



Debates

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Wednesday, 11 February 2015

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.

Australian public service—Belconnen

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (10.01): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the significant investment made by the ACT Government into Belconnen over many years;
- (b) the importance of Commonwealth public agencies located in Belconnen which are an important part of the local Belconnen community and economy;
- (c) the uncertainty over the future of the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Border Protection in the Belconnen town centre; and
- (d) that many Belconnen based small businesses would be severely disadvantaged if the department was relocated away from Belconnen; and

(2) calls on the Speaker to convey the Assembly's strong request to the Federal Government to keep the Department of Immigration and Border Protection in Belconnen.

Madam Speaker, the federal Liberal government cannot even manage itself. Now it wants to spread its disarray to Belconnen in an ill-thought-out proposal to rip the immigration department out of Belconnen.

Immigration was one of the first major federal government departments to be located in Belconnen over 30 years ago as the new town centre was being developed. Before self-government, Liberal and Labor federal governments, through the NCDC, the National Capital Development Commission, cared for and cultivated the development of the national capital and the various town centres it created.

The ACT Labor government is doing the same in Gungahlin—consolidating a government agency workforce there to stimulate the local economy and the community, with workers living in Gungahlin and working in the town centre. It is the same thinking that made Immigration a bedrock of the Belconnen community and economy in the early days.

Since then the ACT Labor government has continued to invest in Belconnen, making it one of the most vibrant of the town centres. I have noted before that we have proved the city to the lake concept and its pleasures in Belconnen. The lakeside at Belconnen

town centre's Emu Bank foreshore is lined with eateries, outdoor tables and the new wetlands where people enjoy the vista of Lake Ginninderra and the adjacent parkland around John Knight Memorial Park.

We have invested in the new rapid bus network and interchanges in Belconnen and facilitated the urban intensification of the town centre, with its skyline rapidly changing and more people moving into the area. The nearby University of Canberra is rapidly expanding, with more students, more student accommodation and more jobs within the university and its support industries in Belconnen.

The first stages of UC sports common are complete and soon construction of the University of Canberra public hospital will commence. Across the road from it is the new suburb of Lawson, providing hundreds of construction jobs at present, and soon it will be home to many more Canberrans. Further afield, Labor is investing in new services at Calvary hospital and the new multi-storey car park. The Bruce campus of CIT is one of the most modern and a great environment for the many students studying for careers in a range of industries.

Across from Westfield Belconnen, the new Belconnen health centre and the nurse-led walk-in centre is another hive of activity, and there are new jobs in the area thanks to Labor. This builds on the work of successive federal governments that once upon a time took responsibility for creating Canberra, not only as the home of our national parliament but as the national administrative centre, housing the great departments of state, the public service, their family members and associated services such as schools and hospitals. This stimulated an environment where business could flourish.

The federal government sought to build this greatest of Australia's inland cities, a model city with a great quality of life for its community. This work has continued under the ACT government and has largely succeeded, according to an OECD report recently. It named Canberra as the most livable region. However, the Liberals, under Prime Minister Tony Abbott, have ripped up the compact with Canberra as the national capital by abusing the public service, treating it as a plaything, relocating offices to electorates it wants to pork-barrel, sacking public servants who ran projects the Liberals did not like and applying wholesale cuts.

Now the Liberals are looking to move the immigration department out of Belconnen. There is no thought for its long-term workers who have made their homes in Belconnen or for the Belconnen businesses small and large that serve and rely on those workers and the department. Immigration's 4,000 workers in Belconnen are a major part of the local community and the Belconnen economy. The Liberals have already hit Belconnen, with the downsizing of the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the arbitrary removal of a sizable chunk of it to Geelong. This is to cover for the federal government's killing of the local car manufacturing industry.

On the one hand, the Liberals are scattering units of the ABS and the tax office to pork-barrel far-flung electorates. On the other hand, they argue Immigration officials need to be within walking distance of each other and the new paramilitary border force. With Scott Morrison, the architect of the integrated customs, border protection and immigration department, now shuffled off to Human Services, who knows how

long this amalgamation will last? The lacklustre Peter Dutton has taken over the portfolio after a disastrous tenure as health minister. He completely alienated the public and all other—

Mrs Dunne: Point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Lawder): Point of order.

Mrs Dunne: Madam Assistant Speaker, I thought this was a motion about the importance of keeping Immigration in Belconnen and not a sequential character attack on ministers for immigration and border protection. I would like you to ask the member to be relevant.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you.

Mr Gentleman: On the point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Gentleman on the point of order.

Mr Gentleman: The motion, in part (b), goes specifically to commonwealth public agencies located in Belconnen. Therefore, it is relevant.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you.

Mrs Dunne: What, character attacks on ministers?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, order! Dr Bourke, I would like to ask you to remain relevant to the motion at hand.

DR BOURKE: As I said, Madam Assistant Speaker, Peter Dutton has taken over this portfolio. He has a previous record of alienating the public and other stakeholders over the Medicare co-payment variations—

Mrs Dunne: Point of order. Madam Assistant Speaker, Minister Dutton's previous record—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Stop the clock, please.

Mrs Dunne: Minister Dutton's performance as the Minister for Health is entirely irrelevant to this debate. You have already ruled. Dr Bourke got up and repeated what he had previously said, in defiance of your ruling.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs Dunne. I uphold the point of order. Dr Bourke—

DR BOURKE: On the point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Can I just finish what I am saying first? I uphold the point of order. Dr Bourke, I asked you to remain relevant, not to repeat

what you have just said. There is no need to just resume where you left off when I have asked you to remain relevant to the motion at hand. Do you have another point of order, Dr Bourke?

DR BOURKE: Yes, Madam Assistant Speaker. The decision-making of the relevant minister is directly relevant to this particular motion. His decision-making as a minister in a previous portfolio establishes a pattern of behaviour and—

Mrs Dunne: Yes, like Joy Burch's.

DR BOURKE: Before I was interrupted, Madam Assistant Speaker, on my point of order, I am about to—

Mrs Dunne: About the behaviour? How long has it got to go on?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Order!

DR BOURKE: I am about to develop that argument further about the decision-making of this Liberal government.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you, Dr Bourke. Your motion does not talk about the decision-making of the Liberal government. Your motion is directly about the importance of commonwealth public service agencies in Belconnen. I ask you—

Mr Barr: It is about point 1(c), actually.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you. Do you have a point of order, Mr Barr?

Mr Barr: And (2), Madam Assistant Speaker.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: So please remain on the topic.

DR BOURKE: Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker. I hope that Mr Dutton will make wiser decisions in his new portfolio and quash this money-wasting plan. Moving the department to new premises will cost taxpayers millions in fit-outs and new leases, achieving nothing in return. For all we know, the next portfolio restructure may break up the super department.

A move would also have also major effects on the rest of Canberra. Just imagine the effect on the rest of Canberra of thousands of workers who mostly live in Belconnen or the inner north, or even Gungahlin, suddenly having to commute across Canberra to get to work.

We already know that the Liberals have no transport plan for north Canberra. They certainly have no vision of how to cope with thousands more commuters crossing Northbourne Avenue or travelling along it.

Mr Coe: Get the tram to Tuggeranong.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Order!

DR BOURKE: Mr Coe, who is interjecting, has absolutely no idea. His plan is to turn Northbourne Avenue into a car park full of Audis every morning. But what would a move of Immigration from Belconnen mean—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Order, members! I am trying to listen to Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: for the people working in the department? Here are some of the stories from residents and workers that I have received.

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Coe, please stop speaking across the chamber.

DR BOURKE: One person said:

I raised my children here and watched them secure jobs within the precinct and they too are now raising their own families here. I want the same level of opportunity for the next generations to grow and prosper, but that is now at risk if the largest industry in the area moves out.

Another said:

We rely on affordable childcare in the local area. Our kids are happy and the proximity from the workplace is ideal for our family. With places at a premium, where will I find a new placement for my kids?

Another said:

I walk to work so my partner can shuttle the kids around our local schools and take them to and from after school activities. If I'm forced to move away from Belconnen we'd need a second vehicle or have to rely on a two hour bus trip.

Another, who lives in Belconnen and drops her children at school in Gungahlin, said:

To collect my children I would need to leave earlier on my pick up day. I already work variable hours to accommodate these times. If Immigration moved I would need to amend my hours, which would result in loss of pay but I would need to pay more for petrol and expensive parking. The other issue is small business. My friend owns one of the cafes that is frequented by Immigration staff and the impact to them with the loss of business would be devastating.

Another Immigration worker said:

My wife and I formerly worked in Civic, when we lived in Holt. We came to realise that working within the Belconnen precinct was more suitable for us as a family, both in terms of dead time on the road in the morning and evening just transiting between work, school and childcare, and also in supporting the local community and businesses. Thus we sought out working positions in Belconnen to bring these aspects together.

We have since solidified our position in Belconnen by taking out a deeper mortgage and moving to Scullin. We did this because our kids are happy and the proximity to our workplace and amenities suits us. I am concerned that a move away from Belconnen will place additional load on local roads, and I will be forced into finding car parking where I can currently walk to work.

This constituent said:

Moving Immigration out of the Belconnen Town Centre will detrimentally impact the quality of life for so many people. Personally I choose to work at Immigration because of the proximity to my children's school and to our home. As a part-time employee I have been able to achieve a healthier work/life balance due to a much shorter commute, easier parking options when arriving after 9am and having the convenience of a recently updated shopping mall within a 5-min walk.

I believe consideration should also be given to the surrounding local small businesses whom are so reliant on the patronage of thousands of Immigration workers. Finally, given the current economic climate how can this government truly justify the huge costs and wastage that would result from such a move?

Another said:

If we are supposed to be one big department, surely there is scope for us all to amalgamate in Belconnen, with ABS downsizing and Unisys taking up space in the purple building! Surely it's better for us to be separated by one road, rather than by several suburbs.

I have also been out doorknocking small businesses in Belconnen. There is universal condemnation of this proposal to relocate the department. Butchers, accountants, dentists, restaurants, fast food outlet franchisees, beauticians, shop owners, grocers and mechanics are all worried about the impact of this change on their businesses. It is a double whammy—a double whammy on top of the pain which has already been inflicted on Canberra by these chaotic Liberals.

Madam Assistant Speaker, for all the reasons that I have outlined, it makes sense for the Liberals to keep the Department of Immigration and Border Protection in Belconnen. I ask members to support this motion.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (10.16), by leave: I move:

(1) Omit paragraph (1)(a).

(2) After paragraph (1)(d), insert:

“(1A) declares its wish for Commonwealth Government departments to maintain their central offices in Canberra as a first priority; and”.

(3) Omit paragraph (2), substitute:

“(2) calls on the Speaker to convey the Assembly’s strong request to the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection to keep the Department of Immigration and Border Protection in Belconnen.”.

I thank Dr Bourke for bringing this matter forward. It is interesting he is so late to this debate. The Canberra Liberals are happy to support the spirit, if not all the words, of this motion. It is a shame Dr Bourke has to be so bitter about these things. I know he has plenty of reason to be bitter, but he should consider where he should direct his bitterness.

This is a very important issue. I said to Dr Bourke yesterday during the listing meeting at administration and procedures that he was a bit late on this because I have already written to the federal government on this issue. For the information of members, I seek leave to table my letter to Mr Michael Pezzullo, the Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, dated 7 January, and my letter to the Hon Peter Dutton, the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, dated the same day.

Leave granted.

MRS DUNNE: I table the following paper:

Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Border Protection—Relocation from Belconnen—Copy of correspondence from Mrs Dunne to the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection and from Mrs Dunne to the Secretary, Department of Immigration and Border Protection, dated 7 January 2015.

I say Dr Bourke is late to this issue because it has been bubbling along for many months now. Senator Seselja and I have been in conversation on this issue and have been working on this issue since probably October last year, to my recollection. It is an issue that should be of utmost importance to members responsible for the area of Belconnen, and I think it is an issue of considerable importance and considerable stress for Belconnen businesses. The Belconnen business precinct depends for its viability on being an employment base. We have seen the effect on the viability of businesses in Gungahlin from the experience of building the Gungahlin town centre and not building employment there for a long period of time. The big ticket item for businesses in Gungahlin is employment.

Mrs Jones pointed that out in two election campaigns and has advocated so well for bringing employment to Gungahlin. Gungahlin shopping centre is essentially a two-day shopping centre—it works really well on Saturdays and Sundays, but during the week it can be quite difficult because no-one is there working except the people

who work in the shops. It is quite a difficult situation and it shows how important employment centres are for the viability of commercial centres.

This is why I have been advocating, along with Senator Seselja, for a very long time on this issue. I know Senator Seselja has met with the previous minister, Mr Morrison, and with the secretary of the department, Mr Michael Pezzullo, on this subject and Senator Seselja and I have discussed these meetings. I know Senator Seselja has planned to meet Minister Dutton; I have not checked with him to see whether he has had that meeting. I am in the process of arranging a meeting with Minister Dutton or his office in early March on this very important subject.

I am glad the Labor Party has caught up and is starting to take an interest in this issue, but I think there are some issues we need to think about. The tone and tenor of Dr Bourke's motion shows how the Labor Party works: Mr Dutton is an unworthy person and casting aspersions upon his performance as a minister; Mr Morrison is an unworthy person and casting aspersions upon his performance as a minister. He was the one who stopped the boats. He was the one who stopped people drowning at sea, but he is an unworthy minister. The Labor Party should look at the issue and take the politics out of it, but the Labor Party cannot take the politics out of this.

The Labor Party cannot stand up for small businesses. It did not stand up for small businesses in Tuggeranong when FaHCSIA was looking at moving out of Tuggeranong. Where were the Labor members for Brindabella in 2013 when the Rudd-Gillard government was proposing to move FaHCSIA out of Tuggeranong? They were silent. As always, when there were job cuts under the Rudd-Gillard government, the Labor members were silent. They did nothing because they did not have the moral fibre or the backbone to stand up for this place against their Labor mates.

