allows new homebuyers to pay rent for a block of land rather than paying for the land up-front. The scheme is one of the initiatives of the government's affordable

housing action plan, and aims to move people into home ownership who would not otherwise be able to afford it by reducing up-front costs and mortgage payments

The Greens support the intent behind the land rent scheme. I think it is fair to say that whilst the scheme previously achieved its objective for a good number of people, the reality was that under the old arrangements anyone could buy up properties at four per cent rent and sell them on at a profit. The scheme was, unfortunately, used by some who were already in the housing market, some who had the capacity to enter the market without assistance, as well as those who exploited the scheme for land banking.

The changes that came through last year responded to these problems and refined the scheme to help it better achieve its objective of targeting low to middle income families. The Greens supported the changes that went through, as they were broadly consistent with our view that we should be shifting government assistance to those who most need it.

The changes that came into effect in October 2013 have removed the four per cent rental rebate that was available to all incomes, and replaced it with a single rate of two per cent which is means tested. The income cap has been changed from \$100,000 per applicant to \$160,000 per household, which increases depending on the number of children. So although the overall threshold is higher, it is a more accurate reflection of circumstances as it takes into account the income of both income earners.

There are clearly some people who had signed up to the previous scheme who may have been entitled to a different arrangement had they signed up at a later date after the new scheme was in place. While I understand that people in that situation may feel that they are in some way missing out, at the end of the day, as Mr Barr has articulated quite well, the government must be in a position where people who sign up at a particular time sign up to a certain deal. We make financial decisions based on the information we have available at the time, on the understanding that there are things that are outside our control that may change in the future. With interest rates, for example, we make the choice whether to sign up for a fixed or variable home loan, based on our circumstances and the prevailing economic climate, knowing that interest rates may go up or down in the future.

I really do not think the government should be changing the scheme so that lessees under the old scheme can switch to the new arrangements. I do not believe it is practical to do this. It would be a bureaucratic nightmare to move people from one scheme to another. With the administration, I think there would be quite a workload. Despite the principle, the fact is that I do not think you should be able to change nonetheless.

It is worth pointing out that, as well as tightening up the eligibility criteria, the new scheme also adds some requirements for lessees once they are in the scheme. Firstly, once their income exceeds the threshold, they must transition out of the scheme. Secondly, if the lessee wants to sell their property, they can only sell it to someone who meets the eligibility criteria. These are limitations which were not in place under the previous scheme. So although more people may now be eligible for the two per cent scheme, there are constraints on the scheme's arrangements that may not suit everyone.

It is also worth acknowledging that those people that joined the land rent scheme at four per cent with a personal income of over \$100,000 are fortunate to have access to the program. Under the old scheme they can remain in the scheme regardless of how much their income goes up, and regardless of the income of their partner.

In summary, the Greens support the intent behind the land rent scheme, and we welcome the recent changes in the eligibility for entering and exiting the scheme. We do not, however, support the proposal to give people the option to move from the old scheme to the new conditions. We need to be quite clear that those that entered into the old scheme did so with an understanding of the system. They have derived advantage from that. It has obviously suited them. I accept Mr Barr's observation that the change to the new scheme does not disadvantage those people that were in the previous scheme in any way, and that is an important test. We simply cannot let people move around systems as government changes the range of incentives. I will not be able to support Mr Smyth's motion today.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (4.38), in reply: No points for guessing that neither the Greens nor the Labor Party were going to support this motion. Indeed, in discussions in my office and with other people, people said, "Yes, they'll bring up the example of the first home owners scheme." Yes, there are grants in the first home owners scheme, but you end up owning the house and the land. Under this scheme you do not. The government is getting the advantage. It is all loaded to the government. The government gets all of the advantage out of this scheme, and, as people are finding now, if they were totally honest and declared everything as they did, they have been disadvantaged, and others have gained advantage by not declaring or putting both partners' names on the lease.

There is, I think, room to move here. It is interesting that the Greens' excuse seems to be that it would be a bureaucratic nightmare. I am not sure what the bureaucratic nightmare is. If somebody asks to change from the old scheme to the new scheme, why is that such a nightmare? I would be really interested in an explanation for that. Does Mr Rattenbury feel that our bureaucrats are so inept that they could not manoeuvre somebody from scheme A to scheme B? I am sure that they could. I am sure that if the minister wanted it, they could. But in this case what we have is some legislation for a scheme that was badly drafted from the start. We have a minister who has had to make changes because they did not get it right and what he does not want to do now is make further changes to give some fairness back to the system. It would not be hard to do.

Those that have written to me—and I know there have been articles in the *Canberra Times* where people have complained as well—will get small comfort from the advantages that those who are members of the old scheme and paying four per cent have, as opposed to members of the new scheme who get two per cent. If you are a young family or if you are a cash-strapped family, that difference between four per cent and two per cent can be quite critical. On the numbers that I used before, it is the difference between three per cent of your gross wage and 10 per cent of your gross wage. That is significant for families, particularly young families starting out. In particular, if one member of the partnership is a stay-at-home parent, it can be very significant.

It is unfortunate that the government will not simply look at this. The fact that they do not have some of the data is somewhat disturbing. It shows again that from the start this was a flawed system, badly thought out and badly administered, because the government did not get it right. As we progress, and as I outlined earlier, the growing ratio of the number of contracts being handed back is quite extraordinary. It will be interesting to see how that trend continues over time.

Having said that, I appreciate that the government is not going to do anything. We will go back to our constituents and direct them to this *Hansard* so that they can see how truly caring the Greens and the Labor Party are about their circumstances, and that the only excuse seems to be that it would be too much of a bureaucratic nightmare to change from an old scheme to a new scheme. It is a nightmare, apparently. Yes, it is a nightmare for some now. The scheme has been a nightmare from the start. We have all seen the difficulties, the troubles and the problems that it has had. I predict that some time in the future there will be further changes to the government's land rent legislation, simply because, as you watch those declining ratios, it will get worse and worse. As others, I suspect, find themselves trapped, not with what they wanted, which was the home of their dreams but, indeed, with a debt that may become a burden, and without actually gaining any increase in the equity of what they thought they were purchasing.

We will watch, we will continue to monitor, we will continue to hold the government accountable, and I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Mr Coe
Mr Doszpot
Mrs Dunne
Mr Hanson
Mrs Jones

Ms Lawder
Mr Smyth
Mr Wall

Noes 9

Mr Barr
Ms Berry
Dr Bourke
Ms Burch
Mr Corbell

Ms Gallagher
Mr Gentleman
Ms Porter
Mr Rattenbury

Question so resolved in the negative.

Budget—deficit

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (4.47): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that in the Government's 2013-14 Budget Review released on Wednesday, 12 February 2014:

- (a) the Territory's budget deficit has blown out from \$253.6 million to \$360.6 million (by \$107 million);
 - (b) the Territory will not reach its promised surplus in 2015-16, but will run deficits until 2016-17, forecasting a modest \$11.2 million surplus;
 - (c) during the period between last June's 2013-14 ACT Budget, and the recent Budget Review, the Government's expenses have increased by approximately \$91 million;
 - (d) the Government's poor management of ACTEW has led to dividends being revised downwards by approximately \$121 million over four years and income tax equivalents by \$54.3 million over the same period;
 - (e) the Government continues to slug Canberra residents and businesses with increased taxes, anticipating a \$7.3 million increase in taxation revenue from the 2013-14 ACT Budget; and
 - (f) the Government intends to identify \$38.1 million of savings across the forward estimates period through initiatives such as staffing efficiencies, streamlining of services, and cessation of projects; and
- (2) calls on the Government to:
- (a) provide a financial breakdown on the elements contributing to its:
 - (i) deficit blow out;
 - (ii) increased expenses;
 - (iii) increased tax revenues; and
 - (iv) savings initiatives; and
 - (b) detail the impact of the Budget Review on the community.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the territory's budget deficit has blown out from \$253.6 million to \$360.6 million—that is \$107 million. That is a 42 per cent blowout—almost by half. The 2012-13 budget forecast a deficit of around \$130 million for 2013-14 and the 2012-13 budget review updated this to \$138 million. So we go from \$130 million, \$138 million, \$253 million to \$360 million since these numbers first started to appear. The present updated deficit is almost three times that which was forecasted last financial year. As is so often the case with Labour budgets, it is probably not unexpected.

Also, the territory will not reach its promised surplus in 2015-16; it will probably run deficits until 2016-17 forecasting an \$11.2 million surplus. But given Mr Barr's track record on this, one would not be in a bad position to bet against that actually occurring.

The truth is that since July 2011 when Mr Barr took over as Treasurer he has never delivered a surplus. Call it his ideological adherence to Keynesian philosophy, or

whatever philosophy he has, the Treasurer is ineffectual in managing our economy. This is his report card to date and he knows it.

The problem is that we started with a supposed deficit in 2013-14 which drifted to 2015-16 and then it drifted to 2016-17. One wonders for how long the drift will continue. It was no surprise that under pressure the government announced a \$107 million deficit blowout earlier this month. The Treasurer lashed out at a Canberra resident and, indeed, lashed out at the media. He said on the ABC that Australian politics and economic debate in this country is dumbed down to the point that it is just a score board. When taken to task by the presenter he got a bit troubled by it so he shifted the blame again and said it is the private sector's fault.

The Treasurer shifted his focus quickly away from the dumbing down of the economic debate to the local private sector in reply to a question about the lack of economic diversification in the ACT. He said, "The private sector are not exactly stepping up to the plate at the moment making large investments. Although we are seeking that, we are going overseas for that because we don't think we're going to get that locally." It will be interesting to see which parts of the local private sector he thinks are not stepping up and how he defines "making large investments". I know people in the community are upset at the fact that he said people are not stepping up to the plate.

It is interesting; during one of the votes we were having a little chat across the chamber about the opening of the Rum Bar last night. There he was saying, "Here's some local businesses stepping up," but there he is on the radio a week before saying business is not stepping up. Which is it, minister? This is yet another example of the government's contempt for Canberra residents and the business community at large.

Rather than admit the fact that the government has mismanaged the territory's budget and failed to diversify the economy over the last 12 years, Mr Barr has instead decided to blame Canberrans for having a dumbed down understanding of economics—this is the least likely jurisdiction to have anything dumbed down—and then blame local businesses for not investing enough. Given that Mr Barr has blown out the deficit by about 42 per cent since its announcements last June, the tack that he has taken is highly condescending.

