



Debates

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Wednesday, 22 October 2014

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.

Multicultural communities

MRS JONES (Molonglo) (10.02): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes the diversity of Canberra's multicultural community which according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics data from the 2011 Census has:
 - (a) 101,965 residents born overseas;
 - (b) 50 or more different nationalities represented, including over 6,000 Chinese, over 5,000 Indian and almost 3,000 Vietnamese;
 - (c) 30 or more language groups represented;
 - (d) 30 or more religions represented; and
 - (e) Over 7,000 Muslims residing here; and
- (2) calls on the government to promote better understanding amongst diverse ethnic communities and amongst various faiths and to do all we can to promote harmony.

Canberra is a wonderfully diverse and multicultural city. As my motion points out, the 2011 census shows us that 86,324, or 24.2 per cent, of ACT residents were born overseas; 58.7 per cent of these have lived in Australia for at least 15 years. Most of them are part of a very well-established ethnic community as well as being fully Australian. Twenty-two per cent of people living in Canberra speak languages other than English at home. Many students come from overseas to study at our unis. Of course, Canberra is home to 90 diplomatic missions and embassies. Canberra in some ways is uniquely multicultural because we are host to so many embassies. So from the formal to the informal we have contact with so many cultures and faiths from all around the globe.

We see the nod to overseas cultures tangibly present in the architecture of embassy buildings and the many gifts from foreign nations which adorn our lake, the British-gifted carillon, the new Chinese gardens under construction and so on. From architectural displays to the very hands which built much of Canberra's built form, we see the input of wave after wave of migration to Australia. I have met many Italians and Croatians who have had a great deal to do with the construction of our key buildings and churches. So multiculturalism and the benefits to our city and to our nation are evident all around us. We are fortunate that this is seen so clearly on a daily basis.

Our multiculturalism has always been a practical and productive one and I see that there are basically two variants on the method of embedding additional cultural groups into our society. There is the government-led policy funding type of integration which involves English language classes and events sponsored to demonstrate our multicultural state, money for cultural associations to assist them to stay strong and connect the longer term representatives of their community to the newer ones. Certainly another equal and probably much more important element of our multicultural success is the bottom-up approach, which we should encourage, of neighbour-to-neighbour support and openness at the suburban level, both through members of longstanding multigenerational presences in our nation to newer arrivals and through the mainstream Australian people reaching out to those who are different.

I will mostly focus today on the bottom-up work that members of our community do but I also take this opportunity to suggest that in the current climate of some fear and concern about the events overseas, and their potential to reach into the hearts of our neighbourhood, boosting the government element would be wise. We must guard against overreaction but we must also put our money where our mouth is and have active support for those who can best combat such fear and increase harmony.

This is not the first time that Australia has faced fears of particular ethnic groups. As far back as the time of Ned Kelly, we have dealt with ethnic and religious clashes to some degree imported into Australia, and from history we have learnt to take a long view, to be very targeted in any action and to think compassionately about perfectly innocent and good-willed people who are vulnerable to unfair discrimination. Such fear can impact upon individuals' confidence about living in Australia. When they leave their front door they can be quite unsure how people will treat them. I am sure we will approach this matter with a largely tripartisan view.

So let us focus for a moment on the contribution of Muslims in particular to Australia and to Canberra. There is significant evidence that Muslim fishermen from southern Sulawesi and Indonesia were fishing here in the early 1700s and were in contact with our local Aboriginal people. In the 19th century Muslim men from Pakistan, India and Afghanistan worked as camel handlers and played an instrumental role in exploring our nation. One of the first instances recorded was on 9 June 1860 when 24 camels and three cameleers arrived in Port Melbourne from India to join the Burke and Wills expedition. Cameleers were vital to travel in the interior of Australia right through until the 1920s, and across the 20th century and into this century Muslims from Turkey, Albania, Bosnia, Lebanon, Africa and many other nations have migrated to Australia to fulfil our growing need for work and for our future as a stronger and more vital Australia. So we owe so much, right from the discovery journeys of Burke and Wills, to the skills and dedication of hardworking Muslims.

In our Canberra region there are more than 20 locally owned businesses run by Muslims, providing a whole range of different goods and services. There are several different organisations which gather in Muslims and their culture here in the ACT as well as a number of centres specifically built for worship, including two mosques and the Canberra Islamic Centre. Canberra's commitment to the Islamic Centre in particular was displayed so practically this year in the many acts of kindness in

helping to clean up after the terrible attacks on the centre, with local residents of the area turning up with mops and buckets to help clean up or people driving by who stopped to donate money for rebuilding damaged assets.

It is in adversity that Canberra really shines and I am sure that there are many of us who will find a way in the present climate to reach out to Muslims in their local area and to reassure them that they are at home here and can be confident of community support. There have been incidents in Canberra of racial and cultural discrimination and abuse directed towards Muslims and I hope when we see it we challenge it. I applaud local non-Muslim women who have attended outside local gatherings to offer flowers for local people arriving at these gatherings. Such outreach is greatly valued by the community and should be noted in this place.

The enemies of our culture win when we give in to fear and prejudice. We must work actively against any legislative changes which divide people into “us and them”. All Australians must be welcome in our public places and spaces. These are their places too. They have as much right to be in a parliament or a shopping centre as we do. Otherwise we will increase the isolation young people and women feel and we endanger more susceptibility to radicalisation.

One of the very best aspects of our national story is cross-cultural friendships and the willingness of people to reach out to each other. We have always shown, and I am sure will continue to show, such openness to one another. In particular it is especially important, I think, between English and non-English-speaking people in our neighbourhoods. I have invited neighbours for Pancake Tuesday at my house or a child’s birthday party, because these actions demonstrate to people that they are valued.

When my grandfather in the 1950s bought his first house for his young family—and he was a new Australian with limited English—his neighbour was Mr Davies. Mr Davies was aware that my grandfather Giuseppe had an old roof that was in danger of rust. He leaned over the fence one day and said, “Joe, your roof needs painting. We’re going to paint it together.” Mind you, Mr Davies at the time was in his 70s and Nonno said to him, “But I don’t have the money to pay for that now.” He said, “Joe, we’ll paint your roof and you can pay me back later.” So the next weekend Mr Davies turned up at the front door with paint, brushes and a ladder and they painted the roof. This action so moved my grandfather that it is still a part of our family story today. Nonno and Mr Davies remained friends and when he was very ill and elderly he gifted my grandfather his prize possession, his rifle, which I remember him cleaning very often.

You do not have to have a common language. People understand the international language of home-baked things or a cup of tea. It might sound minor but it is not. It can be life changing. So I implore Canberrans to realise you hold so much power in your hands and to value the culturally diverse Australians who live near you. Make the effort to reach out and say “g’day, how are you?” to newer migrants in your ambit or living in your street.

Each year in Canberra, the Muslim community enjoys a radio program under the apt management of Diana Abdul-Rahman, whom we have here in the audience—and I thank you for your presence—and Juan de la Torre as well from the Canberra multicultural community. For the month of Ramadan this program, run at a minimal cost, is broadcast on radio and on the internet. Diana organises speakers who promote the very best of Islam: the talks, music and children's segments. This is a work of love and is being proposed to be promoted across other parts of Australia now. The program is in English and reaches out to Muslims all over the community to stay in touch with their roots. I applaud her work.

Diana said to me that the most satisfying part of the program which she has managed for some years is when people tell her that listening to her program really gave them a sense of identity of being an Australian Muslim and a beautiful part of the religion that they are able to identify with. The program is unfunded and I take this opportunity to recommend that the minister consider some form of contribution to this program next year in order that it gets out to more families, because this is the type of work that we need to see increase: people being able to be ethnically as they are and also 100 per cent Australian.

At the end of Ramadan, Diana and her team of organisers put on the Eid-Al-Fitr festival which is held at EPIC. The festival runs for several days and is open to all people in Canberra. Next year it would be a very good thing if more members of the ACT community were reached and attended the event to show their support for Canberra's Muslim community. This event used to receive some limited sponsorship from the AFP but at present it is not funded. I also implore the minister to put some funding into it because it is time that the ACT, through its government, has a chance to demonstrate our support and value of this community.

I also take the opportunity to suggest to the minister that the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum has never been funded for more than rent and basic photocopying, to a value of around \$12,000 per year. The body which preceded it, the ACT Multicultural Forum, was funded significantly more, to the tune of around \$50,000. The work that they do, bringing the best out in our multicultural community, should be very seriously considered at this time for increased support. In particular they may have the capacity to engage with youth in activities which would leave them more practically connected to evolving their Australian Muslim identity, leaving them less susceptible to other influences.

I was very pleased to see that the ACT government recently released capital culture, a discussion paper on multiculturalism in the ACT. It is open for comment until early next year. So I hope that Canberrans will respond to the consultation process enthusiastically.

I also would like to recognise in the gallery Mr Sam Wong, previous chair of the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum, who has, as with Diana and Juan, been involved in supporting the multicultural community for a great number of years in the ACT.

I hope the minister will take these considerations seriously and, indeed, address other avenues for promoting harmony and the value of many multicultural and faith communities in the ACT. One of the reasons for our great success in multiculturalism is that in the ACT it has been a multi-party supported idea, and long may that continue.

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (10.14): I move:

Omit paragraph (1)(b), substitute:

“(b) 50 or more countries of birth represented, including over 13 000 from England, 6000 from China, 5000 from India, 4000 from New Zealand and almost 3000 from Vietnam;”.

I thank Mrs Jones for bringing this motion here today—and I rise to speak in support of it—because here in Canberra we value multiculturalism; we cherish it. We have more than 40 per cent of Canberra residents either born overseas or with a parent born overseas. There are 150 different languages spoken in our homes. Over 250,000 people come out onto the streets of Canberra to celebrate the National Multicultural Festival. Goodness me, that is nearly two-thirds or more than two-thirds of the Canberra population. That is astonishing. Not only do we respect and enjoy multicultural harmony, we are delighted to celebrate our diversity.

The reason I have brought this amendment is merely for the sake of accuracy, because a nationality refers to your citizenship, and many of the people whose countries of birth are referred to in Mrs Jones’s motion will probably already become Australian citizens. Also for the sake of clarity I have included those migrants from England and New Zealand who also do make up a substantial portion of our multicultural community here in Canberra.

I commend the motion to the Assembly and I also acknowledge those prominent members of the multicultural community here with us today.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (10.16): I will be supporting the motion today and the amendment that has been presented. I think there is agreement on the amendment. I acknowledge that it simply fills out and adds further richness to the motion. As Mrs Jones put forth in her motion, we are lucky to live in a very tolerant, accepting and welcoming city, with a rich and diverse society made up of people from many different backgrounds.

The capital region has a long history of accepting newly arrived migrants to Australia and it is worth noting the celebrations of the Snowy River scheme’s 65th anniversary. While the environmental aspects of that project maybe the subject of some debate, the human story is important and the celebrations will have a real focus on the many German, Greek, Irish, Italian, Norwegian, British, Polish and people from the Yugoslav countries who came to the region, many of whom moved to Canberra after the work was complete.

It is also worth noting, however, that much of this migration was under the general banner of the white Australia policy. I say this not to diminish the contribution of

those who came here in the 1940s and 1950s but more to highlight how far we as a country have come in embracing a more colour-blind society and as a place-marker for the future when we can see the vestiges of this particular type of institutionalised racism disappear.

As Mrs Jones references, the most recent ABS data provided a fascinating snapshot of our society's makeup. I will not repeat Mrs Jones's motion's analysis of the ACT-specific data but it is enlightening to see so many groups represented—and it is very positive for our city—and the amazing number of languages and dialects spoken here in the territory.

As some members may be aware, a small but very important item in the parliamentary agreement related to providing funding to support an extra 10 qualified interpreters in the community, focusing on languages or dialects in need. The feedback I have had is that this program has been very welcomed by the affected communities. It is the ACT Greens' belief that the cultural and linguistic diversity in the ACT population greatly enriches our community and should not just be accepted but also celebrated and encouraged. We also know that many of the people captured in the ABS data may also be recently arrived refugees, fleeing persecution and war and seeking safety for themselves and their families in a new country.

I did also want to reflect on the fact that—and a few comments have been made to this effect this morning—we have discussed these sorts of matters in the Assembly before and I think that there is a cross-party track record in the ACT of great enthusiasm for multiculturalism in our city and a strong propensity for embracing the many newcomers to our city, no matter where they come from. I think the ACT government has displayed these qualities by welcoming and supporting refugees and newly arrived people to our community. I believe that we have all benefited from the differing skills and cultures that have been brought here, and we should be proud of our community's response to the human needs presented.

Certainly in my time as Speaker of this place—and I know, Madam Speaker, you have continued this tradition, which in fact I picked up from former Speaker Berry, of having the new citizenship evenings here at the Assembly, and I know many members have attended those events over the years—I saw, in those events, a tremendous appreciation of the invitation of the Assembly but also a great opportunity for people to come together and speak about their history, where they came from. I certainly always enjoyed those evenings, meeting people who had come from a very diverse set of backgrounds. I think it is just one small example of the ACT Assembly embracing newcomers to our community in a very overt and, I hope and believe, appreciated way. Certainly the feedback was always very strong and positive about that evening.

I think Mrs Jones's motion is also timely in regard to the national conversations regarding religious extremism and fear of terror attacks. We are not immune to either the risks posed or the potential breakdown of the respect, tolerance and understanding that we should all cherish. This is a time of great need, a need to build stronger relationships, not damage existing ones, and a need to further enhance and shore up our faith in the basic goodness of humanity.

In short, I think this is a good motion, with some positive additions both from Dr Bourke and Minister Burch on the range of things that the ACT government has already been doing to promote better understanding. I also understand from some media reports that the commonwealth government is seeking to support more understanding and harmony in our society in some key areas of concern, which I applaud. This is how you win hearts and minds, and this is how you maintain our civil society.

I think we do live in a time that is finely balanced and where great care is needed and great leadership is needed by a range of people in our community. Unfortunately, there are those in our community who will fan the flames of hatred, from a range of perspectives, and I think it is our job as community leaders to stand up against that, to insist on greater understanding, to lead by example and to assist our community through times when there are those who seek to divide us.

It is a big job. It will not always go smoothly. I think that unfortunately we will see things go wrong at times. Nonetheless it sits not just with those of us in this place but other leaders in the community. As Dr Bourke just acknowledged, we are joined in the Assembly by some of the leaders in the community. I heard some very important words on radio this morning of community leaders standing up and rejecting division and hatred. I think that we all have an ongoing job to do that. I am happy to speak in support of that spirit that is in Mrs Jones's motion today and, I guess, reflect for all of us on the necessary job that we have to do, particularly at this time. It is an ongoing job, but particularly at this time, in maximising the cohesion, the acceptance, the tolerance and the understanding in our community.

MS BURCH (Brindabella—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Disability, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Racing and Gaming, Minister for Women and Minister for the Arts) (10.23): I thank Mrs Jones for bringing this motion on today. We are supporting it. There has been one amendment put forward by Dr Bourke, and I have also circulated an amendment that I think adds some depth to the motion.

I also recognise in our audience representatives of the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum and NEDA, which is a group that supports people with a disability from an ethnic background.

We are indeed one community held together by a multitude of faiths and cultures. The government remains committed to fostering the social harmony that has been an outstanding feature of our community over the years. Recently, we set out these principles in our "Capital culture" discussion paper. They ensure that all individuals have the right to maintain, practise and promote their culture and language, the right to cultural expression and understanding, regardless of their English language skills, the right to practise their religious and spiritual beliefs, the right to equitable access to government services and programs, the right to participate in and contribute to the social, cultural and economic life of the community, and the responsibility of us all to respect the culture, language and religion of others, within the legal and constitutional framework that is set out by the laws of the ACT and Australia. The paper also articulates the responsibility to treat everyone in a fair and respectful manner, and our responsibility to recognise and accept the linguistic and cultural assets of the ACT.

These principles are now ingrained in the ACT government's policy and legislative capacity through key themes, including human rights, access and equity, ageing and aged-care services, cultural and religious acceptance, language policy, and leadership and governance.

The government's commitment to ensuring that Canberra remains a positive, multicultural and vibrant city was recently recognised by the OECD in naming us the world's most livable city. This is no accident. We have taken a strong leadership role in multicultural affairs and human rights protection. We actively focus on the democratic values of participation, inclusion, fairness and justice; and on ensuring that all Canberrans understand that their rights in our society come with responsibilities.

Whilst our nation faces significant racial tension, our difficulties have been relatively low key and have allowed us to experience long-term social stability. The community response to the trashing of the Canberra Islamic Centre in Monash earlier this year was an important sign of positive relationships in our community. Regardless of faith and background, Canberra stood as one and said that that behaviour was unacceptable for our city. However, we cannot be complacent when it comes to building and maintaining social cohesion, combating racism and directly addressing any community tensions that may arise. We will continue to focus our efforts on those groups that experience lower levels of social cohesion, with strategies to build trust, civic engagement, community resilience and a positive culture of hope, reward and opportunity.

We celebrate and observe a number of events of great significance on our ACT multicultural calendar, including Ramadan, Diwali, the Buddhist New Year, the Global Cricket Challenge, Harmony Day, World Refugee Day and the forthcoming Multicultural Summit.

I cannot let this moment pass without mentioning one of Canberra's most loved events, and that is the National Multicultural Festival. The significant attendance at the event in 2014, in February of this year, and certainly in years gone by, is an affirmation of how much our city values and respects people from all cultural backgrounds and loves coming together to celebrate and enjoy learning about other traditions and cultures.

We also maintain a grassroots community approach throughout the year in supporting and promoting a wide range of multicultural, socially inclusive and participatory programs and activities, such as the weekly Chinese seniors social gatherings, Muslim prayers each Friday, and the observance of orthodox Christian and other religious faith events.

We also support hundreds of non-government groups to undertake projects in our community through the annual participation, or multicultural, grants program that highlights and promotes the benefits of cultural diversity and social harmony in our city. This year 142 applicants shared in the available \$260,000 that was granted under the program.

We do sometimes underestimate the voluntary contribution that is made simply by the day-to-day activity of thousands of Canberrans dedicated to assisting those that are most in need in our community. Indeed the three in our audience are some of those volunteers, and I recognise you again for the work that you do. Their work is in most cases unsung and carried out behind the scenes, often working with people who have arrived in our city from adverse and traumatic circumstances. We believe this effort warrants special recognition.

The 2014 ACT Multicultural Awards, to be announced on 27 November, are an opportunity to give public recognition of outstanding contributions in assisting new arrivals to successfully settle in our city, to secure employment opportunities and to be fairly represented in the media.

Another example of directly provided government assistance to the community is the support for all Canberrans to learn and appreciate another language. We fund over 50 language schools in the ACT and provide financial support to the ACT Community Language Schools Association. We also, through the Multicultural Festival, support an interfaith forum. In the lead-up to a symposium to be held here next week, I met with not only Muslim leaders but also the interfaith leaders. From the interfaith leaders meeting, it was recognised that the faith leaders have an important contribution to make to the social cohesion of our community.

The faith leaders were very keen in that discussion, when I met with them a couple of weeks ago, to explore ways to increase engagement with local youth, both inside and outside schools and formal faith organisations, and to increase an understanding of the importance of human values, cultural acceptance and the spiritual basis of faith. There was a general agreement to remind our young people, and indeed our community more broadly, that we have more in common in our humanity than we have differences across our faith.

Next week, as I have mentioned, I will be hosting the One Canberra Interfaith Symposium. The purpose of this is to explore ways to strengthen the social cohesion of our community in the context of recent developments at a national level. Over 100 people have been invited, with representation from the broader community expected, including representatives of unions, schools, youth, sport and multifaith, and social cohesion issues with an emphasis on youth participation are expected to be debated. We stand ready to implement community development and engagement programs arising from these consultations and from the multicultural summit that will be held later this year.

I see a significant opportunity to better harness and develop the capacity of our local communities to play an even stronger role as we work to maintain our socially harmonious community. As the federal Race Discrimination Commissioner said:

... the vehicle of social progress is like a car on a steep incline, you have to keep your foot on the accelerator to prevent yourself from rolling back down the slope.

Here in the ACT we have our foot firmly on the accelerator.

In closing I want to again thank the volunteers and leaders in our community who are in the audience. I thank Mrs Jones for bringing this forward. I look forward to the multicultural, One Canberra Interfaith Symposium that will be held here next Thursday, where we as a community will make a very clear and public statement of our inclusive approach to all in our society to be treated with respect and dignity—each of whom has the right to be a full citizen of our city—and of our collective role and responsibility in making sure that that happens for each and every person that calls Canberra home. I think that is an endorsement by this Assembly, from all sides, to say that we are one Canberra regardless of where you come from. I thank all those that have made contributions to this debate today.

Visitors

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, before we proceed could I formally acknowledge the presence in the gallery of Ms Diana Abdel-Rahman, the chair of the Canberra multicultural forum, her deputy chair, Mr Juan de la Torre, and Mr Sam Wong, the former chair of the Canberra multicultural forum.

Multicultural communities

Debate resumed.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (10.33): Madam Speaker, I echo your sentiment and welcome esteemed members of our multicultural community here to the Assembly. It is great to see you all here today. I would also like to thank Mrs Jones for bringing this motion forward to the Assembly today. The reality for Mrs Jones is that she not only believes this intellectually but she lives it as well, as someone who has multicultural heritage, both Italian and Scottish, which is quite an eclectic mix, one would have to say.

There is no doubt that many of us in this place feel connected to Canberra's multicultural community because we do originate from a great variety of different countries and cultures throughout the world. Mr Smyth is noted for his Irish heritage, which probably partly explains his love of whiskey. Mr Doszpot is a Hungarian refugee. You, Madam Speaker, are of Italian descent, and I am a former Pom. You can say that when it is about your own culture, can't you? My wife is a Kiwi. I know there are many others that have that multicultural heritage that brings them to this place in Canberra. The statistics that we see here today show what a diverse and multicultural place Canberra is.

As Mrs Jones pointed out, that is enriched by the fact that we have so many embassies here. I know that all of us participate in many multicultural activities, many of which are put on by the embassies. We probably do not appreciate enough in Canberra just how lucky we are to have those embassies on our doorstep so that we can participate in so many cultural events, enjoy the festivities and the variety of clothing and costumes from all over the world—and, of course, the food, which I think we all enjoy.

It is wonderful that we can come here today and embrace our multicultural community in such a bipartisan or tripartisan fashion. That is something that has been a characteristic of this Assembly and certainly the Canberra community.

As others have mentioned—Mrs Jones, Mr Rattenbury and others—it is worthy of us reminding ourselves of the importance of this, and that this does not come as naturally in other places in the world or, indeed, in Australia. It takes constant vigilance and work to make sure that we retain that love of our multicultural flavour here in the ACT.

There is no doubt that the events in Syria and Iraq, and what we have seen there, and events in Australia as well, in part as a consequence, have caused fractures within elements of our community. There is no doubt that our wonderful Muslim community, to some extent, has borne the brunt of that. We need to be open and honest, and acknowledge it. What I would say from my perspective is that I served in Iraq in 2007, and many of my friends in the Iraqi army who I served alongside, their families and their friends at the time, were the victims of terror.

Many of my friends were amongst, particularly, the interpreters. I am very proud to say that the Rudd Labor government opened the doors of Australia so that those interpreters could come to Australia, and welcomed them to their new home. Many of them are now residing across Australia. They bore the brunt of events in the Middle East. It is worth remembering that the vast majority of them, and the people who we see suffering now in the Middle East, are Muslim.

What is happening at the moment is that the vast bulk of the victims are Muslim. I think that is worth reflecting on. It is not an issue that should be dividing us; this is an issue that should be uniting us. We should recognise that at this time we must do everything we can to stand beside our Muslim brothers and sisters and make sure that what is occurring in the Middle East, and by a few people—a very, very few people—in Australia is something that should make us say, ‘Let’s make sure that this strengthens our relationship and our community and doesn’t divide it.’

Again, I thank Mrs Jones for bringing this motion forward. I thank all those who have contributed to the debate today. Let us make sure, as a whole community, as we have done today, that we continue to show leadership on this issue and say to the whole Canberra community that although we are diverse, although we come from many different lands, in Canberra we are one.

MADAM SPEAKER: The question is that Dr Bourke’s amendment be agreed to.

MRS JONES (Molonglo) (10.39): I can sum up and speak to the amendments, I think.

MADAM SPEAKER: No; I think there are other amendments coming. I would not advise you to sum up now.

MRS JONES: There are two amendments.

MADAM SPEAKER: Okay. The question is that Dr Bourke's amendment be agreed to.

MRS JONES: I am very happy to speak to both amendments and to sum up, because I am supporting both amendments. They can sit side by side, because they do not affect the order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Procedurally, Mrs Jones, if you sum up, that closes the debate.

MRS JONES: Yes.

MADAM SPEAKER: But there are other amendments that need to be moved.

MRS JONES: There are two.

MADAM SPEAKER: Yes. If you want to speak to the amendment, speak to the amendment, but please do not sum up.

MRS JONES: Okay. I support both amendments.

Dr Bourke's amendment agreed to.

MS BURCH (Brindabella—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Disability, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Racing and Gaming, Minister for Women and Minister for the Arts) (10.40), by leave: I move:

Insert new paragraph (1)(f):

- “(f) notes the ongoing commitment of the ACT Government to support Canberra's multicultural community, including through:
- (i) support for multicultural events in the ACT community, such as Diwali, Ramadan, the Multicultural Festival, multicultural grants funding, the Multicultural Youth Centre, Multicultural Awards, and the recent release of the *Capital Culture* Discussion Paper on enhancing our city's multicultural way of life;
 - (ii) the recent hosting of two breakfast forums for Canberra's Muslim and Interfaith community leaders on 18 and 24 September; and
 - (iii) the upcoming Multicultural and Interfaith Symposium, to be held in the Assembly on 30 October 2014; and”.

I again thank everybody for coming. It is refreshing at times to stand in this place and have everybody speak on such a positive note on such an important matter as the multicultural community. We are a vibrant and harmonious community. All of us work with, have friendships with and are connected to our multicultural community, either personally—and we have heard of the cultural background of those opposite—or otherwise. Regardless of where we come from—whatever faith, whatever our

background—we are Canberrans one and all, and we will stand as one. Again I thank members for their contributions in this place. It gives me great pleasure that this place puts out to the community a strong sentiment that everyone has right, respect and regard.

Ms Burch's amendment agreed to.

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

MRS JONES (Molonglo) (10.42): I thank all speakers for their support and additions. Sometimes the addition of amendments in this place strips out the meaning of motions that are moved, but in this case I am grateful for the additional information that will go on the record of the Assembly in the *Hansard*.

To start with in summing up, many people have come to this country over a period of hundreds and thousands of years to start a life for their families, to build a future for their communities. Some have come with two bob and one shoe, as a lot of the Italian migrants say. Some have come with more. But the vast majority of our migrants and refugees have come with an intention of working very hard for our future. We are very lucky to have them and we are very grateful that they have chosen Australia as their home.

I would like to acknowledge the work that the government is doing on the upcoming multicultural and interfaith symposium to be held in the Assembly on 30 October. This is a positive step. I hope that many in the interfaith and multicultural community will come to support that event. I urge the minister to bid in the budget process for increased funding for CMCF, and in particular for the Muslim engaging festival of Eid-ul-Fitr and the radio program which is run during Ramadan. These are important bottom-up support mechanisms for our multicultural community. And perhaps if they were able to engage even more with youth, that would be a real, positive outcome for our future and would perhaps stay, at the beginning, some potential problems.

We do really well to remain alert. Yes, we are a successful multicultural community. Are there people whose views are unhelpful? Yes. Are there people who are confused and who are afraid? Yes, there are. It is our business in this place to stay alert. I hope that today's motion will be reported by the press. I know you are listening upstairs, and I really want this message to get out into the community: that we are talking about this matter and that we are aware of current concerns.

This Assembly represents a very vast set of views about how things should be done in our community. It represents families of all sorts of different backgrounds and people from many different walks of life. The fact that we are able to agree conclusively on this matter should send a strong message to those who do not understand that their actions may cause harm or who do not care.

Since the very early days of the Assembly—I particularly want to acknowledge the work that Kate Carnell did in multiculturalism, investing so heavily in starting the multicultural festival that we now enjoy and in other areas of government work—we have worked very hard. There is much more to do. I am pleased that point (2) has

remained in the motion, calling on the government “to promote better understanding amongst diverse ethnic communities and amongst various faiths and to do all we can to promote harmony”.

I call on all Canberrans to ask themselves: “What more can I do? Who do I know? Who is susceptible to feeling alone or to feeling vulnerable? How can I reach out? Who can I talk to? What encouraging things can I say?” We all have a responsibility, and a great deal of power in our hands, to have a functional society and welcome all peoples into our community.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

OECD livable cities report

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (10.46): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT has been ranked number one in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s *Regional Well-Being Report 2014*;
- (b) this ranking follows the Property Council’s 2014 survey which ranked Canberra as Australia’s most liveable city; and
- (c) these surveys are an important indicator of our city’s well-being on not only economic indicators like income and economic opportunities, but they also highlight the quality of life and civic engagement our community enjoys and has come to expect;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) these rankings which analyse our scores in health, education, jobs, income, environment, safety and housing reveal the investment and hard choices made by successive ACT Governments to create a world class city and society; and
- (b) these rankings enhance our reputation and contribute to our economic development and continuing diversification of our economy by providing tangible measurement of the attractiveness of our city as a place to invest, work, study and visit; and

(3) calls on the ACT Government to continue its strong and balanced approach to investing in our people, our services and our economy.

I move this motion today in tribute to Canberra—the people who live here and the people who built this community over its 100 years: the families, the planners, the visionaries and all who believed in carving out a capital for our new nation in this ancient land. It has never been an easy path. Accountants carped and cynics sneered, but we keep the flag of Canberra flying here. It is a tribute to our country’s spirit that

we aim to build a new city, expressing the best hopes of our new society. It is a tribute to the hard work and toil of generations of Canberrans that today we can rejoice in recognition from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's regional wellbeing report that Canberra is ranked number one—number one among regions in the world's most affluent countries.

Here is how the OECD report rated us against a set of nine criteria for wellbeing. In access to services, the ACT was rated 9.6 out of 10, putting it first in Australia of eight national regions and in the top 10 per cent of regions compared by the OECD analysis. In civic engagement, the ACT was rated at 10 out of 10, putting it first in Australia and in the top four per cent of regions compared by the OECD analysis. In education, the ACT was rated at 9.1 out of 10, putting it first in Australia and in the top 20 per cent of regions compared by the OECD analysis. In jobs, the ACT was rated at 9.6 out of 10, putting it first in Australia and in the top six per cent of regions compared by the OECD analysis.

On the environment, the ACT was rated at 9.5 out of 10, putting it sixth in Australia and in the top nine per cent of regions compared by the OECD analysis. For income, the ACT was rated at 10 out of 10, putting it first in Australia and in the top four per cent of regions compared by the OECD analysis. In health, the ACT was rated at 9.9 out of 10, putting it first in Australia and in the top four per cent of regions compared by the OECD analysis. In safety, the ACT was rated at 10 out of 10, putting it first in Australia and in the top 30 per cent of regions compared by the OECD analysis. In housing, the ACT was rated at 8.5 out of 10, putting it second in Australia and in the top 14 per cent of regions compared by the OECD analysis.

Overall we scored 86.2 out of 90. Nobody is perfect, Madam Speaker. While we would like to score the extra 3.8 points we missed, we rated best in the OECD.

That is not to say that there is not more work to be done. We have our share of social problems, and people are doing it hard. We need understanding or a helping hand to get through. I am sure the opposition will be quick to find further fault with Canberra, as the nay-sayers have always done. Nevertheless, let us take a long-term view for a moment and reflect on the achievement of Canberra.