I want to contrast that with the work that is being done by Senator Seselja in succeeding in getting funding for new buildings in Tuggeranong and to keep the department of social security in Tuggeranong. Senator Seselja had the moral fibre and the guts to stand up to cuts and say this was not good enough for Tuggeranong. As a member for Ginninderra, as a Belconnen resident of over 30 years, I am prepared to stand up and say to this government that they need to be very careful of the unintended consequences. It might be easy for Immigration to move to a new spot somewhere else. If they move, I am not concerned about where they move to—I would really like them to stay in Belconnen because Belconnen industries and businesses are there mainly as a result of the amount of employment already there in Belconnen.

Taking thousands of public servants and relocating them to somewhere else in Canberra will have a detrimental impact on not just the Belconnen town centre but the group centres around it. It will have a detrimental impact on schools and all the things Dr Bourke talked about, including increased travel time. It is the case that many people who work in Immigration live in the Belconnen region, but not all of them. It is not the case that people live where they work, and it has never been the case. I lived in Belconnen for most of the time I was a federal public servant and I worked in Woden and I worked in Civic. My husband was a federal public servant for over 30 years and he worked in Civic, he worked in Belconnen and he worked in Woden.

People move around; it is not the case that everybody decides they will stay in a particular department because that is close to home. People move in and out of departments for job prospects, advancement, enrichment, all sorts of things.

The important thing here is that we believe there is a risk that if Immigration moves out of Belconnen there will be a detrimental impact on the Belconnen economy. But, more importantly, we of the Canberra Liberals believe moving public servants out of Canberra will have a detrimental impact upon the ACT economy as well. That is why I propose that we should insert into this motion a declaration that we—we should not have a problem with this—the members of the Legislative Assembly, would like to see that central offices of commonwealth government agencies remain in Canberra. This should be our first priority.

It is easy to pick off one region against another, and people do it as sport—north side versus south side. Some people would rather cross the floor than cross the lake, as an acquaintance once said to me. It is a good line. We make jokes and cast one region against the other. I am principally and first and foremost a member for Belconnen, but I also represent people across Canberra, and we should be standing up for people across Canberra and we should be standing up to this government and we should have stood up to the previous government when they wanted to move people out of Canberra. We should be standing up and saying, “No. Canberra is the seat of government. This is where government agencies should have their headquarters.” I do not have any problem with this; my colleagues do not have any problem with this notion, and I test the Labor Party to see whether they have a problem with this notion.

I am very happy to write to Minister Dutton or anyone else. I have put on the record the fact that I have already done it. I also do not have a problem with the Speaker conveying the strong views of this Assembly to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. However, I thought Dr Bourke’s motion was a little misdirected because it says, “Write to the federal government.” We need to be precise here, and I have suggested an amendment for being more precise about to whom the Speaker should write.

My first amendment is to omit paragraph (1)(a) because this should be an issue of bipartisanship. It is really about the Belconnen economy and it should not be about patting anyone on the back about how good they have been. Successive governments have contributed to Belconnen. I have been a critic of the extent to which successive governments have failed to contribute to Belconnen; for many years very little public works were done in Belconnen. There has been a bit of a change in the last little while with the building of the health building, but the Belconnen Arts Centre is half an arts centre and we cannot bring ourselves to build a full arts centre. If we are going to be envious, the previous Liberal government built a whole arts centre with a performance space for the Tuggeranong community a very long time ago and it has been upgraded by this government while the Belconnen community still does not have a performance space at its arts centre.

Some good work has been done, but it is very late. For four successive elections and through many Assemblies I have been calling for comprehensive master planning for Belconnen, and it has only been in the last year that the Labor Party has come on board. I moved a motion in 2007, maybe earlier, calling for comprehensive master

planning. At the time the Chief Minister, Mr Stanhope, said, “We don’t need it.” The Belconnen Community Council, for as long as I have been an elected member, has been calling out for comprehensive master planning for Belconnen so that there is not a hodgepodge.

Yes, we have tables by the lake, but it has been a long, hard process. I will be critical of previous Liberal governments because we sold off land bit by bit without thought and we ended up with a whole lot of fast food outlets with drive-throughs right on the lake. It was a spectacular piece of bad planning because we never comprehensively master planned. We had a master plan for the foreshore, but we have not had a master planning process until quite recently for the entirety of Belconnen. Without that, we do not have the capacity to actively grow.

There is an issue in relation to business in Belconnen that I will touch on briefly—that is parking and the lack of listening this government does in relation to parking needs in the Belconnen area. The coffee shops and carpet stores and bicycle stores and those shops opposite the old Belconnen police station have begged this government to at least free up the few parking spaces that were part of the block of the Belconnen police station so there could be a few more parking spaces—10 or a dozen, maybe 20 parking spaces. They begged this government over and over again. What have they done? They put up a construction fence and have now constructed a more permanent fence to cut off that parking. They have been specifically begged by local businesses to free up some more parking in that area, but they would not do it. It was a matter of moving a fence a few metres and they would not do it.

There are things we need to do in Belconnen. We need to have master planning in Belconnen, and I am glad there is now a master planning process. We need to be listening to people and actually doing something. Doorknocking is all very well, but if you are not actually advocating and doing something about the parking in Belconnen, it does not matter a tinker’s.

We need to stand up to this federal government, as we should have stood up to previous governments, and say, “Do not mess with our economy by shifting people around.” First and foremost we must ensure that we as an Assembly send a very loud and clear message that we believe that, as the seat of government, government agencies belong here in the ACT. I commend my amendments.

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (10.31): I am pleased to speak to this motion today and thank Dr Bourke for bringing it forward. As a long-term elected Labor member for Ginninderra, it always gives me great pleasure to be able to talk about Ginninderra and Belconnen in particular. It is a beautiful part of the ACT, as I think many people in this chamber would agree. I am very proud to represent it and feel very privileged to be able to represent it.

Madam Assistant Speaker, as you know, Belconnen will be celebrating its 50th birthday next year. In a few short years the population of this region, according to the 2011 census, surpassed 92,444. With such a large and fast-growing population, the Belconnen town centre has grown to serve as a major commercial centre, with car dealers, repairers, service stations, hardware stores, restaurants, cafes, specialty retailers, and large and small clothing boutiques.

The town centre is also home to the new state-of-the-art Belconnen health centre, our very popular nurse-led walk-in centre, the Belconnen library, the Belconnen community centre, the Westfield mall, and various ACT and federal government offices, including the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

Within close proximity to the town centre you will find Lake Ginninderra, which we have talked about this morning. This is obviously the backyard for people who now live in the many new apartments and housing complexes that are close to the lake. We also have the University of Canberra, the Canberra Institute of Technology Bruce campus, the Australian Institute of Sport, Canberra stadium—which, as members know, is home to the Canberra Raiders Rugby League Club and the ACT Brumbies Rugby Union Club—Bruce indoor stadium, CISAC indoor swimming complex, and Calvary hospital. All of these institutions, businesses and leisure facilities depend intrinsically on each other as they provide jobs and services to both Belconnen and the wider community.

The Labor government recognises this, and that is why over the years we have constantly delivered proactive policies, through successive responsible budgets, that have focused on job creation by investing in infrastructure and other transformative projects.

For example, the 2014-15 budget saw the appropriation of \$2.5 billion over four years for infrastructure in the ACT which will provide important new facilities to the Canberra community as well as boosting growth through job creation. Some of the projects that will benefit from this massive investment include the University of Canberra hospital, which, as members know, is very important to the people of the ACT, especially those in Ginninderra.

When completed, the project has the potential in the long term for promoting excellence in education by attracting more students, researchers and academics to the city, and to world-class education institutions such as the University of Canberra and the Bruce CIT campus. Many researchers and academics will come, courtesy of the fact that we will have the University of Canberra hospital. And that is not to mention the large number of jobs that will be created during the construction phase. Of course, we must not forget the invaluable addition this will make to health services in the ACT and region.

We have also seen renewal projects, such as the new bus interchange, which Dr Bourke mentioned before, which has transformed the town centre by facilitating greater access to the facilities in the town centre, as well as enhancing safety for passengers.

Last year the new state-of-the-art Belconnen health centre and the nurse-led walk-in centre were opened. Both of these facilities now provide Belconnen residents with greater access to various health-related services.

We are seeing the continued revitalisation of the Belconnen foreshore area, which is in line with the ACT government's commitment to providing better public places. This is a very popular recreation area that connects the western foreshores district park, the Belconnen town centre, the international standard skate park, the John Knight Memorial Park picnic facilities and the Belconnen Arts Centre. The renewal of the foreshore has, over the past several years, attracted many businesses which have set up in the area and are now providing much-needed services, as Dr Bourke mentioned.

Since its opening in 2009, the Belconnen Arts Centre has become an icon beside Lake Ginninderra. The centre has continued to play a key role in the development of and the opportunities given to Canberra artists. The broader Belconnen and north-west Canberra communities are also gaining from the programs and accessibility to the services provided by the arts centre. That is why in 2012 I welcomed the \$300,000 injection of funds by the ACT government to begin plans for stage 2. I am aware that the planning is now complete and the development application has been approved, and I look forward to the eventual completion of this important community cultural facility, as it will provide much-needed arts and community facilities which will also enhance the foreshore.

Madam Assistant Speaker, as I stated earlier, these infrastructure projects, iconic institutions, businesses and leisure facilities depend intrinsically on each other, and are as a result of careful planning—planning that is focused on satisfying residents' needs, population size and access to services. As you know, this careful planning and renewal have been crucial to the growth and sustainability of Belconnen, and indeed the ACT—and now, of course, this is more important because we face definite challenges. The challenges mainly arise from the federal government's ongoing austerity measures, which continue to undermine the ACT economy, and indeed the entire nation, as Dr Bourke has clearly outlined.

We have seen this federal government reducing the numbers of Australian public servants and federal agencies in the Australian Capital Territory. Of course, across the nation this has had an effect as well. They continue to tighten commonwealth department budgets, including recruitment arrangements that have placed a hiring freeze on the Australian public service. All of this has limited employment growth and undermined business confidence in the ACT.

Every decision this federal government has made since being elected has been bad for this territory. This was confirmed by none other than the Prime Minister, who, on Monday, conceded that his government has been making bad decisions for the last 17 months—something we on this side have been saying for a long time.

The proposal to move the Department of Immigration and Border Protection from Belconnen is one such example of a not well-thought-out decision. And let us not confuse a person's character with their decision-making. Just because someone makes bad decisions does not make them a bad person. I do not think we in this place are saying that these people are bad people; we are just saying they are making bad decisions. That is a behavioural matter.

No-one in the federal Liberal government seems to have a clue as to how these types of poor decisions impact on local communities, schools, local businesses, transport, and most of all on individuals and their families. How many services such as cafes, restaurants and retail stores will be affected? How many people employed by those businesses and those who service these businesses will lose their jobs? This could have a devastating knock-on effect.

The uncertainty caused by this pending decision is already undermining business and investment confidence in Belconnen because of the fact that 4,000 public servants may leave the Belconnen area. Dr Bourke has clearly outlined the effect that this will have on parents who commute every morning and have chosen their workplace and the place where their children go to school, or who have chosen their childcare arrangements. How will this affect these children and parents? Think of the stress that these parents and children are going through as we speak, as they contemplate what arrangements they are going to need to make.

Indeed, it will affect our roads, with possibly another couple of thousand cars on Belconnen Way. We heard from Dr Bourke how people's transport arrangements will be thrown into confusion. And the reasons we have been given for considering such a move are not convincing at best. The Liberals need to understand how communities develop and thrive, and stop doing their best to destroy them.

That is why I am supporting this motion, which calls on the Speaker to convey the Assembly's strong request to the federal government to keep the Department of Immigration and Border Protection in Belconnen.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (10.40): I will be supporting this motion today. I recognise the need for the Assembly, through the Speaker, to communicate our concerns for the future of the Belconnen town centre, and the implications of possible federal government actions on the city as a whole.

The department that we are discussing today has a very significant presence in the Belconnen town centre, as members have touched on today. It sits right at the heart of the town centre, with four buildings holding the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. They are right at the heart of that busy, vibrant commercial and transport hub.

The move under consideration could see approximately 4,000 employees moved to some other part of the city, presumably Civic or possibly other parts. The final relocation space has not been decided upon, so it is not exactly clear. But the possibility of losing 4,000 workers from the Belconnen town centre is very disturbing and would have a very detrimental impact on local business, local house prices and undoubtedly on plans for new development in the area.

Just a few weeks ago I met a small business owner from the town centre and had a particular discussion with him. Basically, he talked to me about the number of staff that he employs and the consequences of this decision. He left me in no uncertainty about how he felt about it. There were in fact a few expletives involved in the

conversation—from his end, I might add—in which he told me how concerned he was and what a significant impact it would have on his business, which he had spent many years building up. He was very passionate about it. I think it underlined that sense of fear and uncertainty that business owners in the area are feeling around the prospect of this possible move.

As other members have touched on, such a move would also significantly impact on the city's traffic and transport plans. Depending on the final location chosen, if the decision goes ahead, it will potentially create new traffic issues that could take some significant time and certainly cost to respond to.

We are very lucky in the ACT to have the town centre structure in the way we do and to have those employment and business nodes spread around the city, and not have everybody channelled into the CBD. There is a real opportunity for us in that, in having reduced transport needs. People are able to live closer to work and therefore have other transport options.

I take on board what Mrs Dunne said. People will ultimately work in different places from where they live. That will be the case for some. Certainly, with not everybody having to travel to the city, it presents a range of transport planning opportunities that I think are very positive, particularly for some of the active forms of transport. If you have a job in the Belconnen town centre and you live in Belconnen, there are a range of walking and cycling options that open up, and that perhaps are not there in most people's minds if they are working further afield. So there are certainly some real positives in those sorts of employment options.

The kinds of disruptions that we would see in the ACT as a result of this decision by the federal government are unfortunately frustratingly common. Such significant proposals have an impact on the city that perhaps is not considered from a commonwealth government perspective, because they have a different set of motivations. But the local impacts are very significant and are ones that we need to bring to our federal colleagues' attention. We need to highlight them so that they do weigh those factors up when they are making their final decisions.