The minister claims the economy is slowing down, yet in the light of the government's deficit blowout it is cold comfort to know that the government's expenses have increased by approximately \$91 million. The government's poor management of ACTEW—let's face it, the Treasurer and the Chief Minister are the two shareholders—has led to dividends being revised downwards by approximately \$121 million over four years and tax income equivalents by \$54.3 million over the same period.

The government continues to slug Canberra residents and businesses with an anticipated \$7.3 million increase in taxation revenue from the 2013-14 ACT budget. So at a time when the government should be making it easier for families to pay bills and businesses to operate, they are hitting them with even more taxes, not to mention the charges.

The government intends to identify \$38 million worth of savings across the forward estimates period through initiatives such as staffing efficiencies—perhaps the minister would like to define what a “staffing efficiency” is—streamlining of services and cessation of projects. What is the low hanging fruit that the minister who closed all our schools is now looking for?

If you go to some of the reforms of this minister, if you go to things that he is in charge of now, things like the lease variation charge, you have only to look at the quarterly update to see yet again the litany of failure this government has in administering the tax system. Remember, this is the great reformer, and this is the government that wants to make sure that everybody pays their fair share. We have got the perfect tax! It is a tax designed by the Chief Minister and Mr Barr called the lease variation charge. It is the perfect tax because it does not affect anything. No-one loses, and the government will reap all this money from it. But we already hear that the community—perhaps it is the business community that is not stepping up to the plate with investment that Mr Barr belittled so much on the ABC radio—refuses to pay the lease variation charge because it affects every project that it is levied on.

Remember, members, in the first year, apart from the first quarter when there was some carryover from the previous scheme—there was a rush to pay—this tax has not reached its target ever. This is a failed tax reform. Indeed, if we look at it for the 2012-13 actual, we ended up with \$15 million. That was revised down from \$24 million, or was it \$26 million, Treasurer? It is so hard to know as the numbers change. The annual budget for this year for the lease variation charge is \$17.6 million, a long way short of the original forecast, which was something like \$28 million. And how is it going? Well, the budget target was \$8.8 million for the half year, of which the minister achieved \$6 million, or a deficit of \$2.7 million. The target is still there at \$17 million; half of the way through the year we have only got \$6 million or about a third of that number.

We know it is affecting business because business I know is telling the government through submissions to the budget and through pleas from business leaders and individuals that projects will not go ahead while this tax is in place. Again, this is the minister who thinks that business is not stepping up to the plate and not investing. But they are not doing it, minister, because of the regime you have put in place.

Of course, there was the extra hit they got when their commercial rates went up. Everybody thought the transfer was only to the residential sector, but it caught up this year and people are quite astounded. Of course, that compounds with your promise to remove the commence and complete charges at the Property Council luncheon to a large round of applause, which I know you enjoyed, Mr Barr, but then it never happened.

This is the environment in which your budget report is delivered, your half yearly update. We all know there are dilemmas and difficulties out there in the business community, but what they are not getting from you is a sense that you understand or that there is hope for them in the long run because of the taxes and the changes and

the legislation and the red tape and the green tape that you and your government, ably supported by the Greens, have put in place which are stifling activity, stifling employment and stifling the growth of the city.

Let's face it, we are a city state. There is no manufacturing, there is no agriculture, there is no mining of great extent. We are a city state. We rely on the city. The city is our home; the city is our future; the city is our economy. We have to build our city and build our economy in that vein. The changes that you have put in place are not working, as is evidenced by the half yearly update to the budget.

Looking back at the government's lack of support for local businesses, it is also worthy to note that government funding for business is less than one per cent of the budget. Compare this to when the Canberra Liberals were in government when it was approximately 1.6 per cent of the territory's budget. In the recent statement of performance for the Economic Development Directorate they missed their target on innovation grants by 40 per cent. They missed their target on the clean tech sector grants by 200 per cent. They missed the target for the ACT film fund applications by 67 per cent.

Mr Barr talks about his global connect program, but he does not talk about how he underfunded this initiative by about \$1.5 million. It is no surprise that the applicants for the 2013 awards have dipped below the 2009 figures. Last year the awards received only 25 applicants for the 12 categories. That is about two applicants for each category. Ironically, Mr Barr talks about the importance of exports to the ACT, but it would not appear he is doing a great deal to make that happen.

In the machinations of Mr Barr's pseudo economic mind, he taxes business more, gives them less and is perplexed as to why local businesses are not, in his own words, stepping up to the plate. That is the state the budget review reveals. We see the deficit slipping further and further out. We see dilemmas for the government, and we know they are looking for savings. The forecast of finding another \$38 million will only be compounded when they have to find more savings to attempt to get to surplus by 2016-17. It will be interesting to see the budget.

I note the minister has got a reasonably predictable amendment to follow, so we will let the debate go on. But I urge members to ask the government to do what is requested: to explain fully the deficit blowout, explain fully the increased expenses, explain the increased tax revenue and how your savings initiatives will work and where they come from, and actually detail the impact of the budget review on the community. What will it mean in terms of lost services or greater charges? What will it mean in terms of lost jobs? What will it mean to individual Canberrans as they go about their daily lives wondering what their government is up to? It is a very simple motion. It is not hard for a government—hopefully—to do that. But, of course, the minister will avoid it. He will simply say, as he always does, “You'll just have to wait for the budget.” I commend my motion to the house.

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) (4.59): So ends episode 1,700 in Smythonomics—the same speech he gives every time he gets up to speak in this place.

It is the same tired old rhetoric from a tired old shadow treasurer, who possibly now holds the record in that portfolio of being the longest serving shadow treasurer in Australian history. He has been waiting a very long time, getting older, slower and more out of touch as time goes on.

Like all other budget documents before it, the 2013-14 budget review reflects this government's commitment to the principles of responsible economic management by maintaining a flexible policy stance to suit changing economic circumstances. The government intends to continue to adopt this responsible approach as it formulates the 2014-15 territory budget.

In the context of the same lecture from Mr Smyth that we get every time, it is perhaps worth reminding him of figure 1 on page 7 of the budget review, which indicates that the government's long history of considered and responsible decision-making gave rise to a substantial period of net operating surpluses. In fact, surpluses ran continuously from 2002 through to 2011-12, with the exception of a minor deficit in the 2008-09 fiscal year, the global financial crisis year. The government ran surpluses continuously through that period.

A decision to run a budget deficit is not one that the government takes lightly, but it is one that is appropriate for the current economic circumstances. We have chosen to support the local economy, in response to a range of economic factors that are beyond the ACT government's control. The obvious question to pose back to the shadow treasurer is this: if we choose not to invest in our economy at this time, who else will?

I invite Mr Smyth to cast his mind back to the global financial crisis of 2008, the sharpest slowdown in the world economy since the Great Depression of the 1930s. After a decade-long period of surpluses, the government decided that a change in stance was necessary, and used targeted spending to support the local economy. That gave rise to a budget deficit in the 2008-09 fiscal year. After that period, the government delivered a number of surpluses—supported, it is worth acknowledging, by the fiscal policy position of the commonwealth government at that time to support states and territories in stimulating the economy through measures that I am sure members are familiar with in relation to education and social housing, amongst others.

The government is fully cognisant of the implications of temporary deficit budgets. But we do it from a fundamentally strong base. The ACT's fiscal position is solid, and our balance sheet goes from strength to strength. Again, it is worth reminding the shadow treasurer that there are only two Australian jurisdictions that have an AAA credit rating with a stable outlook: the ACT and Victoria. We also have a considerable capital works program that extends into the future and that is providing job and investment certainty. We have one of the lowest levels of net financial liabilities and one of the lowest levels of net debt of all Australian jurisdictions.

As a response to global financial crisis, the government introduced a budget plan in 2009-10. Each subsequent budget has updated this plan as necessary to suit the changing economic circumstances. When warranted, the government has run a deficit in order to allow the flexibility to maintain service levels, address the growth in demand in certain areas and, most importantly, invest in the productive capacity of this economy, invest in our people and invest in our community.

In the context of the 2013-14 budget review, the territory faces a period of growing economic uncertainty caused by the Liberals, beyond our control locally. Perhaps it is within the purview of some influence by the shadow treasurer, although I acknowledge that there are limitations even to his powerful influence within the Liberals. But it is the Liberals who are going to cause this significant mugging of the ACT economy in the coming budget.

The economic outlook for the ACT has undoubtedly weakened since the 2013-14 budget. We see daily reminders in the nation's media about the effects of the fiscal consolidation by the commonwealth government, the Liberals, on the territory. The full extent of the mugging of our economy by the Liberals remains unclear, but presumably we will hear more about it with the release—we hope with the release—of a National Commission of Audit report prior to the federal budget.

What I can say very clearly is that, regardless of what the Liberals do to the ACT economy, this ACT Labor government will continue to support our community to face this uncertainty. We will do so through prudent and sensible management of our public finances and of the territory economy.

We are forecasting a return to a balanced budget in a managed way that does not add to that uncertainty. Why a balanced budget? It is important, in the context of public debate about surpluses and deficits, and also in the context of public debate about the different levels of government within this federation, and the responsibilities that these levels of government have, to realise that, simply, running a surplus or a deficit for the ACT does not crowd out private sector investment in our economy; it does not impact on interest rates or the capacity for the private sector to access finance. The ACT government's budgetary position does not impact upon the private sector at all. It does not impact on their ability to borrow money. That is different from the national government, which is obviously a much larger player in the territory economy.

For that reason, the idea that the ACT's fiscal position can crowd out private investment is simply a furphy. The important point for us to consider as we go into the next budget round, and what I anticipate will be a difficult period for this economy over the next few years, is that critical question: if we are not investing in our economy, if we are not investing in our people, who else is going to do it?

To go to the specifics of Mr Smyth's motion, there are a number of items that have affected the budget bottom line. The most significant of those is a change in the valuation of our superannuation liabilities, a long-term liability. That accounts for \$50.4 million of the fiscal impact that Mr Smyth is so interested about. That simply relates to an accounting treatment based upon the prevailing 10-year commonwealth bond rate and how that relates to the discount rate that is applied for this long-term liability.

Let me give a plain-speaking understanding of this. In essence, when interest rates are low, our expenses will be higher. When interest rates increase above the long-term rate that is set in the accounting treatment, which is six per cent—when that commonwealth bond rate goes above six per cent—this figure would swing around to

a positive. If interest rates rise at any point in the next three or four years and our commonwealth bond rate goes above six per cent, this figure turns around for us. That is totally beyond the control of the ACT government. Not even Mr Smyth, I think, would suggest that we have a role in setting interest rates.