Earlier I mentioned the visionaries that are part of the dream of creating this capital, not just as a monument but as a living city where families can grow and thrive. Some say the city was born of a political compromise out of a squabble between Sydney and Melbourne. There is an element of that, but this has always been the bigger dream of a better city, an Australian city in our unique landscape. For much of its history, the growth of Canberra has been driven by federal politicians, beginning with the fathers of federation and characters like King O'Malley who handled the mechanics of getting it started.

Sir Robert Menzies had his political ups and downs in Canberra before World War II. Resuming office after the war, he embraced the vision of Canberra that had been on the backburner for its first 50 years through world wars and depression. He finally moved the major departments from Melbourne and Sydney to be together in Canberra

for the first time, launching an unprecedented building boom, laying the foundations for the new town centres. Like Moses, he stilled the Molonglo's waters and Lake Burley Griffin was filled.

The late Gough Whitlam had perhaps the most intimate involvement in Canberra of any prime minister. Gough was 10 when his father, the commonwealth deputy crown solicitor, was transferred to Canberra in 1926, ready for the opening of the first Parliament House. Gough lived in Forrest and graduated from Telopea Park intermediate high school at 15. Too young for university, he studied classics at Canberra Grammar School. After the war, he returned to Canberra as a politician. He eventually became Prime Minister on a platform that included modernising our national urban infrastructure. His personal experience of the building of Canberra no doubt contributed to that plan. It is an example of Canberra giving back to the nation. One monument to his national program to connect home in every Australian capital city to sewerage and to upgrade sewage treatment is the Lower Molonglo Water Quality Control Centre. Begun in 1975, it was an engineering marvel in its day, drawing engineers from around the world to Canberra to see it. His higher education reforms and investment in universities also made Canberra the clever capital it is today.

Self-government has allowed Canberrans to play a direct role in our city's future. This current ACT government has presided over Canberra for more than a tenth of our history. We have always believed it is important to get the roads, rates, and rubbish right; to get the schools, the health system and the economy right; and to be investing in our future. We believe in equality of opportunity and giving everyone a fair go. These are all part of the quality of life that makes Canberra the city we love. They are all part of the city topping the OECD study and, recently, being judged as Australia's most livable city in the Property Council's 2014 survey.

Government in Canberra is about getting the fundamentals right but also about our future. It is about a progressive, modern, dynamic city, and maintaining a vision of Canberra as expressing something about the Australian spirit. Projects such as the arboretum, city to the lake, urban intensification, introduction of light rail, digital Canberra, diversifying the economy, and Canberra the clever capital are amongst long-term projects of this government that will shape this city into the future.

I have seen the changes in Belconnen over the last 20 years, the last 10 years in particular, greatly improving the quality of life for residents. The growth of a range of educational, health, sporting, artistic, commercial, housing, recreation and transport facilities in Belconnen has been phenomenal. They have brought the Belconnen CBD to life, integrated it with Lake Ginninderra and shown a way forward for other town centres and Civic.

There is always more to do. This government is getting on with it. That said, our future has its threats. Somewhat sadly, given Canberra's role as the commonwealth capital, being largely built by commonwealth governments, our greatest threat is now the current commonwealth government's attitude to Canberra. Canberra is seen by the Abbott government as a place to plunder and punish. Jobs here are being cut or redistributed for pork-barrelling elsewhere. Our flagship scientific organisation, the

CSIRO, which has such a proud history in Canberra, is being slashed; and investments in the clever economy, such as NICTA, are losing federal funding. The short-term thinking of the federal government is threatening our economy and advances in our health and education systems.

The ACT government is doing its best to limit the damage from the federal government, to diversify our economy, and to keep our economy strong. The Chief Minister recently returned from a trade mission to China, for example, and the Treasurer is working tirelessly to drive investment and innovative business initiatives in Canberra.

The fundamentals of Canberra are strong. We enjoy an enviable quality of life, as evidenced by the OECD report and the Property Council's assessment. With the forward-thinking, responsible and inspired leadership of the ACT government and the talented and hardworking Canberra community, we will continue to prosper.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (10.55): It gives me great pleasure to talk about what a great city we live in here in Canberra. Although I have some differences of opinion with Dr Bourke on some of the points he made, I think we can all agree that Canberra is the most wonderful place to live in. It is great to see that the OECD has recognised what we all know—that it is a wonderful, wonderful city.

I reflected on this on Saturday night, when I went with my wife and a couple of friends to the lookout at Red Hill where we had a bit of a picnic. We sat there and there were kangaroos bounding around and we looked out over the city. It is a remarkable design in that you can almost look out from that position and not see the city as it is hidden amongst the bushland. It is quite a remarkable vista that has been maintained in the 100 years of its life for the most part very well. It has not been overdeveloped in the wrong places, and we can be rightly proud of what our forebears have achieved in the ACT. That is not to say there is not a lot to do, Madam Speaker. The job is never done; the job is ongoing and there is much we can do. But when we look back at our history, many notable Canberrans have achieved so much for this city.

When I look back over the last 12 years of the ACT Labor government, there are three things I want to look at: are we in the same position that we could have been? Are we better off or worse off than we should be? I will then look at the plan for this government that Dr Bourke referred to for the future, is that the right balance? Dr Bourke is suggesting it is; I beg to differ. Then I will look at what our alternative vision should be.

Looking at the last 12 years of Labor, given that we are such a wealthy jurisdiction, so well educated and looking at our demographics of who we are as a people and our unique situation of wealth relative to everyone else, have the last 12 years been good for Canberra or have we had significant missed opportunity? I will start with the budget. We now find ourselves with a budget that has \$4.5 billion of debt. It is laden by debt and it is laden by deficit. The income that comes to this government is double that of the income a previous Liberal government enjoyed under Kate Carnell, yet we have massive debt and massive deficit. So, fail on the budget.

When we look at the economy with all of the advantages we have talked about, we see that recently we have slipped from the best economy in Australia to the second worst. The failings are numerous. Mr Smyth will often talk about the failure to diversify and to create opportunities in the private sector. Fail.

Health: this government took over the best health system in Australia and on many, many key indicators has turned it into the worst. The elective surgery, be it our emergency departments, or be it occupancy, with some of the stories we are hearing now—sadly, Ms Lawder's mother-in-law was one of those—nobody is now saying this is the best health system in Australia. So, on health: fail.

Education: we see a good education system, but I note the number of people in this territory that vote with their feet and actually use the independent school system. What we have seen over this time is a government that closed 23 schools and now has a situation where many schools are at or over capacity. That was a massive failure. It was not driven by good education policy; that was driven by the Costello review, mismanagement of the budget and panic. It closed 23 schools despite the Chief Minister having previously said no schools would be closed. Education: fail.

Public transport: go and use the buses, go and wait for a bus and look at the statistics on usage. Despite the hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars that have been spent, despite all of the rhetoric we hear, look at the usage numbers.

Suburban maintenance: I get out, as do my colleagues, regularly and talk to people and go and visit local suburbs. Get down on the ground—I know the ministers do not do that—and talk to the people of the ACT about what they think about suburban maintenance. They will give you a very resounding message that things were better 12 years ago than they are now when it comes to suburban maintenance. You know this, Minister Rattenbury, because you get many of my letters. Fail.

The arts: we now have a Minister for the Arts who thinks that promoting the arts in this town is about Nazi strippers and spending government money on plays called *Kill Climate Deniers*. That is what the arts has become under Joy Burch. We have many, many people—ask Mr Smyth, the shadow minister for the arts—in the arts community asking what has become of arts in this town. Why do we have this minister running this agenda that is so out of touch with our arts community?

Planning of this great city: I know Mr Gentleman has only taken over this portfolio recently so I will not direct much blame to him. I know he just takes his directions from the Chief Minister on things like the bush healing farm or Simon Corbell on other things, but you talk to any of the people in this town who are trying to do developments, who are trying to keep building this city, be it from the smallest developer or someone trying to do a reno all the way through to the big guys in this town, and they will give you the same message: the system is broke.

Business: as much as Dr Bourke tries to blame everything on the Abbott government, it is a reality that the federal government will increase and decrease the size of the federal public service, and there is not a lot that we can do about that from the ACT.

We do not like it. I note this mob opposite were mute when Kevin Rudd was saying, "I'm going to take a meat axe to the public service." I do not remember them saying much about that then. When Kevin Rudd stripped 14,500 jobs, do you remember them howling then? No, I do not. There is hypocrisy when you have a group of people who will monitor only one side of politics and what they are doing federally.

What I say is: a pox on both your houses. Leave the jobs here. I particularly say: do not take any jobs out of Canberra to put them elsewhere, but that is a criticism that can be levelled at federal Labor and federal Liberal. The difference is, I might add, that federal Liberal are doing it because they are cleaning up billions and billions of dollars of debt and financial mismanagement from Rudd and Gillard Labor that, if left untouched, would lead to debt of over \$600 billion to this country. So do not blame the Abbott government for cleaning up Gillard's and Rudd's mess when they were stripping 14,500 jobs and try to use that as an excuse for the failings of the ACT Labor government. It is the reality that that will ebb and flow. The way we are going to maintain our economy, the way we promote growth in this town is by getting our own business sector up and running and working. On every measure there it is a fail.

Dr Bourke is suggesting that this is all wonderful, that the ACT government is doing such a great job, that any problems here in the ACT must be slated to the Abbott government and that this government's plans for the future are wonderful. Let me just talk about one of them, because I am limited by time—that is, the \$800 million for our children's future that this mob opposite want to spend on a tram. What does this tram do? We know it does not take many people in it—less than one per cent of the population. We know it is not going to make much difference for the economic prosperity of this town. I will tell you what it does: it secures the ninth vote in the Assembly. That is the principal reason that this government is pursuing the tram.

Just look at the *Canberra Times* if you want to see what the 6,000 people surveyed think about that tram, whether they think that this is a government that is on the right track. Mr Rattenbury is happy. He will get up and say how wonderful the tram is. He is happy, but what about your constituents down in Tuggeranong, Minister Gentleman and Minister Burch? What about your constituents, Dr Bourke and Ms Berry? What do they think about this? I know what they think about it, because they say the same things to me on the street as they say to you.

There are many things this government is doing that are unfair and misdirected. If you go to those same suburbs and talk to people about their rates and ask them what they think about their rates, they will give you a very clear understanding of that. Rates that go up at 10 per cent per year, year on year on year when incomes are going up at two per cent and pensions are going up at two and three per cent mean that people eventually have less money. The cost of living in this town, as this government covers it in solar panels that increases the cost of electricity, is a real impact. If we want to stay—

Mr Gentleman: Four dollars in 2020.

MR HANSON: Mr Gentleman interjects with "four dollars". Well, the cost of electricity off the grid is in the order of \$40 a megawatt hour. Through the solar, it is in order of \$180. Don't talk to me about \$4. When you look at the facts of what this

government is doing to pursue its own agenda, the people who are paying the price are the people living in the suburbs of Canberra.

This is a government that has got the wrong priorities. It is a government that has squandered the opportunities over the last 12 years. It is because of the work done by our forebears and the unique nature of Canberra that it is despite this government that we are the most livable city. But as we can see, if we do not change the path this government is on, that opportunity will be squandered and we will see a steady decline as the economy continues to decline, as the budget goes into further debt and as people simply cannot afford to live here because the cost of living—be it power, be it rates, be it housing affordability—becomes unsustainable.

There are things we need to do that that this government is not doing. We need to promote growth; we need to promote the right sort of growth in our built environment. What is happening to the city? Take a walk down Garema Place and tell me that is the most livable city you have ever been in. This government has neglected it, and our town centres have been neglected. We need to make sure that the growth in our suburbs is consistent with their unique characters. We need to get this economy going. We need to make sure that this is a place where people want to do business, not a place where people go and do business anywhere but Canberra, and that is what is happening with so many local businesses.

We need to better connect Canberra. A better connecting Canberra is not just about a single tram line from Civic to Gungahlin that is going to strip the dollars out of the ability to deliver a better public transport system, better parking and better roads. We need to make sure that this is increasingly a more livable Canberra. It is not going to be more livable if you cannot get into the emergency department. It is not going to be livable if your schools are full, and it is not a livable place if you simply cannot afford to live here.

I have circulated an amendment that hopefully you all have.

Mr Rattenbury: It's only two words long and he can't even remember it. He's got to pick it up to read it.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Rattenbury!

MR HANSON: Poor old Mr Rattenbury.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, address your comments through the chair.

MR HANSON: I might be getting under his skin a little here. Dr Bourke wants us to say that we should continue with these wonderful policies. The point is, as I have just articulated, that the policies this government has now and the policies this government is planning to adopt in the future will be bad and are bad for this town. This Assembly should be calling on this government to adopt policies that will be good for Canberra—that will promote growth, that will connect this city and that will make it more livable. I move:

In paragraph (3), omit “continue its”, substitute “adopt a”.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (11.10): I thank Dr Bourke for raising this issue today. We can thank, if we take a historical perspective on this, Walter and Marion Griffin and the committee that chose the Griffin design for a large part of the Canberra we have today—namely, the bush capital design. The thought that went into those very early foundations of our city and the design of the national capital in providing us with a constant water supply from the mountains behind the city really laid the foundations for what has become, I think, a very wonderful city, a city that is very early in its shaping. Having just celebrated its centenary, we know that this city is very much a work in progress but one that we have great foundations to build from.

As a result of those early decisions our hills, an integral part of Canberra that we know and love, are protected and our suburbs nestle between them in a picturesque way in the valleys. That is something which Canberrans talk about. No suburb in Canberra is further than two suburbs away from a nature reserve. As a result, all Canberrans really do grow up with the opportunity to develop an appreciation of nature.

For the past century, Canberra's infrastructure has been designed with urban open space protection in mind, endowing us with many street trees, a network of cycling and walking paths, scenic lakes and, more recently, wetlands being retrofitted into our creek system. This means that people are more inspired to head out for a walk in the reserve, to take their dog for a walk through our green belts, to ride their bikes around or to take the family out on the weekend.

We should reflect on the fact that we have excellent roads in this city. We take our great roads and our relatively easy parking for granted. A visit to other major cities really reminds you that Canberra is far from the usual rat race that residents in other cities have to suffer on a daily basis. We have a safe and clean city. We have wide open spaces with lots of playgrounds, and you do not have to walk many kilometres to find one, unlike many other cities.

This is a really easy place for people to live in, to put it quite simply. Whether it is families, single people or people with dogs, it really is a great place to live in. Anyone who goes out to the lake at lunchtime can see for themselves just how many people go for a quick walk, jog or run around the lake. On weekends, of course, it is even busier, with family bike rides, sailing, windsurfing and dragon boating. You name it, there is an opportunity to do it in this city.

People often say that Canberra is a boring place to be. I dispute that fiercely. I think we have the great fortune of being big enough to be a fun city but small enough to be a country town. I often say to people that one of the things that I have learnt since coming to this Assembly—and it is not something I anticipated when I first sought election—is that, as members, we get invited to many community events. I think we all come to this place knowing a fair bit about Canberra and having a pretty strong passion for the city across the political spectrum, no matter which party we run for. I always enjoy meeting the candidates from other parties because the universal factor is that people want to know more about this city, they want to have an involvement, and they feel they know a fair bit about the city.

As members, we get invited to many community events. In the time I have been in this place I have learnt just how rich the tapestry of Canberra is, now knowing much more than I knew when I came here. I tend to say that anybody who finds Canberra boring simply is not trying. There are so many community activities to be involved in and so many things to get out and do. That is something that makes Canberra a great place to be. The OECD data that came out that identified Canberra as being such a tremendous place does not pick up those things. Those things lie between the statistics, but they do, in fact, tell the true story of our city.

From an environmental perspective, as I have touched on, there are many positive facets about this city. The air is clean and we have that tremendous blue sky—a reflection of our lack of pollution, probably our altitude and also our distance from the ocean. We still have some challenges, and I am particularly mindful of the water quality in our urban creeks and waterways. It is, for me, a source of great frustration that those waterways suffer problems, be it Lake Tuggeranong, Lake Ginninderra or Lake Burley Griffin, as well as some of the urban ponds around the place. We have much work to do in that space.

Of course, over 60 per cent of the ACT is protected either in Namadgi national park or as part of our network of nature reserves. This is extremely unusual for any jurisdiction. As Canberrans, we should feel lucky about that, and I know many of our residents appreciate it. Many visitors to Canberra comment on our abundant birdlife. This is something that many of us probably take for granted and perhaps do not even notice on a day-to-day basis. On an average day, in an average backyard, people probably see at least 10 different bird species, I am guessing, although this of course would vary from suburb to suburb.

As a result of all of these historical planning decisions we have great bushwalks right on our doorstep but, more importantly, a great parks service to look after the bush. I say that as the minister responsible, but in the year that we are celebrating 30 years of the Namadgi national park and the ACT parks service, it is an appropriate time to reflect on the great history of our parks service and also the army of Parkcare volunteers who are celebrating 25 years this year. There was a conference last Friday to celebrate 25 years of Parkcare, underlying the tremendous benefit that the many volunteers have delivered to our city over the years.

I have talked already about the breadth of our community and the opportunities to volunteer. There is a tremendous range of volunteer activities, whether it be in sports, the environment, community services or helping those less fortunate in our community. We have high levels of volunteer engagement across our city. This helps people feel connected and part of the community, but it also delivers great benefit right across our community that, again, members in this place fully know.

Despite Mr Hanson's earlier comments, I believe the ACT has an outstanding education system both in our public and our range of independent and non-government schools. One of the great advantages of Canberra is its design; it makes it easy for people to walk to the local schools. That is something we need to continue to encourage as we battle increasing congestion at our schools. I receive letters from

constituents concerned about the build-up of traffic outside schools. There is a challenge for us there to encourage more people to think about whether they do need to take the vehicle to school all the time or whether we can make it possible that they need to take their vehicle less often. I look forward to working with Minister Burch as, between TAMS and the Environment Directorate, we seek to tackle that very tricky problem that increasingly arises.

The ACT has long been an innovative hub for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. Again, as well as having ministerial responsibility, this is an area of personal interest. The ACT is the only jurisdiction to have an elected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative body. It plays an important advisory role for government. The elected body is now in its third term. Like the ACT with self-government, these organisations mature and grow with time. I think that this term particularly the elected body is really going to come into its own. It has already played an important part in advising government. I can see through its evolution that it is becoming a more and more important part of ensuring that the more than 6,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT get the best possible opportunities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans often achieve much better life outcomes than elsewhere in Australia. That is something we should be proud of, but something we must continue to improve. The ACT leads the nation in a number of closing the gap targets. Certainly, the 2013 report found that, when compared nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans are more likely to have higher levels of education and training, greater participation in the workforce, lower rates of unemployment and to own or be purchasing a home.

It also found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans access health services less frequently than those in most other jurisdictions and that we have many people coming from the surrounding region to use ACT services and programs. What this set of statistics tells me is that, as I said, we have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in Canberra who are generally doing better than their fellows around the country. What we do know, however, is that they are still not doing as well as the rest of the community in general. That is an area where we must strive to continue helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people achieve their goals both individually and collectively.

I was going to touch on arts and culture. We have a separate space for a discussion about that later today so I might save my remarks. I will just comment on the fact that we have a wonderful arts and culture sector here in the ACT in terms of both our national institutions and, of course, our local arts and culture scene. I reject Mr Hanson's characterisation of it. There is a tremendous diversity in the community. Not all of it appeals to me, and clearly not all of it appeals to Mr Hanson and his colleagues, but that is the joy of arts and culture.

It is, at a time like this, worth reflecting on the global context. By any measure Canberra is a city that is outstanding on a global measure. I become concerned when I hear people talking this city down, as Mr Hanson did today. As Mr Hanson spoke, I was not actually convinced that we lived in the same town; it was hard to believe. If one reflects on the quality of life in Canberra in any sort of global context, the OECD figures tell it to us, but we all know it.

Anyone who has travelled outside of this city knows that, on a range of just about any measure you care for, this city does extremely well. Sure, there is room for improvement. Yes, there are some cracked footpaths out there and, yes, we are working on fixing them. There are areas undoubtedly to be improved. We do not face the daily threat of war, terrorist activity, mass poverty and overcrowding—those things that on a global scale so many global citizens do face, and it is worth reflecting on that. I am sure someone will get up and take a chip at me for even mentioning those things, saying they are not relevant for a discussion here in the Assembly, but I think it is important to step back and reflect on what we do have in the context of how so many fellow human beings on this planet live their lives. We should reflect on that with great fortune.

There is no doubt, having made all those remarks, that I think Canberra is a great place to live, and certainly on the OECD ratings we do very well. That does not mean there are not things to improve and there are not things that we should change in Canberra. It would be wrong if we said Canberra is ranked highly so we should stay frozen in an unchangeable bubble. On the contrary, we need to keep changing and adapting as our city changes and as new threats and challenges emerge.

Two issues that I have talked about plenty of times before in this chamber are the threat of climate change and the challenges we face from urban growth, including traffic growth and transport challenges. A smart city, and a city that wants to continue to succeed, will look to the future and take on these challenges for future generations. Just as an example, this might be a good time to point out that on a different city ranking, which is the 2013 Economic Intelligence Unit's most livable cities index, eight of the top 10 cities have light rail systems. These are older cities than Canberra but, looking to the future, there is a likelihood that light rail will be an important part of what keeps Canberra highly livable. That is a debate that I know we will continue to have in this place. I am not intending to reiterate my views on it at the moment, but I think it is interesting to reflect on the fact that so many of those cities have that as a common feature.

Picking up on a few of the comments that Mr Hanson made, as I said, it almost sounded like we lived in a different town. Most Canberrans acknowledge that we live in a great city. You can pick up something like electricity prices, and there really are two ways to look at this. Mr Hanson said, "Oh, it's terrible, it's terrible." The ACT has the cheapest electricity prices in Australia and has had for a long time. The last time I looked at it, it was \$1,500 or \$1,600 a year cheaper than for those who live in Queanbeyan just across the border. You can come in here and say, "Oh, it's terrible that the government's doing all of this."

Not only does Canberra have the cheapest electricity prices in Australia by a long shot but also we are building a city that will be insulated against future price increases. It has been talked about in this place, and one can conveniently ignore it if one is trying to build a political narrative, but the reality is that in setting 20-year price contracts we are locking in the ACT's electricity prices over a 20-year period. We are putting in place a legacy for the future of this city that will mean in 10, 15 or 20 years time, when electricity prices continue to rise as they have done for a whole range of reasons, the ACT will be having prices that are fixed in contracts for 20 years.

Any person who sits down and thinks about that from a commonsense perspective knows that we will be very well off as a result of the decisions that have been taken today. That is certainly how I want to think about the future of this city. How do we take this tremendous history and legacy that we have inherited and make sure that not just today but in 15 or 20 years time people look back and thank us for the decisions we took today and acknowledge that we have built on what our earlier founders gave us?

MR BARR (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Housing and Minister for Tourism and Events) (11.25): The ranking of Canberra as the most livable city in the world is indeed a fitting recognition of stable, far-sighted and responsible governance. I would like to take some time this morning to touch on some of the ways in which the Labor government has helped to ensure that the ACT has scored strongly on the economic measures in the OECD report.

At the outset it is important to note that since 2001 the territory government has implemented a strategic and long-term vision to promote growth in the territory economy, to create jobs and to support our community. Critical to this success has been engagement and interaction with the private sector and with the key public institutions in this city to support economic growth, to support innovation and to support knowledge-intensive businesses. And for a small regional jurisdiction, we certainly have been highly active across the private sector, public institutions, and the territory government is supporting initiatives to grow the territory's economy.

Our business development strategy that was launched in 2012 provides the right support to capitalise on the strong foundations that we have. The strategy is already helping to create an investment environment that has seen, I think in recent reports, about 35 per cent of all new investment in property in this city, commercial and residential, coming from overseas. We are supporting that international investment and the right settings to encourage our private sector to grow and to create jobs.

The ACT government have established a range of strong programs and initiatives aimed directly at supporting the local economy, particularly in this difficult period of federal government cuts. Many of these are direct outcomes of initiatives we have already put in train, such as the CBR innovation network, and complement a range of programs and services that are being created out of the government's business development strategy.

The CBR innovation network is in a close partnership with the business community and has recently developed the supporting business fund to help businesses and individuals obtain professional and strategic business services tailored to their needs and opportunities. The developing opportunities in businesses—expanded services program is targeted at assisting former public servants develop business opportunities and jobs to ensure that their human and financial capital remains in Canberra. The youth business connect program will assist young entrepreneurs develop ideas for establishing local businesses. The government will work to link this new funding to existing services for entrepreneurs to ensure the services provided are connected and are able to leverage a broader support network.

There is no doubt that the Liberal Party's harsh budget at the federal level and its cuts to jobs and spending in the ACT are of course affecting our economy and having a particular impact on consumer confidence in the ACT at this point in time. It is important to note, though, the fundamentals of the ACT economy remain strong and the ACT's unemployment rate of 4.7 per cent, although higher than it has been in recent times as a result of the Liberal Party's job-slashing exercise, is the second lowest of all states and territories and remains a full 1.4 percentage points below the national unemployment rate that has also increased since the Liberal government was elected federally.

What is more, over the last decade our economy here has created just under 36,000 new jobs, nearly 10 new jobs every day for 10 years. But we are not resting on this record of jobs growth, and the Labor government locally is doing all that it can to mitigate the impacts of the economic shock caused by the Liberal Party, in particular by supporting employment growth in the ACT.

In addition to the programs that I have just outlined, we are also progressing our \$2½ billion four-year infrastructure program, which not only provides Canberrans with world-class facilities and services but also helps contribute to economic and jobs growth in the territory. We are continuing to make the tax system fairer, simpler and more efficient by cutting payroll tax, by abolishing tax on insurance and by cutting stamp duties. We continue to invest in Canberra becoming a truly digital city and support key sectors of the economy, particularly tourism and construction.

Also, our support for Canberra's tertiary institutions is at the heart of the growth of our knowledge-based economy. Our place in the global education market and our city's recognition as a study destination is entrenched and we are deliberately building on the research base in our city which drives innovation, attracts talent, supports business formation and generates economic and employment growth. We are working at a strategic level to identify the future opportunities in this sector and to promote it globally, most notably through the study Canberra program. Study Canberra is a partnership between the local tertiary education sector and the territory government and is financially supported to promote and encourage Canberra as a study destination of choice for international students.

Smart cities have a strong research base that drives innovation, that attracts talent and that ultimately supports growth and self-perpetuating business formation because of their long-term wealth creation capability. Most importantly, the jobs and economic activity that are generated from this sector are high-value adding and create a competitive advantage. In 2014 more than 10,000 international students are investing more than \$440 million in their economic future but also in our economy each year and the education sector is now generating 11 per cent of our tourism activity. This sector includes 45,000 people in employment in this region and contributes almost \$2 billion to our economy. And it is important to note that no other jurisdiction, no other city in Australia, has an education industry that is so significant in its economic makeup and that is why we are actively promoting Canberra as Australia's learning capital.

Further leveraging off this unique position, the government has established Invest Canberra as a dedicated investment promotion agency to progress and to increase direct private sector investment, particularly with a focus on international and national-level investment. The government recognises the need for the territory to actively compete to pursue that national and international-level investment. It is a simple fact that there is not sufficient capital in our own economy with our small population to meet our city's future economic growth needs. We simply must pursue national and international-level investment.

It is pleasing to see that in recent times around 35 per cent of commercial and residential sales from the Land Development Agency have attracted that international-level investment. We continue to promote Canberra to international investors to provide the business connections and the dedicated support through Invest Canberra to allow for even more new, direct investment to flow into our economy.

A leading example of our international liaison is, of course, the Chief Minister's mission to China earlier this month and my work in Singapore and Japan. The Chief Minister signed an MOU with the city of Shenzhen which focuses on general economic development, with a technology and education focus, and reflects the primary synergies between our cities. From Canberra's perspective, we expect the benefits to flow in the delivery of our digital city initiatives as well as to our universities, research organisations and private sector innovators.

Over the last four years the territory government has also facilitated growth and economic development in our city through land release, nearly 15½ thousand dwelling sites to the market, offering a wide range of housing choice in greenfield locations and in infill locations. The volume of releases has certainly relieved pressure on housing prices and rents and has provided greater choice. This continued sustainable growth across many of Canberra's suburbs and new development fronts has been supported by a program of commercial and community land release to support the broader needs of the population. These new dwelling sites have contributed to the ACT having the highest proportion of public housing in Australia and have supported the growth of the community housing portfolio.

In closing, the government will continue to support the territory economy, continue to support jobs growth in our economy and put in place the range of policies and programs to ensure that we remain the most livable city in the world.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Minister for Planning, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations, Minister for Children and Young People and Minister for Ageing) (11.35): I thank Dr Bourke for his motion today. I will not be supporting Mr Hanson's amendment. I rise today to celebrate the OECD's acknowledgement of something we have all known for a long time, that Canberra is the best place in the world to live. Canberra being named the most livable city in the world is a celebration of the positive work that has been done by the ACT government, ensuring the livability of our city and the opportunities, of course, that exist for Canberrans.

I would like today to talk about some of my portfolio areas and some of the work which ensures that our city continues to develop and grow whilst retaining the features that have seen it deservedly been given this title by the OECD. I believe that the OECD ranking reflects well on the planning of this city by the ACT government in recent years. The creation of the government's master planning program has meant development of our city and our town centres is done in a strategic and thoughtful way which enables Canberrans to consider and endorse the plans for how our city moves forward.

Each master plan sets out principles, outcomes and strategies to manage growth and development over time. They identify what is important and how to enhance the existing character and quality and provide a framework to inform statutory documents such as the territory plan precinct code. They provide for a broad consultation process which allows all community members to have their say in continuing the livability of their community.

Master plans like the ANU exchange, the Belconnen lakeshore, the Belconnen town centre, the Braddon commercial area, City West, the Dickson centre master plan, Hall, the Jamison Centre, the Kambah master plan, the Kingston centre master plan, the Lawson concept planning study, the Pialligo master plan, the Tuggeranong and Erindale centres master plans and the Woden town centre master plan have all played their role in how our city is shaped. Master plans such as the Woden town centre master plan have been instrumental in continued improvement and renewal, with a number of recommendations in the 2004 Woden town centre master plan now being realised.

It is not just our regional town centres that continue to go through major town planning as the city plan continues its development and growth. The city plan was released earlier this year and it sets a vision for future development in the city centre and a framework towards 2030 and beyond. The plan is consistent with the ACT planning strategy and most certainly will contribute to urban consolidation and sustainability. The planning portfolio is currently progressing the city plan implementation through projects such as the Northbourne Avenue planning and development framework study.

As part of the implementation, a city centre study will be prepared which will include three key elements: an urban design framework and urban design guidelines for the city centre, a review of development controls for the city centre, and a transport and movement action plan for the city centre. The Northbourne Avenue component of the study will include a planning review of the Northbourne Avenue corridor to support integrated land use and transport and urban design guidelines for Northbourne Avenue. The primary purpose of this work will be to support ACT government directorates and guide the delivery of capital works, land release and development across the city.

I meet regularly with planners, builders, developers and architects across the city. Reflecting on some of the comments Mr Hanson made earlier, none of the people that I have talked to over recent weeks and months have reflected Mr Hanson's comments today and I do wonder how in touch he is with those particular parts of the city development program. They tell us that—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

MR GENTLEMAN: Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Resume your seat, Mr Gentleman. Stop the clock, please. Mr Hanson, you were heard in silence, I believe.

Mr Hanson: I was not.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I believe you were heard in silence. I do not recall having to speak to anyone, apart from Mr Rattenbury's very brief interjection, which I drew him to order on. I have asked you to come to order several times. I am getting a little tired of it. Will you please let Mr Gentleman finish in silence. Thank you very much. Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I want to reflect on some of the comments that they have made to me as planning minister over the recent weeks and months. They tell us that they want to work with the government, they are looking forward to better consultation and they want to be engaged on the future development of the territory. We want to work with them as well. I think it is a great idea to make sure everybody is engaged.