These impacts start to have a cumulative detrimental impact on Canberrans and the local community, as well as the local economy. We have all heard stories of some of the impacts on the Woden town centre that have arisen from a decline in public service numbers in that town centre. Certainly the anecdotal stories indicate that the reduction of foot traffic in the area has had a significant impact on businesses in that area.

This motion goes to the very issue of large machinery of government changes, otherwise known in this town as the much feared "MOG". As Prime Minister and Cabinet departmental secretary Ian Watt has warned, the danger of expensive and disruptive major changes like this is that they can lead to great inefficiencies and reduced productivity, not to mention the impact on the morale of the workers involved.

I think that is another consideration. There is the local Canberra impact, but there is also a real question mark about the effectiveness and efficiency involved in having

these changes. Earlier in the debate today someone said, “What if, in another year and a half’s time, there is a new minister or a change of government?” We need to try and think about the longer term efficiencies and the efficacy of these changes.

I have my own set of issues about the much-vaunted border force, which is what this merger is all about, and the tone and approach of the federal government to matters in immigration, but I think they are matters for another time and another place.

I would like to thank Dr Bourke for bringing this matter to the Assembly. I was a little disappointed in the discussion today. The actual motion is a good motion. It is an opportunity for this Assembly to collectively say to the federal government, “We are concerned about this. It will have an impact on our city that we need you to take into account.” I thought the motion was framed quite well in that regard.

Welcome back to the floor, Mrs Dunne. I had forgotten your style of contribution to the debate. I think there has been a sharp reminder this morning. But it was a shame that the discussion took the tone that it did. The fact that Mrs Dunne has already written is a positive thing. I do not think that needs to preclude this Assembly also making a statement. So the proverbial contest of who wrote first and when is perhaps not the key issue today. The key issue is that this Assembly has the opportunity, through this motion, to unanimously say to the federal government, “We’re very concerned about this. We want you to think about the implications for this city,” and not just the internal government thoughts that are going on around this move, led by the head of the department or whoever is making these decisions.

I am very happy to support this motion today. I understand the Labor Party will not be supporting the amendment. We need to try and find a way through. Paragraph (1)(a) of Dr Bourke’s motion seems to be a point of tension for the Liberal Party. It says:

... the significant investment made by the ACT Government into Belconnen over many years ...

That, presumably, could include the era back in 1998 to 2001, which included a Liberal government. I think it is framed in a way that we can probably all live with, so I will be voting for the motion as moved.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (10.48): I support Mrs Dunne’s amendment; I think it is a very good amendment. I was going to say I was surprised, but I suppose I am not, because Mr Rattenbury has said, “The Labor Party is doing this; therefore, that’s what I’ll do.” He pretty much said that in his speech. But Labor and the Greens are going to vote against a line that says:

... declares its wish for Commonwealth Government departments to maintain their central offices in Canberra as a first priority ...

Labor and the Greens are going to vote against this Assembly making the point to the federal government that as a bipartisan Assembly we want the federal government to maintain government offices in Canberra. That is pretty extraordinary. That is what they are voting against because they are so churlish that they want some line in there that says, “Praise us about what we’ve done for Belconnen.”

They want this to be a partisan motion. I think this is the key here and it is very important that this go on the record here—that is, what we want to see from our side of this chamber is a bipartisan letter written by the Speaker that goes to the appropriate person in the government to say, “As a priority we want to see public servants stay in Canberra and we want to make sure that the department of immigration remains in Belconnen because of its importance to the Belconnen region.

What is pretty clear from both Mr Rattenbury and Dr Bourke’s speeches is that they see today as the opportunity for a political wedge. They think this is a good political opportunity for them. Dr Bourke’s speech was rife with political opportunism, attacks on Mr Dutton and attacks on the former immigration minister, Scott Morrison. It was not actually about the substance of the issue; it was much more about “Let’s have a go at the federal government because that might be to our political advantage.” Mrs Dunne, who has been an advocate for Belconnen since long before just about any of those opposite were in this place, has said, “Let’s be genuine about that. Let’s add to this motion. Let’s stand up for all jobs staying in Canberra. Let’s stand up for the department of immigration remaining in Belconnen.” She has made some very good points. She has made it very clear that this is not about a judgement about particular accommodation and the suitability of particular buildings; this is about the economy of Belconnen. That is the judgement we are making in this place today.

This is a clear expression of the fact that this side of the chamber will stand up for Canberra and our constituents first. It is not about who the minister is, whether they are Liberal or Labor; we will call it as we see it and we will support this motion in that context. When decisions were made by a federal Labor government that did not support Canberra—it could be Kevin Rudd cutting 14,500 jobs or the removal of public servants or the decision to put public servants elsewhere—those opposite were mute. But when those sorts of decisions are made by Liberal federal governments, we see a ramping up of the rhetoric.

If you want a genuine bipartisan approach to this so that we look after Canberra’s interests and the interests of those people in Belconnen that we all represent, let us make sure this is a bipartisan motion—which is the intent—and let us try to keep out of this motion some of the political attacks that are of no benefit. If you want a political attack, if you want a political fight, we can bring that on and we can talk about Scott Morrison’s record and what has happened in border protection over the years, and we will win that debate hands down. But that is not about this. Let us not bring that into it. Let us not have that debate where we descend into a political fight. Let us do what this motion purports to do and let us have a bipartisan approach to this. Let us get back to the issue, which is about looking after the people of Belconnen. Let us support Mrs Dunne’s amendment, which puts the people of Canberra and the people of Belconnen first, and let us try and get away from some of the political point-scoring we are seeing from those opposite. If you want to bring on political point-scoring about border protection we can have that debate if you want to, but I do not think this is the time or the place.

Smearing federal ministers is not going to help, Dr Bourke, when we are writing to those ministers asking them to make a favourable decision for the people of

Belconnen. Attacking those ministers in the same motion in a most disgusting way is probably not going to help a bipartisan approach to support the people of Belconnen. If you want a political fight on this and on border protection, we will give you one, but let us not descend to that. I counsel Dr Bourke and other members of the Labor Party that if you want a bipartisan approach to this, we are offering you one. We are giving you one.

Mrs Dunne has already written to the department; I have already spoken to the minister's office; Senator Seselja has already spoken to the relevant minister. If Dr Bourke wants to smear the minister and thinks that will help the cause of the people of Belconnen, if he genuinely thinks attacking Scott Morrison and attacking Peter Dutton is going to help them make a favourable decision for the people of Belconnen, and if Andrew Barr thinks attacking the federal minister is going to help him make a favourable decision, they are wrong. It is not. Tone down your rhetoric. Let us have a bipartisan approach; let us put the people of Belconnen first. Dr Bourke needs to wind back the vitriol, wind back the hate, wind back the class warfare, wind back the attempt to bring border protection into this debate and focus on the people of Belconnen.

I support Mrs Dunne's amendments. They are good amendments. They speak to the issue. They support Canberra. They support the people of Belconnen. Let us proceed with this debate in a bipartisan fashion and keep the class warfare, the hate and the attack on the federal Liberal government out of this. If that is where this debate goes, it will not help the people of Belconnen.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Urban Renewal and Minister for Tourism and Events) (10.55): I am pleased we now have on the record the new approach from the Liberal opposition—if you want to get an outcome you should never attack a minister. Presumably all private members' motions from this point on will adhere to this new standard. If we are genuinely seeking to get an outcome for our constituents—this is the new mantra from the Leader of the Opposition—motions attacking ministers are ineffective. That is your entire reason for being in this chamber. Over the entire time you have been a member in this place, Mr Hanson, everything you have ever done has been about personally attacking ministers. That is your reason for being. This is why you turn up for work every day, Mr Hanson. In this new order—

Mrs Dunne: Point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker. I ask you to ask the Chief Minister to comply with standing order 42 and address the chair and not the opposition.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Lawder): Thank you, Mrs Dunne. Mr Barr, please address your remarks through the chair.

MR BARR: If the Leader of the Opposition is to be taken seriously in this new approach to outcome-driven motions on private members' day, I look forward to all future motions being amended to reflect this approach.

On the substance of the issue, I thank Dr Bourke for raising this matter. This has certainly been of concern to Belconnen businesses and the broader Belconnen

community for some time. I will endeavour to resist playing the who-touched-it-first game. Mrs Dunne has decided she needs to say she touched it first. I think a check of the record would show that the federal member for Fraser, Andrew Leigh, might be the first to have raised these matters. Regardless, we are all endeavouring to be on the same page today, in spite of every little attempt to move away from bipartisanship.

The Canberra Liberals cannot even bring themselves to acknowledge that, over 25 years, governments of both political persuasions have made significant investments in Belconnen. They cannot even bring themselves to acknowledge that, and that says it all. They are a party permanently grounded in an opposition mentality with no sense at all that the government, which at one point in time they were, could have contributed over time to investing in the Belconnen community. The ACT government and this Assembly cannot acknowledge that there has been significant investment by the ACT government into Belconnen over many years. It is a pretty sad state of affairs, but that is the position. Mr Hanson and his Canberra Liberals cannot vote for that. There you go.

We will put forward the positive case that the Assembly notes the significant investment made by the ACT government into Belconnen over many years. That is worth supporting, like the rest of Dr Bourke's motion. In relation to Mrs Dunne's amendment, the government cannot support omitting paragraph (1)(a), but it is happy to support the insertion of new paragraph (1)(d). If Mrs Dunne seeks to move that separately, the government can support it. Subject to the failure of Mrs Dunne's complete amendment, I am happy to move such an amendment subsequent to that to reflect those words if that can achieve the bipartisanship those opposite are seemingly so desperate to achieve today. Pettiness will not allow them to support paragraph (1)(a), but I will overcome pettiness and be prepared to support proposed new paragraph (1)(d) with a view to achieving bipartisanship this morning.

Mr Hanson: Very kind!

MR BARR: Well, it is a bigger step of bipartisanship than you are prepared to show, Mr Hanson. You cannot even bring yourself to acknowledge the work—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the chair, Mr Barr.

MR BARR: Madam Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition cannot even bring himself to acknowledge the work of his colleague two chairs down, from his time in government, in the last millennium I think it was—it is that long ago.

This motion is important, and it is important that we put a unanimous view today. In spite of considerable provocation from the Leader of the Opposition and the Canberra Liberals, we will reach across the chamber in the spirit of bipartisanship and support one part of Mrs Dunne's amendment. That reflects what I understand to be the unanimous view of the Assembly, and it would be petty and silly to—

Members interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Resume your seat, Mr Barr. Stop the clock, please. I cannot hear what the minister is saying for the interjections. We are trying to reach some sort of agreement, it appears from what the minister is saying, so I suggest it would be helpful for you to listen so that we can proceed. I certainly have no idea what is being suggested because I cannot hear. I would appreciate a bit of shush. Mr Barr.

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I was saying—and I will conclude on this point—achieving a unanimous outcome this morning would be a good thing and a mature thing for the Assembly to be able to do. Of course, we often find it difficult to reach that point, and people can reflect upon individuals' contributions to reaching this final point, which I hope will be a unanimous agreement to Dr Bourke's motion as it is listed, with one part of the amendment from Mrs Dunne. If those opposite could bring themselves to do that, we will have a unanimous outcome this morning.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (11.03): I, too, am happy to speak to this motion. Of course I very much endorse the amendment put forward by Mrs Dunne. It is most important that, above anything else, we are united as Team Canberra. That is so important. Whether we are travelling on a CPA trip together or simply going interstate for whatever business it is, I think being Team Canberra ahead of party politics is always an advantage. That is exactly what I regularly see happen at CPA conferences. Very rarely have I seen members of this Assembly on the same delegation bicker about party politics or speak about party politics at a CPA event. We are united as Team Canberra, and I think that is a very important message we need to send wherever possible.

That is what I believe Mrs Dunne's addition of new paragraph (1A)—to declare its wish for commonwealth government departments to maintain their central offices in Canberra as a first priority—is all about. I am very pleased to hear from the Chief Minister that he, too, supports Mrs Dunne with that quest.

There is, of course, no doubt whatsoever about the important role the Department of Immigration and Border Protection plays in the Belconnen community, especially the Belconnen business community. That point is well and truly beyond question.

These sorts of motions can be problematic when, in effect, you have an open tender process, you have multiple private sector bidders going for a contract and where we are, in a way, picking sides. I believe it is not the intention of any member of this place to be explicit in wanting to support a particular property owner or developer. However, given it is an open tender and given individual property owners will stand to benefit from the decision, we have to have that in the backs of our minds when speaking to motions like this—that is, we are not seen to be explicitly supporting a developer or property owner rather than the best policy. I believe that is what Dr Bourke's intention is. I am by no means questioning that; I am just reminding the Assembly of the importance of that.

Mrs Dunne has already articulated the case very well about the importance of the department to Belconnen, and I commend her for her words.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Minister for Housing, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Women and Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Social Inclusion and Equality) (11.06): I thank Dr Bourke for bringing the motion to the Assembly. It is clear that we are all—more particularly Mrs Dunne, Mr Coe and the rest of us from Ginninderra and Belconnen—passionate in our defence of our local area. I feel that I need to defend myself in relation to some of the comments that Mrs Dunne made about whether or not the Labor Party in this place had ever spoken out against the federal Labor government. I can certainly say that I have on the current government's stance on refugees and on federal Labor's decision to remove support for sole parents. I will continue to speak out against federal governments who make decisions that affect and hurt the people that I represent.

I think it is right not to go into who said what first because we are clearly in agreement about our defence of Belconnen, but I have to say that Labor absolutely did move on this. I know that the Chief Minister has written a letter. Dr Bourke and I made comments in the *Canberra Times*, and I know that Senator Seselja and the member for Fraser, Dr Leigh, did. In fact, last week I received in my letterbox a postcard which I will table for the Assembly's information. I table the following paper:

Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Border Protection—Relocation from Belconnen—Stand up for local jobs—A community petition by Andrew Leigh MP.