The other change is the impact of the ICRC's water and sewerage pricing determination. In his presentation, Mr Smyth suggested that the independent determination of the ICRC on pricing is somehow my decision or a decision of the Chief Minister and me. Simply put, the ICRC has put a pricing cap, set the price, on what ACTEW can charge for water and sewerage. That impacts upon its dividend and the income tax equivalent payments it makes. It reduces the payments to the government from ACTEW Corporation by \$22.4 million in 2013-14, and by \$120 million over the four years. Income tax equivalents are expected to fall by \$10 million in the 2013-14 fiscal year and by \$54 million over the four-year period. This is not a decision of the Chief Minister or me.

Clearly, the benefits of this decision flow to households and businesses. Whilst Mr Smyth was busy lecturing us in relation to increased commercial conveyance, he neglected to laud the decision that has resulted in about 100 bucks a year or thereabouts going back into the pockets of every household as a result of the pricing determination. But the money that goes back into every household and every business does not come into the territory budget by way of a dividend by the ACTEW Corporation.

These parameter changes are beyond the control of the territory government but are reflected in this moment in time in the budget update. But they are not policy decisions of government. None of the adjustments to the bottom line—the big ones—are a result of policy decisions. I think about 99.7 per cent of the change results from those parameter changes.

To summarise, the 2013 budget review reaffirms the strength of the territory's financial position but also recognises there are a range of external pressures that are driving the softening economic outlook for the territory. We remain well placed to respond to future unforeseen fiscal shocks. But let us be clear: the government's intention is to continue to invest in the territory economy, drive the infrastructure projects that will provide jobs and increase the productivity of the city. That is one point that I think Mr Smyth and I are in agreement on—that we do need to increase the productivity of the city—although, on behalf of the manufacturing sector within the ACT that does exist, I will take exception to his comment that it does not exist. They do exist; they are growing; and they continue to make a contribution, albeit small, to the territory's net exports.

To the fullest extent possible we will continue to respond responsibly and prudently to these matters and these challenges that face us in our future policy directions. It is important that the government budgets for the times. We are going to be entering a difficult period. Through that period, it is important that the territory government continues to support the growth of our economy.

To turn to the specifics of Mr Smyth's motion, it is easiest to deal with those now. That way, we can provide Mr Smyth with the information he needs.

In relation to Mr Smyth's calls for the government to illustrate the financial breakdown of elements contributing to points (i) to (iv), I direct him to pages 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 and pages 42 and 45 of the budget review, which provide the answers, in detail, to all of the issues that he has raised in the second part of his motion. It is important to note that, whilst Mr Smyth always likes to call on the government to do something, it is a bit of an embarrassment to him when we have already done it in the report that he refers to in the first part of his motion. Go to pages 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 42 and 45; you will see the details there, Mr Smyth.

Finally, I should not let pass the opportunity to respond to the verballing that I have received from Mr Smyth in relation to the ABC radio interview that he referred to in his comments. I have observed on more than one occasion that, as the ACT is two per cent of the Australian economy and Australia is two per cent of the world economy, in order for this economy to grow we have to have a national and international focus. There simply is not the private investment capacity within this city of 385,000 people to meet future infrastructure needs. We have to seek investment from elsewhere. We do, and we will continue to. My comments were in relation to the capacity of the ACT private sector. We cannot finance all that we need to just locally; it has got to be sourced nationally and internationally. That is the government's focus.

It would take about a million rum bars, Mr Smyth, to fill the gap that the commonwealth government is going to leave in this economy. We need more than just one small bar in Kingston, as worthy as it is. (*Time expired.*)

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Housing, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and Minister for Ageing) (5.14): I am just thinking about Canberra with a million rum bars spread across the city and what kind of city we might degenerate into if that were the case. I know Mr Smyth would enjoy it, but I think we would probably find it a little bit excessive.

Mr Smyth: No; I do not drink rum.

MR RATTENBURY: Of course; sorry. Mr Smyth is a whiskey man, of course.

Turning to the matter at hand now that I have got rid of that mental image, I acknowledge Mr Smyth's motion. Obviously the ACT budget is very important and one that does warrant debate in this place. I intend to speak very briefly today. Mr Smyth has put up the political discussion that he wanted to put and raised a number of questions in his motion. Mr Barr has gone to the answers to a number of those questions in his remarks and in pointing out the pages in the budget update where the information that Mr Smyth has sought in part (2) of his motion can be found. To that end, I will be supporting Mr Barr's amendment.

Mr Barr: I circulated it, but I forgot to move it. I will need to seek leave to do that once you have finished.

MR RATTENBURY: When Mr Barr moves his amendment, I will be supporting that version, which has been circulated to members. In both the remarks he has made and the text of the amendment, Mr Barr has gone to the questions that Mr Smyth has posed. From my perspective as a member of the cabinet, having to make the budget decisions, I reiterate the position that I have long stated on behalf of the ACT Greens: we are committed to a balanced budget over an economic cycle. It is simply a matter of sustainability, a value that is very dear to the heart of the Greens. You cannot stay in deficit the whole time. There is a time for the government to invest in the economy, to take steps to make investments that will benefit this city down the line. Some of those choices are being made at the moment. But we must also get back into the black. The contribution that I will be making in cabinet will be seeking to achieve that goal, as the government has stated in its time line.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Sport and Recreation, Minister for Tourism and Events and Minister for Community Services) (5.16): Mr Assistant Speaker, I apologise; I got carried away with a million rum bars. I seek leave to move the amendment that has been circulated in my name.

Leave granted.

MR BARR: I move:

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

“(1) notes the Government’s 2013-2014 Budget Review released on Wednesday 12 February 2014 and that:

- (a) the Territory will reach a balanced budget in 2016-17;
- (b) in 2013-14 the Territory’s budget deficit has increased from \$253.6 million to \$360.6 million. This increase is explained primarily by parameter adjustments, including amended timing in the payment of Commonwealth grants and higher than expected superannuation expenses;
- (c) in addition, due to the release of the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission’s water and sewerage pricing determination, the dividend and income tax equivalents paid to Government have been revised downwards, respectively, by \$120.7 million and \$54.3 million over four years; and
- (d) the Review incorporates saving decisions of \$38.1 million of savings across the forward estimates period that focus on improving the administration of Government programs with minimal impact on service delivery and can be broadly categorised as staffing and organisational efficiencies, better targeting of services and other savings, including the cessation of lower priority projects. Further details will be provided in 2014-15 Budget; and

- (2) calls on the Government to continue to manage the ACT Budget in a prudent, open and responsible manner, in particular given uncertainty around continuing contraction by the Commonwealth Government and its current Commission of Audit.”.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (5.17): It is interesting that it may become Mr Barr’s political epitaph that he has added to the economic lexicon of the Australian language the image of one million rum bars as a measure of economic activity. I actually would be curious as to what the economic output of a standard rum bar is. Is there a deviation and how does one work out—

Mr Wall: Perhaps it is a negative output figure.

MR SMYTH: Yes. Can they have a negative output figure? Is there an ABS statistic that backs him up on this?

Mr Barr: We have the Big Mac index and the iPod index; so Canberra can have the rum bar index.

MR SMYTH: There we go; we have the Big Mac index. We now have the Andrew Barr rum bar index of economic activity. I think that reflects probably more on you, minister, than it reflects on me.

Mr Barr: It is an alternative currency, isn’t it.

MR SMYTH: It is. It will become the Bitcoin of the ACT economy, the rum bar economy. It is interesting when Mr Barr is in trouble. He looks with that steely look at the Speaker’s desk and he does not interject. He certainly is more relaxed now; the interjections are coming across the chamber. He has delivered the slap. He starts with the insults because he has got to say something quick. But slow and old? Please, slow and old! You keep up if you can, Mr Barr.

It is interesting that after one of the budget breakfasts somebody said to me, “Andrew runs a good game. He talks a good game. But we all know that under that fake composure he is sweating like a gypsy with a mortgage.” If you want to call me old and slow, I will just quote back what some of the business community said about you. There he is, he is composed, he has got his set piece. Andrew has got this steely grin. Mick, he was looking you in the eyes as he delivered his economic lecture today, but underneath, to quote somebody from the business community, he is probably sweating like a gypsy with a mortgage.

And he should be, because what he has done is simply run out his same old cant. He does not answer any of the questions. Mr Rattenbury says, “He answered the questions.” I do not think the chamber is any wiser in respect of, for example, paragraph (2)(a)(iv). What are the savings initiatives? We asked for more detail. What are the savings initiatives? They are broken down into three categories.

Mr Barr: Page 14, yes.

MR SMYTH: Yes, page 14, staffing and organisational efficiencies. What are they? Better targeting of services; what will they be? Other savings; what are they? The detail is not there. The community has got a right to that detail. This is a reasonable way to get it, through a motion. You can be a bit glib and say, “Yes, I’ll quote you some page numbers.” I have read the report, same as you. I know there is certain information in there but the community is entitled to more information. We get a little bit of a flick, but at the bottom line, at the end of the day, it is taxpayer that pays for this; so we need to keep that in mind.

He, of course, went into the standard Labor attack: this has all been caused by the Liberals. There was absolutely no acknowledgement that the mismanagement of the Australian economy under the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd governments, the huge debts that they racked up and the 14,457 jobs that will go as a consequence of their action. There was no acknowledgement of that. It is part of that fiscal consolidation. We will just write that period off. We will not talk about it. You just ignore the damage done and the fact that at the end of the day somebody at the end has got to bring the budget back into surplus. At some stage there must be a surplus but there is now acknowledgement of that.

Then he says, “Go to page 7 and look at our record. Look at our general government sector net operating balance history. It is a beautiful blue line. Apart from the GFC bit where we were not responsible, it is all these wonderful surpluses.” If I remember rightly, this Labor government has only ever budgeted for two surpluses. They have certainly had more but I would suspect, looking at the period 2001-02 through to about 2007-08, that you were simply riding on the back of the Howard government, their achievements and an economy that was strong. They reaped the dividend of the economic reforms that Keating started and that Howard and Costello continued.

Dr Bourke: And you blame us for the bad times.

MR SMYTH: You have got to take the good with the bad. You have got to give credit where credit is due. I will give credit to Keating for what he started and to Howard and Costello for continuing it. It is a shame you cannot give the credit where it is due. I instance the reforms of the GST and the rivers of gold that appeared and the property boom that occurred under the Howard government. That is represented by those peaks in the positive. Your period, Treasurer, is all mainly negative. Look at that. It is all a big dive. Yes, Andrew becomes Treasurer and it dives. Andrew is still the Treasurer, it still stays below. We are going to wait now for 2016-17 for a mythical return to surplus. We will see.