I did want to comment too on Mr Hanson's comments regarding solar panels and the cost of electricity. As we heard from Mr Rattenbury earlier, electricity in the territory is the cheapest across Australia. Of course the move towards renewable energy does have a cost but it is quite small in comparison to the costs that affect other states. As he said, the cost of electricity in Queanbeyan is somewhere near \$1,600 a year more than the cost of electricity in the ACT. And what does surprise me, of course, about these comments is that it was the Canberra Liberals that supported the feed-in tariff when I brought it in in 2008. It is interesting to see their change in direction.

Within the heart of my electorate that Mr Hanson raised earlier too, Brindabella, we have seen a major infrastructure investment of \$19 million on the refurbishment of the existing Tuggeranong health centre, which will be the base of several medical professions. That \$19 million refurbishment stands alongside the creation of the widely supported nurse-led walk-in centre, a free general health service for all Canberrans aged over two years. We saw the numbers of people attending the first walk-in centre at Canberra Hospital that came originally from the Tuggeranong area. I think it is a great move that we have opened one in Tuggeranong.

Canberrans have known for many years that the capital is the most livable city but, more than that, we know that Canberrans are passionate about their city, about their community, and take a genuine interest in how our city develops and grows. Looking forward, we must remain committed to supporting the growth and development of the next generation of Canberrans and indeed ensure that the city we know today continues to be the city we need it to be in the future.

I would like to share some recent findings that I think provide an excellent insight into the thoughts of this next generation. In developing an ACT government commitment for children and young people, with the aim of developing a whole-of-government vision and a whole-of-community approach to the rights of children and young people in our city, children and young people have told us that Canberra is a great place to live. In seeking the views of our younger people, we have heard them talk about Canberra, that they love to live here for reasons such as it provides great open spaces, green reserves and playgrounds and that Canberra has lots of cool things like Lake Burley Griffin, Telstra Tower, and Questacon. Children and young people have also told us that they feel safe here and that they have access to good schools.

These views are also supported by the data that we have about children and young people in Canberra, and I am pleased to be able to report that the *Picture of ACT's children and young people 2014* publication, due to be released today, provides us with a rich source of information confirming that children and young people in our city are faring well. The development of this commitment shows that Canberra is a city that is serious about providing a community that supports all of our members to reach their potential and also to make a contribution to and share the benefits of our community. While the commitment focuses on children and young people, it recognises the vital role that family and community play in the promotion of children and young people's rights and in the provision of a positive, caring environment.

It is these things which make our city a great place to raise our children and our next generation. While I know that our city is already a great place to raise children, having lived here all my life and raised my own family here, there is always more to do. The recent opening of the boundless Canberra playground is a good example of things that we can do to make our city even better for families. Boundless was made possible by widespread support from the public and private sectors, community groups, school students and individuals and is an excellent demonstration of what can be achieved by working together to ensure Canberra remains the world's most livable city.

Canberra is also an age-friendly city, and you heard me talk yesterday about the older persons assembly we held here. Our strategic plan for positive ageing, together with our positive ageing action plan, provides a framework for social inclusion. The plans support positive ageing initiatives where older people are respected, valued and supported to actively participate in our community.

Canberra is indeed the world's most livable city and, as I have shown, this government has got its foot firmly on the accelerator to ensure it remains so.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra) (11.46): I am very happy to speak on this motion today, and I thank Dr Bourke for bringing it to the Assembly. Like Mr Rattenbury, I too thought Mr Hanson was talking about another city when he got up to speak earlier. I had to check with the motion to see I was speaking on the correct thing. The motion notes that the ACT has been ranked number one in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's regional wellbeing report 2014, which followed the Property Council's survey ranking Canberra as Australia's most livable city. I must have blinked, because I missed the parts in Mr Hanson's speech where he might have

said something positive about our beloved city. He spent most of the time moaning about how awful it is, starting with the Nazi strippers, who I am sure are very nice people and are very proud of living in their city as well. That is the difference between those opposite and those on this side—we are proud of our city and will do everything we can to talk it up and make it better.

It came as no surprise to me that the ACT was ranked number one in the OECD's regional wellbeing report and that Canberra was ranked as Australia's most livable city by the Property Council. It is well-deserved recognition of this government's continued investment in health services, schools, transport, community spaces and facilities, housing and pretty much every other aspect of our community.

Most importantly, these rankings demonstrate that our government's investments are making a real difference in the lives of the people of Canberra. In my electorate, the Belconnen Community Health Centre, which was opened in November 2013, provides increased capacity and access to community health services such as dental, community nursing, and community mental health services. I had the unfortunate pleasure, I suppose, of attending the dental services there with my son this year, and they do a great job. I am very happy to have one so close to my home, as is everybody else who lives in the Belconnen area of Ginninderra. The new Belconnen nurse-led centre, which was opened in July of 2014, is also a wonderful service for the people of Belconnen.

Our second public hospital, the first subacute rehabilitation hospital in the ACT, the University of Canberra public hospital, is planned and construction is expected to begin in 2015. It will form part of a planned network of hospital facilities designed to meet the needs of our ageing and growing population. We have seen the development and delivery of the west Belconnen co-located ambulance and fire and rescue station.

These are just a few of the local investments this government has undertaken, and represent investment for the services and infrastructure we not only need now but our government has planned to build and transform our city for a prosperous and sustainable future.

Too often some people in this place, as we learned earlier today, try to talk down our achievements, but today is a time to celebrate our achievements, which are undeniable. We live in a territory that is well-maintained, safe, with high quality recreational outdoor environments, educational opportunities, good healthcare services, employment and economic opportunities and excellent transport infrastructure.

We have a lot to be proud of, and it is not just about our built environment and infrastructure or our income and economic indicators. In my local community of Belconnen, I see every day just how livable our city really is, from our fantastic dog parks, our skateboard park, which is touted as the best and the biggest in the southern hemisphere, the Strathnairn Arts Centre, the Belconnen Arts Centre, and our amazing schools. These are reminders every day of just how livable our city is no matter what interest you have or how old you are.

Within a couple of hundred metres of your home you are virtually in the bush, and I know Mr Rattenbury talked about this earlier celebrating the 30 years of Namadgi

national park. We see beautiful wildlife almost every day. We have access to community spaces that keep us active and engaged in our communities, from our national parks and nature reserves to our sporting ovals and facilities.

But these facilities and spaces do not matter at all without people who have a great community in Canberra and in my electorate in Ginninderra, from our teachers to our doctors, nurses and healthcare workers, to our volunteers at places like the Domestic Animal Services who care for abandoned animals, to the volunteers who support our sports teams and school canteens, to the organisations, staff and volunteers who contribute to our community every day by supporting those in need, like UnitingCare Kippax.

The OECD and Property Council rankings reflect on our government's investments and achievements. But, most importantly, they reflect on the strength and engagement of the people of Canberra. We are a government that engages with local communities to make sure we are accountable and consultative, and this is seen in our government's cabinet in the community, one of which was held in conjunction with the opening of the Belconnen health centre. These rankings speak volumes about the people of Canberra, about the quality of life and about the civic engagement our community enjoys and has come to expect. These rankings support the investment and hard choices made by successive ACT governments to create a world-class city.

We are making sure Canberra is a great place to live and work, not just today but for many years to come. We are supporting our communities by providing them with services and infrastructure to prosper and to be healthy. I am proud of these results but, more importantly, I am proud to be part of a government that continues to invest in our people, our services and our economy. I am proud of the people who contribute each and every day to make our city so livable.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Health and Minister for Higher Education) (11.52): I thank Dr Bourke for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. As I said in question time yesterday, the government has welcomed the OECD report and the confirmation it provides about the exceptional quality of our city, access to services, civic engagement, education, jobs, the environment, income, health, safety and housing. The OECD findings are very welcome but we know they are not a one-off. As Dr Bourke's motion notes, Canberra has already been named the most livable city in Australia, and we want to ensure our community continues to enjoy that high standard of living, which is why the government priorities align nicely with the outstanding scores identified in the OECD report, particularly around economic opportunity, world-class services and infrastructure, a community which cares for and looks after the vulnerable and the unwell, and a place of strong community and shared spirit and city pride.

If we look at the health portfolio, where the OECD ranked Canberra 9.9 out of 10, we can see many of the government initiatives at work. The ACT continues to enjoy the highest life expectancy of any jurisdiction in Australia. Life expectancy continues to be high in the ACT. It is expected to increase slightly over the next 10 years. We enjoy life expectancy at birth of 85.1 years for females against a national average of 84.3 and 81.2 years for males against a national average of 79.9 years.

We have continued to invest heavily in the provision of high quality health services, and the recent budget continued that record investment. We are very pleased with some of the projects that have been completed under the health infrastructure program, particularly the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, the investment we have made in community health services with the opening of new community health centres in Tuggeranong, Belconnen and Gungahlin, the opening of the new nurse-led walk-in centres in both Tuggeranong and Belconnen, the Canberra Region Cancer Centre which opened in mid-August this year, but also our focus on healthy weight through our healthy weight action plan, trying to ensure that the next generations of Canberrans are not dealing with some of the health epidemics that we are dealing with now. Also for the partnerships we work with for vulnerable communities, for example with the early morning centre and the bush healing farm, which I am very pleased will start construction very soon.

In the environment the OECD report also scored Canberra highly on its natural environment. We have been very proud to be a national leader on policies which act to preserve our natural assets and actively transition the economy towards a lower carbon footprint. In the absence of the Minister for the Environment we should reflect on some of these initiatives and achievements: the most ambitious greenhouse gas reduction targets of any jurisdiction in Australia, targeting a 40 per cent reduction by 2020, which is just marginally above the Canberra Liberals target of 30 per cent, and zero net emissions by 2060; biodiversity planting initiatives which have been a key priority for on-ground restoration and enhancing habitat connections across the ACT and into New South Wales, and ecological connectivity is widely regarded as a critical element in assisting biodiversity to adapt to climate change; the ACT's targeted recovery plans for nationally threatened species and the reintroduction of some species; and the protection of endangered ecological systems such as grasslands and woodlands combined with education of our community of their importance

The OECD also recognised the high level of safety we enjoy in the ACT. It confirms the picture of crime reduction we can observe that was released in the June 2014 criminal justice statistical profile, which continued to report consistent decreases across a broad range of reported property and personal crimes. The June profile sees decreases in property damage and environmental pollution; robbery, extortion and related offences; sexual assault and related offences; motor vehicle theft; theft and related offences; acts intended to cause injury; and unlawful entry with intent, burglary, break and enter. These have all seen decreases year on year. Again, this is a credit to ACT Policing and those ACT government officials who work to ensure that the vision and target of the ACT property crime and reduction strategy is implemented.

I do not think we should just sit here and take these results for granted, particularly when you look across the world with some of the conflicts and turbulence that exists in so many places where individual safety cannot be guaranteed. One of Canberra's great strengths is that as individuals, as citizens, we enjoy a very high level of safety as we walk around and conduct our lives and our business in this town.

Both reports referred to in this motion have attracted national and international attention. For visitors and foreign dignitaries I have met, including on my recent visit

to Hong Kong and China, their level of awareness of Canberra has increased. Even unfamiliar or unsympathetic media outlets have engaged in the discussion. It really is a good sign to have so many people talking about our city. The mix of commentary reflects a dynamism and debate we should never be scared to encourage.

Achievements like this help all Canberrans express the pride we feel for our city. It is important for the government, for business, for education, arts, tourism and other sectors to help capitalise on the momentum of this achievement. The city's new status is also a hugely valuable tool for our diplomatic efforts overseas, building on Canberra's prestige as national capital with these incredible facts about its wonderful quality of life.

The criteria of the OECD report confirm the importance of the government's key priorities, particularly our budgetary priorities in moving the city into the future. Livability lies at the core of our priorities, not only as an objective for our quality of life but as economic advantage and an indicator of Canberra's readiness for future growth and prosperity.

As Dr Bourke's motion requests, we will continue with these priorities and investments in health, education, public transport and other services, fairness—including for the Mr Fluffy home owners and residents—and opportunity for all. Our overarching vision is for a strong, diverse economy, one that provides jobs, attracts investment and underpins the wellbeing of our community, and we will continue to invest in strategies that promote the diversification of our economic base. We are boosting our infrastructure program and we are taking the steps needed to foster and strengthen our local industries.

MS BURCH (Brindabella—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Disability, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Racing and Gaming, Minister for Women and Minister for the Arts) (11.59): I join my colleagues in this room in celebrating Canberra as the most livable city. As Canberrans, we all know what a great city it is.

This OECD report is the latest in a growing number that talk about how well this city measures up. The OECD better life initiative has confirmed Canberra as the most livable city, for the second year. It is important to acknowledge that these achievements and the success of Canberrans have not happened by accident. They have happened because of those with the ability to imagine a better future, to make that future happen and to push back the dead hand of those whose vision for the future is an endless rerun of the past.

We are a community that understands the importance of ensuring that all Canberrans thrive. We understand the importance of different cultures and faiths, and that our individual stories are part of a greater whole.

In education, our investments in education, from early childhood through to vocational education and training and university, reflect our commitment to providing families with the highest quality education. The report ranked education as receiving 9.10 out of a score of 10. In the 2014-15 budget the ACT invested \$940 million in our

public education system. This is up 5.2 per cent from the previous year. And our investment is paying off. ACT students continue to be the best performing in Australia. Our 2014 NAPLAN test results show that the ACT is top or equal top in 16 of the 20 areas tested.

This government recognises that a school's built environment is vital to quality education. That is why we have spent more than \$800 million on capital works in recent years. We have been building new 21st century schools and classrooms to ensure that we thrive in the city's second century.

When we talk of arts, the OECD acknowledges that we must go beyond GDP and economic statistics to get a fuller understanding of a society. It is also important to understand how life is lived. Comparable measures of regional wellbeing offer a new way to gauge what policies work and can empower a community to act to achieve a higher sense of wellbeing for its citizens. The arts are vital to a creative and inclusive community. The arts contribute immensely to the ACT and are a central and sustainable part of life in our community.

The arts help to build an inclusive society, create careers, provide avenues for expression, drive innovation and contribute to productivity and economic growth. Art enhances our quality of life and our experience of public spaces and wellbeing, and the people that inhabit them. The arts stimulate and enrich us, encouraging connectedness and celebration, make an important contribution to our economy and add to the attraction of our city as a tourist destination. Canberrans have an active engagement with arts and culture, attending films, galleries, theatres and cultural festivals at a higher rate than across the country.

The Liberals, of course, see it differently. They oppose public art—even to the extent of refusing to attend the opening of the sculpture of Sir Robert Menzies.

Mr Smyth interjecting—

MS BURCH: Mr Smyth laughs but there was not one Canberra Liberal down by the lake when the statue of Sir Robert Menzies was unveiled. We know that under a Liberal regime we would have Mr Smyth sitting in judgement of all arts funding, with regular book burnings and only performances by those agreed by himself and Andrew Bolt allowed to go forward.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order! I think you should withdraw the comment about book burning. Book burning has a very strong connotation in the modern world, Ms Burch, and I think it is unparliamentary.

MS BURCH: If you want to make that judgement, and you have, Madam Speaker, I will withdraw it.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think you should withdraw without comment.

MS BURCH: I withdraw. Let us look at the comment by Mr Hanson regarding an arts grant to *Kill Climate Deniers*. In this place they have condemned me for funding

directly, and now they are choosing to condemn me for having a panel of local artists and experts view and determine what applications meet the criteria, and make recommendations to me.

With respect to the arts fund panel that approved this grant, I will read out the names of panel members: Professor David Williams, Mr Fiete Geier, Francis Owusu, Bernie Slater, Karen Vickery and Jen Webb. All are local, well-known artists. Indeed this panel was chaired by Professor David Williams, who is currently Emeritus Professor in the ANU Research School of Humanities and the Arts. So Mr Smyth appears to know more than Professor David Williams.

Just on David Williams, his previous appointments were: director of the ANU School of Art, director of the Crafts Board of the Australia Council, a lecturer at Melbourne State College, craft consultant to the Australia Council, arts adviser to the Victorian arts branch, and a secondary and primary teacher. Other positions held were: chair of the ACT Arts Development Board, the ACT Cultural Council, Australian National Capital Artists—ANCA—member of the Australia Council VACB international committee, Asialink visual arts, and the list goes on.

While Mr Smyth chooses to have a cheap shot at me, also, by default, he is having a very cheap shot at this very highly regarded panel. We know that Mr Smyth had to be prompted and prodded by Andrew Bolt, the great campaigner for free speech, before he even opened his eyes and was attuned to this grant, even though it was put out in public some time before. Mr Smyth, I look forward to your intellectual engagement in the motion that you have on the paper later today.

Madam Speaker, we do live in a great city, and this is a government that will ensure that it continues to be great. Canberra is a livable city. As a community, we work hard to create a positive environment for all of our citizens, including people with a disability, their families and carers.

Canberra is now a trial site for the national disability insurance scheme, and will be the first jurisdiction in Australia to accept all eligible people into the NDIS. The NDIS is about giving people better access to funding so that they can get the support they need to live a good life. When the ACT government signed on to the NDIS in July 2012, it did so to provide certainty to all those living with a disability, and to those that care for them.

The NDIS means we will see unprecedented levels of investment in our disability sector—up to around \$340 million each year by 2019-20. This will offer people with a disability more choice and control over the kinds of supports they get and who provides them.

When we look at how women are supported in Canberra as the most livable city, the ACT continues to demonstrate to the world how, with informed policy, we can take action on issues concerning women and girls in the ACT. It was pleasing to see the ACT report such outstanding world ranking results on measures such as safety and education. ACT women generally do well in areas such as education, work participation and earning levels, performing better than the national average. These positive results are important measures in the pursuit of gender equality.

We support women's financial independence through initiatives such as the ACT women's microcredit program. This program, administered by Lighthouse Business Innovation Centre, supports women to establish or develop existing businesses.

We have already discussed this morning our multicultural community. I think it is part of our deep understanding of and respect for our multicultural community that has a significant impact on our being a livable city. I will continue to celebrate and support out multiculturalism through events such as our National Multicultural Festival and the Multicultural Awards, as well as events such as Diwali, Refugee Week and Ramadan.

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (12.10): I am very happy to speak on this topic and support my colleague Dr Bourke. This is a very important motion because it gives this Assembly the opportunity to talk about what we are doing as elected members to improve the lives of our constituents, the very reason we were elected.

You have to agree that being recognised in one way or another in the OECD report on regional wellbeing is something anyone could be proud of—let alone being named the world's most livable city. That is why it is very disappointing to see the continued Canberra bashing and to see the Prime Minister of this country not even acknowledging such an achievement. It is not unusual for him not to be statesman-like. You need only look at the recent statement in relation to shirt-fronting a leader of another country or the ridiculous comment proclaiming that coal is good for humanity. Just be gracious, Prime Minister. Yes, Canberra is a nice city, along with Melbourne, Sydney, Perth and Adelaide—and did he mention Darwin? However, Canberra is the most livable city in the world.

Coming back to the report, it is particularly important because it clearly confirms that this Labor government has got the balance right. That is, we have continued to maintain a strong economy but not at the expense of not providing much-needed support to the vulnerable in our society. Let me quote Angel Gurría, Secretary-General of the OECD:

Focusing on people's well-being and societal progress, the OECD is looking not only at the functioning of the economic system but also at the diverse experiences and living conditions of people and households.

Madam Speaker, this goes to the heart of what this Labor government is about, and it is what sets us apart from the Canberra Liberals and their federal counterparts. That is, whereas the Canberra Liberals and their coalition partners see everything as just numbers which they can play with, regardless of the human cost and suffering, we in Labor believe that the best way to progress a society is by investing in its people by providing the best possible environment and support to enable them to realise their potential, ensuring that no-one is left behind.

This report highlights precisely what this government has been talking about, and implementing, for many years. It recognises that governments and policymakers must look at society as a whole. We know all too well that the Leader of the Opposition,

Mr Hanson, and indeed the Prime Minister have continued to advocate their position that we first need to grow the economy and that only then can we support the vulnerable in our society. On the face of it, it is a very attractive argument, but nonetheless it is a lazy one.

This position was evident in the recent federal budget, which now risks undermining the gains this city has made since it was recklessly undermined once again by a previous conservative federal government. The effects of this current federal budget are already having a negative impact on overall economic activity in the ACT and region, and more so on individuals and their families. Then Mr Hanson comes into this place and, once again, as Ms Berry said, talks this city down. Not content to denigrate the city, he targets all of our hardworking public servants who provide, on a day-to-day basis, the services that he says are failing.

The Labor government believe, and indeed have proved, that economic growth and support for the vulnerable in the community are not in competition with one another, and can be simultaneously achieved.

This was recently demonstrated in the 2014-15 ACT budget, which funded, amongst other things, the new human services blueprint trial in west Belconnen. That was created by this Labor government in partnership with the ACT community sector. As you know, the human services blueprint initiative has been widely praised for the new way it brings services to work together to make it easier for people to get the right support, with the right services, at the right time, for the right duration.

As you know, I have stated in this place on several occasions that this Labor government's key focus has been to make sure Canberra is a great place to live, work and do business. Over the years, it has focused on jobs, health, the environment, education, safety and housing. Not surprisingly, it is these same areas that were focused on in the report, receiving an average score of 9.6 out of 10.

There is no doubt that it is as a result of this government's decisions that the ACT's economy is more resilient than ever and is well placed to manage the negative impacts that are arising from the commonwealth budget decisions.

That is why the government has continued to support the economy and invest in our people, to help counter the impact of job cuts by leveraging our strong balance sheet to invest in infrastructure, to transform our city, to stimulate economic activity and to create jobs, particularly now, when they are needed the most. We recognise that the ACT workforce is perhaps the highest skilled and best paid in Australia, and we know that with the appropriate assistance there can be opportunities for workers and businesses. In per capita terms, the state accounts for 2012-13 indicated that gross income in the ACT was \$97,269 per person, which is nearly \$40,000 more than the national per capita average of \$57,441.

When it comes to unemployment, the ACT has seen continued low unemployment. It has risen slightly, as Mr Barr mentioned, to 4.7 per cent. However, it is still the second lowest of all states and territories, 1.4 percentage points below the national unemployment rate, which has risen nationally due to decisions made by the current federal government.

The Chief Minister earlier this year announced a stimulus package that outlined a two-year support initiative for the building and construction industry. Further to this, the 2014-15 budget saw significant investment in transformative infrastructure projects. Both these initiatives will not only provide the Canberra community with quality facilities now and into the future but also help create jobs, both directly and indirectly

The report, as we know, looked at health. We know that people in the ACT continue to enjoy the highest life expectancy of any jurisdiction in Australia, and it is expected to increase slightly over the next 10 years, as the Chief Minister mentioned when she spoke, with life expectancy at birth of 85.1 years for females in the ACT against a national average of 84.3 years, and 81.2 years for males against a national average of 79.9 years. In recent years we have seen a significant investment in community health services with the opening of three new community health centres, including the new Belconnen Community Health Centre. Plans are underway for further health infrastructure in Belconnen, with the planned future north-side hospital, as Ms Berry mentioned. This means that Canberrans are now able to be provided with the best possible care when and where it is needed.

On previous occasions I have said that this Labor government recognises the diverse opportunities that quality education presents to our children and our young people. Over the years, we have endeavoured to ensure that all ACT children, notwithstanding their circumstances and notwithstanding how much their parents earn or their station in life, can have access to quality education facilities, and also quality teaching, so as to realise their potential. As you are aware, successive Labor budgets have included funding for initiatives that place focus on further improving students' learning, school leadership, transparency and accountability. This has continued to advance our already good record which sees the ACT at the top in NAPLAN results, ranking first or equal first for grammar, punctuation and numeracy at all levels since 2009.

It is important to also note that our education sector is home to world-class research organisations such as the ANU, UC, NICTA, CSIRO, ADFA, Geoscience Australia and the John Curtin School of Medical Research. These institutions, as you know, raise the profile of Canberra as a study destination and help promote our city.

I do not have time to comment on all nine areas the report looked at but, as you can see, being named the most livable city in the world has been achieved through the vision of this Labor government and working with the community to develop good policies and programs. I join with Dr Bourke in calling on the government to continue its strong, balanced approach to investing in our people, our services and our economy.

Question put:

That **Mr Hanson's** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 7		Noes 8	
Mr Coe	Mrs Jones	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

Question so resolved in the negative.

MADAM SPEAKER: The question now is that the motion be agreed to.

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (12.22): I thank my Labor colleagues and Mr Rattenbury for their support for my motion, an important motion which acknowledges the ACT's ranking as number one in the OECD regional wellbeing report of 2014. It was disappointing that the opposition leader, Mr Hanson, after his opening statement, which I think we can all agree with, that Canberra is a wonderful place to live, launched into a grab bag of unsubstantiated allegations. He cannot even—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order!

DR BOURKE: He cannot even bring a piece of policy into this place to defend his position. You have to feel sorry for him, Madam Speaker. It is just one cylinder—one cylinder in the entire Canberra Liberals—that is firing today. And it is a cylinder that is just full of whining negativity. He wants to talk about the federal debt, but what did the federal Liberal government do? What is the first thing they did?

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Hanson! Dr Bourke has the floor.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: I warn you, Mr Hanson.

DR BOURKE: What is the first thing that the federal Liberal government did when they were elected? They increased the debt ceiling to \$500 billion, up by \$200 billion. They just wanted to spend more. They wanted to borrow more. Not so concerned about the debt were they. What did they do with their budget? They spent to seek to entrench inequality, picking on the most disadvantaged, kicking people in the teeth when they are down and out. And look at what came out in August. There was a 12-year high in the national unemployment rates.

What have we been doing in the ACT? We have been working hard to diversify our economy. There have been recent reports of exports of \$1.3 billion—exports in education, government services, health and information technology. This is part of the

outcomes, the fruit, of a sustained and long-term vision to grow our economy, engaging the private sector and supporting innovation. It is enunciated in our 2012 business development strategy.

What are some of the concrete examples of these outcomes for exports and for the ACT? We saw Aspen Medical last year reporting growth from \$32 million to \$95 million. We saw Seeing Machines, which came out of the ANU, signing a strategic agreement with Caterpillar global mining for in-cab fatigue monitoring systems. We saw Bearcage productions signing a formal co-production agreement for a documentary series between Australia and China, and Datapod exporting innovative data units to Papua New Guinea and Sweden. These are the kinds of concrete examples of our policies to bring about growth and diversification of the ACT economy.

On top of that, we are building a fairer tax system. We are investing in the digital city. We are investing in tertiary education and study Canberra, in partnership with the ANU and the University of Canberra, to make Canberra the study destination of choice. Environmentally, we have already heard about the 40 per cent reduction in greenhouse emissions by 2020. Ms Porter talked about the human services blueprint enabling on-the-ground workers working with people to provide and make the kinds of decisions at the coalface which enable us to get the best services out for people so that we can have a one-stop shop for government services to assist those most in need.

These are the kinds of things that this government has been doing to build a better Canberra. These are the kinds of things that this government has been doing that have led to this OECD award. What do you come in here and do? Just whinge.

Motion agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 12.27 to 2.30 pm.

Questions without notice

Asbestos—loose-fill insulation

MR HANSON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, on Monday you were quoted in the media as saying that the bill for the possible buyback of Mr Fluffy homes could reach \$1 billion. You have also said that this amount covered not only the buyback but also the demolition and land clean-up. A number of residents are expressing a desire to rebuild on the same site as their homes are demolished. Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the government's current plans for dealing with the Mr Fluffy legacy?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mr Hanson for the question and for the ongoing spirit of bipartisanship that is being shown to the Mr Fluffy residents as we continue to look for solutions to the long-term legacy that the Mr Fluffy homes present us with.

The current status is that we have put a proposal to the commonwealth government. They are considering that proposal. It is a request for financial assistance to assist with a long-term solution for the Mr Fluffy homes. As part of that thinking, we have also

been working alongside, whilst the commonwealth goes through their processes, to put in place the early thinking about whether a demolition program were to be financed and how that would work. We are cognisant of the desire of a percentage, a reasonably large percentage, of the Mr Fluffy home owners to rebuild or return to their sites. That is certainly part of our thinking in the design of a demolition program.

I would say it is going to be very challenging to be able to offer a program that would be everything to everybody, that will meet everybody's needs, noting how different the expectations and the desires of the Mr Fluffy home owners are. But we are conscious that there are a couple of areas where we are getting quite a strong response from home owners—that is, that some would like to leave, some would like to stay, and then there are some people that do not want to be bothered with anything at all, and we are trying to design a program that is sensitive to the needs of all of those people.

I will also be updating the Assembly on Thursday, in line with my previous statement that I made to update the Assembly quarterly on progress of Mr Fluffy. But in a general sense we are just waiting for the commonwealth to go through their cabinet process.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Can you give us an update on what the expected net cost of this program would be?

MS GALLAGHER: The advice to me—and it is difficult, so I would give this figure with caveats on it, because it depends on a whole range of issues which have not been bedded down yet—is that we would be looking at a minimum of about \$300 million. Obviously, we would be arguing that some of that net cost should be borne by the commonwealth. Those issues have not been resolved—in fact, we have not had a formal response to the position we have put to the commonwealth—but at a minimum it would be a figure of that order.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, can the government give Mr Fluffy homeowners and other affected people a time line for action?

MS GALLAGHER: The time line that the ACT government have control of was to have a task force report and a position by the end of August, and we met that time frame. We have put that position to the commonwealth. I am not in charge of that timetable, although, from the Prime Minister down, they are aware of the need to resolve this as soon as possible, and I have got no reason to believe that they are not genuine when they say that to me.

We have had very good engagement, can I say, with the commonwealth. I cannot speak more highly of Senator Abetz's office for the way that they have worked with me, in particular. The communication has been very good. Obviously the rubber will hit the road when a response is provided, and I am hopeful that that will be in

acceptable terms to the territory. But that timetable is entirely within the commonwealth government's hands. I hope, and I believe, they understand the need to finalise their position as soon as possible. As soon as it is, obviously we will be getting in touch with the Mr Fluffy homeowners and, of course, you, Mr Hanson.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Chief Minister, what options are being investigated to fund the remediation program?

MS GALLAGHER: It will be subject, of course, to budget analysis, and that forms part of our submission to the commonwealth, which is not public at this stage. Once we have an agreed position for the commonwealth I think those documents will be able to be released.

Convention centre—size

MR SMYTH: My question is to the minister for tourism. Minister, on 25 September this year you told the Assembly:

The reality is that we have a convention centre that is suitable for a city of 385,000 people.

Minister, can you back up that statement by referring to a document or guide that has a basis in fact on the size of convention centres per size of population, or is it just your opinion that the existing convention centre is suitable for our city?

MR BARR: It is a combination of my opinion and an analysis of the different sized convention centres in Australian cities.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, is it true that, as reported on WIN news, 90 conventions were turned away last year due to the lack of capacity in the convention centre, and will you now table your analysis of convention centres around the country?

MR BARR: It may be, and I will investigate that matter.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Minister, are you aware of any other proposals for new, or upgrading, convention facilities in Canberra?

MR BARR: Yes.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Minister, what are the government's responsibilities in regard to the provision of a new and larger convention centre in the ACT?

MR BARR: We have identified some land for such purpose.

Mr Smyth: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, under standing order 213A(1) I move that the Assembly now order documents be tabled by the minister in relation to the analysis that he has seen on the size of convention centres against population of cities in this country.

MADAM SPEAKER: You are moving a motion that the Assembly order the minister for tourism to table—

Mr Smyth: On the point of order, the minister spoke of an analysis that he had seen about the size of convention centres, and I asked would he table it. He ignored that in his answer.

Mr Barr: No, I said I would investigate that for you.

Mr Smyth: No, you said you would investigate that.