In the interest of our passionate defence of everything Belconnen, I encourage members opposite to get a copy of the postcard themselves and sign it or go online and sign the pamphlet. It calls on the federal government to ensure that the department of immigration stays in Belconnen.

I want to make a few other comments about Belconnen and the effect that the removal of the immigration department in Belconnen will have on the people that work in that area. Whilst I understand that many people in Canberra will be able to travel across this city to work—those people on higher incomes—it is those workers who are on lower incomes who try to gain employment as close to their homes as they can. When you are earning \$20, or less than \$20, an hour and have to travel across Canberra to do a three or four-hour job, it is just not worth the travel. Moving this particular department will affect those in the low paid sectors, those employed in hospitality and those who are service providers, like many students, migrants and other casual workers who have very little job security and little savings to fall back on. It is those people we also need to keep in mind when we are thinking about moving a big department like Immigration out of a town centre such as Belconnen.

It was reported in the *Canberra Times* last month that these workers make up 60 per cent of a cafe's customers in Belconnen. As I said before, I know that the Chief Minister has made representations and we now know that Mrs Dunne has also made representations. But Dr Bourke's motion gives the Assembly a chance to approach the commonwealth as a united voice, and that is where we want to be. We know that the

Belconnen Community Council supports this initiative. I have already talked about Dr Leigh running a petition against this proposal. We have also seen, as Mr Hanson has said again today, his support for the retention of the department in Belconnen. We now see also the passionate advocacy from Senator Zed Seselja, just as he showed for Tuggeranong last year.

Given the scale of the prospect facing Belconnen is more than double the effect that it would have had in Tuggeranong—some 4,000 workers in the Immigration building alone—and also the effect that it would have on the broader community, it is clear that we need each person in this place and each person who represents Canberrans in the federal government to defend Belconnen, Immigration workers and the Belconnen community and keep that department in Belconnen. There will be a deep and lasting impact if this decision goes ahead. It is in the best interests of economic sustainability and fairness more broadly for the Belconnen community that we call on them to preserve this important part of the Belconnen workforce and the Belconnen community. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Minister for Planning, Minister for Roads and Parking, Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations, Minister for Children and Young People and Minister for Ageing) (11.12): I rise today to support Dr Bourke's motion. I will not be supporting the opposition's first amendment, especially in regard to removing paragraph (1). I want to focus this morning particularly on paragraph (1) and, through my portfolio of planning, the work that has been done in the past and the work that has been done on future planning for Belconnen. So it is a different tack than we have heard this morning.

The ACT planning strategy calls for master plans to be undertaken, responding to 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. In addition, I am pleased to advise that the master plan program, as it progresses, is responding to the emergent policy agenda of this government by seeking to implement the outcomes and recommendations of strategies and programs aimed at ensuring that investment in our urban areas, such as Belconnen and the town centre, meets the aspirations and needs of the community both now and into the future.

I want to reflect on Mrs Dunne's comments earlier about calling for more comprehensive master plans. Contrary to her comments, the master planning process for Belconnen started quite a while ago. If we look at ACTPLA's website, the urban planning and development history of the area shows that the town centre plans, the first planning and design concepts for Belconnen town centre, were prepared in 1968 as part of a master plan report. Some of the illustrations produced as part of that first town centre master plan—and do not forget it was the first town centre master plan—were reproduced in *Tomorrow's Canberra* in 1970. It states:

The Belconnen Town Centre will provide a wide range of commercial, social, employment, and residential facilities for the district population 120,000.

The commercial area will consist of a two-level shopping core closely integrated with other commercial, cultural, social, and entertainment facilities as well as private and government office precincts.

As in the Woden Town Centre, a mixed uses area will be located adjacent to the commercial area. Residential areas for group housing surround and penetrate, to a limited extent, the commercial area. Sites for a hospital, a college of advanced education, technical college, institutions, and sports facilities are also close to the commercial area.

From the peripheral roads direct access will be provided to the various parts of the town centre and to the major parking areas of the commercial area. Public transport routes consist of a local and service road network and a right-of-way separated from other roads for rapid transit services, with two stops in the town centre.

Pedestrians are segregated ...

It talks also about future opportunities for work. There is a lot of comment about federal commonwealth agencies working in Belconnen. I have talked about that because I think it is important to note the history and the lessons that we learn from those planning aspects as well.

Work, of course, is currently underway on a renewed master plan for the Belconnen town centre that will guide its development into the future. The Belconnen town centre provides a significant amenity for the existing 97,500 residents of Belconnen, so not quite yet the 120,000 expected in the first process or master plan. This includes Lake Ginninderra, recreation, employment, health and retail facilities. The centre's setting and relationship with nearby institutions also offers advantages unmatched by many other urban areas in Australia. We need to strengthen and capitalise on these advantages to ensure the Belconnen town centre improves and grows, that small business can thrive, that our natural areas are valued and that the town centre is even better placed for the Belconnen community to visit, work and live.

While the town centre has great opportunities, it also faces considerable challenges, and we have heard some of those this morning. The development of the Belconnen town centre master plan will provide clear planning principles and strategies to inform the future development and character of the existing town centre.

The ACT government is preparing this master plan to ensure that future challenges and opportunities are effectively met. Strategies being investigated to address a range of issues include ensuring anchor employment is maintained in the town centre to support the local economy; improving employment diversity by promoting the opportunities presented by the relationship with the University of Canberra, the AIS, Calvary hospital, the proposed university hospital and the town centre; considering new options for the effective delivery of public realm improvements; improving connections for pedestrians and cyclists and in doing so taking the focus away from cars; encouraging the creation of active and attractive town centre destinations to effectively compete with places such as Bunda Street in the city or Kingston foreshore—Belconnen should be a desirable brand—and providing more street trees in the town centre to assist in mitigating the effects of climate change to increase the livability of the town centre and make it a place people want to visit and live in.

Community engagement to gain feedback on the issues and aspirations for the town centre has recently occurred. The government has worked closely with community groups, particularly the Belconnen Community Council, to ensure that the community is well informed and ongoing conversations about key issues are effective and meaningful.

A considerable number of community comments have been provided during the initial engagement period, providing valuable evidence on the issues we need to address. Those include improving cycle and pedestrian connections across the town centre for safety and convenience; the need for clear controls on building heights; better provision and location of car parking; better quality of the town centre public realm; and the need to create destinations, particularly along Emu Bank.

The draft light rail master plan will be released for community consultation in the coming months. I look forward to hearing from the community about their priorities for light rail in Canberra, and to Belconnen specifically.

I believe this government can demonstrate a sound record of investment in the Belconnen town centre over many years. The approach being taken to integrate land use will contribute to the development of Canberra as a compact and efficient city and will deliver on the ACT government's vision for a connected, livable and prosperous city, of which Belconnen town centre will be an important part.

Ordered that the amendments be divided.

Mrs Dunne's amendment (1) negatived.

Mrs Dunne's amendment (2) agreed to.

Mrs Dunne's amendment (3) negatived.

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

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (11.21): I thank Mrs Dunne for her support for the retention of the immigration department in Belconnen and the recognition of the impact it would have on workers in Immigration, their families and the local economy. I welcome her praise of the ACT Labor government's investment in Belconnen, especially in the new Belconnen health centre and the very successful initial stage of the Belconnen Arts Centre. Her criticism of the previous Liberal government for the piecemeal, chaotic selling-off of the Emu Bank foreshore was intriguing. However, she did pay tribute to the new master plan process underway by Labor for Belconnen. The Liberals will get upset at my references to their federal colleagues' attitude to Canberra and the federal public service. It is chaotic Liberal thinking which is hurting Canberra, hurting Belconnen and hurting families.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, thank you for your advice. Could you just be quiet, please?

Mr Hanson: Sure.

DR BOURKE: They do not like my strong advocacy for my constituents. They do not like it, but I make no apology for that. It is what I was elected to do. This, after all, is supposed to be the second day of good government. What about the previous days, Madam Deputy Speaker? They must have been bad government. Mrs Dunne clearly agrees that this is a bad plan to move Immigration out of Belconnen.

However, I would say it is just as well that Mrs Dunne has not been doorknocking small businesses in Belconnen because some of those apologist lines that she used in her speech would not go down well—lines like, “Not everyone who works in Immigration lives in Belconnen,” that she does not want another north side-south side issue and that it could be okay as long as they stay in Canberra. The forgotten people—and I mention the Liberal Party under Menzies—the shopkeepers, the professionals and the small business people, are not going to like that kind of line in Belconnen.

Then we get Mr Hanson, in his speech and in his interjections, wanting to threaten the Belconnen community unless they suck it up quietly. He wants to tell Canberrans more about how good Scott Morrison has been in Border Protection. This is chaotic Liberal thinking. If today is the day after the federal government started good government, let us hope they take notice of the reasons outlined here today—

Mr Hanson: It is no wonder you are not a minister.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

DR BOURKE: You will never be one. Let us hope they take notice of the reasons outlined here today by both parties for keeping the department of immigration in Belconnen. Perhaps, as with the South Australian submarine deal, on the next bill Senator Seselja could bargain his vote in favour of Belconnen.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Budget review 2014-2015

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (11.25): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes the Government’s 2014-15 Budget Review that:

(a) the Territory’s budget deficit has blown out from \$332.8 million to \$770.5 million;

- (b) the Territory's deficit surpasses the deficit of all other jurisdictions except Western Australia, but on a per capita basis, is over four times that of Western Australia;
 - (c) the Territory will not reach the Government's promised surplus until 2017-18, which it originally planned to achieve by 2015-16;
 - (d) during the period between the 2014-15 ACT Budget, and the recent Budget Review, the Government's expenses have increased by approximately \$467.8 million;
 - (e) during the period between the 2014-15 ACT Budget, and the recent Budget Review, the Government's Net Debt has increased by approximately 29.5%;
 - (f) during the period between the 2014-15 ACT Budget, and the recent Budget Review, the Government's Net Liabilities has increased by approximately 12.5%;
 - (g) the Government continues to slug Canberra residents and businesses with increased taxes, anticipating an increase of over \$7 million in taxation revenue from the 2014-15 ACT Budget; and
 - (h) the Territory's deficit for 2015-16 is approximately \$250 million, which is \$118 million worse than previously forecasted; and
- (2) calls on the Government to detail the impact of the Budget Review on the ACT community.

It is interesting as we start the year that we have received the midyear review and what we find in the midyear review is that the announced deficit of \$770 million is bigger than anything that has been seen in this territory since self-government. And we all know some of the reasons for that. But it is important to put it all in context. This is a deficit that is bigger than the deficit of any other jurisdiction in the entire country, other than WA. New South Wales, Victoria and the Northern Territory are all running surpluses. Queensland's deficit is down to \$64 million; South Australia's is at \$185 million; Tasmania's is \$285 million; and WA's is \$1.29 billion.

But it is also important to note that on a per capita basis the ACT's deficit is four times that of WA. Indeed, if you take the Mr Fluffy expenditure out, we are still second only to WA. It is also important to note that if you discount superannuation adjustments like the other jurisdictions do, the ACT's deficit could be \$881 million. The deficit in the 2015-16 budget was forecast at \$250 million. This is \$118 million worse than previously forecast.

It is interesting to look at the man who is rapidly beginning to resemble Wayne Swan. I am referring to our Treasurer and now Chief Minister. When Mr Barr became Treasurer he inherited a budget surplus of \$43.8 million from the 2011-12 financial year. When he delivered his first budget the deficit grew to \$318.3 million and \$362 million by the budget review. Going from a surplus of \$43.8 million in 2011-12 to a deficit of \$770 million in 2014-15 is a variance of about 1,700 per cent.

However, discounting the funding for Mr Fluffy, the deficit is roughly \$385.9 million and that is a seven per cent increase from the deficit identified in the 2013-14 budget review. And we all know, again, if you take Mr Fluffy out, the deficit has grown by \$53 million. And this is so typical of Labor governments; it is so typical of this Treasurer.

When we look at debt, when Mr Barr became Treasurer in 2011 the actual net debt was a healthy \$473 million. The 2014-15 budget review marks the first time when net debt has been adjusted above the net debt in the original budget, a new low-water mark for this Treasurer. And the territory's net debt position has been deteriorating year on year due to increased borrowings and, despite constant questions about how will it be paid back and when will it be paid back, all we see in the charts—and members only have to look at the chart in budget paper 3 this year—is that the debt is growing and growing. All we have, on page 294, is total external territory borrowings made up of the GGS and the PTEs on a very steep climb and in 2017-18 passing the \$4½ billion mark. That is this Treasurer's work. As I said, the territory's net debt budget position has been deteriorating year on year and since the 2011-12 budget review through to the 2014-15 review there has been a variance of about 436 per cent, an amazing achievement.

When the Treasurer took over in 2011, other borrowings were at \$1.9 million. Since then these borrowings have increased by a variance of 71 per cent. And the general government interest expenses since Mr Barr became Treasurer have done the same thing. They have just continued to climb. When Mr Barr took over as Treasurer the interest expense was about \$95 million. Since then it has grown to \$170 million a year, up by about 78 per cent.

You do have to ask: is it sustainable? And you do have to ask: what is the Treasurer's answer to all of this? The answer to sustainability is no, it is not sustainable to have this growth in borrowings and it is not sustainable to have this growth in interest payments. Our debt to equity ratio is still strong, but the problem is that there seems to be no escape from the way this government spends. And, at the end of the day, the problem that we have is the expenditure of this government.

What is the Chief Minister's answer? You only need to go to page 42 of budget paper 3 this year where he says that the temporary deficits over the next three years reflect the government's investment in jobs and services—temporary deficits. The Treasurer believes that this will simply go away, because they are temporary. But with the same illusion as Wayne Swan gave to the federal parliament and to the people of Australia as a whole, this Treasurer is now simply saying, "It is coming. It will come and we will fix it."