The Treasurer talked about the credit rating. He talked about the credit rating. There is concern about the credit rating in circles where people are saying if they are going to build a stadium, if they are going to build a subacute hospital and if they continue to go ahead with the capita metro of which the Treasurer has said that there is no price to big that will stop capital metro—

Mr Hanson: Just phase 1.

MR SMYTH: Just phase 1! Then there are concerns in financial circles that the credit rating may be at risk because people do not believe the government has got the wherewithal or the power to pay it back. It will be interesting to see how the government finances this. Our preference is for a piece of productive infrastructure that will show the measurable results in the economy, and that is the convention centre. Make money through other sectors and then go and build your capital works projects. But it will be interesting to see what happens to credit ratings if all of those projects went forward.

In respect of productivity in the city, yes, I do admit that there is manufacturing in the city. It is a small sector and that is not what I meant. We do not have the grand smelters, the Alcoas and the car plants. These are things that we do not have. It is interesting; we could have actually had a couple of quite innovative businesses. For instance, I remember the story of Spark Solar before the outcome of the 2007-08 election where all the parties committed to setting up Spark Solar. They wanted to set up a plant in the ACT to manufacture solar cells. They came to the ACT to be close to the ANU and wanted to manufacture here.

But this government got rid of all the business assistance programs in 2006-07 budget; do not give anything to business; it is welfare. They could not help Spark Solar and we do not have the Spark Solar manufacturing plant which was to be a turnkey operation. Everybody in the place seems to be interested in solar power except for the government. It was not interested in manufacturing the cells here and getting the dividend from having some blue collar jobs in the ACT. It is quite interesting. The manufacturing sector could have been busy. It could have been much bigger, minister. That might have led to other things as the synergies worked on.

Let us go to the rum bar. I would like to congratulate Gil Miller, his wife Colleen and Leigh for their endeavour down there at Kingston Foreshore. Let me remind you again that Kingston Foreshore initially occurred under the previous Liberal government. We had the foresight to make the land swap, as was mentioned last night by Gary Humphries—Kate Carnell and Paul Keating.

Mr Barr: Paul Keating had the foresight, yes.

MR SMYTH: He wanted the museum site. He had something we wanted; we had something he wanted and it all worked out. But it did start under a former Liberal government and it is coming along. But let us acknowledge the small business people like Gil, Colleen and Leigh who put everything on the line when they go to work. The minister has now sort of corrected himself. He said that I have somehow slandered him by quoting his words at him when he said, “The private sector are not exactly stepping up to the plate at the moment making large investments, although we are seeking that. We are going overseas for that because we do not think we are going to get it locally.” He changes his tack this evening, members, by saying, “We are only two per cent of the economy. We are only 300,000-odd people and we do not expect to get that sort of investment.”

I can tell you that the Gil Millers of the world and the Colleen Millers and the Leighs of the world are stepping up to the plate every single day because they have got everything on the line. With Andrew Barr at the helm slagging off at people like this is it any wonder people do not have faith in this government. I know that Andrew Wall, who is our small business spokesperson, is out there every day talking to small businesses and he gets the same stories: this is not a government that has the wellbeing, the welfare and the future of small business at their heart because they are just not interested. You can see it. I am talking about large-scale investment. He said, "The private sector are not exactly stepping up to the plate at the moment." They step up every day.

Mr Barr: In terms of large investment.

MR SMYTH: Making large investment? Define large investment? You didn't define large investment.

Mr Barr: \$500 million.

MR SMYTH: For some people, \$500 million—

Mr Barr: Like the airport.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Gentleman): Order, members!

MR SMYTH: There you go. In the private sector, if you are not at \$500 million Andrew Barr is not interested in you. What about the people who put up their \$500,000, their \$50,000, their house or everything they have to set up their rum bar? Good luck to them! Good luck to them for chasing their dreams!

Mr Barr: That does not fill the billion dollar hole that the commonwealth government is making.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Barr!

MR SMYTH: But that is not what you said. But it is not what you said.

Mr Barr: That is what I said earlier in the interview.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Barr!

MR SMYTH: You are in trouble. The announcer called you on your insult to journalistic standards. You went for the swing punch. You missed. You took out the private sector instead and you got it wrong, same as you got it wrong in your response to this motion. You should detail the saving initiatives. You should detail the revenue and where it is coming from. You should detail your expenses and why the deficit has blown out. You should support this motion.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 8

Mr Barr
Ms Berry
Dr Bourke
Ms Burch
Mr Corbell

Ms Gallagher
Mr Gentleman
Ms Porter
Mr Rattenbury

Mr Coe
Mr Doszpot
Mrs Dunne
Mr Hanson
Mrs Jones

Ms Lawder
Mr Smyth
Mr Wall

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Health—end-of-life issues

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (5.31): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that the ACT has one of Australia's fastest growing populations of people aged 60 and over, with numbers expected to increase to almost 20% of the population by 2020;
- (b) that with such an ageing population the need to sustain a conversation, in the general community, on palliative care and end-of-life issues is pertinent;
- (c) that in September 2013 the Palliative Care Conference that was held in the ACT highlighted the need for such community conversations;
- (d) that mid next month I'll be hosting a roundtable stakeholder forum on End-of-Life issues;
- (e) that the Government recently released its comprehensive Palliative Care Services Plan 2013-2017; and
- (f) that the plan will provide strategic direction for the continued development of palliative care services in the ACT, now and into the future; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) continue raising end-of-life, palliative care, and advanced care planning as issues within the ACT community;

- (b) continue to implement recommendations from the ACT Local Hospital Network Council's End-of-Life Issues and Decision Making Forum that was held in May 2013; and
- (c) seriously consider the report resulting from the September 2013 Palliative Care Conference as well as that from next month's End of Life forum.

It is in the interests of the entire community—the elderly, those with chronic illness, carers, families and the health system itself—that we create a more open culture of talking about the end of life. And in recent months the ACT community has begun to speak with greater openness and maturity about death and the process of dying. It is a sad part of life, but it is inevitable. It will happen to us all. It is in the interests of the entire community—as I said, those of us who are older, those with chronic or life threatening illness, carers, families and the health system itself—that we do create this culture.

My own experience of some years ago—watching my mother die in a four-bed ward in an aged-care facility with no palliative care available, and no choice, and more recently being with my husband and his family while we sat with his father, thankfully afforded palliative care—obviously has influenced my thinking.

The ACT government is leading this discussion in our community. It is important that we all talk about the issues with our communities and with our families—to talk about what we want, what we do not want and what we value—when we or our loved ones are facing the end of their life.

The ACT Local Hospital Network Council helped to start this conversation by hosting the end-of-life issues and decision-making forum on Saturday, 4 May last year. The forum was an extremely constructive event and, although many different opinions were shared, there was a strong consensus that everyone should be able to make decisions about their end-of-life care and should be supported by a system that respects their wishes. At the completion of the forum, the local hospital network made a number of recommendations and work has already progressed on a number of these. Importantly, the ACT government has backed up advocacy with action.

Palliative care is an area that will experience a growth in demand as our population ages, and we need to respond to this challenge now so that people can receive the care and dignity they deserve at the end of their life.

It was pleasing to see that Palliative Care Australia held a comprehensive conference in September last year. Keynote addresses and papers were presented at that 12th Australian Palliative Care conference by practitioners, academics and researchers with obvious qualifications in the area. Once again, I believe, and the ACT government believes, that the right thing to do by our community is to talk about these issues and continue to support and enable the most compassionate and dignified palliative care possible.

That is why, on 28 October last year, the Chief Minister released the ACT palliative care services plan 2013-17. This plan incorporates strategies for new and emerging

models of care in the provision of palliative care services and aims to create a more integrated service across acute, subacute and community health services. The plan identifies six goals and associated strategies for the ongoing development of palliative care services in the ACT. In particular, these goals relate to education and awareness of palliative care, access to services and continuity of care.

The scope of the plan includes demand projections, workforce needs now and in the future, community education, support for non-government organisations and identification of possible future models of care. It calls on the experience of consumers, carers, clinicians, non-government organisations, advocacy groups, Calvary Health Care and Southern New South Wales Local Health District. Most importantly, it puts the needs of the individual, their family and friends at the centre of the discussion and will continue its work with this focus. Obviously, we need to draw on the valuable insight and contributions of those who have been working in this field, and researching in this field here in the ACT, nationally and internationally.

As part of the 2013-14 budget the government increased funding for the respecting patient choices program by \$1.2 million over four years. The increased funding provides an additional 1.4 full-time equivalent staff members, in addition to the one full-time employee currently working on the program. Respecting patient choices is an advance care planning program in the ACT. The program is funded by ACT Health and is available to all members of the community. Advance care planning provides a quality assured process for an individual to appoint an “attorney” for health, personal and/or financial matters. The additional staff are tasked to improve the level of community education and awareness across the ACT and increase the uptake of advance care planning across the community and within particular harder to reach groups.

ACT Health is also currently preparing to go out to tender for a community organisation to deliver an advance care planning education and awareness program in the community. The ACT Health advance care planning team is also liaising with ACT Medicare Local on their campaign “be my voice”, which will include a media campaign, including television advertising. This initiative will help address that inequity in our community.

To assist in increasing awareness with health professionals, education has been conducted in conjunction with ACT Medicare Local for GPs, as well as rolling education sessions within ACT Health for health professionals and administrative staff. E-learning has also been developed for ACT Health staff to raise awareness of the program. There has also been an increased focus on the topic nationally. The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care has released a draft national consensus statement “Essential elements for safe and high-quality end-of-life care in acute hospitals”. This has been released for public consultation.

The commission is holding a series of consultation workshops with consumers, clinicians, allied health professionals, hospital managers and hospital executives across Australia, with the ACT workshops scheduled for early March. The aim of these workshops is to ensure that the consensus statement accurately reflects the expected standard of care and practice for end-of-life care in acute hospitals and to consider strategies for implementation.

The subject of how to plan for end of life will never be easy. But it is important to bring about cultural change. I support the people in our community who are making these important decisions and those that are supporting us in our end-of-life planning. That is why I will be holding a forum in March to further discuss this important issue. I am pleased that the government's action in this area is helping raise awareness of issues surrounding end-of-life decisions and that the government continues to deliver practical initiatives, as well as increasing the resources, providing a range of advance care planning opportunities and improving palliative care planning and delivery in the ACT.