MADAM SPEAKER: No, we are not having any conversation between Mr Barr and Mr Smyth. Mr Smyth, could you sit down for a second. First of all, you made a point of order and then, in the course of the point of order, attempted to move a motion. I do not think you can do that. That is the thing. When you stood to move, I thought you were talking about 213, and I thought you would have a problem because Mr Barr did not appear to quote from anything. 213A is slightly different. I think it requires a substantive motion which would have to be circulated, and you might need leave to move it.

Mr Barr: If I could speak, on indulgence, if it would help to resolve this issue, I will provide the information to the Assembly. I just need to investigate. That was my answer, and I am happy to provide that information.

MADAM SPEAKER: That is on the point of order?

Mr Barr: Yes.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: I am sorry, this is a debating chamber, not a conversation chamber, and we would—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Careful, Mr Hanson. We would do a whole lot better if we complied with the standing orders. I know it is nice to be polite and things like that. When you stand and take a point of order—that was not a point of order, Mr Smyth.

Energy—renewable

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Community Services. Minister, in the Community Services Directorate 2013-14 annual report, in section B.4, under “ecologically sustainable development”, it covers the action taken to reduce the carbon footprint of the department. On page 105 it shows that the renewable energy used by the Community Services Directorate decreased to zero kilowatt hours in 2013-14. This has decreased from more than 180,000 kilowatt hours in 2010-11. Minister, why has the Community Services Directorate stopped using electricity from renewable sources when the government is advocating such ambitious renewable energy targets for the rest of the territory?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Lawder for her question. I am unaware at this time of the details behind the reason for the change from those renewable energies. I understand the government has a procurement process in relation to electricity and electricity purchase, but I am happy to investigate that and come back to you.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Minister, is the Community Services Directorate using electricity from renewable sources this financial year?

MR GENTLEMAN: I will have to take that one on notice too. I am unaware of how much electricity is being used either from renewable sources or from coal-fired sources. But I will come back to the member on that question.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, if your directorate is not utilising renewable energy, why is it not leading by example, given that the government is forcing this upon the rest of the ACT?

MR GENTLEMAN: Thank you, Mr Wall, for the question. It is my view that we should be certainly using as much renewable energy as we can. I will certainly investigate that and come back to you with the answer.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, if your directorate is not pulling its weight—

MADAM SPEAKER: Preamble.

MR WALL: in terms of using renewable energy, does this place an additional burden on the small businesses and households of Canberrans to pull their weight?

MR GENTLEMAN: No.

Economy—AAA credit rating

DR BOURKE: Treasurer, could you advise the Assembly on the outcome of the Standard & Poor's recent credit rating review of the ACT?

MR BARR: I can advise the Assembly that the ACT has retained its AAA credit rating and that the assessed outlook for the ACT's finances continues to be stable. We are one of a small number of governments in the world to hold this highest possible credit rating. The AAA rating is an endorsement of the government's short-term fiscal plan and it is an endorsement of our long-term plans to grow the economy and to invest in transformational infrastructure. Standard & Poor's said:

The stable outlook reflects S&P's view that the government will manage its financial position and successfully execute its financial strategy. Successful delivery will further support the ACT's very strong financial management.

I could go on quoting for some time from the Standard & Poor's analysis about the territory's economy and our fiscal strategy—and I think I will! Standard & Poor's also said:

The ratings on the Australian Capital Territory reflect our view of the ACT's very strong economy and financial management, and its strong budgetary flexibility.

We consider the ACT's financial management to be very strong.

The ACT's political and managerial strengths, debt and liquidity management, and its management of government-related entities support our very strong view of its financial management.

We expect the ACT's tax reforms to be successfully implemented.

Further, the ACT has demonstrated its willingness to release land as part of its growth strategy to offset weakening revenue streams.

This is simply a resounding endorsement of this government's economic and fiscal strategy and, in particular, our strategy to support our local economy at a time when the Liberal Party is trashing our economy.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Treasurer, why is this outcome important for the ACT economy and community?

MR BARR: A strong credit rating is an important measure that provides investors with confidence that Canberra is a good place in which to invest. It signals strong financial management, it signals a strong economy and it signals strong budgetary performance. All of these are important foundations for investors and for business. They reflect a stable environment in which to operate, with minimal economic and financial volatility.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Treasurer, how does this compare to Australian and global economies?

MR BARR: The territory is one of very few jurisdictions worldwide to hold this highest possible credit rating. Here in Australia the ACT and the state of Victoria are the only two semi-government issuers that hold a AAA rating with a stable outlook. New South Wales holds a AAA rating with a negative outlook. The ACT's credit rating is a significant achievement. To put this into perspective, in non-US semi-sovereign governments around the world, only 26 jurisdictions are rated AAA stable by Standard & Poor's. This includes jurisdictions in Australia, Canada, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Just to reiterate this achievement, of the multitude of semi-sovereign jurisdictions around the world, only 26 are rated AAA stable by Standard & Poor's, and the ACT is one of them.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Minister, what is the ACT government's credit rating track record?

MR BARR: The territory has held a AAA stable credit rating since February 1994. That the territory has held this highest possible rating for more than 20 years is testament to the stable, far-sighted and responsible governance of this government and indeed its predecessor governments over that 20-year period.

Shopping centres—amenities

MR DOSZPOT: My question is to the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services. Minister, you may recall the numerous requests and correspondence from the Hackett Community Association regarding their request for improved facilities, including seating and toilets at the Hackett shops. In your last letter to me, you suggested you had been unable to source funds for such facilities, although it had been listed earlier as a priority for funding. A similar issue has now arisen at Watson shops. They have also been lobbying for facilities at their shops for some years, without success. Meanwhile the government is spending hundreds of millions on light rail. Minister, why do long-established shopping centres like Watson and Hackett not have such basic facilities as toilets?

MR RATTENBURY: TAMS has to manage its available resources, and it is a matter of usage. I am in the process of signing a letter to Mr Hanson, who has also requested that toilets be installed at another shopping centre. There is of course the initial cost, the capital cost of installing them, and then the cost of maintaining them. In areas that are deemed to be low usage, TAMS has to make those decisions. So TAMS prioritises high usage areas.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, what alternative avenues for funding can you suggest to residents in established suburbs like Watson who are seeking basic amenities at their local shopping centre?

MR RATTENBURY: I must confess that I do not actually quite understand where Mr Doszpot is going with his question, so I am unable to provide an answer to it.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, what benefits will the residents and small businesses owners in Hackett receive from light rail?

Dr Bourke: On a point of order, relevance. This started out with a question about toilets.

MADAM SPEAKER: No, it was a question about improved facilities of various sorts at the Hackett and Watson shops. Mr Coe's question was—

Mr Doszpot interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: It is all right, Mr Doszpot. Mr Coe's question was?

Mr Coe: What benefits will the residents and small business owners in Hackett receive from light rail? It is also important to note that Mr Doszpot did mention alternative priorities for the government, including light rail, in his original question.

MADAM SPEAKER: The question is entirely in order.

MR RATTENBURY: I think there will be a range of benefits for the people of Hackett arising from light rail. One of the objectives in building light rail is to reduce the necessity for people to drive to the city. At the moment residents of Hackett experience a level of rat-running through their suburb by residents travelling out of Gungahlin, seeking to find alternative routes to the city to the most congested road in Canberra, Northbourne Avenue, the one that the Canberra Liberals want us to do nothing about. That is the situation. That is the first benefit.

The second benefit is that it will provide a high-speed, regular, high-frequency service down Northbourne Avenue, and the bus network will be realigned to feed into that high-speed, high-frequency spine down Northbourne Avenue. So Hackett residents—

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Coe!

MR RATTENBURY: Given that Mr Coe is so busy shouting out over the top of me and is not interested in listening to the answer, I am not sure there is anything else I can further add to this question.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Minister, could you update the Assembly on any upcoming shopping centre upgrades?

MR RATTENBURY: Certainly, and I thank Ms Berry for the question. There are a range of ongoing shopping centre upgrades. As members would be aware, there has been a long-term program to move through the suburbs dealing with shopping centre upgrades.

Certainly at Chapman shops there is a \$1.2 million project that will upgrade the public assets at the shopping centre to current standards. That will do things such as, after an extensive consultation process with the community, lead to improved lighting, improved landscaping, and particularly parking arrangements for disability access, where the centre will be upgraded to meet modern standards. With Chapman, for example, the intent is to provide an overall better public domain.

There are a range of other shopping centres that are being upgraded. We have recently seen the completion of works at Red Hill and Waramanga, for example. And in Ms Berry's electorate, the forward design for Cook shops, for example, is completed—as for Evatt and Florey as well as a range of other suburbs where the consultation on those designs has been progressed.

Sublime Constructions

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for Planning. Minister, the *Canberra Times* reported on 18 October that at least six former clients of Sublime Constructions have been refused coverage under their home warranty insurance policies because the entity that built their homes was not the same entity that took out the cover. The *Canberra Times* also reported that Sublime Constructions and Development has been removed from the government's list of licensed builders but that two associated companies and the company's nominated builder remain on the list.

Minister, you are reported in the *Canberra Times* as saying that it is not the responsibility of private certifiers or the Constructions Occupations Registrar to verify information provided to them for the issuing of commencement certificates and certificates of occupancy, which are accepted as proof that valid warranty insurance is in place. Minister, do you stand by the *Canberra Times* reporting of your view?

MR GENTLEMAN: Yes. I think it is important to understand the directorate's role in these matters. We as a government are making sure that the appropriate plans and documentation are in place. But, when it comes to activities that are not perhaps lawful, it is not our position to act as a policeman in that case. I understand the matter is looking towards the courts so I will not comment on it any further.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, how can it be considered best practice for the certifier and the registrar to issue a commencement notice without checking the documentation?

MR GENTLEMAN: The practice is that the documentation presented to the directorate is taken on in good faith. So if a builder or a certifier supplies documentation to the directorate, the directorate understands that that documentation should be correct. If there is a falsity in the documentation, it is not up to the directorate to identify that. It then becomes a legal matter.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, how can the government continue to allow associated companies and a builder who has been linked to numerous failed projects to remain licensed?

MR GENTLEMAN: The licences take place until appropriate actions occur within the courts. As I said, this is a court matter at the moment. I would imagine that, once the court has finished, the directorate would look at its options after that.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, what protections are available to clients of unscrupulous territory builders?

MR GENTLEMAN: Lawful actions are available through the courts.

Territory plan—program

MS BERRY: My question is to the Minister for Planning. Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the master planning program across the city?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Berry for her question. The ACT government master planning program provides strategic planning direction for areas of the territory that are undergoing change. The master plans are important planning tools which are able to identify opportunities, planning principles and desired outcomes to manage change consistent with the government's strategic priorities while retaining the key value of those areas.

The process of developing a master plan involves extensive community engagement; consultation with other government agencies; seeking advice from specialist consultants on matters such as traffic, parking, transport, economic viability, urban design, social planning and heritage; and preparation of a draft vision, objectives and design principles. Draft master plans are then presented back to the community and stakeholders for comment, and feedback is incorporated into the final preparation of the plan. Presentation to government for endorsement occurs, and then there is the release of the final master plan to the public.

Recently completed master plans include Dickson, Kingston and Kambah group centres, Tuggeranong town centre and Erindale group centre. The Pialligo rural village master plan was released in late 2013.

Features of these recently completed master plans include improved retail opportunities; increased density; increased building heights; introducing more

residential development; increased permeability for pedestrians and cyclists; integrating new public transport infrastructure; new and improved pedestrian connections throughout the centre; and the release of blocks 47 and 48 in the Kingston group centre, and that is part of the existing car park as well, for the purposes of mixed-use development, including a full-line supermarket. Confirmation of setbacks at Dickson will ensure that the scale and character of the centre are retained, and there will be increased building heights in the centres so that redevelopment is encouraged but solar access to key public spaces like Green Square is retained.

At the Kambah group centre we are providing guidance for improvements to the public spaces, including an expansion to the central courtyard and encouraging retail activity onto the streets; improving connections between the two main commercial areas; and improving access in the centre, including new parking, improved traffic circulation, new road connection into the centre along Kett Street and a new road parallel to the grass swale that will become the new frontage to the centre.

At Erindale we are looking at improved traffic circulation, with new roads and intersections, which is being tested via a traffic study; providing opportunity for more on-street car parking; and improved pedestrian and cycle connections along the north-south connection through the centre. And we have made recommendations to improve the bus station location and access for pedestrians.

At Pialligo we are increasing the opportunity for small-scale commercial businesses along Beltana Road. I know that members opposite will be very pleased to see those improvements for small business. We are providing strategies to preserve the fertile soils and capacity for current and future food production. We are also protecting and promoting the Aboriginal and historic heritage values of Pialligo.

We are looking at master plans for Oaks Estate and the Weston group centre to be finalised shortly. The Woden town centre and Mawson group centre studies have commenced and draft reports are anticipated to be released for public comment towards the end of the year. These areas are being prepared simultaneously to align metropolitan transport, land use relationships and infrastructure.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Minister, how important are the master plans to creating a livable city?

MR GENTLEMAN: The master plan program delivers long-term planning for our town centres, group centres and transport corridors. Each master plan sets out principles, outcomes and strategies to manage growth and development over time. It is a high-level plan, intended to set out objectives and strategies to manage development and change over time.

The process of developing a master plan ensures beneficial outcomes for the community through implementation of planning and transport strategies such as providing better access to services and public transport, also reserving land for community uses and open spaces, and improving pedestrian and cycling connections, creating more employment and housing choices with new development and creating

people-friendly public spaces in and around our centres. Master plans also recommend changes to land use zones to respond to changing community needs, foster redevelopment and provide opportunities for economic growth and change.

Master plans ensure that diverse community needs and concerns for our existing centres are understood and reflected in planning decisions, especially the needs of vulnerable members of our community such as elderly people, people with disabilities, young people and households on low or no incomes.

Close discussions with the community promoted throughout the master planning fosters a better understanding and awareness of place-specific needs for Canberra to be a city where everybody can take advantage of its network of centres, open spaces and modes of travel to enjoy a sense of wellbeing and participate in a vibrant civic and cultural life.

While master plans do not contain detailed design, they set about a process that defines what is important about a place and how its character and quality can be conserved, improved and enhanced.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Minister, could you give us an update on the status of the Weston Creek group centre master plan?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Hanson for his question. I do not have that in my notes for Weston, but I can come back to you with that later on.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, what are some of the things that have been achieved through master planning in the last decade?

MR GENTLEMAN: The Tuggeranong town centre master plan was released in September 2012. The vision of the town centre is Canberra's urban gateway to the mountains, which offers a unique lifestyle with easy access to open spaces and waterways. The Tuggeranong town centre master plan recognised that the town centre was struggling economically. It recommends increasing building heights for much of the centre to attract and encourage redevelopment. Previously heights were generally limited to four storeys across the centre and now may range to a height from four to 12 storeys in the current master plan. The recommended building height takes into account consideration for the surrounding landscape and protects the views of the Brindabella Ranges.

The Tuggeranong town centre master plan recommends improving spaces for people by requiring new buildings to address streets to increase activity and interaction, ensuring new residential development overlooks public spaces to increase surveillance and safety at night, requiring very large blocks to provide mid-block pedestrian links as they redevelop for permeability, and requiring all new development by the lake to address the lake as an important asset to the area.

The Tuggeranong town centre draft variation 318, which gives effect to the Tuggeranong town centre outcomes, was tabled in the Assembly on 7 August and took effect on 3 October this year.

In Belconnen the master plan has achieved significant changes for the town centre. It identified the need for several road extensions, including the extension of Aikman Drive to Eastern Valley Way, Lathlain Street to Belconnen Way, and Lathlain Street to Benjamin Way. That 2001 Belconnen master plan recommended the relocation of the previous bus interchange, and we know the outcomes from that have been substantially improved.

Visitors

MADAM SPEAKER: Before I call any more questioners, I would like to acknowledge the presence in the gallery of a visiting parliamentary committees group from various provincial parliaments and the national parliament in Pakistan. Welcome to the ACT Legislative Assembly.

Members: Hear, hear!

Questions without notice

Disability services—parking permits

MR WALL: My question is to the Chief Minister, representing the Attorney-General. Chief Minister, in December last year my colleague Mr Coe wrote to the Attorney-General suggesting a regular audit of the number of disability parking permits issued and the processes by which they are issued. This was prompted by frequent complaints from constituents about the misuse of permits, including concerns that the permits were being misused by able-bodied relatives and used to park all day in car parks which are time limited.

The Attorney-General advised in his response that his directorate was considering ways to mitigate the risk of permits being misused. Chief Minister, what changes has the Justice and Community Safety Directorate made to ensure that disability parking permits are not misused?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mr Wall for the question. I can advise that the Attorney-General, with the Office of Regulatory Services, will be bringing a number of submissions to cabinet within the next three weeks, specifically relating to all matters parking. I presume that the work that is being done around any misuse of disability parking arrangements forms part of that work.

I have asked for a parking cabinet to be held. It is going to have a look at a wide range of issues relating to parking across the territory, and I am happy to ask that the Attorney-General update the Assembly following that meeting.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Chief Minister, what feedback has the government received on the changes to the way disability car parking spaces are designed and marked under the changes to the Australian standards relating to disability parking?

MS GALLAGHER: The feedback has been mixed, I think it is fair to say. There have certainly been those that welcome having more area to exit and enter their vehicles, for some people who have a particular disability, and there are others who find it more inconvenient. I think there has also been a concern about the efficiency of the utilisation of the space for some of those centres. I believe that at some point—and I will check this—Roads ACT stopped implementing the standard as it was, pending further advice. I will check that for you; it is in the back of my head, after some of the feedback we had from implementing the new national standard.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Chief Minister, how many disability parking permits are currently on issue and how many disability parking spaces are currently gazetted in the ACT?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mr Doszpot for the question. I will take that on notice, although I recall that, in terms of the availability of disability car parking spaces relative to non-disability car parking spaces, we had the right balance. I think there has been some question about whether they are located in the right places—that is where there are more elderly people who may be using disability permits or mobility permits. We might need to look at the balance of them in certain locations. I understand that is being done as well.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Chief Minister, will the government increase the number of disability parking spaces and the way that disability parking spaces are allocated?

MR RATTENBURY: Madam Speaker, I might take that question on behalf of the Chief Minister. It is actually the responsibility of the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate.

MADAM SPEAKER: Okay, Mr Rattenbury.

MR RATTENBURY: I can inform Mr Doszpot and the Assembly that TAMS actually had a specific and dedicated meeting with a range of disability groups earlier this year to canvass the specific issue of whether there was adequate and suitable provision of disability parking spaces, including the issues around the new Australian standard and the feedback that we received on that.

At the time, certainly the provision of disability parking spaces in the ACT was above the standard ratio. We indicated to disability groups at that time, and I have also indicated to specific constituents, that where people feel there is a particular shortage—and I make this offer to all members—TAMS will go out and examine a particular shopping centre or location and further spaces can be provided. I have had a number of examples of that recently. Particularly where there are medical facilities, it is possible in specific locations to make those adjustments.

Transport—light rail

MR COE: I have a question to the Chief Minister. I refer to a recent *Canberra Times* survey that showed that 59 per cent of people who participated opposed the capital metro project. You stated:

I accept that the project needs a lot more explaining. We have to continue to talk to people about the benefits of the project.

You added that the government would continue to sell the project to voters, industry and potential investors. Chief Minister, how much will the government spend over the next two years trying to sell this project to voters, industry and potential investors?

MS GALLAGHER: The government has not taken any decision about allocation of an advertising campaign, if that is what Mr Coe is alluding to. The comments I made in the *Canberra Times* related to me, largely, and to other members of the government continuing to talk with the ACT community about the project and about the benefits that this project will deliver to the city and across the city. That is what that comment that Mr Coe is quoting referred to.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Chief Minister, why does the ACT government need to spend any money advertising the light rail project to Canberrans?

MS GALLAGHER: As Mr Coe would know, there is a legislative framework for government advertising that has been agreed to by this place. I imagine that by agreeing to it there is an acknowledgment that government needs at times to advertise and communicate with the broader ACT community. I can assure Mr Coe that any campaign that may be commissioned to support the significant change that light rail and, indeed, the broader transport for Canberra message may require will fully adhere to the requirements of the act.

I do not think it is unusual, and I think we can look at the border security “turn back the boats” campaign and how many millions of dollars are being spent on that selling a particular message. It is not unusual for governments to use government advertising when particular policy decisions have been taken. My own view is that if it is reasonable, if it fulfils the requirement of the government agencies advertising act and there is justification for an advertising campaign across any area of government, that is an important part of the work the government does.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Chief Minister, is the reason that the Productivity Commission and Infrastructure Australia do not support this project because it has been poorly explained by you or because it is actually a poor use of taxpayers’ money?

MS GALLAGHER: I did not catch the last bit but I get the gist. I do not believe that either the Productivity Commission or Infrastructure Australia have seen the final

business case, which will, as I have said in this place, be released next Friday. We will be very happy to stand by the project and explain all the details of it. Nor have I ever said that it has been poorly explained. What I do accept is that it is a change to the way that we have had public transport services provided across Canberra. There are questions about the project from the community, legitimate questions, that a responsible government needs to answer, and the work of continuing to explain this project will be ongoing. I imagine that will happen—

Mr Coe: So it's not just me.

MS GALLAGHER: That will be for people who support the project, Mr Coe, and for those that do not. I think there is a range of projects across government where you get people who support it and people who do not. The job of the elected representatives who have a particular policy position on it is to explain why we have that and why we are proceeding with light rail.

I am very optimistic about the opportunities that are presented from continuing to talk about the project. The more people I talk to who actually understand the detail and some of the decisions the government has taken to date, the more their concerns are addressed. That is something that this government will prioritise and continue to do. I have no doubt that those opposite will continue their destructive and wrecking approach to the light rail project. It is what we expect. In many ways if you took a different approach, we would get a little bit worried. But we expect that that is how it will continue. Our job has to be much broader. We have certain responsibilities that we have to fulfil that you do not need to bother about, and we will continue to work on that and continue to explain the benefits that will come from a city-building project like this. (*Time expired.*)

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Will the government make a further submission to Infrastructure Australia with the new business case?

MS GALLAGHER: The government will be making submissions to Infrastructure Australia about ACT government projects. I would draw members' attention to the fact that we have a Prime Minister at the moment who is a roads prime minister, who wants to build roads across Australia. He has made that very clear to me, to all first ministers and indeed to the Australian community, in presentations and speeches that he has made. But yes, I do not see any reason why the ACT government should not provide submissions seeking commonwealth government assistance for major infrastructure projects.

Gaming—reforms

MS PORTER: My question is to the Minister for Racing and Gaming. Minister, how will the recent reform package for ACT clubs help clubs maintain their viability and grow?

MS BURCH: I thank Ms Porter for her question. The reforms I announced on 2 October deliver on the government's commitment in the 2012 memorandum of

understanding with ClubsACT, and they reflect our common commitment to a strong harm minimisation framework while ensuring the long-term viability of our community clubs. These are the biggest reforms seen in this sector for decades. They mean the biggest reduction in gaming machine numbers since self-government. By 2018 we will have a ratio of 15 gaming machines for every thousand adults in the ACT.

The reforms give small clubs the opportunity to move out of gaming forever by allowing them to sell their machines to other clubs. The progressive tax reforms mean that small clubs will pay less and the largest clubs will pay more. Hotels and taverns will be able to get out of gaming by divesting themselves of their outdated class B machines.

The establishment of a trading scheme will allow clubs to buy and sell entitlements to operate gaming machines. We will be cutting unnecessary red tape, all the while retaining a strong focus on harm minimisation.

The clubs reform package heralds a new era for the industry. The freeing up of regulation and the introduction of a trading scheme will allow our community clubs greater flexibility to manage their business and to sell machines they no longer require. The package of reforms will help them to remain viable and to grow.

The small clubs wishing to move away from a reliance on gaming machine revenue will be given support to do so, including access to lease variation charge remissions to help redevelop their land.

Mr Smyth: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, I seek your ruling on standing order 156, where it says that a member who is party to or has a direct or indirect interest in a contract made on or behalf of the territory or a territory authority shall not take part in discussion of the matter or vote on a question in the meeting of the Assembly. I would ask that you rule on the conflict of interest the minister has as a member of the Labor Party that owns Labor clubs.

MADAM SPEAKER: I am sorry, but the standing order does not apply. Standing order 156 relates to voting; this is answering a question on notice.

Mr Smyth: It also applies to the discussion of a matter. Clearly, we are discussing a matter.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Chief Minister! This is a very difficult issue. Mr Smyth has asked me, quite frankly, a difficult question and I have to contemplate it. It is an issue that has arisen sufficiently often in this place. It is an issue that has been directed to the Ethics and Integrity Adviser on at least one occasion, and it requires an appropriate response. I cannot collect my thoughts with people shouting at one another across the chamber.

On the point of order, Mr Smyth raised standing order 156, which relates directly to voting and divisions. In relation to conflict of interest it says that a member shall not

take part in a discussion of a matter or vote on a question. This is not a discussion of a matter; that would be interpreted as a matter of public importance, which is an issue before the Assembly which does not have a vote.

I should have stopped the clock, but I will rule on this.

I do not uphold the point of order because the standing order relates directly to voting. There is reference to “discussion” in the standing order, but I rule that that relates to issues like a discussion of a matter of public importance and does not relate to question time.

Minister Burch had two minutes to go in answering the question, so if the clock could be started for two minutes to allow Minister Burch to answer her question.

MS BURCH: This clubs reform package heralds a new era for the industry. The freeing up of regulation and the introduction of a trading scheme will allow our community clubs greater flexibility to manage their business and sell machines they no longer require. Small clubs wishing to move away, as I have said, will be supported to do so.

Next month I will host a roundtable with the specific intention of providing a pathway to support clubs’ efforts to diversify. There will be a more equitable distribution of the overall taxation burden on the clubs while supporting all clubs with an increase to the tax-free threshold.

The reduction in unnecessary red tape will also reduce the administrative and regulatory burdens they face. The changes will be implemented so that a robust regulatory framework applying to gaming machines is preserved and enhanced to reflect contemporary standards.

I would like to acknowledge the club sector for the way in which it responded to the government’s reform process. As I understand it, ClubsACT recognise that they have not got everything they wanted but, overall, it is a balanced package that will give certainty and a positive regulatory framework for many years to come.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, are you saying harm minimisation measures will be maintained under the reform package?

MS BURCH: Absolutely. The ACT already has the strongest protections for problem gamblers in the nation. These protections will not change under the new reform package. We have a daily \$250 limit on ATM withdrawals in gaming venues. We do not allow people to smoke in gaming areas, meaning that they need to get up and leave their machines if they want to smoke. We ensure that gaming areas are screened from sight within the clubs.

Our clubs contribute 0.6 per cent of their gross gaming machine revenue each year to the problem gambling assistance fund, which provides counselling and a 24-hour

hotline service through Relationships Australia and Care Financial. Clubs contributed over a million dollars to this fund last financial year.

The reform package includes the largest reduction in gaming machines in the ACT's history. Based on current numbers, it would mean around a 10 per cent reduction. On commencement of a trading scheme, the clubs will be required to quarantine at least 200 machines from operation for a minimum of 12 months. A one-in-four forfeiture will apply to all machines traded during phase 1.

After three years we will introduce a cap of 15 machines per 1,000 adults, dropping well below the average of New South Wales. Clubs will surrender entitlements on a pro rata basis to meet that new ratio. By allowing hotels and taverns to divest themselves of outdated class B machines, we are restricting the availability of machines to our community club sector.

I commend the ACT community clubs for their willingness to work with the government to deliver on these important reforms and also for the work that they do across our community.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Minister, what consultation occurred with clubs and community groups in developing the package?

MS BURCH: I thank Ms Berry for her interest. Consultation on the reform package, in particular the development of the trading scheme, occurred with multiple groups, including clubs, hotels, the community sector and state and territory governments.

A discussion paper on how a trading scheme could work was released in July of last year, and a public call for comments was put in the *Canberra Times* and the *Chronicle*. Copies of the paper seeking submissions were provided directly to key organisations, including all clubs with gaming machine licences; all hotels and taverns with a gaming machine licence; the Canberra casino; state and territory regulators; and community and industry groups such as the AHA and ClubsACT. Community groups included Mission Australia, the ACT Churches Council, the council on the ageing, the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum, Care Inc, the Salvation Army and ACTCOSS.

Of the community groups, submissions were received from Care Inc and Mission Australia. These submission, together with others received on the discussion paper, provided valuable input into the development of what is a well-balanced set of reforms. We will continue to work closely with all stakeholders as the reforms are finalised so we can ensure that they are in place early next year.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, is the government supporting clubs with any red tape reduction measures?

MS BURCH: We are supporting the clubs in red tape reduction, as we are supporting many other industries across the ACT in streamlining their processes where we can. The clubs reform package includes specific measures to reduce unnecessary red tape and regulatory burden, in line with suggestions received from the industry as part of ClubsACT membership on the government's red tape reduction panel.

The reforms alleviate unnecessary bureaucracy by abolishing gaming machine access registers, abolishing the requirement for approval of machine attendants, increasing licence terms for machine technicians, clarifying provisions relating to changing club constitutions, and allowing small clubs to pay their problem gambling assistance fund contributions on an annual basis in arrears.

In addition to having a positive impact on clubs, these reforms will result in greater efficiencies to government by allowing the Gambling and Racing Commission to focus on its key responsibilities. Further, the trading scheme is based on an open market approach with minimalist intervention by government in its operation.

Broader changes will be made to the licensing arrangements to allow the trading of machines to occur. These changes will not in any way compromise the integrity of regulatory arrangements or the harm minimisation framework. These changes have been in line with comments to me by clubs. Again I take the opportunity to say, and I hope this would be agreed by all in this place, that clubs are a valuable part of the community. They make contributions to many worthy groups within our community. I want to thank them for that because I know that they do well and that the community organisations they support certainly value their contributions.

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

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

OECD livable cities report

Health—bush healing farm

Disability services—parking permits

MS GALLAGHER: Yesterday Mr Coe asked me about the source of the data and whether the ACT government had provided data to the OECD report. I can confirm that the OECD collect their data from a range of official sources generally from the National Statistical Office and that the ACT government did not provide information to the OECD for the OECD report.

Mr Wall asked me a question about the Ngunnawal bush healing farm, around expenditure to date. I can confirm that the expenditure as at the end of September was \$2.244 million, largely to do with the decontamination of that site.

In relation to the number—Mr Wall asked me today—of mobility permits, there are 16,822 mobility permits in operation at the moment. In relation to the question around the implementation of the new standards for mobility parking, disability parking, TAMS stopped retrofitting existing disability parking with the new standard, but all new parking is required to be built to the Australian standard.

Carers—acknowledgement

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (3.30): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that 12-18 October 2014 was Carers Week;
- (b) Carers Week is about recognising and celebrating the outstanding contribution unpaid carers make to our community;
- (c) over 43 000 people in the ACT provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition, terminal illness, drug and alcohol issues or who are frail aged;
- (d) carers come from all walks of life, all cultures and all religions;
- (e) caring can be very demanding and often restricts the lives of individual carers and their families; and
- (f) Carers Week is an opportunity to educate and raise awareness among all Australians about the diversity of carers and their caring roles;

(2) acknowledges the commitment given by carers in the ACT; and

(3) acknowledges the work of community organisations who assist carers in their valuable role.

I bring this motion to the Assembly today to acknowledge those in our community who are carers and those community organisations who assist our carers. I think it is important, when talking about carers, to reflect on who is defined as a carer. There are many people in the community who take on a carer's role and who would not automatically categorise themselves as a carer, who would not consider themselves to be any different from anyone else and who would not realise how significant the role is that they have taken on.

Carers can come from all walks of life and all cultures. They range in age from children of only nine or 10 years old to the elderly, maybe 80 or 90 years old. They can be parents, friends, siblings, spouses, children, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews, even neighbours.

A carer is ultimately anyone who provides aid to a person with care needs. It could be help with feeding, bathing, dressing or administering medications, or for more independent people it could be helping with banking or shopping or assistance with communication. Carers also provide comfort, encouragement and reassurance to the person they care for and monitor their health and safety on an ongoing basis.