But we know that it was meant to be in 2015-16; then it was 2016-17. Now it is 2017-18. Year on year the surpluses elude this government and they slide further and further into debt. And it is because we have got an eyes-closed, fingers-crossed, temporary deficit sort of mentality from this Treasurer and now Chief Minister that we have this problem. We know that he had his eyes closed and his fingers crossed and hoped it would all go away when Kevin Rudd's budget slashed 14,457 jobs from the commonwealth public service, the majority of which were going to be in this city.

It was intriguing to hear Dr Bourke blame it all on the Liberal Party, but this is the problem. Those opposite will never acknowledge the faults of federal Labor, and the root of our current problem is federal Labor's mismanagement of the budget. Yes, it has been exacerbated by the additional job cuts that the coalition put in place, but this is what happens when you do not stand up for your territory, as the Liberals always have, against whoever is in office federally. We stand up for jobs in this territory.

This is what happens when you do not genuinely diversify your economy. This is what happens when you suddenly find the word "diversify" just before the election in 2012 and put it in a document, a document that renames, rebrands, relaunches to make up for the disastrous 2006 budget where this government abandoned the business community of the ACT.

It is also what happens when, beyond the public service, you are totally reliant on land, a land-based economy and a land-based budget. "How can I sell another block of land? How can we get more land into the market so that we can balance the budget?" Instead of taking the long-term view and actually having a long-term plan about what is the best use of and the best return over time on blocks of land so that all benefit over the years, this is what happens when you are reliant on land and you get the double whammy of public service cuts and reduced demand for land.

What we have is the Treasurer looking and sounding more and more like Wayne Swan. He has got his own version of the mining tax as well, and we know that is called the lease variation charge. We will get the update on the lease variation charge, I think it is tomorrow afternoon, when the quarterly financial reports are delivered. But the lease variation charge has never delivered the revenue that it said it would, never even got close, because it is a dud tax. At the same time, it limits urban renewal.

Here we are, we are down to renewal now, and the Chief Minister used the word "renewal" what, 18 times in his speech yesterday? But if you genuinely want urban renewal, why would you put a brake on it using a tax like the lease variation charge? We all know that most of the projects are finished, and there are not too many cranes left on the skyline in Civic. Most of those projects were projects that were approved before the changes that saw the lease variation charge brought in and, having spoken to the developers, most of those projects would not have gone ahead had they been subject to the lease variation regime. And that is the problem.

All we have got from this government is words. All we have got is a government that has had a lot of luck in terms of revenue that flowed in from things like the GST and the property boom, but the people of the ACT are out of luck because this government has not provided for the future. We know that, as I have said, the surpluses always just seem to be that extra year away. "They are coming."

Yesterday he was looking and sounding more and more like Wayne Swan. We had all the platitudes yesterday. We had all the platitudes that said, "We are the Labor government and we include everybody." Yes, you do, and everyone is being let down by this approach. That is why we are calling on the government to detail the real impacts of the budget review on the ACT economy.

How will the government make up their shortfall while constantly fixated on light rail, constantly ignoring the business community? The people of the ACT are telling us that they are hurting, that their rates are going up. We all know that rates will triple. We have got it from the Quinlan review. We know that rates will triple and are going up, and you only need to look at the documents in the budget papers to see the increases in the rates that will come year on year. When you look at them, you can see that we have already had huge increases and there are increases to come. The sum collected from general rates, based on the figures in the current year's budget, goes up by 12 per cent next year. In 2016-17 it goes up by another 12 per cent, and in 2017-18 it goes up by another nine per cent of the total take.

The problem for people is that is coming out of their pockets, and they are doing it tough. Because they are doing it tough they are not spending, and we have got this spiral where retail, which is really the eyes of your economy, is not doing well in the ACT. And you have to ask: what is the government to do? Doom and gloom, yes. "It is all Tony Abbott's fault or it is Mr Fluffy's fault or it is instability in the world markets." But it is never this government's fault.

But when you look at the state of the budget, what you see is that this government always outspends what it earns. And therein lies the problem. We look at, for instance, the 2013-14 actual outcome. Revenue was \$4.3 billion, expenditure was \$4.5 million. In the original 2014-15 budget, expenditure was \$4.8 billion against \$4.4 billion in revenue. The revised budget has it at \$5.3 billion of expenditure against \$4.4 billion of revenue. And so it goes on. In the 2015-16 revised estimate, the revenue is expected to be \$4.6 billion and they will spend \$5 billion. And in 2016-17, there is \$4.9 billion in revenue and call it \$5.1 billion in expenses. The dilemma is that the government spends so much without a way of sustaining it.

Yes, Mr Barr, since becoming Chief Minister, talks proudly about delivering typical Labor values. He is certainly delivering typical Labor budgets and typical Labor economic management. It is the debt and the deficit, and that leads to increased taxes, fees and charges that ordinary folks have to pay. You only have to look at some of the enormous increases last year to see that.

We have seen how debt has grown. We have seen how the deficits have grown. Indeed, it is interesting in the update this year that, when you look at the tables, net debt is up 4.3 per cent, net financial liability is up 13.4 per cent. When you look at net worth it has declined from \$16.7 billion, as the original figure in the budget, to \$16.3 billion in the budget review. And these are things that the people of the ACT will suffer from.

So it is time that the government detailed the impact of the midyear review on people's households. It is time they told people what they are doing. And it is time that they gave people some surety that their cost of living is not going to blow out. And we all know how effective the cost of living statement is. It is why the Liberals put it in the Financial Management Act. We know that in the first year fees and charges from the government went up almost \$600 for the average household. They got a little wiser last year. They split it into a number of scenarios. But they go up. They go up every year, without any consideration of the people that have to pay it.

So it is appropriate that the government tells us what taxes, charges, fees or fines they are likely to put up in the coming budget. It is important that people know so that they can start planning and getting ready for what inevitably comes. I note the Chief Minister has now circulated an amendment to look at that, but it is full of the same stuff: “We are focusing on this; we are doing that.” I noticed that, when he became Chief Minister last year, Mr Barr did say he would have to get out from behind the desk and go and talk to the real people. Perhaps he should have been doing that since he first appeared in this place in 2006, and he would have a better understanding of what his policies are doing to households in the ACT, whether it be in Belconnen or Tuggeranong, in the inner south or the inner north, Gungahlin, Woden or Weston.

People are hurting. They are hurting because of the policies of this government. They are certainly hurting because it is a typical Labor government, and they are certainly hurting because there is no certainty on how this government will pay off its growing debt. Indeed, the interest payments that cover that debt are, of course, funds that cannot be expended on delivering services, better quality roads, better management of the environment and all the things that are important to people—health, education, as well as safety and personal security.

What we need from this Treasurer, from this Chief Minister, is not idle words like “renewal”. What we need is some truth about how he is going to fix it. *(Time expired.)*

MR BARR (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Urban Renewal and Minister for Tourism and Events) (11.41): I move:

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

“(1) notes:

- (a) that the 2014-15 ACT Budget was focused on investing in Canberra, notably investing in our economy, investing in our people and investing in jobs;
- (b) that the ACT Government has taken a proactive approach to supporting the ACT economy and community in the light of the Commonwealth’s contraction, including meeting the shortfall of \$240 million in health funding that was cut by the Federal Government;
- (c) that the ACT Government has taken an explicit decision to carry a short-term Budget deficit to support the economy;
- (d) that the ACT Government has a measured and responsible path to return the Budget to balance, with the Budget to return to balance in 2016-17;
- (e) that the financial position outlined in the 2014-15 Budget Review remains consistent with the 2014-15 Budget;
- (f) that the majority of the variation to the Territory’s Headline Net Operating Balance in the 2014-15 Budget Review from the 2014-15 Budget is due to

the Government's decision to implement the Asbestos Eradication Scheme, with the Scheme to impact the Budget by about \$530 million over the forward estimates period; and

- (g) that the Territory retains a AAA stable credit rating, and that this rating was reaffirmed by Standard & Poor's in light of the announcement of the Asbestos Eradication Scheme; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) maintain its commitment to supporting the ACT economy and community;
- (b) maintain its commitment to rid the Territory of the legacy of loose-fill asbestos by continuing to implement the Asbestos Eradication Scheme; and
- (c) maintain its commitment to a measured and responsible approach to returning the Budget to balance."

The amendment notes that the 2014-15 ACT budget and the government's fiscal strategy remain focused on investing in our city—investing in our economy, our people and jobs.

The ACT government has taken a proactive approach to supporting the ACT economy and our community in light of the commonwealth contraction. This has included meeting a shortfall of \$240 million in health funding that was cut by the federal government. The ACT government has taken an explicit decision to carry a short-term budget deficit in order to support the economy in our community at this time. We will continue to take a measured and responsible path to return the budget to balance in the longer term.

The fiscal position outlined in the budget review, of course, remains consistent with what was outlined in the 2014-15 budget: that the majority of the variation, as the shadow treasurer has acknowledged, is due to the decision of the government—indeed, this Assembly—to implement the asbestos eradication scheme, which has a significant impact on the territory budget, of around \$530 million over the forward estimates period.

Missing from the shadow treasurer's contribution was the point—I will make it, and I will continue to make it—that the territory retains a AAA stable credit rating. This leaves us, I think, only in partnership with Victoria, of all the Australian states and territories, as a state or territory with a AAA credit rating with a stable outlook. Everyone else amongst the states and territories has either been downgraded or is on a credit watch. This AAA stable credit rating was reaffirmed by Standard & Poor's after the asbestos eradication scheme announcement and the impacts of that were known.

My amendment calls on the government to maintain our commitment to supporting the ACT economy and our community, to maintain our commitment to rid the territory of the legacy of loose-fill asbestos by continuing the asbestos eradication scheme and to maintain a commitment to a measured and responsible approach to returning the budget to balance.

This really goes to the heart of this issue. What we get consistently from the shadow treasurer is an argument, partly made, that the government spends too much. The spending on the asbestos eradication scheme was supported, so presumably that is quarantined from what would be a Treasurer Smyth budget in the future. Apparently spending on health, education, the environment and a few other things that the shadow treasurer indicated would also be quarantined from any spending reduction.

The onus here is really on the shadow treasurer in moving motions like these. If he is concerned about the level of government spending and if he is concerned about the range of things that he claims to be concerned about, he has ample opportunity to put forward a motion today calling on the government to reduce expenditure in certain areas—if he has the courage of his convictions. If he really wants to enter into a debate and have that debate about where the government should be spending its money, taxpayers' money, where the budget priorities should be—if he wants to do that, he should put that forward. If he wants to be the advocate of fiscal Darwinism for the territory and if he wants to get into an austerity fetish, Madam Speaker—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, you interject far too much. You speak across the chamber. You are a distraction to the speakers and to other members. Desist.

MR BARR: If the austerity fetish and fiscal Darwinism are the preferred policy approach from the shadow treasurer, bring it on. I am very happy to have that debate—very happy.

Fundamentally, our fiscal policy settings at this time in our city's economic history are designed to encourage infrastructure growth, to encourage jobs growth and to encourage economic growth. Any rational economist would recognise that in the current economic circumstances a mad rush for the territory government to deliver a surplus for the sake of it, which is the argument from the shadow treasurer—it is not about what is happening in the rest of the economy; it is all just about a tiny mind, a tiny accountant's mind, as to how a budget should be presented.

If you are fair dinkum, Mr Smyth, get out there and argue for everything that should be cut from current government expenditure. Don't sit there and say, "Goodness me." Actually bring forward a policy alternative. You have been in this place longer than almost anyone. You have been sitting in the shadow treasurer's position for as long as almost anyone in the Commonwealth of Nations, not just this country. You have had ample time to deliver a policy alternative. If we must immediately have a budget surplus, then indicate, today or even next week, in private members' business, where you will cut the hundreds of millions of dollars of expenditure from the ACT government budget. Alternatively, you could put forward a range of measures that might increase revenue. There are many different ways of achieving a balanced budget.

The fundamental question for this economy now is: why would the government run a surplus in these economic circumstances? What would that achieve for our economy?

What would that mean for employment? What would that mean for infrastructure? If it is the position of the shadow treasurer that it must be a surplus or a balanced budget over everything else at this moment in time, given everything that has been thrown at this economy—from his federal colleagues in particular, but not exclusively—then let him say so and let him put forward the measures that would achieve that.

That is certainly Joe Hockey's position. That was Tony Abbott's position until a few days ago. All of a sudden, everything has changed. I have no doubt that the federal government will continue to run budget deficits for some time now, with a view to supporting the Australian economy, as they should at this time.

The ACT, like the Commonwealth of Australia, had very low levels of debt and has a AAA credit rating. So we have the capacity to support our economy at this time. We have the capacity to invest in productive new infrastructure for this city. We also need to maintain the high level of services that we provide to the Canberra community. And we need to support jobs; we need to continue to support jobs.

The alternative economic recipe, the alternative policy position, is exactly what has happened in conservative states. Where conservative governments have come in in other Australian states, what has their approach been? To slash employment, to cut services and to reduce spending on infrastructure or to try to privatise everything that is not bolted down. We have seen what has happened to those governments in Victoria and now in Queensland. If that is the recipe, if that is your policy approach, bring it on. We are very happy to have that debate and to contrast our approach with that of conservative Liberal governments in Victoria and Queensland—indeed, what we have been seeing nationally. We are very happy to do that. If you want to continue down that path, great. We look forward to that debate. We really look forward to that debate.

We do not resile from supporting our economy at this time. We do not resile from putting jobs first. We do not resile from supporting new productive infrastructure for Canberra. And we do not resile from working in partnership with the private sector—indeed, with new investors in the ACT economy. We are seeing that, and it is terrific for Canberra. Our national and international exposure as an investment destination and as an exporter of high quality goods and services is growing day after day. The shadow treasurer may not like to hear that, but there is a positive message from the Canberra economy: it is the success of our enterprising businesses, who are focusing on national and international markets and achieving outstanding success.

There is also a great story to tell about the new level of investment that this economy is attracting at a national and international level. An economy of our size does not have sufficient capital within our territory's borders in order to maintain a level of growth and living standards, so we are seeking to attract new capital into this economy. And we are succeeding. We are also using our own balance sheet to invest in new productive infrastructure for the territory. That is this government's focus, and that is what this economy needs at this point in time.