Together with healthcare professionals and members of the community, we are moving the ACT towards being a jurisdiction which talks about the issues that surround the end of a person's life and plans for when this time comes to pass. I continue to encourage all members of this place to be involved in the public conversation with their own families, communities and stakeholder groups.

I emphasise that end-of-life planning is not something that you should leave till you think that maybe it is going to be the end of your life because, as we sadly know, many people in our community face this issue much earlier than they perhaps would have liked. I think the time for discussion in any family with any individual is now.

I am therefore calling on the government to continue raising end-of-life and palliative care and advance care planning as an issue within the ACT community, to continue to implement recommendations from the ACT Local Hospital Network Council's end-of-life issues and decision-making forum that was held, as I said, in May 2013, to seriously consider the report resulting from the September 2013 palliative care conference, where papers were presented by the people that I mentioned before—the researchers, the academics and the practitioners—and to consider the results of my forum that will be held in March on end-of-life issues.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (5.41): I am pleased to speak to this motion. I do have a little sense of *deja vu*. I know that we have discussed this before, and the motion that we are looking at today does look somewhat similar to previous motions that we have looked at in this place.

When I compare the motion to some of the comments that have been made by Ms Porter in the *Canberra Times*, and in quotes as well, it is interesting, having regard to the public commentary around these issues. I know that Ms Porter has been very careful in this place to say, “This isn't just about euthanasia,” and so on, but when you look at the debate that is being sparked, the *Canberra Times* stated:

Mary Porter intends moving a motion in the ACT Assembly on “dying with dignity” and end-of-life issues, an action sure to reignite the euthanasia debate.

The article talks about the people that she has invited to her forum who have “written extensively on voluntary euthanasia”. It goes on to say:

At the forum in March, voluntary euthanasia and assisted suicide will be up for discussion. “Up to this point, we have not talked about it—it's like the elephant in the room. We go to these forums and they say we are not talking about voluntary euthanasia.”

It talks about the trip that Ms Porter undertook through Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands looking at voluntary euthanasia in those countries. I suppose I would say that if the intent of what Ms Porter wants to do is to have a debate about euthanasia, she needs to consider the various elements of legislation, but she should be somewhat honest about what we are talking about here, if that is what she is doing, because that is certainly the debate that she is creating in the media. They are certainly the signals that she is sending when she does that. I remind Ms Porter—and she is probably aware of it—of section 23 of the self-government act in regard to these debates.

Having said that, end-of-life issues are very important. They are, indeed, difficult issues for our community, and they deserve the most sensitive and thoughtful attention of all Assembly members. But I do reflect that, given it is only six months since this matter was last discussed, there are no new or substantive matters that we are debating here. Perhaps this debate would be more appropriate if it was post Ms Porter's forum, and post the report of her visit overseas being published. Certainly, it seems that we are going around a little bit in circles.

We are being asked to pass this motion on palliative care. I would not say that it is misleading, but we are being asked to talk about things that do not even exist.

Turning to the substance of the motion, I think the point that Ms Porter is trying to get across is that the medical, ancillary and health support professionals who make palliative care their daily work and those individuals who choose to give their time and experience as palliative care volunteers truly deserve the greatest respect and thanks from us all in the wider community.

The fact is that death and dying are inevitable, and it is an experience that eventually touches each of us individually in a myriad of challenging, daunting and sometimes frightening ways. As we each face our own death or share and experience the approaching event with a loved one, it is an experience that few of us can ever be totally prepared for. Professional and well planned and funded palliative care is a mark of a caring and civilised society which has its priorities right and recognises the needs of all of its community members at every stage of life's journey.

The Canberra Liberals are pleased to note and acknowledge the recommendations of the recent ACT Local Hospital Network Council, which held an end-of-life decision-making forum. I would like to address some of the key points in this report.

Clearly, the management of death should be a public health issue. Historically, death was often seen as something beyond the issue of a health system. Medical practitioners were focused on our health outcomes at the beginning of life and throughout life but not at the end. The task of the doctor was often viewed as simply to issue the death certificate. As the community embraces a new view, we are increasingly and correctly accepting death and dying as a public health matter.

In a caring society, we need to address our society's culture around death and to normalise death and dying. We now understand that the sooner health professionals have contact with people who can help us accept the fact of dying, the better will be the outcomes and experience for all.

An important part of a well-lived and healthy life should be a death that is as good an experience as it can possibly be made, given that, ultimately, I suppose you could say that no-one gets out alive. Ultimately, we just need to make sure that it is the best experience in the circumstances.

One issue that was made clear at the Local Hospital Network Council forum late last year was that, despite the progress made in current palliative care, a wider acceptance of the role of the whole health system in that care is needed. It is now widely accepted that health service management need to ensure that action is taken to embed sound palliative care practices across the whole health system.

I have previously acknowledged that, by its nature, talking about death and advanced care plans is complex. The challenge is bringing together medical and legal language, emotions, values, religion, culture and family. It is a cultural issue in our community. We have a multicultural, multifaith society, and the issues of managing that within a health system take on challenging dimensions. These are sensitive issues and touch the dying and their families at emotional and sensitive times. As we move to provide more and better palliative care programs, the needs of our multicultural, multifaith society will need to be acknowledged.

The key recommendations of the ACT Local Hospital Network Council's end-of-life issues and decision-making forum include greater involvement and understanding across the community on end-of-life care issues. I certainly support the need for significant engagement in education with the diverse communities in the ACT to increase the understanding of what happens at the end of someone's life and to understand the range of perspectives on this issue and people's needs, and to normalise discussions of end of life.

A second issue discussed was increased information and awareness of the usefulness and benefits of advance care planning. I understand that there is, as I have said previously, a need to increase awareness of advance care plans in the media and through contemporary and traditional social networks and education campaigns.

A third issue was to create a greater acceptance of the value and importance of advance care planning amongst all carers and professionals. Certainly we hope that that is the case, and that primary healthcare professionals in particular are discussing advance care plans with their patients before they reach the acute care setting.

Item 4 was to clarify and simplify the legal framework for advance care planning and move towards a common framework and set of documents for them. Certainly it is important that the legal framework for advance care plans is clear. Moving towards a common framework is a desirable aim. Other issues included taking steps to make advance care planning easily available and options in end-of-life situations being openly discussed. I certainly welcome that discussion that is taking place.

There are three specific items in the motion that Ms Porter is calling on this Assembly to agree to. She calls on the government to continue raising end-of-life, palliative care and advance planning issues within the ACT community. I certainly support that

endeavour. She calls on the Assembly to continue to implement recommendations from the ACT Local Hospital Network Council's forum of May 2013. I am not sure whether the government is supporting all of those recommendations.

Ms Porter: It has not happened yet.

MR HANSON: No, the one from May 2013. She also calls on the Assembly to seriously consider the report resulting from the palliative care conference in 2013 as well as that from next month's end-of-life forum. I have some concerns with this because with regard to the conference in September 2013 there is no report. There is a list of papers. My office has spoken to the convenor from Palliative Care Australia and we have been advised that the conference had no report. We have contacted Ms Porter's office, and there is no report. So Ms Porter is asking the government to consider a report that does not exist. There are a bunch of documents from the forum but there is no report. I believe she is going to use some language to try and explain that away, but, ultimately, it is pretty clear that Ms Porter has the support of the health minister in this regard. If the health minister chooses to consider a report that does not exist, and if that is the way she chooses to use her time, good luck to her.

In the next item Ms Porter is asking the government to make sure that the report from the end-of-life forum, that has not even been conducted yet, is seriously considered. I am a little bit incredulous that Ms Porter's motion is asking the government to consider a report that does not exist and to consider a report from a forum that has not even been conducted yet. I question the value of what this government are being called on to do when they are continuing to raise end-of-life issues—I do not think that anyone has any argument with that—and then calling on the government to consider two reports that do not exist.

I am happy to support the thrust of what is being said. These are important issues, but Ms Porter needs to make sure that the messages she is sending to the community with regard to voluntary euthanasia are consistent with what she is saying in this place and that she is honest about what she is pushing out there in the community. It would be useful if Ms Porter were to give us a view on voluntary euthanasia. She has now moved a couple of motions, she is having a forum and she has travelled extensively throughout Europe, discussing with and visiting countries where voluntary euthanasia takes place. It would be useful if she were to provide a view other than coming into this place and saying the government should consider reports that do not exist. I am not sure how that is actually progressing this debate.

If she does not have a view one way or the other then she should say that. But if she does have a view, and this is a stealthy push because that is her subtext to it, I would encourage her to make it plain and clear. I would say to Ms Porter that if that is her view, that she is actually advocating for voluntary euthanasia, be honest about it. Do not send mixed messages. Do not get other people to do your dirty work for you in forums. If you have come to a conclusion after your visit to Europe and after your extensive reading on this matter, be honest. I would ask you, in your closing remarks, to say that that is what you are doing—that you are pushing for voluntary euthanasia, and be clear about it.

I do have concerns about this motion. I think that it achieves very little in terms of taking the debate forward since we last spoke in this place. But if the government want to examine a couple of reports that do not exist, it is really a matter for them to worry about.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Housing, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and Minister for Ageing) (5.56): I welcome the discussion Ms Porter has sought to bring to the Assembly today. These are challenging issues and the snide tone of Mr Hanson's comments added very little to the debate and reflect much more on him than on the nature of Ms Porter's motion. These end-of-life issues are very important to the Canberra community. As the decision-makers in this Assembly we should be doing all we can to ensure that people can maintain a quality of life in their later years and that when they have a terminal illness they are empowered to make critical decisions about their own life and death. Giving them that power is about giving a person control and dignity in what is probably the most significant and vulnerable time in a person's life.

As the Minister for Ageing, through the course of carrying out that set of responsibilities, I have the occasion obviously to spend time with a range of older people in our community. I have all sorts of discussions with them, but it would be fair to say that issues of aged care, palliative care, advanced care planning, end-of-life choices and, yes, euthanasia, are issues that older Canberrans raise with me.

Perhaps as they approach those issues in their lives they get very pragmatic about it and it does not become some ideological issue or some taboo issue; it is a very real and practical issue that people face. They are usually very serious, very sensitive and thoughtful discussions with older members of our community who take these issues very seriously and who want them to be talked about in a way that the community is actually engaging in. For my mind, that is where I feel very positive about the work that Ms Porter is doing in trying to have that conversation. Mr Hanson's comments have highlighted how difficult it is to try and even start that conversation. For example, Ms Porter has just been accused of having an agenda, and I think that is symptomatic of how difficult it is to try and have these conversations.