A lot of the people who are carers in our society do not even necessarily realise that they are carers and they would not use that word to describe themselves. But a carer is

someone who provides unpaid support and care to a family member or friend who is frail or elderly, has dementia, a mental illness, an intellectual disability, an acquired brain injury, a disability, a chronic illness, or who has received or is receiving palliative care or has other complex needs.

The carers themselves need support, and they need to be valued and recognised in our community. It has been estimated that the annual replacement value of informal care in Australia is \$40 billion per annum, with carers across Australia providing 1.32 billion hours of care each year.

Carers can feel excluded from everyday society. I raise that not to imply that those who need care are a burden in any way but to shine a light on the carers facing these situations and who selflessly care for others. Families do not resent the care and support that they provide—their love and devotion are evident—but carers can feel exploited to reduce costs or feel taken for granted.

Being a carer can be emotionally challenging, physically exhausting and financially draining. Research has shown that 50 per cent of primary carers in Australia are on a low income and many find it hard to cover living expenses, let alone build savings or superannuation. It has been shown that carers usually ignore their own health needs and are 40 per cent more likely to suffer from a chronic condition, such as back problems and anxiety and depression, and these conditions can be directly linked to their caring role.

Many carers are chronically tired and are in desperate need of a break, even just one night of unbroken sleep. Many carers can find themselves socially isolated as they miss social opportunities and are left with little time for other activities. Overall, caring can seem to take freedom and spontaneity out of life, yet carers do it without question.

The pressing needs of ageing carers is also an area of concern. These ageing carers can be haunted by fear of what may happen to their family member once they are no longer able to provide an appropriate level of support. Many ageing parent carers are female and most have been providing care for 30 years or longer. Ageing parent carers are very resilient. However, studies have shown that their wellbeing is significantly lower than the national average. Health, finances, life achievement and future security and future planning for the person or persons in their care are significant areas of concern.

The limited availability of alternative accommodation options, apart from the family home, is another area of concern for ageing parents. It was in 1975 that the world's first carers association was established in New South Wales, and six years later in 1981 carers in the ACT held a public meeting to address concerns about the needs of those caring for aged people. It was soon after this initial meeting that the ACT carers group was first established. We have come a long way since 1975, with organisations right around the world designed to provide support for carers, but they still very much need our support.

I commend Carers ACT and other organisations in the ACT who support carers. I commend the young carers network, as well as the associations to assist friends and

relatives of those with a mental illness, who all provide invaluable support to our community. However, what is of greatest importance here today, what we are here to speak about, is the acknowledgement of carers and Carers Week and the recognition of the role that carers play.

Reaching out to someone in a caring role can help them feel less excluded and isolated, and it is important to say that this is not unique to Carers Week. Similar intentions cross over to recognition in events like R U OK? Day, mental health awareness day, Social Inclusion Week, International Day of People with Disability, foster carers week and many other awareness events.

For example, this week is also Children's Week. We must recognise that children have a right to be just children, yet there are many children in our territory who are carers themselves and need support in Carers Week, but, I stress, at all times. It is about community and reaching out to other members of our community to include them, support them and show our respect and appreciation for the role they play. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Minister for Planning, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations, Minister for Children and Young People and Minister for Ageing) (3.36): I thank Ms Lawder for bringing forward her motion today and for her work with our office to ensure that we could all agree on the one motion. The subject matter of this motion is critically important to the whole Canberra community. Taking time to reflect on the commitment and contribution of all carers is absolutely appropriate, particularly following last week's celebration of Carers Week 2014.

Carers come from all walks of life and can be almost any age. They play a vital role in helping to make our community a vibrant, functioning and inclusive place to live. Our community is a better place because of the role carers all do for us. The government values the role that carers play in our community. In 2011 the ACT carers charter, which was launched by my colleague Minister Burch, outlined the rights that all carers in the ACT should expect. These principles lay the foundation for our government's vision of how best to recognise and support the vital work that carers do in our community, how to engage with carers on matters that impact on them, not only as carers but as individuals in their own right, and how we as a community can value and respect carers.

In the ACT the term "carer" encompasses a diversity of individuals performing a caring role. The charter defines a carer as "a person who provides unpaid care to someone else who is dependent on the person for ongoing care and assistance". This definition includes people who provide informal care and support to friends and relatives with needs associated with disability, ageing, ongoing physical or mental illness, or substance abuse, as well as grandparents, approved kinship carers or foster carers who provide a caring role to children and young people.

The ACT carers charter outlines five principles that inform the support and services provided to carers. These are: carers are engaged in matters that affect them as carers, carers are consulted in the development and evaluation of services, carers are valued

and treated with respect and dignity, carers are supported to sustain their caring role, and carers' diverse needs are acknowledged and appropriate supports provided. These principles are evident in the high quality of services provided by many of the non-government organisations who support carers, including Carers ACT.

I would just like to reflect on an opportunity I had a few weeks ago to pop over to Barnados, as they encourage more foster carers to come into the ACT. We had a wonderful presentation there by Professor Judith Pratt, who told us about the really difficult role that carers take on and, of course, the challenges that they may see from kids in foster care. The challenges include those children that have come from perhaps a traumatised background and need real support and encouragement to grow as they get a bit older.

It was really enlightening to hear her frank definition and description of how these children can be, but it was also encouraging to hear how these children can be brought back into a somewhat normal life later in life if trauma is dealt with at an early age. She was really descriptive in telling us how parents operate in the parenting function with their young children, especially as young babies. She described the actions that we do automatically as parents. We look down at the baby's face and we have interactions in terms of our facial recognition and the baby's facial recognition. We tend to giggle when they do and we look sad when they look sad. She told us this is the way children are hard-wired for later on in life, that those interactions and physical changes in their faces show how they can react with other people later on in life.

She explained that those children that have had trauma do not have the same hard-wiring and it takes quite a long time for foster carers and clinical assistants to be able to help get that child back to a normal lifestyle. It was a really rewarding day, especially for me and those people that were thinking about becoming foster carers. I congratulate Barnados for that seminar.

In 2014-15 the government has provided almost \$1.4 million to Carers ACT to deliver community support, respite, advocacy, information and alternative forms of communication. Carers ACT has also been engaged by Disability ACT to deliver a carer wellness program and a national disability insurance scheme carer pathways program from 1 July this year through to 31 December 2016 at a cost of \$300,000. The carer wellness program is designed to support carer wellness through practical preventative activities and strategies. The NDIS carer pathways program is designed to assist carers to build their skills and confidence in adapting to self-directed approaches in the context of the NDIS.

Carers ACT are also funded \$370,000 to provide policy, support, training and capacity building for people with mental illness and their carers to participate in consultation processes run by the Health Directorate. In addition, Carers ACT are funded \$420,210 to provide a range of services to clients under 65 years old—and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers that is under 50 years old—through the ACT home and community care program for younger people. These services include counselling and support, information and advocacy, centre-based day care and social support.

The NDIS is fundamentally changing the way people with a disability are supported, for the first time putting the choice and control over their supports in their hands. Carers will be central to supporting people with disability in determining the choice and control that will make a difference in their day-to-day life and their longer term aspirations. Carers will play a critical role, at the request of the person they care for, in the goal setting and planning process of the national disability insurance scheme.

The importance of carers was brought home to me just last week. I was delighted to join around 100 carers last Wednesday in a celebration of Carers Week. I had a number of conversations with a range of different carers who shared with me some of the issues, challenges and joys of being a carer. The event heard from a young 22-year-old man who, having had a very difficult relationship with his parents, had been through the out-of-home care system in the ACT. He provided a very personal, firsthand account of the positive support and influence he had received from his carers and how they had guided and supported him in childhood and teenage years through to his adulthood.

I would like to finish by thanking all Canberrans who undertake a caring role. It is the people of Canberra that make this community a great place to live. The contribution of thousands of carers in the ACT is a clear demonstration of the heart of this community. I thank Ms Lawder for bringing this motion forward today.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra) (3.46): We have been advised that today there are over 43,000 people in the ACT providing unpaid care to family members and friends who have a disability, mental health challenges, significant physical health challenges and those who are frail aged. And I further acknowledge the very important role that the unpaid, volunteer kinship carers and foster carers have in providing care to those children and young people who are some of the most vulnerable in our community.

There are over 600 children and young people in Canberra who are unable to live with their birth families. Foster carers and kinship carers play a vital role in providing these children and young people with a secure and stable home on both a short and long-term basis. These children are currently being provided care in 322 kinship placements and 246 foster placements. Foster carers and kinship carers are, without a doubt, the backbone of our child protection system. They open their hearts and their homes to this city's most vulnerable children and young people.

We know that there are different pathways to becoming either a kinship carer or a foster carer and that this presents a very serious decision for any family. Making this very important decision affects the life of the carers and their families, and it is clear that either option requires considerable commitment and brings significant changes, challenges and joys as part of the foster or kinship care experience.

I have a neighbour who lives in Dunlop and who is just going through the process of becoming a foster carer. All of us, all of her friends and her family, are very excited about her achieving this and being able to foster a child, and we look forward to meeting that person when that moment arises. The thought that goes into the

preparation of people to become foster carers by organisations like Barnardos is really quite amazing. I have been fortunate enough to be able to share in her journey to becoming a foster carer.

Carers Week is a fantastic opportunity to focus on foster carers, kinship carers and permanent carers as highly valued members of our community. I understand that the West Belconnen Child and Family Centre hosted a wonderful celebratory morning tea last Wednesday morning and provided a wonderful opportunity for the community to thank carers for the commitment, dedication and love they consistently provide to our children and young people.

I also understand that two foster carers and two kinship carers will be funded to attend the national foster and kinship carer conference in Hobart on 13 and 14 November this year. This will provide an opportunity for these carers to engage with other carers from around Australia to hear up-to-date information about caring for children and young people.

People become foster carers for many reasons. The main reason is their love and enjoyment of the company of children. Kinship carers begin caring because a child or young person is known to them and requires their care and support. Carers come from many cultural backgrounds and have a diverse range of life experiences. This is so important in ensuring the best possible match for children in need of a secure and stable home. Those carers providing care in the ACT can be single, married or in de facto or same-sex relationships.

There are carers who are highly skilled in the provision of care to babies or adolescents specifically and there are carers who provide care to children and young people with disabilities. More than a quarter of children and young people in care are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Therefore foster and kinship carers from this background are also so important to ensure appropriate maintenance of cultural identity.

I would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of our community organisations in supporting vulnerable children and young people in care, and I would also like to sincerely thank Child Protection Services, out-of-home care agencies' staff and our community sector partners for all of the work that they do to ensure children and young people are strong, safe and connected to our community. It is also important to acknowledge the direct support provided to foster carers on a daily basis through those community-based, out-of-home care agencies. I know they are committed to helping their carers provide the best care possible for children and young people.

Lastly I would like to take this opportunity to encourage anyone who is interested in becoming a foster carer to contact our community organisations, Barnardos and Marymead, for more information. Carers Week has been a wonderful opportunity but, as Mr Lawder has said, it is not the only opportunity that we should take to acknowledge the hard work of all our volunteer carers. I would like to thank Ms Lawder for raising this very important issue.

MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (3.51): I thank Ms Lawder for bringing this motion forward today. Within the ageing community there are a growing number of older carers predominantly looking after either a spouse or a child. The caring arrangements range between informal care in a home environment to formal care within an aged facility setting. We cannot forget the work that our older carers provide within the community. And while it is done out of a sense of love and family we also cannot forget that it can take an immense toll on the carers' social and mental wellbeing. Carers within the ageing community should be commended for the dedication and effort that they make in ensuring that their family members are cared for in what they believe to be the most appropriate and safe environment, all whilst managing issues and priorities that are placed on them.

According to a report titled *Australia's welfare 2013* from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the increase in the number of carers between 2006 and 2011 was relatively high among people aged 60 to 69—39 per cent for males, and between 41 and 44 per cent for females. High growth rates were also reported among carers aged 85 or over—50 per cent for males, and 36 per cent for females.

Research has also shown that a care recipient's need for help with basic daily activities generally increases with age. Much of the informal care provided to older people living in the community is provided by spouses who are often older themselves. According to the 2009 survey of disability, ageing and carer's data, 77 per cent of primary carers aged 65 and over were caring for their spouse or partner, while nine per cent were caring for their child and another nine per cent were caring for their own parent.

Carer's Week highlights the very important work that carers undertake in our community and the value that we should all place on the services that they provide. The support that community organisations can provide in respite care is paramount to the continuation of these crucial roles. Respite within an aged care setting or within an informal home-based environment allows the carers, who often have issues to contend with as they age, time away to recoup and, more importantly, provides time to socialise. I commend Ms Lawder for bringing this important motion to the Assembly today and acknowledge both the commitment of carers and the community organisations within the ACT that provide such valuable services.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (3.54): I thank Ms Lawder for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. Being a carer, be that formally or informally, can be a very demanding role but one that many would never be able to separate from their personal love and respect for the person they are caring for. I think that is, for me, a really central point here. It gives a formal designation, and Carers Week recognises that formal notion of being a carer. Most people do it simply because that is what they would do, because it is somebody they care about, they are very close to or they simply respect.

I do not think most people consider themselves carers with a capital C in that context. They are husbands and wives, they are partners, sons, daughters, dear friends doing only what comes naturally to support loved ones with their physical, emotional and

mental health needs. But as we know, love can have its limits. Indeed, in December 2010 the Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services released its report *Love has its limits*, after looking into respite care services in the ACT. This was a major piece of work that really brought to the forefront the issues for the Assembly and the community, and I think it still holds value in the conversations we are having today.

Young carers in particular sometimes have trouble articulating the role that they play in their family when care needs are present. While it is estimated that more than 300,000 of Australia's carers are young carers, with 150,000 under 18, we also know that that number is probably much higher. For a young person, caring for a family member can bring responsibility earlier than perhaps it should. It can impose on time that other children would spend hanging out with friends or doing homework or playing sport. It can also impact on their own wellbeing and their own health, especially if it leads to a lack of sleep and exercise and perhaps sacrificing proper meals.

I think it is very important to reflect on that particular pressure that can be placed on young people. However, they do assume a responsibility perhaps beyond their years. Again, they do it because it is the right thing to do, they do it out of love—all of those points that I was talking about earlier. A younger person in the role of carer may also be carrying responsibility for looking after themselves in a way that other young people would not. So we see that double effect there. And while many young people may grow and strengthen from this experience and learn new skills, it is not something that we would necessarily wish upon them over the longer term.

But perhaps more importantly, it is an experience that young people need supporting through so that caring can be a positive experience and that they do grow and strengthen from it rather than simply become a burden from it or perhaps being asked to take up responsibility ahead of their years. Of course, it is something that many would never want to stop doing but we need to make sure that it is not a burden that is beyond their young shoulders to carry.

Some carers are in a position where they need to support family or friends with long-term chronic conditions and sometimes it can be a temporary situation. However, these temporary situations can spin into long periods, putting people's lives into turmoil, and often these people are not in a position to be able to organise government or community sector support.

Certainly here in Canberra we are well supported with a high rate of volunteering and we are lucky to have a strong community sector that can support our carers, and a government that, in turn, supports these groups. We have many government and non-government support agencies that offer practical, financial and emotional support, be that respite care, holiday outings or medical assistance and advocacy. Certainly I have been to events organised by—and I have been engaged by or lobbied by—some of those carer organisations who have done a very good job of representing the issues that carers face and it has given me a much greater insight into some of the challenges and responsibilities that carers do carry.

At the end of the day the real work is done by the carers themselves. I fully support the motion before us that acknowledges the commitment made by carers in the ACT and acknowledges the work of community organisations which assist carers in their valuable role. We as a community need Carers Week and the subsequent focus that it brings on this important issue to remind us of the powerful and vital work that is often invisible but never underestimated. And with that last thought in mind, I do appreciate the motion today which offers members of the Assembly the opportunity to recognise the very significant contribution of carers in our community. I fully support the motion.

MR WALL (Brindabella) (3.58): I am pleased to speak to Ms Lawder's motion today and I commend her for bringing to the Assembly today recognition of the work of unpaid carers. Carers, in fact, do play a significant part in our community. They provide unpaid support and make a contribution to society that is all too often easily overlooked. In my role as the shadow minister for disability I have had the privilege of meeting with a huge number of unpaid carers and have managed to start to grasp an understanding of the extent of their commitment. The dedication and the work that they put in never cease to amaze me.

Often this commitment has been made over many years and the toll of putting someone else's needs before their own does often take a toll on the carers themselves. Sometimes it is a physical toll; sometimes it is financial. Unpaid caring can also have an impact on other areas of their lives such as family relationships and often makes it difficult to maintain friendships and relationships outside the family unit as well.

One of the most common and consistent issues that I hear within the disability community, when talking to carers, generally comes from those carers that are reaching the later stages of their lives as they age and the concerns start to come up as to what will happen to the person that they have been caring for when they are no longer physically capable of doing so. It is a concern that is often raised and is an issue that I think presents itself not just in a disability space but across the community. It is an area in which a lot of work still remains to be done. We have seen attitudes from both government and service providers progressively change in this area and carers themselves have also seen many changes in their time as they have looked after their loved ones or extended family.

There have been many changes in these spaces and the changes ahead also continue to cause some concern and anxiety about what the future might hold. Carers that have perhaps been spending the best part of the last half century looking after a family member have seen substantial change in the language that we use to describe people with a disability, not to mention the therapies, the supports and the accommodation options that are available for them. There is one very important question that is consistently raised when I speak with carers, and that is, as I mentioned, "Who will look after my child when I am not here or when I am no longer physically able to provide the care I now provide?"

I think it is important also to make a note of the economic contribution that carers make. The Productivity Commission, when it was doing its investigations into the

NDIS, reported that two-thirds of the support that people with a disability receive generally comes from in-kind care and support from family, friends and extended community. To put that in dollar terms, it is estimated that that support equates to over \$40 billion in the Australian economy each year. It is a substantial contribution that must be acknowledged and recognised. As a community, we need to value the contribution that is made by carers in any way we can. Therefore I pay tribute to the love, the care and the commitment made by all of the unpaid carers in our community. I again commend Ms Lawder for bringing this motion here today.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (4.02), in reply: I thank everyone for their support today for this important motion. As we have heard from several speakers, it is important to reflect that providing care does not imply that the person you are caring for is a burden on the carer. However, sometimes carers can feel that they are excluded from social activities and certainly may feel other pressures on their lives such as financial stress.

Carers Week last week gave us the opportunity to reflect on the important work that carers do every day and every night. As we have also talked about, it is not the only opportunity. We can do that on any day and any week of the year, but it is good to have that focus for one week of the year. It reminds us how important the work of carers is. Once again, thank you to all members for their support of this motion today.

Motion agreed to.

Schools—early intervention programs

MR WALL (Brindabella) (4.03): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that the ACT Government will withdraw from providing early intervention and therapy services for pre-preschool age children from the end of the 2014 school year;
- (b) the Minister for Disability committed to providing a report to the Assembly in the first sitting week of Term 4, 2014 with an update of the readiness of early intervention non-government service providers to commence in the 2015 school year as a result of a motion moved in the Assembly on 4 June 2014; and
- (c) that the subsequent report provided by the Minister is wholly insufficient and fails to provide any assurances to families who will be seeking early intervention services at the commencement of the 2015 school year; and

(2) calls on the Minister to provide the Assembly by the end of the next sitting week, a factual and detailed response as to how many providers have been registered and are equipped to provide early intervention and therapy services at the beginning of the 2015 school year, as well as the details of how many places will be available in these programs in total.

The opposition feel compelled to move this motion today after the minister's categorical failure to respond to the previous motion brought to this place some months ago. In an amended motion agreed to by members of this place in June this year, the minister was called upon to report to the Assembly in the first sitting week of term 4 in 2014 with an update of the readiness of early intervention non-government service providers to commence in the 2015 school year.

What we saw yesterday skimmed the absolute surface of what needed to be articulated. I also note that the words used in this statement are the same glossy, flowery language that goes out in letters to potential providers and families alike, give or take a few words. The minister put great stock in the numbers provided to her by KPMG and their market soundings. She told us with great enthusiasm that KPMG have interviewed 31 providers, interviewed five peak body organisations, carried out 14 family focus groups with 64 participants and produced reports on best practice in early intervention and advice to government on transitioning.

All these numbers do not help the families of the 300 or so children who are currently accessing worthwhile, meaningful and result-bearing early intervention programs, nor do they help the families who next year will need to access such services for the first time. What these families want to see are the facts about exactly who is coming to the ACT to provide these new services, where these services will be located and how many places will be available within these programs.

The minister also relies heavily on the fact that the government hosted an expo, which, incidentally, was called an early intervention and therapy services expo. In reality, it had about five early intervention providers on display. It is all smoke and mirrors with this minister and her government.

In an email sent to me by a constituent hoping to get some information by attending this expo I was told:

I attended the expo on Saturday specifically with the purpose to meet all these new providers that would be coming to run Early Intervention Programs that are facilitated with a specialist educator.

Once again we were disappointed.

Out of the 50 stall holders we found only 5 that "maybe" are going to run a program and have put in a tender. Out of those, 2 do not have any premises or representation currently in the ACT and are not going to pursue it until they know the outcome of the tender. One may do something out of their current premises (Cerebral Palsy) if they have enough parents approach them. Out of the other two, one is a brand new business ... which will have premises in November and the other is still looking at the premises that the ACT Government are willing to offer up ... Out of these possible 5 organisations the programs they may have are as follows:

1. A group program once a week for 2 hours and the parent stays. Pointless when children are needing to become independent from their carers ...

2. A group program once a week for 3 hours and they can only have a maximum of 70 children for the week. The group of children will have varying ranges of disabilities all in together ...
3. A program will run once a week for 2 hours only if there are enough parents that have come forward and then they will try and group children together with similar needs ...
4. A program once a week on a Saturday morning with children with varying needs, approximately 2 hours. This cuts into family time ...
5. A specific program, say if children need to learn how to open their lunch boxes. So a short program over a few weeks targeting a specific skill ...

So we are very disappointed as was our Early Intervention teacher who was also there. We currently have nearly 6 hours of our facilitated program twice a week. So that time has been halved just for starters let alone what the actual program is going to entail.

The constituent goes on to say:

Our meeting with KPMG where we advised of two to three consecutive days of 3-4 hours, with a specialist educator with children with similar developmental needs without parental or carer involvement whilst they attend these sessions, have resulted in nothing. These businesses should not be grouping together children that have Autism, Asperger's, Global Development Delay or behavioural issues or other impairments. It would be disastrous for all of those children.

Why can we not have the choice of having our current Early Intervention programs and use the NDIS funding to pay for it? We have that option for our Therapists with Therapy ACT.

Again, our children are still caught in the middle of this mess. 3 years time it may be great, but that doesn't help us now. So as per Joy Burch's statement of "no child will be left behind" guess what ...

Mr Assistant Speaker, I offer my full support to those providers who are willing to come to the ACT and set up shop. In fact, it is a daunting task for all disability service providers to change their way of thinking and step out of their comfort zone of doing what they know best and start operating in a new system much more like a corporate entity. This is a big step and one that is part of the changes that the NDIS is bringing to the disability sector; changes that, I might add, are supported wholeheartedly by the opposition in this place.

However, in this instance I feel the providers who have shown their willingness to step into the early intervention space are struggling. From discussions I have had with some of them, a common theme prevails. They have not been given enough time to navigate their way through the maze of paperwork and regulations. Again, I will draw on an example from one such service provider in an email sent to me just last week:

I have also asked on a few occasions for someone to contact me about a possibility to use a location/office space in Canberra that will become vacant with services ceasing so we can streamline our services better and provide social skills groups, centre based therapy but no one has returned my calls or responded to our requests. We are supposed to operate in January under the NDIS and this deadline is fast approaching and we have received very little or no support so far. We have parents concerned and coming to us with questions that we often cannot answer. We are in the business of helping people and I love nothing more than seeing children thrive with the support and intervention they deserve but this process is not being made easy and we feel like we are swimming upstream with little support and I know that our program manager, who only works three days, feels the enormous pressure on her shoulders as parents are asking questions that she cannot answer.

This email was sent to me on 15 October, just six days ago, and it clearly illustrates that this provider—one of only five currently identified as being capable of delivering these types of services needed—is still not up and running in the ACT and is not ready to start rolling out its services just yet.

Predictably, the minister will shortly stand and somehow start sheeting home the blame to the federal government, as has been her role previously. Pointing the blame back to the federal government and their role in the NDIS rollout till this date has been her go-to position—go to the political attack, on and on. There is no-one to blame here except the current government for the local decisions that have been taken.

I would like to take a moment to mention the support the ACT Green in this place is giving the minister on this issue, support that is passively being given by not standing up for the community and not demanding that the minister provide adequate answers and responses to the community. Mr Rattenbury often seeks to portray himself as the voice of reason in the community and here in this place, but to date on this issue he has shown nothing more than to be an accomplice of the government by failing to stand up.

The opposition, on the other hand, have identified a solution to this problem, a problem that was looming from the very beginning. We called on the government very early on, after consulting widely with the families, carers, and educators in the early intervention space to continue to provide services through the department of education and training for a further 12 months from December of this year, or at least until such time as prospective service providers were up and running here in the ACT ensuring no gaps in service.

Instead of working collaboratively to ensure the continuity of these services, the ACT government and the minister have ploughed on with their plan, all the while digging in deeper until we have ended up at the point we are now. This is not unlike the minister's previous attitude towards youth justice, a "la, la, la" moment when her fingers went in her ears and she closed her eyes while she was being told about some of the serious issues facing the Bimberi detention centre.

The response the minister provided yesterday showed complete disregard for the welfare of these children, their families and the potential service providers that are seeking answers. It showed a complete lack of empathy and understanding of the issue, and did not provide anything but platitudes. The tardiness this minister has shown in responding to the 2,000 or so petitioners who also called for her to take action is yet another example of this disregard.

In a ministerial statement yesterday, the minister quoted from the *Canberra Times* in its editorial of 9 October:

Uncertainty must be confronted and sorted, not used as an excuse for delay.

This statement is true. However, the uncertainty in this case lies with the fundamental issue of providing early intervention treatment for three and four-year-old children, with such issues as autism and global developmental delay, treatment that is potentially being stopped in its tracks by this government's attitude of steamrolling ahead and hoping for the best.

The *Canberra Times* opinion piece the minister quoted from yesterday also includes the following statement, which was cleverly omitted by the minister:

In Canberra, some carers have expressed reservations about the readiness of private providers to take over the ACT government's early-intervention programs for children with disabilities, due to occur in January. And though Disability Minister Joy Burch says no child will be left without service or support, calls for the private sector to be given more time to prepare, including from Opposition disability spokesman Andrew Wall, continue to be made.

The minister will be held to account by the community on this issue. She has tried to back away from her claim that no child will be left without service or support. The statement has now become "no child currently receiving services will be left behind". This simple change in language dramatically changes the scope of the ACT government's commitment. Like all age-based services, as one cohort transitions from preschool and early intervention into kindergarten, another cohort is about to enter the system. This language change has left parents needing to enrol their children in early intervention programs next year for the first time in complete limbo.

For some people who do not have an interaction in the disability space, understanding what these changes mean may be difficult. To put it simply, using the ACTION bus network as an example, imagine that the government took the decision to close down ACTION at the end of this year without consultation and without providing an alternative public transport provider. Now imagine the uncertainty the community would be facing as people tried to figure out how they would get to or from work or how their children would get to or from school. This is the reality for hundreds of Canberra families as the services they are acquainted with will be gone at the end of the year, and as at this point in time no clear alternatives have been provided.

Interestingly, Minister Burch finally responded to some of my calls for a bit of further information a couple of minutes after 11 am this morning on Twitter. She said:

... there are currently 20 providers registered with the NDIA for early intervention or early intervention therapy services in the ACT.

This is a big step for the minister. Firstly, it seems that her use of Twitter has improved markedly, but, on a more serious note, this is the first time she has provided any glimpse as to what options may be available for next year. When the minister rises to speak on this motion, if she provides anything less than the details of who those 20 providers are, the type of intervention programs they will be offering and the number of enrolments that will be available for the beginning of 2015, she will again be failing in her role as a minister and she will be failing the families in desperate need of answers. Minister Burch has an obligation to the families, carers and service providers to provide straight answers to the questions they are asking, and she should be doing that as a matter of urgency. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MS BURCH (Brindabella—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Disability, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Racing and Gaming, Minister for Women and Minister for the Arts) (4.17): In many ways, I thank Mr Wall for bringing this matter to the Assembly again. We have heard such loaded and misinformed commentary from him again today, as has occurred in the weeks preceding today.

The government does not support Mr Wall's motion. I move the amendment that has been circulated in my name:

Omit all words after "notes", substitute:

- “(a) that the ACT Government will commence the transfer of early intervention and therapy services for pre-preschool age children to new providers from the end of the 2014 school year;
 - (b) the Minister for Disability committed to report to the Assembly in the first sitting week of Term 4, 2014 with an update on the readiness of early intervention non-government service providers to commence in the 2015 school year, as a result of a motion moved in the Assembly on 4 June 2014;
 - (c) that subsequently, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) conducted a tender process for delivery of early intervention services to ensure coverage of all children who would otherwise have been eligible to access services through the Education and Training Directorate, and that this process will be finalised in the near future; and
 - (d) that the Education and Training Directorate will host a ‘Meet the Provider’ information session on 17 November 2014 at the Hedley Beare Centre for Teaching and Learning to allow families to meet with the successful providers following the NDIA tender process; and
- (2) calls on the Minister for Disability, consistent with her statement to the Assembly on 21 October, to update the Assembly on the results of the NDIA tender on early intervention services as soon as they become available and to

ensure that this includes details of the number of providers registered and details of the services that will be available, to be provided to Members out of session if necessary.”.

Yesterday I provided a brief update to the Assembly on the readiness of providers to commence early intervention services in preparedness for the 2015 school year. As I said yesterday, the national disability insurance scheme has gone out to tender for these services. As I said yesterday, and I will say it again today, the NDIA is finalising this tender process, and it should be completed within the week.

Mr Wall asked in his closing remarks for me to provide details of those providers—through either ignorance or just skipping through the reality of this. This tender process is being managed through the NDIA. It is not mine; it is being managed by another organisation.

Mr Wall: There’s the blame shifting.

MS BURCH: Mr Wall is trying to say I am shifting the blame to someone else. The reality is that an independent commonwealth body, the National Disability Insurance Agency, have had carriage of that tender. It is for them to run and to make the decisions on. They are very close to announcing, as I said yesterday, the successful organisations that will be providing early intervention programs to our young ones next year.

Again, as I said yesterday, I will inform the Assembly and families of the results of that tender process as soon as I am able to do so. If Mr Wall thinks that I am not as keen as he is to get the information out to families, he is simply mistaken. I am sorry to keep repeating myself; however, Mr Wall appears not to understand that there is a tender process underway, being run by that commonwealth agency, and as soon as they finish their important work the information will be available to Canberra families.

This is the first time that the national disability insurance scheme has undertaken a procurement-style process for services anywhere in Australia. As such, it is essential that the proper time and care are taken to finalise this tender process in the interests of ACT families. The ACT government and the NDIA are focused on ensuring the best outcomes for families who will be accessing these services in the future.

I believe that the opposition, regrettably, is more interested in scoring political points against me and, in doing so, is creating a heightened level of uncertainty for families. Indeed all the change attached to the national disability insurance scheme raises questions for families. It would not be unreasonable for families to have various levels of concern and questions about this change. That is not unreasonable, and I have been doing all that I can, as have the National Disability Insurance Agency and Disability ACT, to be up-front and provide as much information as is available in a timely manner.