I am very happy to have this debate. It is austerity; it is cuts; it is Campbell Newman, Denis Napthine, Ted Baillieu and Lawrence Springborg. You name the leaders. They

are recycling through it. It is Tony Abbott and Joe Hockey. If you want that, that is the Liberal Party brand; that is what you will get. That is what Jeremy Hanson and Brendan Smyth would deliver for the people of Canberra. If the people of Canberra want that, if they want that economic approach, they will have the opportunity to vote for it in a couple of years.

We are going to contrast our approach with what we have seen from state Liberal governments and from the federal Liberal government. We are going to support this economy, we are going to support jobs, we are going to support new investment and we are going to back our own entrepreneurs, our own innovation and those areas of the ACT economy that continue to grow rapidly.

That is why the agenda I announced for the government yesterday includes a number of important legislative reforms that will unlock significant new investment and opportunities for Canberra, not least of which are the University of Canberra reform bills, which will unlock nearly \$1 billion worth of new investment in that campus. That will provide not only some fantastic new amenities for Canberrans in terms of health services and the like that will be located on the university campus but also significant export earning potential for the university as it attracts more international students and researchers and more national level students and researchers. That is an important growth area for the territory.

We continue to see strength in our export sectors. That is only going to grow. The recent devaluation of the Australian dollar is certainly helping those areas of our economy that are exposed to currency fluctuations. The recent reduction in interest rates, reflecting the state of the national economy, also provides a benefit for Canberra households, as there are, as I understand, slightly above the national average of mortgagees, mortgage holders, in the ACT than nationally. That benefit of a reduced interest rate on home loans will be passed through. The banks are putting this into the pockets of Canberra households. In the last six months, we have seen six consecutive increases in retail spending. Indeed, the December figures for the ACT were quite encouraging.

The momentum needs to be maintained into 2015. There is no doubt that the federal budget—what happens in the federal budget and what happens in the Senate in terms of a number of measures that are currently before the Senate—will have a significant impact on consumer confidence. If Canberra households are slugged with massive increases in higher education fees and if Canberra households are slugged with a GP tax, that will undoubtedly impact on the level of discretionary spending and certainly will impact on consumer confidence. I hope the Senate will block those measures. I hope there is a change of heart and that the good government that started yesterday under Prime Minister Abbott will continue. (*Time expired.*)

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (11.55): I firstly congratulate the shadow treasurer, Mr Smyth, for bringing this motion before the Assembly today. Discussion about our economy and about our budget is always front and centre for the Canberra Liberals. We will not be supporting the amendments put forward by the Treasurer. To be honest, it must be pretty embarrassing for Andrew Barr.

MADAM SPEAKER: For Mr Barr.

MR HANSON: For Mr Barr, who thinks that, like Wayne Swan, he is the world's greatest treasurer. But when we actually look at the record of Mr Barr since he became Treasurer, what we see is record deficits for the ACT—in fact, as Mr Smyth has pointed out, record deficits in the context of the nation. If delivering massive record deficits is a point of pride for Mr Barr, and I do not think it is—

Mr Smyth: No, it is not.

MR HANSON: No, it is not, is it? He seems to be justifying it and then defending it. It is a very odd position he is in. The net debt seems to have exploded under this minister. We had a very low debt till he became Treasurer. It has exploded. Borrowings, again, under this Treasurer have exploded. Interest payments have exploded under this Treasurer. Mr Barr likes to make parallels with the Liberals and what we might be like. But what we see is the Wayne Swan treasury approach, which is to borrow, to put your jurisdiction into massive debt and deficit but always to promise a surplus just beyond the next election. There is this miraculous surplus that appears after the next election.

I have been trying to fathom what Mr Barr means by fiscal Darwinism. I had not taken Mr Barr for a creationist before, but perhaps what he is talking about is the miracle surplus that he purports will be delivered. The reality is that this is a man who has only delivered deficit, who has only delivered greater debt, who has only delivered greater interest payments in every single one of the budgets that he has delivered. That is the reality. That is the reality and I can guarantee you that whilst this man remains Treasurer that will continue.

But he expects the community to believe that just over the horizon of the next election there will be this sunshine of surplus. Does anyone believe that? I do not think anyone believed Wayne Swan. In fact, when it came to the reality, what we saw, rather than the surplus that Wayne Swan had promised, was about \$50 billion of deficit. Mr Barr is looking for his miracle. It will not come unless there is a Liberal government and Mr Smyth can take control of the purse strings of this jurisdiction.

Mr Barr is struggling for ideas. He is saying: “Where are the ideas? Where could we create more wealth? Where could we make cuts to expenditure? What ideas have you got, Canberra Liberals?” Let us get rid of capital metro. There are tens of millions of dollars being expended in the budget right now on capital metro that we would not expend—tens of millions of dollars; and, as forecast, what is coming is hundreds of millions of dollars that do not need to be spent.

There you go, Madam Speaker. There are some ideas for you. There are tens of millions of dollars of ideas. There have been these solar and wind projects that we have seen coming forward from this government that we know are not just hurting the budget but hurting every single Canberra household when they turn on the light switch.

I turn to some of the public art put in by your mate Jon Stanhope. How many tens of millions of dollars was spent on that? There is the jail and so on. Certainly on the expenditure side we have given you some guidance. Tens of millions of dollars worth of savings could be made right now. You could do it at the next budget. We would welcome it.

In terms of the revenue side, what you are doing as a government, led by the Treasurer and Chief Minister, is driving business out of this town. It is driving prosperity out of this town with things like variation 306, which is making it so difficult for people to do renovations, to do building. It is squeezing the small businessman out of this town. Things like the lease variation charge are a tax on development. What we have seen is very little revenue coming in from that tax.

But I know, having spoken to many developers—I am not just talking about the big end of town; I am talking about the little guys out there—that they are going interstate. They are going to Queanbeyan; they are going to the Gold Coast; they are going to Victoria; they are going elsewhere. Prosperity is leaving this town. All the time what we see is that the revenue is going to shrink. The income is going to shrink. What we see is that the approach from Andrew Barr is to tax more.

Not only is the debt going up and not only is the deficit going up but the taxation is going up. Talk to any Canberra household about their rates. Talk to business about their rates. Although we have the denial that there would be these rate increases that we foretold—it was not hard: we got it from the Quinlan tax review; it is not like we made this stuff up—we know from the Treasurer's own budget that rates are going up at 10 per cent a year.

What does this mean for businesses in this town? I was speaking to a business owner in Manuka who owns property there. He simply cannot afford the rates. It is tough for small business out there. It is even tougher because of the desperate need to pay for things like light rail, as this Treasurer has done in an attempt to try and balance his books to achieve the ever-elusive surpluses.

The scale of the problem is significant. From time to time governments will run deficits. There is an appropriate time to run deficits. But the problem is that if you take the Andrew Barr approach—the Mr Barr approach, Madam Speaker—which is to always run deficits, then when things do come along, and they will come along, they are going to impact on your budget. We have faced Mr Fluffy, but before this town has faced upturns and downturns in the economic cycle. It has faced natural disasters. There will always be something. That is why, if you have a strong budget, if you have a strong economy, when these things come along the impact of them is lesser.

You can run a small deficit to get through those difficult times. But if your strategy is always to run a deficit, you are going to run into trouble. The trouble that this government has run into is Mr Fluffy on top of massive deficit, meaning that we now have record debt, record deficit. As Mr Smyth pointed out, we are not here to say we support strong business for the sake of business. We are not saying that we should have a strong economy just for the sake of making the books look good. It is about the

social dividend. It is about the fact that if we can create jobs in a strong economy, that is good for everybody. What it means is that if we can get extra revenue coming into our coffers, if we can make sure that we control spending, then there is more money to spend on health.

What we have seen under this mob is \$41 million taken out of the health budget that was meant to be rebuilding the Canberra Hospital. It was ripped out. We see no concrete plan to rebuild the Canberra Hospital. Where is that plan? Where is the money that is being invested in those services? It is about education. We know that our schools are under pressure. We know that last time this minister had control over expenditure in his portfolio he cut 23 schools.

Here he is trying to say: “You are just going to cut. You are people like Campbell Newman or Tony Abbott,”—or whatever slur it is. He is trying to create some sort of manufactured slur. Remember, Madam Speaker, that the last time Andrew Barr had control over something like this, he cut 23 schools. He is the man who is responsible for the greatest cuts in the ACT’s history. He is the man who has come in and cut 23 schools. If you want to talk about who has experience in cutting, who has experience in slashing, then I tell you who it is.

Government members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order!

MR HANSON: I will tell you. There are interjections. They do not like it because the greatest cutter, the greatest cutter in the history of the ACT, the man who slashed 23 schools, is Mr Barr. If he wants to talk about cutting and he wants to talk about slashing, he knows how to do it. Just ask him and ask all the schoolkids across their schools. *(Time expired.)*

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (12.06): The Greens have long held the view in our economic policy that one does need a sustainable budget. There is an appropriate time for deficit. There is also a time when a surplus is required to balance that out.

The great tension, of course, in sorting these things out, and the challenge for government, is to meet the service expectations of the community, including the many demands that are put in this place in motions on private members’ day, to support jobs, to keep the city running well, but at the same time to find the revenue to match this. That is, of course, the great challenge of trying to deal with a budget and make sure that we do have that sustainable budget in the long term and also make sure that we are investing in the infrastructure that we need for the future.

I have looked at both Mr Smyth’s motion and Mr Barr’s amendment. They certainly present two very different stories. One might expect that in this kind of discussion. But I think at the end of the day it is worth reflecting on the things that are going on in the ACT economy. We have heard quite an elaboration of that today. We certainly have the Mr Fluffy issue, which has provided a very significant impact on the budget

in terms of the set of numbers. That has been discussed today and has been detailed by Mr Barr particularly in his amendment. It is a very eye-watering number in some regards. But is a number that we must take on. We must provide a lasting solution to this problem to deal with it once and for all and to give certainty to our community on this issue.

There is no doubt that there have been a number of other pressures facing the ACT budget, including movements in GST payments and the like, that continue to have perhaps a disproportionate impact in an economy the size of the ACT's, compared to, say, New South Wales or Victoria, where such movements perhaps are more readily absorbed in the context of a larger economy.

I think these are the challenges that face the ACT. I think that it is an important observation that Minister Barr has made in paragraph (g). The ACT continues to maintain its AAA credit rating. This has been reaffirmed, as he notes in his comments. I think that that is a very positive thing in light of the approach the ACT government has taken to dealing with our current economic circumstances.

The significant investment that is being made in the capital is accounted for in those recent assessments. Things like capital metro and the upgrades of the public health system are being taken into account in those analyses. Yet the ACT retains its stable credit rating. I think that reflects the fact that these projects are affordable, which is certainly something that has been taken into account in weighing up what we can and cannot do in terms of infrastructure investment. For me, that is a very positive sign. The fact that the credit rating remains stable I think shows that the decisions we are taking on issues like capital metro, which we have heard much criticism of from those on the opposite side, about whether they can be afforded or not, reflect that they are affordable.

There are various other points in Mr Smyth's motion and Mr Barr's amendment that have already had an airing today. I will be supporting Mr Barr's amendment. I think it reflects the thinking that is going on in the budget discussion process, which is that we do need to find the right balance between providing the services that this community expects, that this community needs, and continuing to support the ACT economy at a time when there are ill headwinds, as perhaps would be the way to put it.

We need to be mindful of the fact that we cannot continue on that path and we do need to work our way back to surplus. That is certainly the work that has been done in budget planning. I am happy to continue to support that approach.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (12.10): I guess Mr Barr's speech can be characterised as same old, same old. He does not like criticism. He does not like being hoist on his own economic petard. But the facts are the facts. They are there and it is quite clear that this Treasurer, this Chief Minister, can renew the rhetoric but cannot renew the economy. And that is the problem for this city.

We acknowledged straight up that Mr Fluffy was a factor, and I said that. But if you take the Mr Fluffy expenditures out, the budget deteriorates by another \$53 million according to the half-yearly update. Again, this just simply shows that this minister

(1) cannot control the spending of his ministers and (2) really does not have an answer to return the budget to surplus. It just keeps slipping away. It is always just on the horizon. It is always just one more year. That does not help the families of the ACT.

Indeed, if members go to page 22 of the midyear review, it is interesting that the expected expenses from the 2015-16 budget, which is yet to appear, to the election year budget, the 2016-17 budget, only go up by \$23.5 million—\$23 million growth in expenditure in a single year. The actual outcome for 2013-14 was \$4.5 billion. The original budget for 2014-15 was \$4.8 billion. Of course, with Mr Fluffy it has gone to \$5.3 billion; in 2015-16 it is expected to be \$5 billion; and then, it is interesting, in the 2015 budget it is \$5.0543 billion. But in 2016-17 it only goes to \$5.078 billion, an increase of some \$23.5 million. If the Treasurer and Chief Minister achieves that, it will be a miracle. Of course, that is the basis for them getting into surplus.

It is interesting that in the 2016-17 budget it goes from \$5.078 billion to \$5.241 billion. What is that, about \$150 million? But the Treasurer wants us to believe that, particularly in an election year, the increase in expenses will simply be \$23 million. If he achieved that it would—I did not check, but I should go back and check—probably be the smallest increase in expenses in the history of the territory. I would suggest that it is fairy floss. It is a delusion and that is why the surplus keeps slipping away. You know the Treasurer is in trouble, the Chief Minister is in trouble, when he starts going the names. He has now invented financial Darwinism, fiscal Darwinism, and tiny accountants' minds. Good on you. They are good debating points, but it is not going to fix your problem.

He poses the question of alternative policy. Let us put alternative policies. As you would know, Madam Speaker, in 2006 I said we should have a new convention centre. The entire business community agrees with the concept of a new convention centre and there is a document from the then Canberra Business Council with 54 different organisations saying the number one priority is a new convention centre. We saw on Monday the release of the EY report *Australia Forum—and its potential economic benefits* from the now Canberra Business Chamber. It says that it will increase activity by \$1.6 billion over 20 years. During construction, it will create 3,000 jobs; when operating it will create 1,400 jobs.