I know many older Canberrans find that very frustrating. The ones I am talking to are saying, "Look, we just need to have a real and practical conversation about this." For my mind, that is the most important part of this, and I would like to think the Assembly can have those conversations in a way that is meaningful.

It is well known—I will put it on the table—that the Greens support giving people the right to choose how they might end their lives. We would allow terminally ill people who are experiencing intolerable pain, suffering or distress the ability to choose to die in a peaceful and dignified death at the time of their choosing. That is no great secret. Many Greens members have said that over the years and in various other jurisdictions.

That said, I acknowledge that it is still a very sensitive discussion in the community, and that is where having discussions like we are today and the sort of fora Ms Porter

is seeking to organise are important for allowing further discussion about those matters in the community. Of course, I find it most intriguing that all opinion polling shows that a vast majority of Australians support some form of right to choose, and yet it is such a divided debate in this country. My surprise at that never ends.

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 RATTENBURY: I do not want to speak too much longer other than to acknowledge that these are really challenging questions. I know people in the community want us to talk about this in a serious way.

I will speak briefly about advanced care because this is an important part in the spectrum of end of life—that is, the decisions and discussions that the community needs to be involved in. Recognising the importance of these end-of-life decisions, the Greens took the issue of advanced care planning to the last election and secured additional funding for advanced care planning in the parliamentary agreement. The budget last year included \$1.2 million over the next four years for improvements to advanced care planning. This funding will enable ACT Health to develop and implemented range of appropriate care planning tools including establishing a mobile clinic. It will be a relief to many elderly patients and those with chronic illnesses in their families that they have access to these sorts of services.

The advanced care planning processes assist people to think about future medical scenarios they may face and what types of treatment they would wish to receive. It provides clear directions from a patient to their carers when the patient is no longer able to communicate their wishes. It also assists patients with their right to refuse future medical treatment.

Establishing such a process also helps patients to think through the various scenarios which may arise over the course of their illness rather than discovering the range of decisions necessary as they front up to them. Advanced care planning is an important way to assist older people to think about future medical scenarios they may face and what types of treatment they would wish to receive in such situations. It also makes formal reviews and decisions about their own lives so that this is clearly understood by both family and professionals.

I am particularly appreciative of the fact that these additional resources have been made available in the budget because until this point the respecting patient choices program run out of the Canberra Hospital which promotes advanced care planning was being administered by one part-time ACT Health staffer who also promoted advanced care plan to other ACT Health staff. Clearly that was a really good job, and the additional resources will mean that the promotion of this program will be improved and more people will have access to it. As a result of that, more people will have confidence about the later stages of their lives and will feel less nervous and less uncertain because they will have better knowledge. I certainly welcome that; it is a positive development.

The other thing I will say towards the end of my remarks is that advanced care planning also underlines the very significant spectrum of issues that are to be discussed in this area. I was recently talking with the chair of the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, David Lawrance, who many would know is also involved in palliative care here in the ACT in another capacity. We were discussing what palliative care means to people and the likely growing demand for it in future years. Again, that underlined to me the importance of these discussions both from the practical side of planning to ensure there is enough capacity through to the emotional side of talking with people about what they think their needs might be and what would make them comfortable should they find themselves with these sorts of needs down the line.

I will leave my remarks there other than to simply welcome the fact that Ms Porter has brought on this discussion because it recognises the fact that these are issues that are very real for a significant sector of our community; a sector of the community that I am talking with constantly. I know they are raising these issues with me and I look forward to further discussion inside this place but, more importantly, out in the community about how we move forward on some of these very sensitive issues.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Health and Minister for Higher Education) (6.04): I welcome the opportunity to speak to Ms Porter's motion today on the very important issue of end-of-life care and raising awareness of it across the community. As our population ages it is important that the ACT creates a more open culture where talking about death and dying is normal and an expected outcome of life both within our community and with health professionals across the ACT. The first step, of course, is to start the conversation within our community and within our families to talk about the end-of-life experience we want for ourselves and those we love and care for.

The report released by the AIHW in November last year entitled *Palliative Care Services in Australia 2013* showed a 49 per cent increase in palliative care separations across Australia between 2001-02 and 2010-11. Separations from public and private hospitals in palliative care accounted for 0.6 of separations but 37.2 per cent of patients who died as an admitted patient had been a palliative care patient. Over the five years to 2011-12, Medicare benefits paid for palliative medicines, specialists and services have more than doubled.

The report also included some interesting facts about the ACT. Some 743 palliative care public hospital separations occurred in the 2010-11 year. Of these 69 per cent were public patients, 21 per cent were private patients and 9.3 per cent were Department of Veterans' Affairs patients. Public hospital palliative care separations in the ACT increased by 8.4 per cent between 2006-07 and 2010-11.

What we can see from these statistics is that the demand for palliative care services continues to grow, and that is not surprising considering the ageing population here in the ACT. What we also know is that an ever-increasing number of patients want to die in their own homes surrounded by family.

The Local Hospital Network Council last year had a forum on end-of-life issues and decision-making where a number of stakeholders from across the community came. Their work has been included in a report which has been provided to me—I think it has been tabled in the Assembly—which provides a number of recommendations for us all to consider. That is mentioned in Ms Porter’s motion, as is the report from the palliative care conference, which I note Mr Hanson had some concerns about. My understanding is that it was a report of the papers that were provided at the conference and that they were collated as a report of the conference. Those papers are available for reading. The reports of both of the Local Hospital Network Council’s forum and the palliative care conference can provide all of us with information and certainly recommendations about going forward.

In relation to Ms Porter bringing this motion forward, I do not think any of us in this place can doubt the very strong interest Mr Porter has in this issue. She has been leading the work on it across our party room for a number of years and I commend her for the interest she has shown and her preparedness to advocate in this space. As Mr Rattenbury said. It seems that issues around palliative care and end-of-life decision-making is not like any other area of the health system where there is an incredible amount of scrutiny and interest from birth right up to when you reach the end-of-life. At the end-of-life point it is almost like we feel constrained, perhaps by our own mortality. I do not know what it is that stops us from having the same kind of open discussion about end-of-life care that we have about the beginning of life with maternity services and so on. My experience as health minister is very different.

There is a growing level of interest amongst health professionals to raise the level of patient engagement in end-of-life care and make sure that medical professionals are respecting the choices that patients make in end-of-life care, which is exactly the title of the program that has received some extra funding: the respecting patient choices program. There have been some difficult issues I am aware of where the choices made by parents might not accord with some of the decisions that medical professionals believe they have to take in order to provide healthcare treatment. We have seen a couple of those go through the court system.

I think there is more interest than ever before about advanced care planning, healthcare directives and health attorneys being appointed so that information for medical professionals is available if choices need to be made about withdrawing treatment or no longer providing treatment. Some of the work around respecting patient choices looks at some of those difficult issues.

In relation to the palliative care services plan, that has covered off the major areas we need to focus on over the next three years. It looks at how we provide a network service across our healthcare services from the hospice to home-based care to the subacute care to the community health system. There is an element of each of those that have responsibility for providing care to people needing palliative care.

The other area is how we continue to make sure we are able to provide the right type of in-home assistance and care that people need when they reach the end of their life. Speaking from personal experience, I have nursed both my parents in end-of-life care.

When my father passed away my mother was around. She was a nurse and that certainly helped in feeling like we were able to care for him, even though he did pass away in hospital in the end. With my mother, luckily my sister was a nurse, and that helped incredibly to care for her at home during her final few months.

It is hard to support families. It is difficult to make sure that the right care is available, particularly as the end of life really nears and the time for someone to pass away nears, and it is important that the health system is able to provide support to families. We know families more and more do not necessarily want a hospice; they do not necessarily want a hospital. In fact, most people do not want to die in hospital; they want to die at home with their loved ones around them. That is a really big challenge for us.

The euthanasia debate raises its head every time you talk about end-of-life care. I am happy for this Assembly to have a discussion around euthanasia. There are constraints within the self-government act. Perhaps that is the first discussion we need to have—that is, whether we should be constrained under the self-government act around euthanasia. But I do not see any reason why that should stop us working to promote end-of-life care and decision-making, respecting patient choices and making sure people have information about it.

In a way, because euthanasia always drowns out this debate and people have such strong views on either side of the euthanasia debate we lose what we need to do around respecting patient choices, listening to people and making sure that the end-of-life care that is provided to them, whatever form that might take—and that might take providing no treatment or providing treatment—is appropriate for their needs. Credit to Ms Porter for the work she has done and the personal investment she has placed in this. It is an example of Assembly members doing good work.

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (6.14), in reply: I thank all of those who have contributed to the debate. I will respond to Mr Hanson's comments. You will note, Mr Hanson, that I have frequently reported that I went to Europe with an open mind to examine models of voluntary euthanasia and assisted suicide—I did say that—as many people had approached me after their own experience of loved ones dying or contemplating their own death and who wanted to have this choice. However, as I said to those people, “You need to know more about what you ask for,” and many do not. I also went to explore palliative care and end of-of life directives, also to explore the journeys that these countries had gone on to get to the point they have and, importantly, to talk to people on all sides of the debate on these issues.

I specifically mentioned on my return—and it was reported in the paper—that quote from Woody Allen, “I have questions to all your answers,” and that is certainly how I felt when I came back, and I still feel that. I went into this discussion with an open mind and to further discussion in the community. One of the most valuable pieces of advice I had from those I talked with—and I talked with more than 40 people who I had the honour to meet in Europe—was to not have a polarised debate as this will not help the community to have an open and helpful discussion, the open and helpful discussion that Mr Rattenbury and the Chief Minister have both described. Of course, this is the very type of discussion I hope we can generate rather than invite the type of polarised debate Mr Hanson generates by his comments with regards to my motion.

As to Mr Hanson's comments about the palliative care conference report, I point out to him the following: firstly, there is a wealth of insight in the research in those papers which I have no hesitation in asking the government to seriously consider. Secondly, if you care to look up the definition of "report" in Wikipedia it says a report is an account of any informational work, usually of writing, speech, television or film, made with the specific intention of relaying information or recounting certain events in a widely presentable form. The Free Dictionary says it is a formal account of the proceedings or transactions of a group. The Oxford dictionary says that as a verb it is to give a spoken or written account of something that one has observed, heard, done or investigated. The Webster dictionary when referring to it as a noun says it is a story in a newspaper or on radio or television that is about something that has happened or that gives information about something. So I think the word "report" is quite adequate in describing what the palliative care conference papers represent.