Let me be clear about exactly what this tender process has involved. It has involved numerous market soundings, the development of the tender conditions and appropriate advertising, an industry briefing, the evaluation of submissions, recommendations and

subsequent notifications of successful and unsuccessful providers, thorough contract negotiations, and clear discussions between infrastructure and capital works and schools. The NDIA also must advise organisations who tendered of the outcome before making significant public announcements.

One would hope that the opposition would not want to jeopardise this tender process by playing cheap politics. I am disappointed that Mr Wall chooses to spread misinformation about this process at a time when parents are naturally concerned about these changes for their children.

This morning Mr Wall put out a media release in which he claimed that “early intervention and therapy services will end at the conclusion of the school year”. Mr Wall knows quite well that Therapy ACT services will continue until the end of 2016. So let me be clear about that for Mr Wall: the government will withdraw from early intervention school-based services at the end of this year. Therapy ACT services will continue for another two years, until December 2016.

I remind Mr Wall that within days of the government’s announcement of withdrawing from being a provider of special disability services, Mr Wall locked the Canberra Liberals into supporting that policy. He knows that it is the right thing to do and he supports that position.

I am fully committed to ensuring that we have high quality providers ready and able to deliver early intervention services from term 1 of next year. I know the National Disability Insurance Agency is also wholly committed to this for our community.

Mr Wall is on record as supporting, as I said, the withdrawal of government provision of these services, yet I believe that, again, he continues to raise and heighten concern by telling families that there will be no providers for these services next year—and he has continued to do that. I think it is unfortunate that the cheap political shots at me—and he was very colourful in his language about my performance in this regard—are not going to the heart of the matter. We should be standing as one in supporting the national disability insurance scheme, supporting the work of the agency and supporting families in this transition process.

In relation to the information about 20 organisations, this is information that is publicly available. If Mr Wall goes to the list of publicly available providers that are on the NDIA’s website, it shows that there are registered organisations. Providers of early intervention services include Assistive Technology Centre, Community Options, DUO, and others; and there are nine organisations that are providing both early intervention and therapeutic services, including ASPECT, Neurospace, the Shepherd Centre and Therapy 4 Kids. The NDIA has also confirmed that since that list was put up on 9 September seven more organisations have been registered.

That is on top of what will come through with the NDIA tender. While I do not know the outcome of that tender or who has applied, the fact that we have so many providers already registered clearly demonstrates that there is a strong market interest in supporting early intervention services for families. When the tender is announced—and, as I understand it, that will be within the week—I hope that Mr Wall does not

continue raising concern or heightening anxiety for families by saying that these organisations are not ready. Clearly, they are ready. They have put in a tender. They have been supported through a rigorous tender process through the NDIA so that they will be ready to go.

The NDIS means that families now no longer have to slot into conventional programs that the ACT government has traditionally delivered. There will be opportunities for families to seek new supports that best meet their needs.

The NDIS is about change. It is about improving outcomes for people with a disability. We know that by investing in early intervention for children there will be real benefits for each child, for their families and for the lives of these children as they move through to their adult years.

This process is not an easy one, and I know that for some families the prospect of change is overwhelming. But as I said yesterday, and Mr Wall made reference to it, uncertainty must be confronted and not used as an excuse for delay. The NDIS has the potential to change our society, and change it for the better.

The government is supporting families through this period of change and offering regular updates about the transition of services to community providers. We will inform families about the new providers as soon as we can. There will be an open day on 17 November to allow families the chance to meet and interact with the new providers. Let me repeat that: the tender process will be completed. There will be community providers known and announced, and an opportunity for Canberra families to meet them on 17 November has already been locked in.

The tender process means we will be able to provide families with certainty about the new services and offer financial security to providers while allowing them time to adjust to the new model. It will give the market time to mature, while ensuring services are operating as that occurs.

The NDIS is a vital reform, and I am proud that the ACT is a trial site. We will be the first jurisdiction to have all eligible participants enter the scheme in two years. This government has a clear plan and we are doing all we can to put in place quality early intervention services that will deliver positive outcomes for Canberra families for next year and for many years to come.

I have said in this place, and I will continue to say, that children will be supported through this transition. It is change; there is no doubt about that. And for some families change brings areas of concern. I want to do all I can to make sure that that concern is relieved and not heightened through misinformation.

The National Disability Insurance Agency is finalising the tender process that will deliver community-based organisations for the provision of early intervention services for the beginning of the school year next year. There are currently approximately 300 young ones in these early intervention programs delivered by Education and Training. Of those, 160 or thereabouts will move through to either preschool or kindergarten years, and they will continue to be supported within those formal school structures, and their disability will be supported in those structures.

As I understand it, applications are now being taken for the early intervention programs—a list, so to speak, of young children that are coming into this space. They will be assessed and provided with information, and there will be the opportunity to meet these new providers on 17 November.

Mr Wall needs to be clear about this. I do have an obligation to support Canberra families; I am supporting Canberra families—working with the National Disability Insurance Agency, with Disability ACT and with Therapy ACT to make sure that this transition is as seamless as possible. I have absolute regard for the families with young children in the early intervention programs, because I recognise and value the difference that quality early intervention can make to those children and to the families.

But Mr Wall also has an obligation to Canberra families. His obligation is to not put out misinformation. I would ask him, when this tender is announced within this next week, to get behind the organisations that are standing up and are prepared to deliver these services, and to cease his ongoing commentary that there will be no services in 2015. There will be services ready for Canberra families in 2015.

The NDIA is committed to that; we are committed to that. Those services will be known within a very short time and provided to Canberra families in readiness for them to meet first hand and discuss with them the best arrangements that suit their family. Those opportunities will come into place on 17 November this year, in readiness for the school year in 2015.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (4.30): I thank Mr Wall for the motion today. I have some sympathy with why he has put it on the table; in the minister's statement on Monday there perhaps was not the clarity and the certainty that some were expecting at the start of term 4 and that many were hoping for. I understand that for parents there was not the clarity that they were perhaps hoping for either. It is not unreasonable of parents to want to have this information very soon, because there is very significant change coming with the implementation of the NDIS. They now have one term in which to investigate and choose new providers for the delivery of their children's programs for next year. Parents were probably expecting to see a list of providers—the list of providers—delivered with some certainty, but they have been told that there is another process underway and that the information they want is not available yet. So I do appreciate that there is a level of concern and frustration there.

Having said that, I also have sympathy for the minister and the directorate on this. They have always been clear that they believed it was very important to vacate the field of providing these services in order to encourage other providers to enter the game. Ultimately, under the NDIS, we know that that is what is going to be needed. If we wanted the government to stay as a service provider, we should have thought twice about signing up to the NDIS. But we did sign up, and everybody at the time said: "The NDIS is exactly where we want to go. It is the thing that is the major reform for disability services in Australia."

I have watched with great interest the shift in this debate over time. In the lead-up to the agreement to the NDIS, everybody supported it very strongly. What has been very

interesting to observe is that the reality of implementing it is incredibly complex. Among a range of service providers that I have spoken to across a whole range of areas, and service users, people have been a bit surprised and confronted by some of the changes and just how large it is going to be. There has been a very interesting shift there in the way that people have thought about this issue.

But as I say, the ACT did sign up to the NDIS, and we are in the position of being one of the earlier adopters. That means, in the context, that we are at the front of the line when it comes to experiencing some of these changes and also experiencing some of the unexpected challenges that the massive change to the NDIS has thrown up. That is where I think there is a real challenge for both the minister and the directorate in the ACT: they are trying to grapple with something incredibly complex and be one of the first to do it. In that context, I know they are working incredibly hard to make that as smooth as possible.

The challenge of how to vacate the service delivery field is a significant one for the ACT in the area of early intervention services. We have had a large proportion of children's disability services provided by the government sector for a very long time, and there has been a very limited number of private and/or NGO service providers operating in the territory. In addition to that, the ACT is a small jurisdiction with a reasonably limited and well-defined market for these services. New providers need to know that they will be able to be viable and sustainable in that context. Again, it is part of that massive change where there is considerable uncertainty and people are trying to find their way through those significant changes.

In the intervening period since the last motion, the NDIA have really changed direction here in the territory as to how these services are going to be provided. I think that has come as an acknowledgement that the model that was being proposed was not necessarily going to work, due to the size and scale of the market and the expectation of parents in regard to services that they had previously been provided with through the ACT education department. These expectations were likely made clear to government through the KPMG market sounding process.

Again, I come back to the point that as we step through this very significant change, issues need to be resolved. I think it is not reasonable to come in here and say that the minister or the directorate must have all the answers at a certain point in time. What we can expect from the minister and the directorate is that they remain very focused on this and that they move as quickly as possible to address the issues as they arise. I believe that that is occurring.

In early September, the NDIA called for tenders to provide services. This will be for all children who would otherwise have been eligible for the ACT education directorate services. I know there have been some concerns that children coming into the system for the first time in 2015 might not be provided for. From seeking information on this issue, and through my discussions with the minister's office over recent weeks, particularly in the last 24 hours as we double-checked things in preparation for the discussion of this motion, I think it is quite clear that new children coming into the system will be catered for. The minister has been clear about that

today; the text of the amendment is clear about that. I hope that that piece of information assuages the concerns of any parents who remained unclear about what the situation is going to be.

The tender process has closed, and it is close to being finalised. I understand that the minister is not in a position of being able to provide full details at this stage—not any more details than she has—as the tender process is not a process that she is in charge of. However, I also know that parents are on the edge of their seats waiting to see what is going to happen. They are interested about what options are going to be available and frustrated that they have not received the clarity that they are seeking just yet.

I am sure the NDIA is going to be moving as quickly as possible to let parents know what is happening and who providers will be. I also think that parents should be reassured that the kinds of services they are looking for are more likely to be forthcoming under the tendering model: the input from parents has been put into that model, so they have had a very significant impact on the design of that approach. The tendering model also delivers some confidence to service providers that the ACT will be a viable place to operate in and will allow them to get established in the ACT before having to operate in a model that is totally driven by individual choice in the marketplace. That is also something to be reflected on here: not only is there uncertainty for parents; there is also uncertainty for providers. I think that the approach that has been taken through this tendering process and the provision of a level of guaranteed service is one that addresses concerns on both sides of that equation.

I will be supporting the amendments brought by Ms Burch, but only because I believe that, while they change some of the wording of Mr Wall's motion, they maintain the intent of the motion, which is to get information to parents as quickly as possible about the service providers that will be operating.

In particular—and I said this to Mr Wall in a side conversation—Mr Wall's motion called for the provision of information by the end of next Thursday. I have sought clarity from Minister Burch about this. She is not in a position to guarantee it by next Thursday, so I am happy to support the rewording she has indicated, which is that the information will be provided as soon as it is available, and if that is not during a sitting period, it will be circulated to members outside the sitting period. We do not want to leave it until the latter part of November for Ms Burch to report back to the Assembly if that is the way the timing turns out, if it happens to come sometime after next Thursday when the Assembly heads into a break for three or four weeks.

As I said that timing is somewhat out of the minister's hands. I have had assurance from the minister that she will share this information as quickly as possible once she has access to it. As I said the amendment reflects this. On that basis I will be supporting the amendment moved by Minister Burch today.

MR WALL (Brindabella) (4.40): I will start with the minister's accusation of me running, to use her words, a "loaded and misinformed commentary". I will also draw a correlation to the quote that she is reported in the ABC news today as saying:

I think it is very disappointing that he is actually causing distress to families by saying services will end.

Through you, Madam Assistant Speaker, I say this to the minister: if a loaded, misinformed commentary is the only way of getting answers out of you and your directorate on what services will be available and where the transition is headed, I will continue to do so. To accuse me of saying that no services will be available next year is simply putting words in my mouth. Point to where I have said that there will be no services next year. Continually, it has been a call that we needed clarity of what services—

Ms Burch: Government services will end.

MR WALL: Government services will end. Correct. The minister is correct: government services will end at the end of this year. They have failed, though, to provide an alternative as to what other service providers will be here in 2015 to bridge the gap.

The government has taken a decision to cut and run from early intervention services. We are now partway through term 4; we have about six or seven weeks until the end of this term. Parents need to now start considering what their options will be next year. They are running out of time. These children have special needs. These children often need to be aware of the surroundings they are in, with familiar locations. They need to have relationships or trust with the teachers or service providers they are going to be working with. To give parents limited time to assess what these options are going to be next year is simply causing unnecessary distress.

We all talk about the NDIS as an opportunity to give people with a disability and their carers opportunity and choice. I have called for this information to have been made earlier. These are calls that I have been making since as early as June this year. This information needs to be provided. Parents that rely on this certainty and rely on making sure that they are making the right choices on behalf of their children need the time to consider what their choices are. Not outlining who the service providers will be next year until, as it may be, 17 November provides parents and carers with very limited opportunity to consider what choice they will want to make for 2015.

It is a decision that we do still support; we are supportive of the government in getting out of this space. Like Liberal Party philosophy, if there is someone willing to do the role that government is currently providing, the non-government sector should be given every encouragement and every opportunity to do it. The manner in which this transition is being handled is where the issue arises.

If in June, when these calls were first being made by me and my opposition colleagues, there was a clear plan of what the transition was going to be, with a time line, details of who other service providers might potentially be, what services they would be looking to offer and the capacities that they might be able to enrol in in 2015, parents would have been given ample opportunity to assess what their options were. Instead we are leaving it until the end of this school year to inform parents of what

their options are next year. That is what I find completely unacceptable. Joy Burch, as the minister in this instance, has simply failed to provide, in what the community would expect to be a reasonable time frame, details as to what the options are.

To that end I, like the rest of the families and service providers that are out there looking at what the options are, will continue to hold my breath, continue to wait and see what the options are and wait and see what results this minister can produce. The fact that the commonwealth is now in charge of the remainder of this transition is probably a good thing. It is testament to the commonwealth. I think it is in safe hands. Senator Fifield, overseeing the agency, is doing a sensational job. The competence and aptitude that he brings to the portfolio space are something that this minister should be very envious of.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Marriage equality

MS BERRY (Ginninderra) (4.45): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that today marks one year since the Marriage Equality Bill 2013 was passed by this Assembly;
- (b) the ACT was the first jurisdiction to pass legislation enabling recognition of same-sex marriage in Australia;
- (c) that marriage equality exists in 17 countries including New Zealand along with 30 states of the USA and several cities and provinces of Mexico;
- (d) that recent polling shows up to 72% of Australians support marriage equality; and
- (e) in the last federal census it was revealed that the ACT has the highest proportion of same-sex couples of any jurisdiction in Australia; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) continue to voice its support for changes to the Federal Marriage Act and advocate for changes to the *Marriage Act 1961*;
- (b) continue to provide support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning (LGBTIQ) people, in particular LGBTIQ youth; and
- (c) congratulate LGBTIQ activists who work tirelessly to campaign for the rights of the LGBTIQ community.

I am pleased to put and speak to this motion today to mark one year since Australia's first same-sex marriage legislation, the Marriage Equality (Same Sex) Act 2013, was passed in this Assembly. As a result of our marriage equality act, 31 loving couples were married. While the passing of this bill itself was a major achievement of the government, which has a long and proud history of legislating to remove discrimination and protecting the right to equality, since the introduction of the marriage equality act, the ACT government, in consultation with the LGBTIQ advisory council and A Gender Agenda, has introduced a number of changes to formal recognition of sex or gender on a birth certificate.

One of the most significant amendments to the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1997 unanimously passed on 20 March 2014 was the removal of the requirement for sexual reassignment surgery for a person to be eligible to change their sex on their birth certificate. The government also made administrative arrangements for the legal recognition of a third category of sex and gender on birth certificates—indeterminate, intersex and unspecified.

While the marriage equality act passed one year ago today, there was a lot of work that went into getting the legislation to the Assembly, work by many people both in Canberra and across Australia over many years. These people often made personal sacrifices to support the marriage equality campaign. Their sacrifices made me think that we do not talk enough about what legislation like this means from a personal perspective. That is why, when I wrote my speech for this day 12 months ago, I asked couples to share their marriage equality stories with me. This was Chris and Dylan's story one year ago:

We are Chris and Dylan. We've been together for almost six and a half years. In that time we've grown together, both as individuals, and as a couple. We've had our share of ups and downs—some wonderful times and some not so wonderful times. But what keeps us together throughout all of this is the love and commitment we share for one another.

Marriage equality, to us, is about recognising and protecting that love and commitment. It is about providing the same recognition to our relationship that our friends and family receive in their relationships. It is about respect. It is about dignity. The word "marriage" carries a high level of respect and dignity in our society. It is about family; our family. It is about being treated fairly and equally.

We celebrated our relationship by joining in a civil union just over one year ago. On a rainy day in the cherry blossom-filled Nara Park, we were accompanied by our family to publicly declare our love and commitment to one another. The sun came out just in time for the ceremony, we stood in front of our family members, teary-eyed, and declared our union. It was wonderful. But it wasn't marriage. It was very special. But it did not carry the same dignity as marriage. It was a step on the path to equality; a step towards the respect that so many take for granted.

We are Chris and Dylan. We are a family. Our love binds us together. And we look forward to the day when we are treated like any other family. Today is the next step on that path to equality.

Here is what Chris and Dylan had to say 12 months later:

We were honoured to have Yvette tell our story 12 months ago, and we're honoured again that she's asked for our thoughts again today. 12 months ago the ACT became the first Australian jurisdiction where gay and lesbian couples could have their relationship recognised as equal. We were proud then and we are proud today that the ACT did that. Its progressive and accepting culture is one of the many reasons we happily call Canberra home.

Same-sex marriages in the ACT were sadly short-lived. The decision by the High Court of Australia was disappointing, although we do respect that decision, and the judicial role the Court played in making that decision. The silver lining from that day was the confirmation by the justices that the Commonwealth Government would be able to legislate for marriage equality, avoiding constitutional challenges later on.

12 months ago, Australia was ready for marriage equality. Today, we're still ready and we're still waiting. In the last year friends, such as the United Kingdom, achieved marriage equality. In the United States marriage equality has spread like wildfire across the country, especially in the last month. We know many couples who have decided not to keep waiting for their homeland to make that decision, and to go to New Zealand, or to Britain, or the US, or to any of the many other places around the world that treat all relationships as equally important. We're very happy for them being able to finally have their relationship recognised with the dignity and respect that it deserved. But it's sad that they had to leave their own country because ours doesn't yet do that.

12 months changes a lot. We've both grown as people. We've grown as a couple, even more in love and committed to each other. Australia has grown as a country too. But we still don't have the equality that the vast majority of us believe in. That must change. The Federal Government has the power to protect all couples and to tell the world that as a nation we value all families, regardless of their makeup.

We again thank our territory representatives for standing up 12 months ago and saying that. Now we ask again that our federal representatives do the right thing and take the same stand.

That is just one of the personal stories amongst many. I am proud to know so many families who, in addition to their busy lives, find the time to care for one another while devoting time and effort to support the campaign for marriage equality.

Another couple that I spoke to last year provided their speech for me. I asked them to reflect on marriage equality 12 months on. Jess and Amy say:

All we can think of is in 12 months a lot has changed. We have had a baby. We have lost loved ones. The restaurant and cafe scene in Canberra has boomed and terrorism and Iraq are back on the radar, to name a few. But something hasn't changed. We still can't get married. I find it ridiculous that there are so many things that the federal government needs to do and so much money to be cut and redirected. Why would they waste time and resources and money taking the ACT Marriage Equality Act to the Court? Is discriminating against two women who love each other such a high priority in these turbulent times?

These families, just like each of our own families, contribute equally to our city and their local communities, and the law should show them the same respect by recognising them equally. Even though our legislation was struck down in the courts, it was not an effort made in vain. It will not stop this government advocating against and acting to remove discrimination in all its forms. If we maintain the rage and enthusiasm, we can push for change and we can promote debate to make marriage equality an issue so that it does not just fade away. If we do this, I know we will one day see marriage equality nationally.

This motion today provides us with the opportunity to reflect on the marriage equality cause, to reflect on the ACT government's achievements in legally recognising civil partnerships, civil unions and same-sex marriages, and to once again build support for marriage equality.

Marriage equality now exists in 17 countries around the world, including New Zealand, the UK, 30 states of the USA and several cities and provinces of Mexico. Recent polls illustrate the majority of Australians support marriage equality, yet our own Prime Minister refuses to allow a conscience vote for coalition representatives. But this should not deter our efforts.

Today we are calling on the commonwealth to remove the discrimination that exists in the definition of "marriage" in the commonwealth Marriage Act and to recognise the right of all committed couples to solemnise their marriage. I remain hopeful that the federal government will show leadership on this issue. I call on all members of the Assembly to show their support for this motion to demonstrate the ACT's public support for marriage equality and to support the rights of individuals whom they love and whom they can marry.

Marriage equality is an issue that should not come down to the political party you support or technicalities about the separation of powers of governments under our constitutions. There is no reason for delaying reform any longer. We can achieve great things together if we listen to the personal stories of people in our community like Chris and Dylan's and Jess and Amy's. If we respect the views of others and their right to be fully respected and recognised in law, we can achieve anything.

Marriage equality is one clear way we can demonstrate our commitment to inclusion and respect for everyone. It would show that we are ready to move beyond discrimination on the basis of sex, relationship status or gender identity. Marriage equality will not weaken the institution of marriage. When everyone has equal legal recognition, it makes our society stronger and more prosperous, and most people recognise that.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the important work of advocacy groups like Australian Marriage Equality for their input and support of our marriage equality legislation, as well as groups like the LBGTIQ advisory council and A Gender Agenda for maintaining their constant advocacy across Canberra. Their determination and tireless efforts to achieve recognition of not only legal equality but also substantive equality is a critical part of the law reform process and was significant in fostering community

support for marriage equality. I look forward to continuing to work with these organisations, their leaders and members and many members of the public to campaign for marriage equality not just in our own community but across Australia. Denying marriage equality is an affront to human rights and says to these loving couples that you are not allowed to express or formalise your love in the same way as other couples in our society.

I am calling on members of the Assembly to join with me today to call on the commonwealth to remove the discrimination that exists in the definition of “marriage” in the commonwealth Marriage Act. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (4.57): I rise today to speak to this motion. There are two substantive issues for debate here today. One is this Assembly’s support for the LGBTIQ community, and the other is that of same-sex marriage. I would like to take them in those two parts.

Turning firstly to the issue of our support for the LGBTIQ community, I would like to hope that, similar to the expressions that we had today from this Assembly about multiculturalism, there would be a unanimous view amongst everybody in support of all people in our community, whichever political persuasion, whatever gender, that the leadership of their city supports them and embraces their diversity. Certainly in that respect, we will be supporting the elements of the motion in, principally, 2(b) and (c) that call on those elements. There is bipartisan support for that.

I was at an AIDS Action Council meeting and Mr Smyth, my colleague here, was not there that night—were you there? I cannot quite remember. You were there. They made him a fabulous member for the support that he has shown to that community. Certainly in my maiden speech I made the point very strongly about support for the gay and lesbian community and furthering rights for that community. In my view we have done so.

Indeed Ms Berry talked about some legislation that was passed earlier this year with particular relation to trans-sexual and intersex people and change to the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act, which we supported. I will read out a nice message that I got from a leader in that community after that legislation was passed:

Hi Jeremy,

Just wanted to let you know how very pleased I was that the ACT Liberals supported the changes to the BDMR Act—

the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act—

last week. The comments you made in your speech were insightful and showed a genuine engagement with the substantive issues. I would be keen to stay in touch about monitoring the implementation of the changes and also about any other issues related to the trans and intersex community.

Please don’t hesitate to get in touch if you’d like to discuss anything or run stuff past me either in an official capacity or in an informal confidential basis. On a

personal level I am really impressed with the leadership that you showed on this issue. Thank you. It meant a great deal to a large number of people in the community as well as their friends, partners and families and members.

I think that was a good step in the right direction for a large number of people—in actual fact, it is not a large number of people but that does not matter—in our community.

I will turn now to the issue of same-sex marriage. The first point I would make in response to the motion is that it does not acknowledge the fact—I notice Mr Rattenbury has circulated a similar amendment to the one I will be moving—that the High Court of Australia overturned the ACT legislation. I do not think you can have a motion talking about this issue without that element or fact in it. In fact the High Court judgement was definitive. It was unanimous. It said:

If a Commonwealth law is the complete statement of the law governing a particular relation or a thing, a territory law which seeks to govern some aspects of that relation or thing cannot operate concurrently with the federal law to any extent.

I think everybody in this place would be well aware of the High Court's decision, which was, of course, definitive. I will be seeking leave to move amendments to the motion. Certainly one of those is simply to add into Ms Berry's motion that the High Court ruled that marriage is legally and constitutionally a federal matter and cannot be legislated by the ACT. That is factual. I do not think that there would be any disagreement to that.

The point I would make, though, is that there is a range of diversity about same-sex marriage in our community. I recognise that there are strong advocates for it, and I recognise the position of those opposite who are strong advocates for same-sex marriage. But equally, in the community that I represent there are people who are very much for same-sex marriage; there are people who do not support it, for a range of reasons, including their faith. And I respect all of those views. I do.

From my point of view, I am broadly neutral on this issue. If it does come to pass that same-sex marriage is legislated in the commonwealth parliament, that would be of no concern to me. I am not advocating that. It is a federal matter and it is for my federal colleagues to determine. I note that you, Madam Assistant Speaker, are an advocate for same-sex marriage, a strong advocate for same-sex marriage, and I know that you do lobby your federal Liberal colleagues on this matter. I am open to that. Certainly in the Liberal Party, on my side, I am very open to all of our members expressing their view. But as you will recall, we did not vote for the legislation because we were told, based on the legal advice, which was definitive, that it was going to be ruled unconstitutional and we were not going to vote for things that are not legal. The High Court, indeed, ruled that that was the case.

There are other views in our community that I think are worth noting. This is not Liberal versus Labor versus Greens. There are a broad range of views within this community on this issue. I think it would be useful to quote from Julia Gillard, the former Labor parliamentarian, Prime Minister, leader of the left in the Labor Party, who said in 2011:

I think that there are some important things from our past that need to continue to be part of our present and part of our future. If I was in a different walk of life, if I'd continued in the law and was partner of a law firm now, I would express the same view, that I think for our culture, for our heritage, the Marriage Act and marriage being between a man and a woman has a special status.

Now, I know people might look at me and think that that's something that they wouldn't necessarily expect me to say, but that is what I believe.

In essence, my view is that, in actual fact, Julia Gillard had a much stronger position than I do in opposing same-sex marriage; that is for sure. I do not oppose it. There are a range of different views across the community on same-sex marriage that cross the political divide.

I have mentioned this before but when I knew that this debate was coming on—not today but previously—I got in contact with Uncle Mike and Uncle Ian, who are, in actual fact, my mother's cousins but have always been uncles to me. They have been together now for, I think, close to 50 years—it is a long time—as a same-sex couple. I wrote to them and asked them their view in 2012, in fact. I said:

An issue I am expecting to come onto the agenda sometime in the new year is that of gay marriage and I was hoping you might be able to help me out with some advice. Although I have quite a few gay friends, none have been in a relationship anywhere near as long as yours ...

... I am trying to understand whether 'marriage' itself is an important issue or not to you when it comes to ... your relationship from a personal perspective ...

What I am trying to understand is how you feel about the issue, not what others think or what various lobby groups might say. I would really value your opinions (maybe you each have different views) ...

They responded. This is simply one view—in fact, two views, but they share the same view, which is probably good for the harmony in their relationship. They said:

Our desire to enter into a civil partnership—

which they did—

was simply to ensure that we safeguarded ... matters ... on a financial footing ... Neither of us was particularly interested in the ceremony or anything related to it, we simply wanted to ensure that we were treated as equals, in all respects, to married couples. Beyond this we are not in the least bit interested in getting married. Being older we believe and accept that marriage is 'formalizing' a relationship between two people one male and one female. Furthermore our personal view is that we do not see any advantage in getting married as it would not in any way enhance our relationship.

Indeed there are a variety of views. We have Liberals who are strong advocates, we have a former Labor Prime Minister who is opposed. We have people who are gay supporting, some opposing. It is a range of areas.

To that extent, I will move a further amendment which, without, in essence, changing any words, notes that the government supports same-sex marriage, is advocating strongly for same-sex marriage. I acknowledge that. But rather than ask that people in this Assembly who do not support same-sex marriage, which is their right and which I respect, call on the government to support such marriage—we would have a division amongst us, a divide, a split, essentially using this issue as a wedge—my amendments simply use the word “notes”:

the ACT Government’s support for changes to the Federal Marriage Act and its advocacy for changes in the Marriage Act 1961 ...

It recognises that the government is strongly supporting the changes—exactly the same words. If that is what they want to do, that is their right to do it, and I am sure they will continue to do that.

I know that there are people who are leaders in the gay community who worry that what happened in this place with the legislation, with that whole debate previously, was not helpful. I would like to quote from Brian Greig who is a former Democrat and a veteran GLBT rights campaigner. I quote from what his view of the Labor-Greens legislation was. This is from a leader in that community:

The ACT gay marriage act is in deliberate breach of the constitution and is designed only to embarrass the Prime Minister ...

Having now read the Australian Capital Territory’s Marriage Equality (Same Sex) Act 2013 I can reach no other conclusion than it is deliberately designed to fail. Far from being a genuine attempt to advance the cause of marriage equality, it seems little more than a political stunt aimed at trying to embarrass Prime Minister Tony Abbott.

It goes on:

This territory act so obviously breaches aspects of the federal constitution that it is impossible for me to believe it does so accidentally. The High Court will not dwell on this issue for long. It will not split in its decision. There will be no dissenting voices.

And that was the case. He continues:

So, what on earth is the ACT’s Lilliputian legislature up to?

For almost a decade the key lobby group pressing for change, Australian Marriage Equality, has been working diligently and apolitically towards bringing the nation forward. It has reached out across the crossbenches, winning support and confidence from both doubters and conservatives.

He talks about legal advice from Walker. Greig says:

Walker’s main point to equality reformers, without wanting to be too simplistic in interpreting his advice, is that the states and territories do in fact have the

power to act, but only where they expressly legislate the same sex-marriage outside the federal definition of marriage.

He goes on:

Despite the best legal advice ... and the best ... advice from AME in multiple meetings, ACT Chief Minister Katy Gallagher and her Attorney-General Simon Corbell have forged ahead into certain defeat.

Presumably, the ACT government's "strategy" is to embarrass Abbott ...

The saddest part of all this is that well-meaning gay couples in Canberra seem to have been cynically used as pawns in a political game by the ACT Assembly ...

The clumsy intervention of the ACT into the equal marriage campaign, in this way, at this point in time, does the overall movement in Australia a great disservice. Those responsible should be held accountable.

That is that quote. That is disappointing. The *Canberra Times* editorial also made the point:

Whether this rushed approach proves the bill's salvation or its undoing remains to be seen, but in the event it is found to be invalid, questions may be raised about the government's haste to do battle with the community.

That the Gallagher government announced it intended to legislate for same sex marriage a week after Tony Abbott's election will inevitably lead to the conclusions that it was intent on making a political rather than a social statement.

Members, let us unite, as we did this morning, behind everyone in our community with different views, whatever their sexuality is, and, by a simple amendment, something on which we can all join together and as an Assembly, say, "We respect and we want to see continued advocacy, support for our LBGTIQ community." And let us not have any more of what the *Canberra Times* and some leaders in the gay community are saying is politicising an issue. That is the last thing that they want. I now seek leave to move the amendments circulated in my name together.

Leave granted.

MR HANSON: I move:

(1) Insert new paragraphs (1)(f) and (g):

“(f) that the High Court ruled that marriage is legally and constitutionally a Federal matter and cannot be legislated by the ACT; and

(g) the ACT Government's support for changes to the Federal Marriage Act and its advocacy for changes in the Marriage Act 1961; and”.

(2) Omit paragraph (2)(a).