You want some savings? Get rid of capital metro. What were the additional jobs in capital metro in the first stage? What was it? Fifty-four jobs, 54 operating jobs. Fifty-four jobs versus 1,400 jobs. If you are serious about—

Mr Gentleman: It is 1,000 jobs.

MR SMYTH: So it is 1,000 jobs? Mr Gentleman interrupts that it is 1,000 jobs that will come from capital metro.

Mr Gentleman: 50,000 over its period of life.

MR SMYTH: Sorry, how many?

Mr Gentleman: 50,000 over its period of life.

MR SMYTH: It will create 50,000 new jobs, capital metro? It will employ 50,000 people, Mr Gentleman? You need to get your facts straight. What the report says is it will bring 49,000 jobs into the corridor. It does not tell you where those jobs come from, Mr Gentleman. Those jobs come from other parts of Canberra. It does not claim to create new jobs. In terms of employment on capital metro, my memory is it is 54 jobs to operate the capital metro. What the convention centre delivers is 1,400 jobs.

Again, it is not my report. EY did it. The net contribution to Canberra BCR is 2.4. Sometimes it is hard to compare infrastructure projects, but the BCR on capital metro is 1.2. You choose: 2.4 or 1.2.

Mr Barr: And you knew exactly what the EY representative said about comparing those businesses.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Barr!

MR SMYTH: And that is what I said. I just said that. It is difficult to compare.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, can you sit down, please. Stop the clock. Mr Barr, you take exception to people interjecting over you. I called you to order and you did not come to order. Can I call you to order and remind you that you do not like it when people interject over you and you should keep that in mind.

Mr Barr: Madam Speaker, on indulgence, I accept your ruling, but, given the number of times that the Leader of the Opposition interjects compared to my interjections, it is a ratio of about 100 to 1. I know you called him to order before and I appreciate that.

MADAM SPEAKER: Are you sure you want to do this, Mr Barr, or do you want—

Mr Barr: I said on indulgence, Madam Speaker. I am raising this point. I accept your ruling.

MADAM SPEAKER: You do not have indulgence. Sit down.

MR SMYTH: I made it quite clear. The gentleman who delivered the report said it is very hard to compare these things. But I am just saying here is one that creates more jobs, a lot more jobs, when it is operating and has a very strong BCR. It brings revenue. But it is also the things beyond that. I am living somewhere else in the world. Will I fly to Canberra, fly to the new international airport, when the international flights appear to go to a city that has a great conference and convention centre? I wonder how many people are actually going to come for a ride on the tram. I suspect the difference between those two groups would be enormous.

Mr Barr then rails against the privatisation agenda and fiscal restraint. He is the man, as Mr Hanson pointed out, who shut 23 schools and he is the man who has just sold ACTTAB. He is the man who is looking at selling the streetlights. He said that there are other assets on his agenda. Maybe I am not getting what the Treasurer is saying here. He is accusing me of something I have never said, but it is exactly the thing that

he is doing. And it is that sort of approach that people hate about politicians: when you accuse the other side of doing something or of going to do something that you are currently doing—and you do yourself no service, Chief Minister, by running that line.

Then he mentioned tourism. Let us look at tourism. Some of the latest stats I have seen show overnight trips to the ACT, domestic overnight visitations and average spend for a night, declined when in just about every other jurisdiction in the country they went up. Why is that? We had the boost of the centenary, but we have got a government that failed to deliver long and lasting benefits from that.

We have had to reboot CBR. A year later it has been rebooted. One would ask the question: why? Obviously it was not working. Maybe you make the case that you are just refining it so that it works better, but it would be great for the tourism minister, Treasurer and Chief Minister to table some documents on some actual hard data on whether or not CBR has been successful.

This is an important motion because at the end it affects people, where they live and how they work, their cost of living, their wellbeing, and business confidence when people want some leadership. One of the Labor members one day will stand up and shock us all by saying, “Yes, Kevin Rudd cut more than 14,000 jobs from the federal public service and that had an impact on the ACT.” We stand here and say, “We do not like what the coalition is doing in regard to job numbers.” But we are honest in that review. We also stood in this place and decried what the Rudd Labor government was doing, but none of those opposite had the courage to stand up for their electorate. Getting a lecture from the likes of those opposite about job cuts is a bit rich when they just went quietly into the night when the Kevin and Julia show was cutting jobs in the ACT and at the same time not giving the sort of supporting infrastructure that, for instance, the Howard government did through the building of highways, additions at the airport, museums, monuments, memorials—those sorts of things.

This is an important motion. It should not be amended, because if we amend it it means that we are supporting the same old, same old—same old Treasurer, same old story, same old Chief Minister, glib words, glib lines. “Transformational” lasted a year. We are now into “renew”. Let us have a genuine debate about real renewal for the ACT and where it might go, not just have our heads in the sand from a government that is tired and a government that really does not have an agenda. Everything they drop on the table, like city to the lake, is now not a priority—unless the Chief Minister has now put city to the lake back on the agenda as a priority.

They do glossies like Mr Corbell did in 2005 for the development of Civic that had 16 major initiatives, none of which occurred. They are good at the glossies, but they are not good at the delivery. We have got Auditor-General’s reports that say they are not good at the delivery of capital works. This motion should stand as it is.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 7

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

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 12.25 to 2.30 pm.

Questions without notice

Gaming—policy

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Racing and Gaming. I refer to a statement on 5 February from former Chief Minister Jon Stanhope in relation to the Labor Party's continuing ownership of the Labor clubs. Mr Stanhope said:

The association with gambling and the conflict of interest, perceived or otherwise, are both morally and politically unacceptable ...

Minister, was your recent decision to increase the note limit on poker machines influenced by the Labor Party's ownership of the Labor clubs?

MS BURCH: No.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Minister, has your recent decision to increase the note limit on poker machines increased the perception of a conflict of interest?

Mr Corbell: Point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Point of order, Mr Corbell.

Mr Corbell: Madam Speaker, the question is asking for an expression of an opinion.

MADAM SPEAKER: Sorry, what was your question?

Mr Hanson: My question was: has your recent decision to increase the note limit on poker machines increased the perception of a conflict of interest?

MADAM SPEAKER: I think that what Mr Hanson is asking is an empirical question, not a hypothetical question. The perception of a conflict of interest could be measured. I will allow the question.

Mr Corbell: He is asking the minister for an opinion.

MS BURCH: In my view, no.

MADAM SPEAKER: He was not asking for an opinion; he was asking empirically. Supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, why should the community have any confidence in your handling of the gaming and racing portfolio, given your recent decisions and your recent backflips?

MS BURCH: Because I provide good communication with the clubs, with the community, and because the reforms I have put in place—

Opposition members interjecting—

MS BURCH: The reforms I have put in this place today—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order! I would like to hear Minister Burch.

MS BURCH: The reforms I have—

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order! I would like to hear Minister Burch. Supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, why has the government allowed the perception of an unacceptable conflict of interest to arise regarding its association with gambling?

MS BURCH: I do not believe we have, Madam Speaker.

Canberra Institute of Technology—Auslan

MR DOSZPOT: My question is to the Minister for Education and Training. Minister, in annual reports hearings last November you said that CIT planned to offer a certificate III in Auslan in 2015. In light of a petition being circulated suggesting training is not being offered, can you confirm whether certificate III is still proceeding, and have there been requests for other level training in Auslan following the rollout of NDIS services in the ACT?

MS BURCH: I thank Mr Doszpot for his question. Yes, CIT are teaching the level II in Auslan and they are offering level III in Auslan this year. Also, there is, through CIT Solutions, access to a level almost like a community awareness level of Auslan training. I have indeed met with an Auslan interpreter. I think many of us have had a

discussion with Mandy over this matter. There needs to be a distinction between offerings through CIT, which are there and in place, and the concern that has been raised about the pool of available interpreters across the community. I have raised that with Disability. I have asked them to make contact and to write formally to the NDIA, given that we are six months into the NDIS, to see whether they have been able to identify a need through the plans that are put in place. That is the advice that I am seeking. I am exploring that. Once I get that information, we can respond accordingly.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, have you had conversations with the NDIA and the deaf resource centre about such courses and, if so, what was the outcome of those?

MS BURCH: Thank you, Mr Doszpot. I think, in part, I have answered that in reply to the first question. I have not had a direct conversation with the NDIA, but I have asked the directorate to approach them and to seek some formal advice, based on the evidence that may come through the six-month planning.

There are a small number of interpreters in town, but a certificate III will not make an Auslan interpreter anyway. So there is still other work, other skills and other attributes that need to be attained beyond a cert III—that is available through CIT—to make sure that we get that pool of interpreters.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Minister, what research has the government undertaken about claims that Auslan interpreters will be in high demand and that Canberra will not be able to provide sufficient access to training, and will you make that information publicly available?

MS BURCH: Once I get some advice back through the department, based on the information through the National Disability Insurance Agency, I will be more than happy to provide that advice. I will be standing in this place tomorrow with a routine update on the NDIA, so in future updates I can include that information.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Minister, what will happen to the vocational education courses in Auslan if you are not liaising sufficiently with the NDIA about the future of Auslan in the ACT?

MS BURCH: There are two separate activities or areas of interest. There is vocational training, which is on offer through CIT at the moment, and then there is the question that has been raised by Auslan interpreters, who have spoken to many in this place, about the pool of interpreters in the community. They are two separate matters. Certainly, I am hoping that we can get some further advice or information about the demand for interpreters. We know there are a few interpreters in town. They are well used, but I am not quite sure how great the demand is for more interpreters. Hopefully, the information through care planning will provide that to us.

Environment—Mugga Lane tip

MR WALL: My question is to the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services. Minister, many residents of Tuggeranong, namely in the suburbs of Macarthur, Fadden, Gowrie, Chisholm and Gilmore, have contacted me about the overwhelming bad odour emanating from the Mugga Lane tip affecting their quality of life. It was publicly stated by ACT NOWaste that work ceased at the tip on 6 February and therefore the smell would abate. Will you guarantee that the smell has stopped and will not occur again? If not, why not?

MR RATTENBURY: As Mr Wall has indicated, the works at the tip have now ceased. They ceased on Friday, 6 February. TAMS have advised residents that they expect the odours to cease in a short period after that. There will of course be a period when that is finalised. I hope it has now finished. There is certainly no intent to do further works, so I do not expect the odour to recur.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, what suburbs were notified about the potential effects of the work at the tip and in what formats did this notification take place?

MR RATTENBURY: I will seek the specific details and provide advice to the Assembly.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Minister, will you be investigating the delays in rectifying the smell and, if so, will affected residents be informed of the outcome?

MR RATTENBURY: No, I will not be. There were a number of measures that were put in place by TAMS to mitigate the smells. Unfortunately, the project did take longer than initially anticipated. There were delays caused by rain, which has had an impact on a number of things that TAMS is doing, and there was a suspension of work over the Christmas period. These are the reasons it took longer than anticipated. That is well explained. There does not need to be an investigation to assess that. So, no, I will not be undertaking one.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Minister, how many complaints regarding the smell have been recorded by Canberra Connect over the past three months and how were these complaints resolved?

MR RATTENBURY: ACT NOWaste received 58 complaints from residents in the 10 weeks to 4 February 2015 and they continued to communicate directly with each of them throughout that period. Once somebody had been in touch and ACT NOWaste had their contact details, I am advised that they did continue to provide those residents with an update.

Business—reform

MS FITZHARRIS: My question is to the Chief Minister and Minister for Economic Development. Chief Minister, can you update the Assembly on the government's strategy to promote innovation and economic renewal in the ACT?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Fitzharris for her first question to me in this chamber. In today's tough global and national economic environment, innovation is essential for Canberra businesses to grow. We on this side of the chamber are very focused on the process of innovation and business renewal. We think that Canberra businesses, given the right tools and support from government, can compete with anyone. This government's 2012 "Growth, diversification and jobs: a business development strategy for the ACT" set out a comprehensive plan to grow the territory economy.

The past three years have seen a concerted effort by every member of this government, with actions under the strategy all fully implemented. Importantly, though, this strategy is a living document and we have very successfully tailored approaches to business development in areas such as digital capability building, access to government, procurement reform, and supporting our tertiary and research sector.

Business innovation has been a standout area, thanks to policy being built around consultation with business and, importantly, very strong partnerships with representative organisations. I think that the most significant development is the establishment of the CBR Innovation Network, closely followed by the establishment of Invest Canberra—two targeted, strategic initiatives that focus our efforts on maximising our strengths and our abilities in research, innovation and collaboration, and also in attracting new investment.

The CBR Innovation Network was formally launched in November of last year. The network links government and the business community directly with five major research institutions through which we can continue to diversify the economy, develop emerging enterprises, support export capabilities and grow local employment opportunities.

A year earlier, in December 2013, I launched Invest Canberra, a body whose primary goals are to attract new investment and generate economic growth by capturing new technologies, skills, capabilities and products as well as investment capital to build strong and competitive industry sectors in the territory. Invest Canberra also provides a partnered approach for government agencies that are leading major infrastructure projects, resulting in a one-government approach to joining our economic, environmental and social policy objectives.

In addition to these primary initiatives, the government has, of course, implemented a wide range of actions to foster the right business environment to support investment and to accelerate innovation. The Digital Canberra Challenge engages ACT innovators and small and medium size enterprises in the development of new and enhanced digital solutions aimed at improving government services and operations.

The program stimulates innovation in electronic and mobile technologies, in turn helping to improve community access to government and public sector services and, importantly, to deliver productivity-based savings.

Significant changes to our taxation framework through an increase in the payroll tax threshold to \$1.85 million and a range of regulatory reforms and actions to reduce regulation that imposes unnecessary burdens or costs on business activity have been a part of this process. Access Canberra, our new one-stop shop to cut red tape, has already started its work, making life easier for small and large businesses, for community groups and for individuals needing access to various permits, approvals and licences. *(Time expired.)*

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Fitzharris.