As to my forum, it is intended as a wide-ranging discussion. Indeed, a wide range of stakeholders will attend the forum, including the AMA, Palliative Care ACT, Dying with Dignity, representatives from religious bodies, aged care, health care and healthcare consumers to mention just a few. I have no hesitation in calling on the government to seriously consider that and also the papers and the research that was presented at the palliative care conference.

When one considers something, one does not necessarily have to adopt it, Mr Hanson—through you, Madam Speaker. It is the very consideration of these very important and sensitive matters that I would like to have. I would like us to talk about them and to have this open discussion.

Lastly, I want to thank the health minister and my government for their support of my desire to continue exploring these very important and sensitive issues.

Motion agreed to.

Adjournment

Motion by **Ms Gallagher** proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Big Issue

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (6.19): On 5 February this year, I took part in the *Big Issue*'s selling challenge as part of International Vendor Week. I had the spot outside the Canberra Centre during the lunch hour selling copies of *Big Issue* alongside Bianca, a regular *Big Issue* vendor. I did manage to sell 13 copies in 30 minutes, which I think Bianca thought was a decent effort, although she reckons she could have sold more herself as a much more experienced seller.

International Vendor Week shone the spotlight on the work done by the *Big Issue* in developing the skills and self-confidence of people from disadvantaged backgrounds as well as providing an income-earning opportunity through selling the magazine.

Since its inception in 1996, the *Big Issue* has recruited, trained and supported around 4,500 homeless, marginalised and disadvantaged people across Australia. Last year in Canberra the *Big Issue* supported 48 vendors, who sold over 35,000 magazines and calendars. A typical Canberra vendor sells around 1,500 issues per year, earning them \$4,500.

International Vendor Week also gives us an opportunity to get to know our local vendors. I would like to take this opportunity to read excerpts from the profile that Bianca wrote about her life and her experience with the *Big Issue*. She said:

It's been 10 years I've been selling *The Big Issue* in Canberra, and a long time since my last profile. Life has been very good these last few years.

This year, I shaved my hair and I wear wigs now. The long blonde wig in the photo is a Lady Godiva wig, and I've got a Lady Gaga wig and a crown, too.

As you might take from this profile, Bianca is quite a character. She went on to say:

I've got 10 wigs—sometimes people don't recognise me, but they recognise my voice. I like to make people laugh and smile. But I scared someone once when I wore the spiky black wig with yellow spikes! Maybe it was the fake nose ...

I spent a lot of time at foster homes when I was younger, but would always run off. My mother still lives in Canberra. One brother died of cot death, and I have another brother and my sisters. I get on with them but I don't see them much.

She then goes on to talk about her partner, Steve. She says he is “a beautiful man”. She says:

We've been together for eight years. He works with me; we are a team. Steve's got a car and I chip in for petrol. He's in Curtin, a 20-minute drive from my place.

I don't get much pension, only \$90 a week after the Public Trustee takes out the rent. Each time I get magazines, I pay 50c extra, so that I save 50c for each one I sell and collect it every two weeks on Friday. Then I can spend it on DVDs or wigs or on Steve, because I love him too much!

I don't go into the *Big Issue* office at Woden much—I'm too busy work, work, working! I'm a workaholic—I work long hours ...

I like my customers, I get to know them, and on my birthday I made lots of money at Curtin and got flowers, chocolates. I'm a good salesperson—I stand there and say, “Hello handsome, would you like to buy a *Big Issue*? Hello sir, it's a good magazine.” ...

My fridge doesn't work—I'll have to find one somewhere. And save up for a computer and a TV, and a holiday. And for a present for Steve's birthday in October. When I'm 90, I might retire?

As you will take from that story, Bianca is quite a character and I had a great time selling with her. But that profile and that little insight into her life tell you what an important contribution *Big Issue* makes. Through that one person, you can see the sense of purpose it gives. I know Bianca works hard. She sets a quota for herself that she wants to sell each day, and she said she will stay out there till she sells them. It sometimes takes her 10 hours to sell the 30 or 40 magazines that she wants to sell that day.

I would like to thank Bianca for sharing her story and showing me the ropes. I know that at least the Chief Minister and Minister Barr were out there on the day as well. And perhaps there were others that I am not aware of. We all got an insight into the fact that it is a bit of a tough gig selling *Big Issue*. I would like to thank Canberrans who stop and purchase the *Big Issue* from the vendors, because it does make a real difference for them. I would also like to formally thank Big Issue for the opportunities they provide for disadvantaged people in our community to improve their self-confidence and also for giving me the chance to get to know more about the experiences of vendors like Bianca.

CAT awards

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (6.23): I stand to congratulate Coralie Wood and all those who were involved in the recent CAT awards gala night. As we know, these awards are not only for the ACT but also for the wider region, engaging a large number of adult and youth theatre communities from as far afield as Orange, Bathurst, Wollongong, Merimbula, Wagga and Molong. Obviously this is a greater region than our official region.

These CAT awards are great for the region but also great for Canberra. Busloads of visitors spent the weekend here to support their nominees. Of course, at the awards these visitors had a great time. They took back to their towns and cities happy memories of the visit, looking forward to returning for the 2014 awards, I would imagine, and encouraging their families and friends to visit as well. Congratulations to all who were nominated and those were awarded a CAT award.

It was pleasing to see Launa Boucher win an award for best contribution by a senior actor. She is in her 80s and is a well-known identity of Molong in the Molong annual revue. She is one of the favourites of that revue. I was fortunate enough to travel to Molong a couple of times to see her in that revue, which has raised millions of dollars over the years for local charities. Also involved in the Molong Players is a detective sergeant from Orange, Kevin Beatty, awarded the gold CAT award for outstanding achievement in original scriptwriting, performance and direction. The whole revue is a great thing to see; I am really glad that they won two CAT awards this year.

There were many other regional and ACT people who were awarded CAT awards. The recipient of my professional development scholarship for 2014 is Thomas Walsh of Batemans Bay, another regional person. Thomas is well known from the CAT family, having been nominated for a number of CAT awards over the last seven years, including for best newcomer in a school or youth musical, best lighting design for a

play, and best youth actor in a featured role in a musical. Tom has been performing since he was six and has been involved in technical production since he was 14. During that time, he has been nurtured by a longstanding CAT member company, the Bay Theatre Players. With their help and support, he has been accepted by NIDA to study production.

Since I became involved in the CAT awards more than a decade ago, I have always been inspired to see the many young people who got their start in professional theatre by winning a CAT award. As you know, many of them say that winning that award is what gave them the confidence to seek to pursue a career in the professional theatre. There would be few, if any, more difficult careers to choose. I am full of admiration for young people who make that decision to follow their dream.

In order to assist a young person who has chosen to follow this path, I established the professional development scholarship last year. The inaugural recipient was Pete Ricardo, himself a winner of a number of CAT awards. Pete is currently studying at an academy in Melbourne. I can report that he is doing particularly well and developing many new skills which will hopefully lead to a successful theatrical career.

This year we received almost 20 nominations, and the decision about who to select was a most difficult one. I want to thank both Coralie Wood and Stephen Pike, who assisted me in the process. I have great pleasure in announcing that the recipient of this year's development award will go to NIDA, as I have just said. I also let people know that, if they know about young people who they would like to nominate for next year's scholarship, there is a way to do that through the CAT award website. Nominations are now open.

CAT awards

MR COE (Ginninderra) (6.28): Last Saturday, like you, Madam Speaker, and Ms Porter, I was once again pleased to attend the ActewAGL Canberra area theatre awards. As in previous years, I would like to read into our territory parliament's official record the list of the winners.

The TransACT best set designer for a play was Anne Kay. The TransACT best set designer for a musical was Patti Kennedy-Hyne. The AMB best costume designer for a play was Cate Ruth, Emma Sekules, Miriam Miley-Read, Mia Ching and Ann McMahan. The AMB best costume designer for a musical was Christine Corrin, Jennifer Bond, Lauren Cunio, Rhoda Boyce, Nyla Collis and Melissa Jones and Jo Knight. The AMB best costume designer for a school youth production was the costume team from Kim Harvey School of Dance.

The Shellharbour Village best lighting designer was Chris Ellyard. The TransACT technical achievement award went to Tony Oakden, Dean Walshe, Alex Short and Duncan Henderson. The John Thomson magic moment of theatre award went to "the panda going through the washing machine" in *Aladdin*.

The Shellharbour Village best original work for a school or youth production went to the Gundaroo Public School. The Shellharbour Village best original work went to Rachel Hogan and Alexandra Howard for *The Bird Man's Wife*. Tim Dalton of

Luton's best ensemble in a musical went to the cast from *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change*.

The Ryleho best ensemble in a play went to the cast from *Wickfield Wonderland*. The Caphs Restaurant best orchestra for a school or youth production went to the Combined Canberra Grammar Schools Orchestra for *Guys and Dolls*. The Sarah Byrne best orchestra went to *The Phantom of The Opera*.

The Patricia Kelson encouragement award went to Andrew Rushby and Shannon Weatherstone. The John Barilaro MP best youth actor in a featured role in a play went to Jack Parker. The John Barilaro MP best youth actor in a featured role in a musical went to Callum Bodman. The John Barilaro MP best youth actress in a featured role in a play went to Romy Turner. The John Barilaro MP best youth actress in a featured role in a musical went to Audi Reza and Nicola Hall.

The Ryleho best youth actor in a leading role in a play went to Daniel Greiss. The Ryleho best youth actress in a leading role in a play went to Charlotte Smee. The Capital Country Motel best youth actor in a leading role in a musical went to Bryson Grenfell and Kaya Byrne. The Capital Country Motel best youth actress in a leading role in a musical went to Kaitlin Nihill.

The Notaras Group best variety performance by an individual or ensemble went to Mary Ross and Kevin Cross and the circus troupe from Circus 35 South. The Jim and Heather Leedman best dance performance by an individual or ensemble went to the Intermediate Contemporary Team from Kim Harvey School of Dance.

The Blumers Lawyers best actor in a featured role in a play went to Oliver Baudert. The Blumers Lawyers best actor in a featured role in a musical went to Jordan Angelides. The Blumers Lawyers best actress in a featured role in a play went to Molly Jones. The Blumers Lawyers best actress in a featured role in a musical went to Christine Wallace and Mia Agius. The National Capital Motors best actor in a leading role in a play went to Graham Robertson.

The Conveyancing Canberra best actor in a leading role in a musical went to Ron Seymour. The Bob Winnel best actress in a leading role in a play went to Jenna Roberts. The Teatro Vivaldi Restaurant best actress in a leading role in a musical went to Georgia Kollaras. The Richards Consulting best choreographer for a musical or variety show went to Pauline Young.