Question put:

That the amendments be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 7		Noes 8	
Mr Coe	Ms Lawder	Mr Barr	Ms Gallagher
Mrs Dunne	Mr Smyth	Ms Berry	Mr Gentleman
Mr Hanson	Mr Wall	Dr Bourke	Ms Porter
Mrs Jones		Ms Burch	Mr Rattenbury

Question so resolved in the negative.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (5.17): I thank Ms Berry for introducing this motion today, which brings the issue of marriage equality to the Assembly for discussion again. It is relevant for us to discuss this again because there are many members of the ACT community who identify as lesbian or gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer, and those Canberrans—our own constituents—continue to face discrimination in that they are unable to marry the person they love and have that marriage formally recognised. Many LGBTIQ Canberrans are hurt because they want to marry and they cannot. Others do not even want to marry, but the law is still a hurtful symbol of discrimination. It says to these people, “Somehow you are not equal to others and the laws of the country will let other people marry, but not you”. I think that is an entirely unfair, unsatisfactory situation that we must continue to talk about in order to bring about change.

The territory, of course, made an effort last year to legislate to allow marriage equality in the ACT. I was very supportive of that effort because historically the Greens have been strong advocates for action in this area. It was Christine Milne’s bill that decriminalised homosexuality in Tasmania in 1997 after more than a decade of campaigning and negotiating, and the Greens have consistently advocated on marriage equality for the almost two decades since then, introducing legislation to parliaments all around the country and driving the political push for change.

The ACT made a proud effort in 2013 and passed the Marriage Equality (Same Sex) Act. It certainly inspired and galvanised a lot of people; it moved the debate forward, and for a short and very special time it allowed same-sex couples to marry in the ACT. For many of the advocates and activists who have worked on this issue with great commitment, it was a very special moment and a recognition of their efforts.

Legally it was an extremely tricky area, but there was a good chance—based on a variety of legal advice—that the ACT laws would survive legally and we would actually be an Australian jurisdiction that genuinely embraced equality. I take the opportunity at this point in my remarks to reflect on the comments Mr Hanson just made, particularly the fact that he cited the opinion of Brian Greig. I simply and respectfully disagree with Brian Greig’s comments. He is entitled to make them, and I think it speaks to a place where there clearly were different views. I was certainly

privity to discussions, legal opinions and meetings where people put different views on the effect of the ACT legislation. The bottom line is that there were different lawyers with different views.

What I find disingenuous is for Mr Hanson to come in here today and say, “We need to get onto a similar page about this, stop being political about it and try and find some common ground.” I would probably respect that view a little bit more if he had not cited Brian Greig in the way he did to make a political point around the history of the issue in the ACT and then called a division over his amendment. We know why that happened, but that is a discussion for another day and not in this context.

I said to Mr Hanson earlier I did not share his view on his amendments; I had a slightly different take on it and that I intended to move my own amendment. But if you genuinely want to come in here and say, “Hey, let’s put the division behind us and acknowledge there are different views on this and move forward,” you do not need to call a division in this place. But that is what Mr Hanson did; he did it because he wanted to make sure that he has one more on the tally when he comes out with it at the end of this term and says, “The Greens and Labor Party voted together all the time.” Let’s see it for what it really is and let’s name it for what it really is. That is what that was all about today.

Trying to prosecute the fact that this was somehow done as a political stunt last year simply reflects that he fails to take account of the fact that it was a genuine commitment to try and get that done. There were different legal views; unfortunately, the legal views that said the ACT legislation would not work prevailed. But that does not mean we should not have tried, because to not try is to simply stand still and do nothing, and that is not a position I was prepared to be in on behalf of the Greens.

It is very sad that the challenge was successful in the High Court—we all know the federal government decided to go to the High Court and challenge the ACT’s laws. I note at least the legislation did not suffer outright political interference via the former power of federal veto, a power that was removed by amendment moved by Senator Brown, so at least we actually got to have it litigated in the High Court. Unfortunately the ACT government’s legal advice was defeated, but it was important that we tried.

The High Court overturned the ACT legislation on a legal basis and formed a view that the federal Marriage Act covers the field in the law of marriage. The crux of the issue is that the federal Marriage Act defines marriage as occurring between a man and a woman and that this is an exhaustive statement on marriage. That was the finding of the High Court and that is the situation we now find ourselves in. To that end, I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Insert new paragraphs (1)(f) and (g):

“(f) the Federal Government challenged the *Marriage Equality (Same Sex) Act 2013* in the High Court; and

(g) the High Court ruled the ACT Act was inoperative because the Federal Marriage Act is an exhaustive statement on marriage and provides that a marriage can only be between a man and a woman; and”.

I have sought to add this text to fill out the story on Ms Berry's motion, which I completely agree with. I think it is important, though, that we reflect the situation the High Court has placed the ACT in. It is also worth reflecting on where this definition came from and how the ACT ended up in this place. The language in the federal Marriage Act was specifically amended by John Howard's coalition government in 2004 in order to up the act to exclude the option of same-sex marriage. The changes amended the Marriage Act to define marriage as exclusively between a man and a woman. It is an unfortunate but nonetheless historical fact that federal Labor voted to support that amendment. Federal Labor voted with the federal coalition to change the Marriage Act to specifically say that marriage could only be between a man and woman. Fast forward to 2013 and the ACT's efforts to allow same-sex marriage, and it was this action from 2004 which was really the killer blow to our efforts.

In 2004 the Greens stood up against these changes and voted for equality. The Greens argued in the federal parliament that the marriage amendment bills were discriminatory against LGBTIQ people. We condemned both the government and the Labor Party for failing to acknowledge the change within present-day society and the makeup of couples. At the time the Greens introduced amendments to the 2004 legislation, which included provisions that acknowledged gay and lesbian unions within the definition of marriage. It also recognised these unions as marriages in Australia regardless of whether they were performed in a foreign country. These Greens amendments were not supported by the Liberal or Labor parties at the time, and that was a great shame. At the time Bob Brown spoke out about Labor's decision, saying that its decision on gay marriage entrenched discrimination. He said it was politics over principle that failed gay and lesbian communities as well as the huge section of the Australian community which supports equality before the law for all Australians.

I have to say that although I am deeply supportive of Labor's recent efforts on marriage equality—and certainly of the efforts of my local Labor colleagues—there is a sad irony in the fact that an amendment supported by the Labor Party was what came back to bite the ACT in 2013. Senator Brown said at the time of the 2004 amendments that Labor was cutting off its own opportunity to make future reforms in this area. I will not dwell on this topic any longer, and I want to emphasise that I support the genuine efforts of my Labor colleagues in the territory to make progress in the area of marriage equality.

We now know that the issue largely rests in the federal sphere. My Greens colleagues in the federal parliament are continuing to push strongly for change. The Greens currently have two bills before the Senate. One is to ensure that same-sex people who are married in jurisdictions overseas—jurisdictions that are more enlightened than ours—can have their marriage recognised in Australia, otherwise they suffer the indignity of checking their marriage in at the customs gate.

The second bill seeks to allow marriage equality outright by amendments to the Marriage Act. The Greens have opened this bill up to co-sponsorship. My federal colleagues are willing to work with any of the other parties or members who will join in support of this legislation. On such an important issue, it is necessary to move

beyond politics and for politicians to work together. It is also important that Prime Minister Abbott allows the members of his party to undertake a genuine conscience vote on the issue of marriage equality.

As Ms Berry pointed out, the latest polling shows that 72 per cent of Australians support marriage equality. Countries all around the world are leaving Australia behind by recognising marriage equality in their own laws. It is an easy change to make. For a short time, this was the case in the ACT. The sky did not fall in; nothing changed except that people were happy. They shared their love, and for a short time an enduring discrimination was lifted and people were treated fairly and with respect. Sadly, we were overruled by the High Court, but that does not take away from the fact that there was a time here in the ACT that was a very important time.

I support Ms Berry's motion. I thank her for bringing it to the Assembly, and I reiterate on behalf of the ACT Greens my strong support for marriage equality and for action from our federal parliament.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Minister for Planning, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations, Minister for Children and Young People and Minister for Ageing) (5.27): I thank my colleague Ms Berry for bringing this important motion here today. I am pleased to speak on the motion, and I would like to reflect on this momentous day—one year since we passed the Marriage Equality Bill 2013—and some of the work I am doing in my capacity as community services minister.

Marriage equality is an area of reform which is gaining momentum in many parts of the world. From America to South America, Europe, South Africa and New Zealand, legislation is being passed on a more frequent basis every year. This is one of the few reforms which will not have a negative impact on anyone in the community. There is not a single person in this country who, if members of the same sex were to be allowed to marry, would be negatively impacted. It is a win-win legislative change all round. I was extremely proud when the Marriage Equality Bill 2013 was passed on this day last year. Minister Barr's speech supporting the legislation indeed moved me to tears, and I am very glad we passed that legislation.

Despite the decision of the High Court which followed the bill's passing in this place, I believe it was a statement of our ideals in the territory and epitomises everything that Canberra stands for—inclusion, fairness and equality. This part of the spirit of Canberra was also represented by Mrs Jones's motion earlier this morning on Canberra's multicultural diversity.

The time for marriage equality is well past. We have seen that countries like France, with only 50 per cent of the population supporting marriage equality, can successfully pass legislation. I firmly believe here in Australia, where 72 per cent of people support marriage equality, that legislative change must happen. Federal deputy opposition leader, Tanya Plibersek, has flagged the possibility of introducing a private members bill for marriage equality, noting that the prospects of progress on the bill are contingent on the Liberal Party allowing a conscience vote for coalition MPs. I thank Ms Plibersek and encourage her to bring this bill to the federal parliament.

I am reminded today, however, that our focus must remain broader than progressing marriage equality. While we have made a lot of progress on removing discrimination for the LGBTI community, many challenges still present themselves. Canberra is by many accounts one of the most if not the most LGBTI-friendly cities in Australia. Data from the 2011 national census shows this. The ACT had the highest proportion of same-sex couples of any state or territory in Australia. Of all the couples who registered, I think 1.1 per cent were in same-sex relationships.

However, for many people to grow up gay or gender diverse remains a challenging period in adolescent life. I know that adolescence is difficult enough for kids without the added pressure of thinking they have to hide who they are out of fear. LGBTI teens and adults alike experience a severely elevated level of mental health issues in comparison with the general community. The sad thing is that this does not surprise me.

Attitudes of the past and the attitudes of some who are still living in the past are hurtful, they are alienating and they have no place in modern day Canberra or Australia. LGBTI youth are much more likely to end up homeless than the general population, and this is an increasing trend. While society becomes more accepting, gay youth are coming out younger and while still financially dependent on their parents. If the parents struggle to accept their children, they sometimes end up needing to find alternative accommodation.

At the other end of the spectrum, the LGBTI community has identified that there are major challenges to be faced by the community while our ageing population begins to enter aged-care facilities. Issues surrounding recognition of relationships and a lack of training for staff in dealing with gender diverse people can cause particular issues in residential care. Many people facing the prospect of entering the aged-care system are fearful of discrimination and social isolation.

It is because of these challenges that the ACT government continues to support and provide services specific to Canberra's gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer communities. As Minister for Community Services, I am guided by the advice I receive from my advisory council on LGBTI issues. The advisory council performs many tasks, one of which is to liaise between the community and the ACT government. Whilst this is their primary role, they also undertake research and provide advice on matters referred by the Minister for Community Services or raised as a result of community consultation, identify priorities and develop a work program of actions to advance the interests of the LGBTI community, engage and seek advice from the LGBTI community as well as service providers and key stakeholders and act as a link between these stakeholders and the ACT government on relevant issues. They disseminate and communicate, either in person, electronically or otherwise, information to community interest groups on the proceedings of the council, and they establish and maintain cooperative networks with other ministerial advisory bodies and relevant ACT government agencies. They provide an annual report on the progress of work undertaken by the council to the Minister for Community Services.

In conclusion, to paraphrase Macklemore, as Minister Barr quoted so beautifully a year ago, a certificate on paper is not going to change it all, but it's a damn good place to start. I commend the motion and thank Ms Berry for bringing it forward.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Housing and Minister for Tourism and Events) (5.34): I thank Ms Berry for bringing this motion forward this afternoon and for her eloquent and passionate commitment to this cause. It is terrific to see so many progressive voices in this place and in our community continuing to advocate for marriage equality. I take the opportunity to thank Minister Gentleman and Minister Rattenbury for their contributions to the debate and for their ongoing advocacy within their segments of the community, in Mr Rattenbury's case within the Greens party. It is encouraging for the LGBTI community more broadly to know that we have so many allies across the political spectrum and that people are prepared to advocate for this most important cause.

To a certain extent, there is a degree of sadness that we even have to continue to have these debates in this place, but it is important to continue to keep this issue on the agenda. I have a series of simple messages today, the first of which is that this issue will not go away until there is marriage equality in this country. It will continue to be raised every day, every week, every month and every year until we get an outcome. That is my commitment, and I know that is the commitment of everyone who supports our cause. It will continue to be advocated passionately.

The second point I would like to make is that I think we have all just about had a gutful of the dissembling that comes from the modern-day conservative about the role of government. It is a fascinating thing. It is apparently all right for government to dictate who you can be in a relationship with, who you can marry. Apparently we are now going to decide what clothes you can wear. We have the perverse circumstance where the government does not think it has any role in supporting health and education, to support the states and territories, but is very keen to decide what clothes you can wear and who you can marry.

It is the conundrum of modern conservatism, isn't it? It is all about government having involvement in your private life—what clothes you wear, who you want to marry—but completely walking away from a whole range of important social responsibilities. That is the modern-day conservative. Certainly at the fringe end of the Liberal Party you see that—Cory Bernadi and others, people who sidle up to the Australian Christian Lobby and see that as some sort of moral protection for abhorrent positions that are taken by that organisation in relation to gay, lesbian, transgender and intersex Australians.

Let us also call it quits on people who say, "I know a gay couple who don't want to get married; therefore, marriage equality is not important or shouldn't be progressed." I know straight couples who do not want to get married, but I do not go out there saying that therefore no-one else should be able to get married or that heterosexual marriage is not really important because I know someone who I spoke to once who said they did not really want to get married so it does not really matter. It is only when

you have walked in the shoes of someone who has that basic right denied that you might have a bit of a sense of the hurt that that can cause. It is no sop to this to suggest that just because one, two, 100, 200, 1,000 or 2,000 gay couples do not want to get married, that right should be removed from everyone else. That is a pretty fundamental point here. I have had a gutful of hearing that excuse put forward, particularly from conservative politicians who do the hand-wringing, saying, “I really support you,” but when it comes to actually voting for something that might make a difference, might change a law, might be meaningful, go to water. We see a bit of that in this place, and we certainly have over the years.

I will acknowledge, and I am really pleased, that Mr Hanson and his team supported the births, deaths and marriages legislation earlier this year. That is fantastic, because that breaks a pattern where the Canberra Liberals voted against every single piece of LGBTI reform that occurred in the previous decade. With adoption rights, when we voted—when this parliament voted—to remove discrimination on adoption, the Speaker of this place gave one of the most abhorrent speeches I have ever heard in this place about gay and lesbian people. That stands on the public record as her view. No-one on that side of politics demurred from that; nobody got up and said something different.

All of those law changes, all 105 of them, through each iteration on civil unions or civil partnerships, were blocked and opposed. Ten years on we were told, “That’s actually not so bad. We probably quite support that.” But at the time you did not.

I am pleased you have moved on. It shows that the progressives are winning this argument. We have got to keep on putting it if we are going to win it nationally, but we will. Those who stand opposed to it will look increasingly stupid. I am absolutely certain that at some point in time we will all look back on this period—this period of inaction, this period of dissembling, this period of doing anything to not talk about this—and just shake our heads and go, “I cannot believe it.”

In a week when one of the great lions of progressive reform in this country passed away, it is worth reflecting on his approach to social reform and imagining what this country would be like if there were not people like Gough Whitlam. Where would we be without no-fault divorce? Where would we be without the range of social initiatives that he pushed through, through sheer willpower, passion, political organisation and the ability to rally behind important causes? Think of those fundamental changes that have occurred in our society as a result of that passion. That is there in this debate, and it will continue to be there in this debate so long as good people continue to fight the fight, argue for change and continue to be passionate.

I thank Ms Berry for her passion. I thank Mr Rattenbury for his passion. I thank Mr Gentleman for his passion today. I thank all of my Labor colleagues and everyone who speaks up in favour of marriage equality. Your support is greatly appreciated, and we want to continue to hear your voice as we move towards what is an inevitable change in this country, one that is long overdue. It is time, Madam Deputy Speaker.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (5.42): I want to speak briefly to the amendment and make a couple of other comments.

We will be supporting the amendment. It is really just a factual element; it just informs the motion better.

With regard to the reflections on why we divide and why we do not divide, if I move something in this place, it is because I believe in it and I think it is a reasonable position to have. What happened was a bit disingenuous. I spoke to Mr Rattenbury, gave him an advance copy of my amendment and asked for his support—as I did with Ms Berry; I gave her an advance copy of the motion and asked for her support. So clearly, this was not some tricky political manoeuvre to try to get people to vote against it. I genuinely wanted support for my amendment; I thought it was a good amendment. But that being the case, I do not think that we should not then divide on it. If we moved something that we did not then support, that would be a very odd position to have.

Mr Rattenbury says that this is part of some long-term agenda to try and present him as being part of the government. People understand that he is a part of the government. If you are a cabinet minister, people are probably sold on the fact that you are part of the government.

Other than that, I just reflect again that this may be something that comes to pass in the federal parliament. But it is worth reminding people that from a legislative point of view, the High Court has made it very clear that this is a federal issue and that now it is only the federal parliament that can legislate on this. If people feel strongly one way or the other, I would encourage them to speak to their federal representatives, should they want change or not. That is perhaps the best approach rather than trying to play out necessarily a federal legislative issue in the ACT Assembly.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra) (5.44): I will speak to the amendment and close the debate. We will be supporting Mr Rattenbury's amendment, and I thank him for bringing it to the Assembly today. It does include some factual comments, and it is important to have those included in the motion.

On Mr Hanson's amendment, no, it was not a good amendment, because it took out the part where it says that the ACT government will "continue to voice its support for changes to the Federal Marriage Act and advocate for changes to the Marriage Act 1961".

We on this side of the place will maintain our rage and enthusiasm to push for change, to continue to promote debate and to make sure that marriage equality does not just fade away. Mr Hanson, I invite you to join with us in that regard.

I have to comment on a couple of things that you said in your speech, Mr Hanson, through you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know that Mr Rattenbury and Mr Barr reflected on these as well. It is fantastic for everybody to hear today that you stated your and Ms Lawder's support for and ongoing lobbying of politicians in the federal parliament, but then you go on and say other things that make it hard for us to believe that you really do want to get behind this and continue to support it.

It was really good for you to share the stories of your uncles; that was great. But as Mr Barr said—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the chair, Ms Berry, please.

MS BERRY: Sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker. It was really great for Mr Hanson to share those stories in the chamber, but the whole point of this is that they chose not to get married. Chris and Dylan, Amy and Jess and all of the other people who want to do not have that choice. That is the whole point of marriage equality: you get to choose. Like Mr Barr, I am a bit sick of it. You should just stop, because it is just starting to get a bit overdone.

One year ago, the crowd in the public gallery was overflowing with supporters for marriage equality and there was spontaneous applause when it passed. It was a moment that was special, and it still is today. As a result of our marriage equality act, 31 couples were married—couples who had previously been told that they could not express or formalise their love in the same way as other couples in our community.

I felt it was fitting to reflect on this legislation and what it meant to couples 12 months ago. It is just as fitting today. I asked people to let me know what marriage equality means to them one year on. This is what Meg had to say:

We were one of 31 couples who had the privilege of being legally married for a very short space of time before it was ripped from us.

My initial motivation though mixed was largely political—we should stand up and be counted in this human right issue. But once the wheels started turning and it became possible, I was blown away by how emotional this became for me—for us.

We received a fair bit of publicity, so many recognised us in public. We found strangers from all walks in life embracing us in tears, leaving flowers on our doorstep, putting congratulation notes on our car. Canberra embraced this decision with an outbreak of joy. It was very special.

Thank you ACT Government. Our marriage is no longer legally valid but you gave me the opportunity to say to my children, grandchildren family and community, but most of all to myself and to my partner that this love, this relationship is central to my life and worthy of respect in every way. I will always treasure that.

This is what Krishna and Veronica had to say:

We are one of the 31 couples who married last December under the Same Sex Marriage Act and heard that you were keen to hear from some of us.

We'd like to say that 12 months on from the passing of the Same Sex Marriage Bill in the Assembly, we are still grateful to the ACT Government for taking the courageous step to enable our marriage—albeit short lived.

It was significant and meaningful to be able to get married and for that short time we and our children felt we were recognised as equal citizens. Even though we were disappointed at the High Court decision, we will never forget the level of acceptance we felt over those few precious days. It was a euphoric time and we knew we were making history. It's such a shame that the marriage was annulled—even though we still have the beautiful commemorative certificate!

This anniversary is an unfortunate reminder that the reality is that whilst much community support continues in terms of respecting our relationship—we still do not have true equality—and that hurts.

This is what Darlene and Liz had to say:

We were honoured to be able to marry on 7 December last year, and we will always remember it.

Just like any wedding, it was a wonderful day spent with family and friends, celebrating our life together. Perhaps the only difference between our wedding day and those of other people, was that we had more media. It was special, it was fun, there were cheers of celebration as we were pronounced legally married. It was really special to have our children, Frazer, Anna and Isobel, play a role in the ceremony. Liz's 98 year old father travelled from Toowoomba with her brother and other family members. Darlene's parents and others from her extended family came from Sydney. Friends came from many places, including Canberra, or sent messages of love and support; just like any other wedding.

That fact that our legislation was overturned in the High Court does not change the way these couples feel about each other or diminish the memories of their wedding days. Our actions in this Assembly showed these families and countless others that we believe they are equal members of our community, deserving of respect and equality before the law. The commonwealth's challenge and the High Court's decision were a setback, but not a defeat. The High Court rejected the notion of a fixed meaning of marriage. It held that the marriage power in the constitution allows the commonwealth parliament to make a law with respect to same-sex marriage.

Today we are calling on the commonwealth to remove the discrimination that exists in the definition of marriage in the commonwealth Marriage Act and to recognise the right of all committed couples to solemnise their marriage. I remain hopeful that the federal government will show leadership on this issue.

By supporting this motion we are challenging outdated legal notions and meet our responsibilities to the people we represent to make sure that each and every member of the Canberra community is treated with respect and dignity. These are the principles that have brought us into government, they are the principles the majority of the community support, they are the principles of progressive government, and they are the principles of this motion.

I thank Mr Barr, Mr Gentleman and Mr Rattenbury for their comments on this motion and I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Arts—policy

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (5.53): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes the Minister for Arts, Joy Burch's failures in developing the Territory's arts sector which includes:
 - (a) giving \$19 000 of taxpayer money in the 2015 Arts ACT Project Funding round to a theatre production called *Kill Climate Deniers*;
 - (b) consenting to a Fringe Festival act, which included a performer in a Nazi uniform and wearing a Hitler moustache, who stripped down to her underwear;
 - (c) removal of ArtSound FM from Key Arts Organisation status;
 - (d) failure to commit to Stage 2 of the Belconnen Arts Centre;
 - (e) failure to fully deliver on the ACT Arts Policy Framework; and
 - (f) failure to adequately consult with the ACT arts community;
- (2) expresses strong concerns regarding this Minister's judgement and professionalism; and
- (3) calls on the Minister to table in the Assembly by the last sitting day in February 2015, the Government's:
 - (a) proposed review of its Arts Policy Framework, including a detailed plan on stakeholder consultations, funding and implementation; and
 - (b) strategy for the delivery of its Arts Policy Framework to date, including a detailed plan on stakeholder consultations, funding and implementation.

It was delightful to have Ms Burch say this morning that she would like to see some intellectual engagement on the issue of the arts, then, because of her own personal technique, she just went straight to the slur. That is what you do when you cannot hold an intellectual argument or an intellectual engagement. That is what you do when you do not have a case. Of course, what the minister said was that I was a book burner. I thought, "Let's consult with the philosophers about book burning in the modern context." As everyone in this place would know, Alain de Botton is a well-known modern contemporary philosopher, perhaps one of the great philosophers. He has certainly written several books about it. I remembered what he had said in his book *Art as Therapy* about book burners:

Censorship does not meet with much enthusiasm these days. We tend to think of it as a small minded defensive interference with a cherished freedom to express ourselves. We associate it with book burning, political repression and ignorant intolerance.

So that is the slur the minister throws because she does not have a case. But de Botton, in his role as a commentator on modern society, has written books called *The Consolations of Philosophy*, *How Proust Can Change Your Life*, *Status Anxiety* and *Religion for Atheists*, and now he has written this book called *Art as Therapy*. He goes on to say:

However, it is time to recognize that, in most countries, this phase has definitely passed.

That is, the book burners. He continues:

We should revisit the idea of censorship, and potentially consider it not as unenlightened suppression of critical ideas, but as a sincere attempt to organize the world for our benefit. The threat now is not that wonderful truths will be repressed by malign authorities, but rather that we will drown in chaos, overwhelmed by the irrelevant and unhelpful trivia, unable to concentrate on what is genuinely important.

Unable to concentrate on what is genuinely important and, indeed, fund what is genuinely important.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Stop the clock. Mr Smyth, resume your seat for one moment. I remind you that the statement about book burning was withdrawn by the member.

MR SMYTH: No, that is okay.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am just reminding you.

MR SMYTH: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I am not accusing anybody in this place of being a book burner.

It is interesting about what we ascribe to, and, indeed, what we fund. It is interesting that the leader of one of the local arts communities entered the fray in this on the Twitter space. What did he say about this issue? What he said was—and Ms Burch got the same tweet:

A tolerance of satire, even puerile attention seeking titles, the sign of a healthy robust democracy.

That may be true but it does not mean you have to fund it. We all heard at the estimates committee—particularly you and I, Madam Deputy Speaker, because we were there for all of it—groups like the Childers Group say that the dollar is really tight; in fact the dollars have been reduced by this government. So why is it that we are funding puerile, attention-seeking titles instead of seeking to ensure that we strive to be the best?

Again, what does de Botton say about art? It is interesting. Let us have an intellectual engagement here, minister; it will be interesting to see if you can. He said:

What is the purpose of art? This book argues that the problem is not primarily located in the individual. It lies in the way that art is taught, sold and presented by the art establishment. Since the beginning of the 20th century our relationship with art has been weakened by profound institutional reluctance to address the question of what art is for. This is a question that has quite unfairly come to feel impatient, illegitimate and a little impudent. Because often—

Mr de Botton goes on to say—

the saying “It’s art for art’s sake” specifically rejects the idea that art might for be the sake of anything in particular and therefore leaves the high status of art mysterious and vulnerable. Despite the esteem art enjoys, its importance is too often assumed rather than explained.

He goes on to say:

What if art has a purpose that can be defined and discussed in plain terms? Art can be a tool, and we need to focus more clearly on what kind of tool it is and what good it can do for us.

He goes on to say basically that art is an extender for the mind. It is a tool for the mind. It allows us to address our psychological frailties, as he calls them. The book then looks at the seven functions of art, which he defines as remembering, hope, sorrow, rebalancing, self-understanding, growth and appreciation, not puerile, attention-seeking titles—and that is the problem with this minister. This minister does not actually understand the arts and does not get what they are for; hence this motion today.

With respect to giving \$19,000 worth of taxpayers’ money—from very limited money—to a group that have a production called *Kill Climate Deniers*, I think in the current political worldwide environment urging anybody to kill anything, even in jest, shows bad judgement and bad taste. If it is serious, it is an outrage. If it was a joke, it is just not funny. And that is the problem with this minister. Unfortunately, she is in charge of the arts, and the arts are not doing what they should in this city.

Paragraph (1)(b) of the motion refers to “consenting to a Fringe Festival act, which included a performer in a Nazi uniform and wearing a Hitler mask, who stripped down to her underwear”. In its right place, that might be acceptable. Burlesque has a long tradition, and I do not disavow that tradition. But was it appropriate in a family event?

At 6 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly having been put and negatived, the debate was resumed.

MR SMYTH: I am sure the minister would like this debate to end, but we continue—thank God for that. It is a question of where the arts should be held, what the

government should fund—and, indeed, the government’s knowledge of what was going on, because the FOI revealed that the minister and her officials perhaps did not know as much as they should have, or in some cases knew too much but did not do anything about it, even though they were warned about the activities of the director of the fringe festival.

If you want to see whether this minister truly has her thumb on the pulse of the arts community in the ACT, you have only to go to the removal of ArtSound FM from key arts organisation status and what it means and the lack of understanding of the officials, and indeed the minister, of what they have done. At this stage ArtSound’s funding has not been reduced. The government’s policy in relation to how the funding can be used has changed. The policy was introduced without consultation, again against the way the government are meant to operate, or say that they will. ArtSound was given no advance notice.

The new policy requires that the funding ArtSound receives cannot be used for administrative purposes; it can only be used for the development of artists. For a community radio station, the former is essential to enabling the latter. So we have this chicken and egg situation. This change puts enormous pressure on ArtSound’s ability to deliver on its funding obligations and, as a consequence, staff numbers have been cut back. Now, that is supporting the arts! And on top of that, the remaining staff have had hours cut back.

But even worse, the government’s policy means that ArtSound must now rely on volunteers to do the work that would be otherwise done by paid staff. That is contrary to the government’s own policy on the use of volunteer labour in the workplace. It would be interesting to see how the government might deliver its programs without administrative support. This is what the government is expecting of ArtSound.

The government argues that ArtSound receive administrative support funding from the commonwealth through the Community Broadcasting Foundation. Yes, they do. The CBF provides some small salary subsidy—in this case only \$10,000, I understand—which is applied for competitively against 350 other community radio stations. So there are no guarantees. Other grants are sought but are restricted to specific projects, equipment capitalisation et cetera—hardly sufficient to provide the administrative support that a busy community-based organisation needs and certainly not enough to justify the government’s policy of prohibiting the use of government funding for administrative support.

The government has said it does not provide funding so that ArtSound can “just play music”. How patronising is that? ArtSound has never used government funding so that it can “just play music”. All ArtSound radio programs are presented by unpaid volunteers. Running costs for broadcasts are funded by membership, sponsorship and donations revenue. Further, included in ArtSound’s volunteer presented and produced programs are around 10 hours of work of broadcast time, and an additional 30 hours per week of pre-production time for programs devoted to and associated with artistic development in Canberra. Developing the arts community—there is a noble challenge, Madam Speaker; and including broadcasts of locally recorded concerts and live studio performances.

ArtSound also operates a parallel private internet radio network service in 12 retirement villages. The government has also placed restrictions against the threat of defunding if the ArtSound board is not comprised of people independent of artistic involvement in the station or people in any way contracted to or remunerated by the station. That is an infringement of human rights as well as the rights of the members of the organisation to serve on the board. The board has conflict of interest policies in place to deal with any such instances.

ArtSound's constitution and the licence conditions set by the Australian Communications and Media Authority are such that board compositions should be drawn from the membership and include a diverse range of appropriate skills. Under its broadcasting licence, ArtSound cannot open itself to a situation where the ACT government could be seen to be in a position to dictate, either directly or indirectly, the way it constitutes its board or the nature of its programming.

This is the sort of regime this minister runs. The problem, of course, is that we do not know where we are going, and you can see that from the failure to commit to stage 2 of the Belconnen Arts Centre—something I know you are very much in favour of, Madam Speaker—or, indeed, to deliver on its own arts policy framework.

It was interesting, in discussion with many arts groups over the last couple of months, and indeed through the estimates process, how many people were unaware of how this is to be delivered. There is no strategy and there is no funding. There are no targets and there are no time lines. What we have are some principles, and then they say, "This is being done by some programs." But where is it taking us and what does it do?