The Caphs Restaurant best musical director for a school or youth production went to Anita Collins. The Caphs Restaurant best director of a school or youth play went to Sophie Benassi. The Blumers Lawyers best director of a school or youth musical went to Hannah McFadden.

The Sarah Byrne best musical director went to David Wall. The Stage Whispers and David Spicer Productions best director of a play went to Duncan Ley. The AllBids and The Glass best director of a musical or variety show went to Amy Copeland. The Michael and Joan Mary O'Brien best dance production went to *My Fair Lady & Dance Delights 2013* by Kim Harvey School of Dance and *The Yellow Brick Road* by Classical Ballet Centre Canberra.

The Meredith and Peter Crowley best production of a school or youth musical went to *Guys and Dolls* by the Combined Canberra Grammar Schools. The Tim Dalton of Luton's best production of a school or youth play went to *The Burning* by Canberra Grammar School. The Queanbeyan Players best production of a variety show went to *Wagga Wagga Takes Two* by SFP Productions. Recruitment Systems' best production of a play went to *Under Milk Wood* by Canberra Repertory Society.

Recruitment Systems' best production of a musical went to *Avenue Q* by SoPopera! and *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change* by Queanbeyan City Council. The Financial Index best contribution, on or off stage, by a senior went to Launa Boucher. The Canberra area regional excellence award went to Queanbeyan Players for 50 years entertaining Queanbeyan and the region and Cowra Musical and Dramatic Society for their support of young people and theatre in Cowra through amalgamation with YAMA youth performing arts.

The Ryleho in the spirit of the community award went to Circus 35 South for providing healthy lifestyle opportunities for young people on the south coast of New South Wales. The ActewAGL gold CAT award went to Kevin Beatty for outstanding achievement in original scripts, performance and direction for Molonglo Players. The Mary Porter professional development scholarship went to Thomas Walsh.

Finally, I would like to thank the judges who do a wonderful job and volunteer so much time and their own resources: Edwin Briggs, Peter Dark, Dave Evans, Ian McLean AM, CSC, Chris Neal, Terry O'Connor, Charles Oliver, Stephen Pike, Oliver Raymond OAM, Norma Robertson, Rose Shorney, Anne Somes, Bronwyn Sullivan, David Whitbread, Don Whitbread OAM—and, of course, a very big thanks to Coralie Wood OAM.

Aboriginal Hostels Ltd

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (6.33): Aboriginal Hostels Ltd is doing great work not only in our local community but also at a national level. Last year the AHL celebrated an important milestone—40 years of service as a provider of temporary accommodation for thousands of Indigenous Australians. Its many hostels all over Australia provide a safe haven for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people needing temporary accommodation away from home. The hostels provide accommodation for people who have had to leave their local communities for a range of reasons, including needing medical treatment or students relocating to undertake studies.

Since its humble beginnings in 1974, AHL has grown from one small hostel in Brisbane into a premier service provider nationally. AHL continues to play a significant role in the lives of Australia's first people by providing more than 500,000 nights of safe and affordable supported accommodation. From its head office here in Canberra, AHL manages 51 hostels nationwide, and it continues to support local events, including the National Multicultural Festival and NAIDOC on the Peninsula.

Last year it also hosted the World No Tobacco Day “tackling Indigenous smoking” luncheon in Canberra, along with Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service and the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation—NACCHO.

With a sole focus on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians, this year AHL will continue to provide a range of safe and culturally appropriate temporary accommodation options for singles, couples and families. AHL hostels are often the hubs of communities in which they are located. Its employees are local people with local knowledge. For many Indigenous Australians, Aboriginal Hostels provides not only a bed to sleep in but also access to fundamental services. These include legal advice, medical care, education and employment services.

In addition to this, the organisation serves up around 1½ million meals a year. It also provides financial assistance to other organisations to ensure another 34 hostels can provide accommodation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Nationally, this organisation provides nearly 500 jobs for Indigenous Australians. It is playing a role in addressing socioeconomic gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by providing employment, training and career opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia and right here in Canberra.

In 2013 Aboriginal Hostels continued to have a higher proportion of Indigenous employees than any other Australian government organisation, with 73 per cent of its employees being Indigenous. Fifty of those workers are employed by AHL right here in Canberra. The Australian public service census for 2013 found that 88 per cent of AHL employees are proud to work for the agency and 92 per cent—92 per cent, Madam Speaker—enjoyed the work that they do. Job satisfaction is high and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are at the forefront of AHL’s service delivery.

I commend Aboriginal Hostels’ hard work and its commitment to achieving better futures and better lives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Beyondblue national road show

MRS JONES (Molonglo) (6.36): I was honoured to have been at the launch of beyondblue’s national road show yesterday at Parliament House hosted by beyondblue chairman Jeff Kennett and CEO Kate Carnell. As the shadow minister for mental health, I was encouraged to see a room full of people who are keen to support beyondblue in its work around depression and anxiety.

The beyondblue national road show will be travelling across Australia in the big blue bus promoting their “take one step” for mental health campaign. The aim of this campaign is to help people tune in, open up and take action on their mental health concerns. The road show will connect with thousands of people in major cities and small towns across the country with a focus on raising awareness of anxiety, encouraging men to take action on their mental health, helping to reduce suicide and decreasing discrimination and stigma for the very many Australians who suffer from or manage a mental health condition.

Statistics show that one in five women and one in eight men are likely to experience depression in their lifetime and one in three women and one in five men are likely to experience anxiety in their lifetime, which means that over one million people are living with depression and over two million have anxiety.

While fewer men than women suffer, women are more likely to seek help than men, so creative solutions are needed. Beyondblue has found ways based on research to bring openness to action on mental health. One campaign I might mention is the man therapy campaign, which you may have seen in the ad breaks for the summer cricket broadcasts. This creative campaign does not tell men to go and get help but it suggests that if they are stressed out, burnt out or down in the dumps, they should use man therapies and tell depression and anxiety who is boss. It is a great and imaginative campaign, and just one of many that beyondblue has on the go at the moment.

I commend the great work of beyondblue and encourage everyone to get behind their national road show. People interested in finding out more about beyondblue and the “take one step” road show should visit their website at www.beyondblue.org.au.

Brendon Robert Morrison

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (6.38): I rise tonight to commemorate the life of Brendon Robert Morrison who passed away on 17 February. He was born here in Canberra just a year before me and spent most of his life around Queanbeyan, the ACT and on his family’s properties. The funeral today was attended by more than 600 people. Key people, of course, were Brendon’s family. Pat Power and Simon Corbell were there, as was Brendan Smyth from the opposition, which was great to see, together with Gai Brodtmann and Mike Kelly.

Brendon Morrison was quite a larrikin and much larger than life. He was known in all walks of this community across the ACT. Bishop Pat described Brendon’s links to Queanbeyan, across Canberra and well beyond, including even Wandandian, which was pretty interesting.

Brendon was a life member of the Australian Labor Party, ACT branch, and spent most of his recent time at the Weston Creek sub-branch. He was also the plumbers union president at a previous time. We heard today of his efforts there on the committee of management for the plumbers union and how his forensic approach to detailing the plumbers union finances at each administrative meeting meant that they spent many hours late into the night dealing with these issues. He wanted to make sure that every dollar was spent correctly and he would not let them leave until they could explain how it was spent.

We heard today that they were told, “It is not your money. It is theirs; so spend it wisely.” He will be missed by all. There were people there today from the union and many of the unions across the ACT, from his fishing club, the Vikings Fishing Club and, of course, from the Rural Fire Service. He belonged to the same group as Brendan Smyth.

He came from an original Canberra family, the Morrisons, who once owned quite a bit of land across the ACT. I will mention the people that spoke about him today. There was Christopher Dorman from his primary school; Patrick O'Brien from Marist Brothers; Gerald Morrison from Royalla, who is his cousin; Gil Mathie from Wandandian; and Bill Quade from the Blind Beggars. Apparently at some time in the 1970s Brendon used to do a bit of door bouncing at the Beggars and Bill told some stories from those times. There was Damien Kirkwood from the union and Tony Pring from the Tuggeranong Viking Fishing Club.

One of the fondest memories I have is the times when he did the Santa Claus run. He travelled across the whole south of Canberra in the back of a ute to provide lollies for children. He did this in his own time and paid for it out of his own money. He would take at least two weeks off work. He had Santa's helpers to drive him around. There were many fond memories of that time.

I also have a really strong memory of him helping out at my place at an end of year function where he was helping to prep for the barbecue. He had about 20 potatoes and about a dozen onions to get ready for the barbecue. I handed him a paring knife. In his gruff voice he said, "That's not a bloody knife. Get me something that I can hang off." Then he worked for about three hours cooking the barbecue for our friends in the party.

He will be missed by all. I think I speak for all, especially on our side of politics, when I say that we will certainly miss him. I wish the best to his wife Di and all his family on their loss.

Belconnen Arts Centre

MS BERRY (Ginninderra) (6.42): Last Friday I had the opportunity to attend several new exhibitions at the Belconnen Arts Centre. I opened three shows on the night, including Craig Cameron and Eva Louise's *InDoors*, a celebration of reused and recycled artistic materials, Karen Green's *Grey Matters*, an inspiring record of ageing and gender, and Jacklyn Peters' *The Neighbourhood Project*, a lovely record of one street and the people who live on it.

I was particularly pleased to open Jacklyn's show because it so completely captured my hopes for what the Belconnen Arts Centre is going to do for the Ginninderra community over the coming decades. Too many of the people I speak to have well meaningly described the Belconnen Arts Centre as bringing art "to" Belconnen. And whilst I think access to art of other places is important, it is only a tiny part of the role this young centre is already playing.

My hope for this centre is that my kids, and every kid in the community, can grow up in the Canberra suburbs knowing that their lives, and their part of the city, is worthy of art. The practice of making art, with its hard work and years of practice and intellectual process, automatically values its subjects. It is for this reason that I do not just want my kids to know that art is accessible or culturally familiar; I want them to know that art is made in Belconnen, that it is relevant to their experiences and that it

values the places they live and play in. I think it is clear that the Belco Arts Centre shares this aspiration and it was clear in all of the artwork that was on display last Friday that there is plenty of talent to fill this space.

I would like to acknowledge everybody who is involved in the day-to-day running of the centre, and particularly thank Jacklyn for the care she has taken with capturing and valuing her corner of our amazing suburbs.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.45 pm.