It is interesting that, for instance, in another publication, *Art Cities of the Future*—and wouldn't we all aspire to Canberra being an arts city of the future?—there is a fabulous quotation from Jane Neal about Cluj. "Where is Cluj?" you may ask. Cluj is in Romania and it has a population of 309,000. It is a bit smaller than the ACT. It has almost 50,000 students, so it is quite a lot like the ACT. And it has the same problems that we have. It is seen often as a small regional city and not up to the big boys like Sydney or Melbourne. I quote:

As the current generation of Cluj artists were growing up, they knew—even at a subconscious level—that it would be much more difficult for them to achieve national recognition and success than their Bucharest counterparts. They felt they would always battle with the 'provincial' label.

And who has not, as an artist in Canberra, battled with that? It continues:

They saw the necessity of fostering a thriving community of artists in Cluj, and this was coupled with the understanding that to achieve fame and recognition they would first have to break into the international market and receive validation that Bucharest's art taste-makers could not ignore. These twin goals combined together to provide a fertile environment for artistic exchange and development.

Are we that brave that we want to see Canberra in the next edition of *Art Cities of the Future* published by Phaidon Press? You do not see that sort of aspiration in the arts

policy framework. But what is more important, you do not see a strategy to deliver it. It is interesting in talking to so many groups that they do not understand how the strategy is delivered and they do not understand what funding is available for the strategy.

That is why I have included paragraphs (a) and (b) in part (3). The strategy is actually under review, or it is meant to be reviewed in 2014. But many in the arts community did not know that, and, of all I have spoken to, none have been contacted about it. So nobody knows how this review is being conducted. That is why in part (3) I say that the government, by the last sitting day in February, should table its proposed review of the arts policy framework. I want to know what the detailed plan was on stakeholder consultation, how much funding there was and how the review was carried out.

Paragraph (b) states that we should have a strategy to deliver the arts policy framework. Again, what I think would be valuable is to know what the strategy is and the detailed plan on stakeholder consultations, funding and implementation so that we know where the government has gone.

If you look at this document, it could well just be another document like so many that this government has that sits on the internet and they say, “Well, because we’ve got programs it’s okay.” Page 7 states:

The Framework provides a structure within which arts policy and the goals and outcomes associated with policy will be developed ...

Well, where is that development? Where are the goals? Where are the outcomes? It says that it will—and I quote:

guide the implementation and review of existing policies and programs. This will include ...

And it goes on. The “Context” reads:

The ACT Arts Policy Framework sets out ideas ...

So we need to know what is happening. The “Guiding Vision” states:

Canberra and its region comprise an inclusive, unique and creative arts landscape where excellence is highly valued.

Yet puerile titles are funded. And there is the difference:

Canberra and its region comprises an inclusive, unique and creative arts landscape where excellence is highly valued.

Yet, from one of the leaders of the arts community in the ACT, what we are funding is puerile satire. If you want excellence, you need to fund it, you need to have it work and you need to make it work properly. That is why in part (2) I express strong concerns regarding this minister’s judgement and professionalism, because she clearly

thinks she wanted a debate and some intellectual engagement on this, but I am not sure she is up to it, Madam Speaker. And from her actions you can see that. Where you take away funding from ArtSound, a valuable group for the community who rely on the radio, what you have is a dumbing down of the arts in the ACT. (*Time expired.*)

MS BURCH (Brindabella—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Disability, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Racing and Gaming, Minister for Women and Minister for the Arts) (6.09): I am delighted to talk on arts and to take the opportunity to speak about the growth and development of the arts sector in the ACT under this government. Quite contrary to Mr Smyth's assertion, our arts community is thriving.

This year the government has provided \$8.5 million in funding to a wide range of artists, organisations and facilities that support the development of arts and provide countless opportunities for the community to engage with arts. This funding is critical to the development of arts, and I am pleased to report that it has delivered strong outcomes against the arts policy framework.

The shadow minister referred to key arts organisations, but I am pleased to inform members that 20 key arts organisations are supported in the ACT across circus, dance, music, literature, theatre and visual arts to the tune of around \$4 million a year. These organisations provide a diverse range of opportunities for the community to access and participate in all aspects of the arts. Importantly, these organisations nurture and support individual artists by providing critical infrastructure, studios to develop their works, performance space, rehearsal and performance areas, and galleries and shops not only to display their works but to sell them. In 2013 alone \$1.7 million was returned through this program as income directly to artists or for artist activity.

Mr Smyth made great comment about the removal of ArtSound FM from key arts organisation status. In case he is ill informed on this, I inform him that the key arts organisation round of grants are peer assessed—that is, peer assessed by those with high standing and of high regard in the community. The peer panel for ArtSound's application was, for Mr Smyth's interest, Ms Philippa Buining, a theatre producer, Tobias Cole, an internationally renowned countertenor with Opera Australia, Julie Dyson, the National Director of Ausdance, Rafe Morris, a musician, Barbara McConchie, a visual artist from the ANU School of Art, and Melanie Tait, a local broadcaster and playwright. Peer assessed—it is not me with a pen, as Mr Smyth would have it if he had his way, writing key arts organisation funding. This was a peer assessment; a rigorous independent process made those decisions around ArtSound.

I would like to talk about another key arts organisation—that is, Megalo. Based at Kingston, Megalo not only provides a working space for local printmakers, but it is a space where members of the public can come in off the street and work with artists of national or international significance. Since its move to Kingston, supported by the government, Megalo has undergone some impressive transformation. Gallery visitors and membership have just about doubled. Last year alone Megalo provided over 10,000 hours of studio access for artists. I am very pleased that the board of management and staff and members of Megalo have confirmed that they wish to stay in their current premises.

I would like to mention a special exhibition put on by Megalo in collaboration with its neighbour, the Canberra Glassworks, another key arts organisation we support. This exhibition, *Glint*, was collaboration between four printmakers and four glass artists who worked across disciplines to present a fabulous joint exhibition of glass and print. This exhibition could not have been possible without the government's co-location of both organisations at the Kingston arts precinct.

Another 18 key arts organisations do great work here in the ACT. Any suggestion that they are not developing the territory arts sector displays a lack of knowledge about what is actually happening in this sector.

Just recently I announced successful applications for the 2015 project funding round, and I am pleased to report that the government was able to provide a record number of grants—49—for next year, up from 42 in this year. This is evidence that the government is not only supporting the arts sector but increasing its support. A record number of applications were received.

Mr Smyth has mentioned the Aspen Island Theatre Company's project, a play being developed with the working title *Kill Climate Deniers*. It is, no doubt, a provocative title, but without knowing anything about this other than its title, Mr Smyth has instantly declared it unworthy of project funding or support simply because it holds the word "kill". If Mr Smyth's logic were applied to all works of arts, generations of school children would never have read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and what a tragedy it would have been for our children and others not to read that classic. The reaction to Mr Smyth's kneejerk attack on this play shows that Canberrans are a little more sophisticated when they look at titles.

I found it personally amusing that a week or so after the announcements were made and in response to something Andrew Bolt had put out, the creator of this theatre piece had months before pegged Mr Smyth's reaction almost to a T. I will read from act 1, scene 1 of the play:

Politician—I am appalled and disappointed that this organisation has chosen to fund a theatre project entitled 'Kill Climate Deniers', using, let me remind you, taxpayers money. I understand it to be an offensive piece of leftist propaganda. **I haven't read it, nor do I intend to.** I have no desire to engage with the work itself or to discover that it might be more complex and layered than its title suggests. I am only interested in using it for short-term political leverage and to stir up some outrage to distract from how little I myself am doing with my own taxpayer-funded salary.

The creator of *Kill Climate Deniers* had Mr Smyth pegged to a T. It is a shame Mr Smyth chose to follow Andrew Bolt and attack these artists. It is also a shame that Mr Smyth—and he has continued to here—has disrespected the esteemed Canberra artists of the panel who assessed the applications and recommended the projects. That panel included Professor David Williams from the Childers Group. Indeed, Mr Smyth is often quoting the Childers Group. They are a very fine group and very strong advocates of the arts. Mr Williams is from the Childers Group and is a former Director of ANU School of Art. Other panel members are: Francis Owusu, former

ACT young Australian of the year; Fiete Geier, one of Canberra's most respected and loved guitarists and musicians; Bernie Slater, an acclaimed visual artist; Karen Vickery, an actor and director who has taught at NIDA; and Professor Jen Webb, a poet and a writer from the University of Canberra.

It is a shame that Mr Smyth has attempted to smear this entire project funding round and, by extension, the other 48 artists who have received funding. His political attack diverted attention from artists such as Sparrow Folk, who will take their glam folk act celebrating Canberra's suburbs to the Edinburgh fringe festival, and writers like Irma Gold, who secured project funding to travel to Thailand to research her two new picture books for children.

I will quote from Ms Gold, where she recently informed the *Canberra Times*:

We are fortunate in the ACT to have a government that has consistently provided a strong funding program to support the arts. This is so important with writing projects that can take years to come to fruition. The grants I have received have enabled me to develop my practice in ways that otherwise simply wouldn't have been possible.

They are the words from a grant recipient, local writer Irma Gold. It is typical of how Mr Smyth ignores the views of the ACT arts community but, again, prefers to attack me and individual artists to score some cheap political points. He has mentioned his conversation with arts groups that think that the arts framework is failing. Well, he must be talking to a different group, because the artists community that I talk to value the arts framework and value the funding programs that sit under it.

Of course, this was another chance for Mr Smyth to get all outraged and indignant, as Mr Hanson did earlier in the day and trotted out the tired old example about the Nazi stripper. His motion refers to consenting to a fringe festival act which included a performer in Nazi uniform wearing a Hitler moustache who stripped down to her underwear. When I look at the daily program I see that Mr Smyth had nothing to say about our multicultural community, had nothing to say about the OECD ranking Canberra as the world's most livable city, had nothing to say about the work of carers, had nothing to say about early intervention and therapy services, had nothing to say on marriage equality, but he had plenty to say about strippers and underwear. This is not an intellectual policy debate; this is Mr Smyth taking cheap political shots at me at anyone's expense.

If we get to the fringe festival, through the 300-odd pages that went to the Canberra Liberals as part of an FOI request, they will know absolutely that I did not consent to that act; we engaged an artistic director. That artistic director, Jorian Gardiner, delivered a successful festival—18,000-plus visitors went to the fringe festival. It was well received and well regarded. There were over 100 artists and Mr Smyth is worried about this one act. He made some comment that it was a family event. It was not a family event; everybody in that audience was advised that this was adult content.

But just on this, I will quote Jewish writer-director-actor, Mel Brooks, who said in regard to Hitler:

You have to bring him down with ridicule, because if you stand on a soapbox and you match him with rhetoric, you're just as bad as he is, but if you can make people laugh at him, then you're one up on him. It's been one of my lifelong jobs to make the world laugh at Adolf Hitler.

When the Canberra Liberals were making much to-do about this back in February, I say again that not one person who was at the fringe festival made contact with my office saying they were offended by the act. I will read some comments from the *Canberra Times*:

I was front and centre at the fringe (I'm even in the above picture!), this was one of the better performances of the night, and was a huge parody making fun of Hitler and the Nazis. I seriously doubt any of the wowsers making a big fuss about this have seen it or have the slightest idea what they are talking about.

Another:

I was at the show, and how a Jewish person or in fact anybody could be offended is beyond me. If Giulia Jones wants to stop people making fun of Hitler because it could damage our multicultural society, I think Ms Jones is the one that has serious questions to answer.

And:

Mr Hanson, one would think you'd find some real issues to address. Does this mean that the current ACT government is doing a reasonable job if this is the best you can come up with?

Or:

Shame on the Canberra Liberals for using such a sensitive tool as this to achieve their political goals and for defaming artists or arts organisations.

That is telling, and it continues here. Mr Smyth also mentioned the review. He should know this is scheduled for review in 2014. The processes of that review are being finalised, and we will talk with many community organisations about the best way that we can check this is delivering the aspirations.

I could go to many more examples about how this government is supporting our artists in creating works that are thought-provoking. I will not take the role of a censor. I will not step in the way of creative artistic development. I will always support innovation and arts that provoke and get the community talking. It is a cheap political shot at me from Mr Smyth bringing in his textbook and challenging me to have an intellectual debate. He had no interest in an intellectual debate; this was always to be an insult.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (6.24): I intend to keep my remarks brief, mostly because I cannot wait to hear Mr Smyth's response to Ms Burch's claim of his focus on strippers and underwear. I saw Mr Smyth pick the pen up and start making some notes; I can only imagine that it is going to be a witty response, but I will wait and see.

We have, of course, covered some of these topics in the Assembly previously, most notably during the no-confidence motion on 25 February this year, when we spent some time discussing the Nazi burlesque show at the fringe festival. I pointed out at the time, and reiterate now, that something as horrible as Nazism has been addressed through comedy and satire many times before, from Mel Brooks's story *The Producers* through to *Hogan's Heroes* and even *Seinfeld's* Soup Nazi. People do often deal with complex and dark issues by making light of them.

More recently, we have seen the Canberra Liberals become upset about an artsACT grant for a play called *Kill Climate Deniers*. In a perfect example of life imitating art imitating life, the play opens with lines intended to be spoken by a generic reactionary politician who says:

I am appalled and disappointed that this organisation has chosen to fund a theatre project entitled "Kill Climate Deniers" using, let me remind you, taxpayer money.

I sped through that quote because we have already heard it today. At the time, the play's director, Julian Hobba, said the artwork dealt with some dangerous ideas but quite explicitly did not condone violence. I remember commentary at the time from David Whitney, the director of artsACT, along the lines that anyone who thought this play was an endorsement of political violence would probably also think Shakespeare's plays are an endorsement of regicide. That sums up quite neatly the level of understanding and analysis that we are seeing with some of these works. The play's director, Mr Hobba, said:

Reactionary negative responses about a work of art based on partial impressions are a common part of our cultural life. It's a good way of keeping artists in their place, but it most often misunderstands the full nature of the work.

In a conveniently timed column in this week's *CityNews*—an interesting publication but one in which at least Michael Moore's columns usually make some sense—Michael Moore turns his attention to this issue and declares:

The Liberal Party doesn't have a consistent, well thought out, shared view on how freedom is achieved. Instead, political opportunism drives an inconsistent approach.

He goes on to point out that Mr Smyth complains about a lack of government intervention in the arts and that he would no doubt complain about freedoms if the government had intervened.

It is interesting to watch the balancing act the Canberra Liberals are trying to perform when on the one hand the federal Attorney-General is defending people's right to be bigots and on the other hand the local shadow arts spokesperson is scoring political points by attacking a lack of government intervention in free speech.

The motion goes on to canvass the removal of ArtSound FM from key arts organisation status. I listened to this discussion with some interest today, because I

have now heard two fairly different accounts of the situation. I think it will prompt me to give ArtSound a call myself and have a chat to them about it. I have been out to their site previously, and I think they provide a great community service. We have heard the two versions of the story. I think there is one that probably requires some further investigation—the sense that they perhaps do not have the money now for admin funding versus the peer review process of actually moving them across into the program funding away from key arts organisations, and also where ArtSound are going in the future.

The motion also calls on the government to table a proposed review of the arts policy framework by the last sitting day in February. This is a review that the Minister for Arts has already committed to in the policy framework itself. I am advised that it is proceeding on schedule; I can only imagine that the minister will bring it to the Assembly.

Having considered this motion and listened to the debate, I do not support Mr Smyth's motion unamended. I think any amendment that would be moved would probably be so far away from what Mr Smyth intended and require such extensive rewriting that it really would be an entirely different motion. So I will not be voting to support Mr Smyth's motion today. I acknowledge the discussion that has taken place. I have found it interesting in places, and I have no doubt that we will re-prosecute these issues at some point in the future.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (6.29), in reply: You have some interesting conversations in this place, and you kind of take it from Mr Rattenbury some days because I think I see Mr Rattenbury at more arts events than I see the minister. That is an interesting contrast between the pair. I was writing furiously, and I was just thinking that Ms Burch said that I was challenging her to intellectual engagement on the arts, but it was she who threw intellectual engagement on the arts up in her speech this morning. I responded, thinking she would respond. I quote a couple of philosophers whose books I happened to have in my office; she resorts to Mel Brooks. That is the level of debate. I have got a lot of respect for Mel Brooks as a social satirist and a commentator on the human condition, but, when even your local leaders are saying that this is a puerile thing, you have to question the funding.

The minister then hides behind *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I do not think *To Kill a Mockingbird* was funded by a government grant. It was the expression of an individual who put their time and effort into writing a book. They did not seek government funding, but they did publish a great work of art. Mr Rattenbury mentions Shakespeare. I do not recall "Kill Richard III" as the title; it is just *Richard III*.

The point I made when we had this argument, and it is a very important argument, is that with rights comes responsibilities. Is it my right to say whatever I want and claim it is freedom of speech or art? That might be your view. But you have to put things in the context of the times. At a time when we have various groups around the world saying, "Kill Australians," it is interesting that the government choose to sponsor this piece of work.

Key arts organisation status may be peer assessed and these artworks may be peer assessed, but the assessment is made against the government's policies and criteria.

So either we have an admission from the minister that she has no policies or criteria about what the arts grants should be seeking to achieve, or we simply have a minister totally devoid of any commitment or input on what significant government expenditure should achieve. Therefore, to say that the minister has no influence over that peer assessment is either nonsense or negligence. The peer assessment is not independent if the government sets policies and criteria, and she cannot distance herself from peer assessment in this way. It is a very feeble argument.

What do we get? The arts are very important. Mr Rattenbury was there at TEDx the other Saturday. A professor from the University of Canberra talked about the importance of the arts in the development of the young brain and how the arts provide stimulation to the three cores of activity in the brain and help produce greater neural transfer across the left-right divide. If we get it right, the arts are a stimulus to learning; they actually help literacy and numeracy.

In the formulation of policy about the arts for which the minister is responsible, in education, we have a suggestion from the Childers Group, which includes most of the people she read off that list. I speak to those people whose names the minister read from those lists. They are saying that it is time we had a strategy, and they understand the funding. But it is more than that. Let us just go to the estimates. That group, the Childers Group, said, “We want an arts officer from artsACT, from the arts community, embedded in education.” What did the minister say? “No; we’ve got arts people.” That was not their point. They wanted people out of the community assisting and growing those relationships. Again, where is the commitment from this Minister for the Arts to make it work?

I would recommend to all that when the TEDx talks are put up they should go and listen to what Anita Collins had to say about the development of arts in the early ages—zero to five and the zero to seven—and how it actually assists with literacy and numeracy. It is fascinating. Let us have an intellectual engagement about that one, minister. Of course, you were not there. There is this defence: “Mr Smyth didn’t speak to any of the other motions today.” Goodness me! If I had, we would not be having this debate, because it would have extended all of the other debates given that this is the last item on the notice paper. I am sure the minister would love not to be doing this debate today, but bad luck: here it is. We should have intellectual engagement.

If the group that want to put on *Kill Climate Deniers* want to do it, go and do it. Go for your life. That is your right. My question is: why would the government fund that? Let’s go to the context of the last debate. Imagine if a group came forward and put up a proposal for *Kill Gays*, *Kill the Disabled* or *Kill Ethnic Groups*. There would be outrage. But somehow it is acceptable to fund an organisation, however tricky. “We wrote this down and it was a trap for the unsuspecting politician.” But how acceptable is it, in the climate that we live in—this is what I said—to exhort anybody to kill anybody by publishing something called *Kill Climate Deniers*. If you had targeted any other of those groups or minorities, or another group in the community, there would be outrage, and there should be outrage.

It is not smart when you have to use the word “kill”. Shakespeare did not have to. An example was used about Shakespeare. Yes, Shakespeare’s plays are quite violent. The

majority of people, let's face it, have not read all of Shakespeare's works, but many would know the various titles and associate them with Shakespeare. It is often the title that the majority of the public will hear; that is all they will hear, and they will make their judgement, whether it is right or wrong. We say, "Don't judge a book by its cover," but that is what happens.

That is why there will be posters potentially around town saying "kill climate deniers", brought to you by the ACT government, blessed by the ACT government and given the imprimatur of ACT government funding, which, let's face it, people leverage off. It is some sort of authorisation. Whether it was intended to be that way or not, it is used in that manner: "We received a grant to put this on" indicates that it is important; it is a tick of approval. I would question the judgement in allowing that to happen.

The minister cannot escape by saying that somebody else did it. I would assume, minister, that you have some control over your department. I would assume that you approved the policies and the criteria. I would assume that you are in charge of your department. Then again, maybe I assume wrong. I think that the level of debate that we had today, when she forgot her own challenge, shows that this is a minister who is not up to the portfolio. This is a very important portfolio.

Let me go to the book *Culture City*. It talks about culture in the arts and how we build it into our city. Matthias Sauerbruch says:

The city is many things: it is a place of communication and power, of economics and of politics; it is a traffic node, a living space, a work place and a pleasure ground. The city is the locus of the community, if at first only one of purpose. In both form and content, the city is the most public manifestation of those aspects known as culture—

read "arts"—

it embodies our cultural memory—

read "arts memory"—

at the same time it is the place of culture's continuous renewal—

read "arts continuous renewal".

When the minister agreed with her colleagues to can city to the lake and the city plan, and when Mr Corbell's plan, "A capital future", was not acted upon after it was delivered in 2005, I wonder how they helped with the creation of an arts city, putting work into place to inspire people, to challenge, to send a message.

Let me go to a book by Elizabeth Mossop and Paul Walton, *City Spaces: Art & Design*. The book refers to a quote from Barbara Kruger:

... if architecture is a slab of meat, then so-called public art is a piece of garnish laying next to it ... While this is often the case, to describe most art in public spaces as decorative is to oversimplify the issue.

That is the problem. We have got a minister who likes to simplify the issues. She said, “Let’s have some intellectual engagement.” Her contribution to intellectual engagement was to simply read a list of inputs. As we so often hear from Labor governments, it is all about the money they spend. They do not say: “Did we get value for money? Did it improve the community? Did it grow the community? Did it expand the community?” Instead, it is simply: “We spent the money.” We all know that Labor governments are good at spending money, but there are people out there in the community who want to know where that money is going and where the strategy to deliver the framework is. That is why this motion is important. They want to know when the review is being conducted. That is why this motion is important. As we found out at estimates, the government is doing an economic impact assessment of the arts on our community, and most people in the community did not even know it was being done.

This is a minister who is negligent and who is failing in her job as Minister for the Arts. (*Time expired.*)

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 7

Noes 8

Mr Coe
Mrs Dunne
Mr Hanson
Mrs Jones

Ms Lawder
Mr Smyth
Mr Wall

Mr Barr
Ms Berry
Dr Bourke
Ms Burch

Ms Gallagher
Mr Gentleman
Ms Porter
Mr Rattenbury

Question so resolved in the negative.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Live lighter

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (6.43): On Monday I represented the Chief Minister at the launch of the live lighter campaign in the ACT. It aims to increase awareness and motivate interest in healthy eating, healthy weight and exercise. True to its message, we started the launch with a healthy dose of activity—walking from the Patrick White lawns and taking the stairs to the fourth floor in the National Library. The Heart Foundation ACT was funded to deliver live lighter through a healthy Canberra grant. An ACT newspoll survey found that the community strongly supports the ACT government taking active steps to reduce levels of overweight and obesity in adults.

The Heart Foundation originally developed the campaign in Western Australia in partnership with the Cancer Council for the Western Australian Department of Health. It is a healthy lifestyle campaign aimed at adults aged 25 to 64 years. So far the live lighter campaign evaluation results have been highly successful in Western Australia. Based on anti-smoking campaigns, the live lighter campaign advertisements are graphic in purpose. It is necessary to get the message through to the public.

In 2014 the Chief Health Officer's report noted that 63 per cent of Canberra's adults are overweight or obese and this rate is increasing. Live lighter's graphic "grabbable gut outside means toxic fat inside" advertisement is a sit-up-and-take-notice message. It is the same kind of message which has been effective for HIV/AIDS, which has been effective for smoking and which has been effective for getting people to wear seatbelts while they are in their cars.

Visceral fat is particularly harmful and lies deep within the abdominal cavity located around the organs—heart, kidney and liver. A large waist is a risk factor for type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers. The good news is that the middle-age spread need not be inevitable or an enduring fact. Heart Foundation chief executive Tony Stubbs says that small changes in the way you eat and how active you are can have a big impact on reducing your chances of getting heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

Live lighter provides new insights into the meaning of being overweight and motivates and moves people into action about their own health and wellbeing. While too much fat is harmful, we do need some fat for good health. This is why live lighter talks about achieving and maintaining a healthy weight rather than focusing on weight loss. The campaign encourages discussion about overweight and obesity as a critical population-level health issue while also providing the resources and tools to help people make and maintain the healthy lifestyle changes that are useful to them.

The live lighter website has testimonials, facts, recipes, meals and activity planners. This campaign is a vital component of the suite of activities supporting the ACT government's towards zero growth healthy weight action plan. I congratulate the ACT government and the Heart Foundation ACT on their partnership and their ongoing commitment to the health and wellbeing of the ACT community.

I look forward to seeing the campaign in action on our television screens—it already is—on our bus stops, social media and all around us very soon and seeing Canberrans taking up a healthy lifestyle challenge.

Master Builders Association ACT

MR COE (Ginninderra) (6.46): I rise this evening to speak about the Master Builders Association of the ACT. The MBA is Australia's major building and construction association and the national body is the oldest industry association in the country. The movement began in the early 1870s and was federated nationally in 1890. MBA ACT was formed in 1925 and now has over 1,200 members from five building and construction sectors—residential builders, commercial builders, civil contractors, subcontractors, trade contractors and suppliers and professional consultants.

MBA ACT provides its members services, including industrial relations, technical assistance, networking events, insurance, government liaison and promotional opportunities. The association also provides comprehensive training and employment through its training organisation, Master Builders Group Training, which has been operating since 1969.

Master Builders ACT is governed by the executive committee, including president Valdis Luks, treasurer Frank Porreca, and other members—Peter Naylor, Andy Crompton, Hans Sommer, Frank Porreca, Gracie Ferreira, David Colbertaldo, Nigel Forde, Stephen Wise and Marc Roland. I would also like to acknowledge executive director John Miller and deputy executive director Jerry Howard. I think members on both sides of the chamber would agree that the advice and advocacy provided by the MBA is first rate and a real credit to all involved, especially John and Jerry.

Last Thursday I was pleased to attend the MBA ACT annual dinner at the National Museum. The annual dinner was an opportunity for members of the building and construction industry, along with members of the community, to gather to recognise the achievements and contributions of those in the industry. The guest speaker for the evening was John Mackay, who spoke about his life and involvement with the Canberra business community.

Hans Sommer was awarded life membership of the MBA at the annual dinner. Hans has been involved in the building and construction industry for over 20 years. He has always been actively involved in the work of the master builders for a significant time, including as the chair of the master builders work health and safety advisory group. Hans has also been involved in the MBA's executive committee, peak council and the professional sector council. Hans joined Village Building Co in 1998 and managed their Wollongong office. Prior to his time at Village, Hans was a director on 14 ACT government joint-venture development boards and was a public servant.

Longstanding members of the MBA were also acknowledged on the night. Members who had been involved for 20 years were: Designcraft Furniture, Trend Windows and Doors, Stramit Industries, Schiavello and Capital Landscape Supplies. Members who had been involved for 25 years were: Rider Levett Bucknall, Manteena, Village Building Co, Robinson Building Group, Wilde and Woollard and Walpett Engineering. Cercol Construction Services was recognised for 35 years of involvement with the MBA.

The master builders build the community award was presented to firms involved who contributed to the boundless Canberra all abilities playground. Firms recognised were: ACT Recycling, ActewAGL, Boss Constructions, Bradley Allen Love, Brindabella Contractors, Colliers International, Construction Control Australia, Cord Civil, Cox Architecture, D Group, Elvin Group, Hindmarsh Constructions Australia, Independent Property Group, Indesco, Koundouris Group, Milin Bros, RAM Constructions, Red Hub Documentation Services, Sellicks, Village Building Co, Waterland and Woden Contractors.

I would like to congratulate all those involved with organising the MBA annual dinner and acknowledge the event sponsors—Cbus, Village Building Co, the Master Builders Fidelity Fund, Adjudicate Today and Lennox VW Commercial Vehicles.

For more information about the work of the Master Builders ACT, I recommend members visit their website at www.mba.org.au.

Ms Anna Wellings Booth

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Health, Minister for Higher Education and Minister for Regional Development) (6.50): I rise briefly to record in the Assembly the passing of Anna Wellings Booth on 3 October whilst gardening at her Canberra home. Anna was, as many members of this place know, a foundation member of Breast Cancer Network Australia and played a leading role in the organisation of Breast Cancer Network Australia's first field of women on the lawns of Old Parliament House in October 1998.

She dedicated much of her adult life to raising awareness of breast cancer and, as members would know, took on dozens of voluntary breast cancer support roles. She was a leading advocate on behalf of women diagnosed with breast cancer, despite her own diagnosis being almost 30 years ago. She made, without doubt, a real difference to the lives of many women and their families through her work, including with the breast cancer support groups, Dragons Abreast and Breast Cancer Network Australia.

Anna founded Dragons Abreast ACT in 1999 after putting a small advert in the *Canberra Times*, in the public notices, to which a number of women replied. The first regatta was held, I think, in 2003. In fact, the last regatta was held in Anna's honour, and at her memorial service the Dragons Abreast women went out on the lake in her honour.

We heard at the memorial service stories from family and friends, from neighbours, from people who had only recently got to know Anna. The stories at the service were funny and fondly remembered Anna's ability to chat, to cook, the amount of notes and ideas that she had jotted down and left all over the kitchen table. I think anyone who went and who knew Anna knew that she never said no to anything. She was the one involved in all the campaigns who got things done whilst others had the ideas. For example, with the field of women on the lawns, she was the one who had all the field of women stored in the garage and made sure that they went out and were placed where they needed to be. It now is quite a famous way of making one's campaign well known.

Anna was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in the General Division in 2012 for her service to women's health through a range of breast cancer organisations. She helped develop Dragons Abreast ACT and the sport nationally and has been a mentor and inspiration to hundreds of people throughout her time in the sport. Again, at the memorial service the Dragon Boats Association spoke very highly of the role that she had played in the sport nationally.

Anna was the first ever recipient of life membership of Dragons Abreast ACT and was quite simply one of the most wonderful people you could ever hope to meet. She was someone—and many people spoke of this at the service, including the guests that gathered on the shore at the Yarralumla yacht club to listen and pay their respects to Anna and her family—that you felt very fortunate to meet and you knew that she would always be working in the best interests of the Canberra community and for all of those women and their families who have been touched by breast cancer.

Anna will be deeply missed but long remembered. On behalf of the ACT government, I offer again my deep condolences to her many friends and family.

Lake Burley Griffin

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Minister for Planning, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations, Minister for Children and Young People and Minister for Ageing) (6.54): As everyone in this Assembly will know, last Friday marked the 50th birthday of Lake Burley Griffin. It was my great pleasure to join Pedal Power in a family celebration of this important birthday. Some 80 children and young people took to their bikes as part of the lake-themed treasure hunt around Commonwealth Park and up to the National Carillon.

The event was hosted by Pedal Power executive director, John Armstrong, who during the events interviewed Dr David Nott and Chris Anderson, who both had close associations with the area before it became a lake. Chris had formerly lived in a home that was situated on what is now Springbank Island.

Accounts were told of when the lake was used for grazing paddocks and when a small bridge called Scott's Crossing was used to get people across the Molonglo River to the parliamentary triangle on the eastern side. One area of the current lake even used to be a golf course. I was able to reflect on some of my time in Canberra prior to the lake filling and reflect on my concerns about where the yabbies would go once the lake was filled. How times have changed!

Whatever your association with the lake, whether it be to walk or run around or even to sail on, Lake Burley Griffin has become an integral and much-loved part of our city landscape and a testament to those who had the vision for its creation.

I would like to thank Pedal Power for hosting such a fun family event, and thanks also to Warehouse Circus for the face painting. Most importantly, happy birthday, Lake Burley Griffin. We look forward to the next 50 years.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.56 pm.