MS FITZHARRIS: Minister, how is Invest Canberra helping to grow the business sector in Canberra?

MR BARR: Since its launch in December 2013, Invest Canberra and the team of staff and their associated partners have been working very hard to attract new investment to our city. This investment, of course, generates employment and economic growth, capturing new technologies, skills, capabilities and products, and is helping us to build some very competitive industry sectors.

To date, Invest Canberra has responded to approximately 100 investor leads and has promoted Canberra's investment opportunities and formed relationships with high value international investors in Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo, China and the United States. It has promoted a pipeline of investment opportunities in priority industry sectors and infrastructure projects to international investors and will continue to do so in the future.

Significantly, Invest Canberra assists in the investment process by facilitating government approvals and makes it easier for potential investors to do business with government. We are, of course, starting to see some very significant international investors entering the Canberra market, and I am very pleased that one of those new players who have come into our market is now the major sponsor of the Brumbies.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, how is the CBR Innovation Network helping promote innovation in Canberra?

MADAM SPEAKER: Can you repeat that, Dr Bourke? I was not tuned in to the beginning of the question, sorry.

DR BOURKE: Yes, I can, Madam Speaker. Minister, how is the CBR Innovation Network helping promote innovation in Canberra?

MADAM SPEAKER: The CBR Innovation Network is different from Invest Canberra?

Mr Barr: Yes.

MADAM SPEAKER: Chief Minister.

MR BARR: The CBR Innovation Network has as its vision to link businesses and entrepreneurs, to accelerate innovation and growth, and to maximise wealth creation. This is undoubtedly the key to further diversification of the ACT's economy. The innovation network will achieve this through the development of strong linkages across the local innovation sector and, importantly, leveraging off the opportunities and benefits presented through collaboration and shared goals.

The network's five foundation members—the Australian National University, NICTA, the CSIRO, the University of Canberra and the University of New South Wales Canberra—have made significant contributions both financially and in kind to establish the network, which secures its position as the central player in collaboration and innovation policy in the territory.

Resources such as the Entry 29 co-working space and the GRIFFIN Accelerator further enhance the network's reach and provide direct and ready access to mentors, resources and investors who support and work with participating companies. These initiatives are aimed squarely at expanding our economic base, diversifying our economy but, most importantly, growing local employment.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, you mentioned that 100 leads had been received. How many were followed up, how many came to fruition, how many jobs were created and what was the dollar value generated in the ACT economy?

MR BARR: All of the leads are followed up. That is Invest Canberra's job. They work very hard and are doing an outstanding job. I would like to take this opportunity from Mr Smyth's question to put on the record my appreciation for the hard work of the team of Invest Canberra.

They were particularly active, in partnership with the local organising committee for the Asian Cup, in presenting a number of business seminar and networking opportunities as part of our city's hosting of the Asian Cup football tournament, which I think everyone agrees was an outstanding success. There were plenty of critics in relation to the ACT government's investment in that major sporting event, but we took not only an opportunity to promote our city through sporting channels but, through Invest Canberra and the good work of that team, a number of business development opportunities that presented themselves during that tournament.

Invest Canberra report annually in the annual report of the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, and I refer the member to that annual report for further information in relation to their work. It is reported annually. I do not have a running counter in my head at question time at this moment. You will get that information in the annual report.

Childcare—centres

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Planning regarding a proposed childcare facility on Harrington Circuit in Kambah. Minister, while we all acknowledge the need for childcare places, nearby residents of the proposed facility have contacted the opposition and the government about concerns regarding parking, traffic and safety. Minister, could you please advise how the facility complies with the territory plan and what consultation has taken place with residents about the proposed facility?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Lawder for her question. Yes, there has been quite a bit of interest in regard to the development application for a childcare centre in Kambah, for the operation of a childcare centre. The development application went into the Environment and Planning Directorate well prior to Christmas and then the DA was publicly notified on 17 December last year. Until 22 January this year, we had 51 written representations in regard to the development application. The application is now being considered by ACTPLA.

In regard to consultation with the community, I have had a number of calls. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend a meeting request on the particular development at the time. There was a request made, a time and date to be notified. Unfortunately, that did not occur so I was not able to get to that request. I have worked with the Tuggeranong Community Council too on assisting those around the area to have community input into the development application.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Minister, can the owner of any house in Canberra seek to convert their home into a registered childcare facility?

MR GENTLEMAN: There are several opportunities for people to make development applications for childcare centres. I understand there have been quite a few in the Kambah area as well. So it is up to the directorate to determine whether those applications are appropriate.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, what are the rules around home businesses in the ACT?

MR GENTLEMAN: There are quite detailed regulations with regard to running businesses from the home. I have had quite a bit to do with a home business in regard—

Mr Hanson: A point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: A point of order. Can we stop the clock, please.

Mr Hanson: It is on relevance. The question was “what are the rules”, not how many there are. I would ask Mr Gentleman to address it. I am sure—

MADAM SPEAKER: Sit down, Mr Hanson. That is not a point of order.

Mr Corbell: Nice try.

MADAM SPEAKER: It is not even a nice try.

MR GENTLEMAN: There are quite a number of rules in relation to home businesses. They vary, depending on the sort of home business. There are quite a lot of regulations on development applications as well, in regard to amending properties for home businesses. If members opposite wish to know, or my colleagues, I will certainly get some more detail.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, will the facility be regarded as a home-based business or a stand-alone commercial enterprise, and what land is available elsewhere in Kambah in a commercial or community zone?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Coe for his question. In regard to the number of other childcare centres in the area—I am sorry, if he could just read it again.

MR COE: Sure. The first part was: will it be regarded as a home-based business or a stand-alone commercial enterprise, and, secondly, what land is available in Kambah in the commercial or community zones?

MR GENTLEMAN: I will have to take the detail of that on notice. I will certainly come back to the member with those answers.

Health—maternity services

MRS JONES: My question is to the Chief Minister. Minister, in the *Canberra Times* of 14 January 2015 it was reported that ACT Health was considering proscribing hospital attendance for mothers-to-be with a postcode test. I quote from the *Canberra Times*:

Chief Minister Andrew Barr admitted the proposal would limit Canberra mothers' choices, but told the ABC that ACT Health was looking for the "least worst" option. Mr Barr stressed ACT Health would "engage broadly" with the community for an extended period before a decision was made.

Chief Minister, given your comments, will you rule out limiting mothers' choice of hospitals?

MADAM SPEAKER: I am not quite sure why the Chief Minister was asked that question.

MR BARR: I was acting health minister.

MR CORBELL: The Chief Minister was acting health minister during January, Madam Speaker. I thank Mrs Jones for the question. I am aware of the concerns that have been raised by a number of expectant mothers and their broader family and support networks in relation to this matter. I can reassure members that at this time no proposal is before the government in relation to this matter. If such a proposal was to be put to the government, it would first of all be the subject of detailed public consultation.

I note there has been speculation on this issue and I also note there has been commentary about demand in our maternity services. It is the case that maternity services continue to see significant demand. It is normal for the health administration to look at the best ways of managing that demand, but there is no proposal at this time to adopt such a course of action. If there was such a proposal, before being considered by government it would be the subject of detailed consultation with the broader community.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, why was the comment made that this was being considered if it was not? If it was the “least worst option”, what other options were being considered?

MR CORBELL: My understanding is that this emanated from an ABC news report. I understand the journalist involved was in discussions with people, informally, in maternity services and there was speculation on this issue. But that is what it is at this point in time—speculation. There is no proposal before the government at this time. If there was to be, as I said in my earlier answer, there would be a detailed process for a discussion, in consultation with the community, before any such proposal was considered further.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Has there been any option discussed, promulgated or advised within the Health Directorate to limit women by postcode as to where they can give birth?

MR CORBELL: There is no decision within the health system directing or requiring officials to undertake this course of action, because it is not the policy of the government, nor have any policy options been put to me as the minister.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: What has caused the shortage of beds at TCH?

MR CORBELL: Lots of babies.

Energy—renewable

DR BOURKE: My question is to the Minister for the Environment. Minister, last week you announced the outcome of the government’s reverse wind auction. Can you please tell the Assembly about this auction and its results?

MR CORBELL: I thank Dr Bourke for his question. Members will be aware, of course, that the government has a comprehensive program to shift towards a renewable electricity supply for our city by 2020, with a 90 per cent renewable energy target. As part of the latest round of the use of our large-scale feed-in tariff laws to achieve this objective, the government has now announced the winners of a 200-megawatt reverse auction for wind energy generation.

I am very pleased to say that the ACT has received a large amount of renewable energy at a very cheap price for consumers, enough electricity to supply over 100,000 Canberra households and, in total, enough from these three wind farms alone to deliver 33 per cent of the ACT's electricity needs. This is perhaps the most significant step change ever achieved by an Australian jurisdiction to shift towards a low carbon future when it comes to its electricity supply.

The three winning bidders are for wind farms in Victoria and South Australia. The reasons they have been chosen are the very competitive price that they deliver to consumers—meaning the lowest possible cost to electricity customers—and, secondly, the very significant investments that these companies are going to make directly into Canberra and the broader ACT economy.

It is also worth highlighting that one of the winning bidders is a Canberra-based start-up, Windlab. Windlab is a Canberra-based company which has been successful in securing the lowest price ever achieved for wind energy in Australia with its Coonooer Bridge wind farm in Victoria, at a price of only \$81.50 a megawatt hour. This is a great success story for a Canberra-based start-up, spun up out of the CSIRO, with its global headquarters here in Canberra.

The other two winning bidders are, secondly, RES Australia, for an 80-megawatt wind farm near Ararat, at a price of \$87 per megawatt hour. And the third is a French wind energy developer called Neoen, for a 100-megawatt wind farm development near Jamestown in South Australia. Combined, we are delivering large-scale renewable energy at a cheap price for Canberra consumers—five cents per kilowatt hour net price as a result of this outcome. That is cheaper than commissioning new coal or gas-fired generation in this country, and everyone who has observed the outcomes of these auctions knows that that is the case.

As with our previous 40-megawatt solar auction process, we are demonstrating how you can make the shift to a low carbon future, how you can de-carbonise your electricity supply, how you can reduce your city's greenhouse gas emissions and how you can drive investment and innovation into the ACT economy. These are outstanding results for the ACT, outstanding outcomes for electricity customers and outstanding outcomes for making Canberra a more sustainable city.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, what does this mean for ACT electricity consumers?

MR CORBELL: It means—and I thank Dr Bourke for his supplementary—locking in large-scale renewable energy at a cheap price for consumers for the next 20 years. The net price per kilowatt hour is 5c, averaged across all of these wind farm developments. The maximum pass-through cost, anticipated to peak in the year 2020, is \$1.79 per household per week as part of the overall \$4.67 per household per week in 2020 to achieve the 90 per cent renewable energy target overall.

Of course, we all know that these costs are more than offset by the savings of around \$4.50 to \$5 per household per week through the mandated pass-through of energy efficiency measures under the government's energy efficiency improvement scheme and the savings measures being delivered by electricity companies like ActewAGL. So this really does highlight the benefits of locking in cheap prices for consumers into the long run. Renewable energy is now cheaper than electricity from new-built coal or gas plants and, as we make the shift to a low carbon future, we must draw on these very competitive forms of energy generation.

They are the outcomes we have been able to achieve. They achieve reductions in our greenhouse gas emissions of over half a million tonnes each and every year, a total of 12 million tonnes over the next 20 years—a combined 33 per cent of our electricity supply from renewable energy generation just from these three projects. And I recall those opposite saying that this was not possible, that it would never be achieved, and that we would have to cover the ACT in solar farms to make it happen. That is clearly not the case. This government is showing leadership on how to make the shift to a low carbon future.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mrs Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, what other benefits will there be for Canberra?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms Porter for her supplementary. As part of the government's auction process, we have said to all bidders that they must demonstrate how they are going to invest in our economy—how they are going to create jobs, support innovation and support growth in the ACT economy. That is particularly the case if the proposed generators are outside our immediate region, which these three generators are.

I am very pleased to advise the Assembly that the three companies, in terms of their direct investment into the ACT economy, have committed to a range of investments worth \$50 million. The broader economic benefits are over \$240 million across the next 20 years of these feed-in tariff entitlements. That includes investment in our research institutions; investment in the ANU for the creation of Australia's first masters in wind energy development; and investment in the Canberra Institute of Technology—a massive \$7 million investment in the Canberra Institute of Technology from the private sector to establish a centre of excellence in renewable energy skills training and development. That is an outstanding opportunity for our CIT.

At the same time, we know that Windlab are committed to growing their workforce over the next three to four years by a third. Ask how many businesses in Canberra are growing their workforce by a third over the next three to four years. This is a fantastic outcome, particularly for a Canberra-based start-up company, a company that is a winner of the exporter of the year award from the Chief Minister's export awards. At the same time, Windlab are committing to operate their global wind operation centre, for wind farms overseas and here in Australia, from Canberra. They are committing to employing more people from our universities. *(Time expired.)*

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Fitzharris.

MS FITZHARRIS: Minister, what is next for the renewable energy sector in the ACT?

MR CORBELL: What is next, of course, is more jobs and more investment in our wind energy and renewable energy generation sector. And what is coming is \$1.2 million in renewable energy innovation fund support from the wind developer Neoen.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order!

MR CORBELL: What is coming is \$240 million of broader economic benefits—

Dr Bourke: A point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Dr Bourke, a point of order.

Dr Bourke: The speaker is being continuously interrupted by interjections from the opposition. I ask you to call them to order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Actually, I would say, Dr Bourke, that the speaker was not interrupted. The only interruption came from your point of order. I think that by that stage the opposition had quietened down.

MR CORBELL: What fantastic outcomes for our economy as a result. The government will now be reviewing the outcomes of the latest auction, as we do with each auction round, and then we will be proposing to proceed with a further auction round of 50 megawatts for large-scale solar with storage capability here in Canberra and in the broader area.

These are great opportunities to demonstrate how solar with storage can help improve the reliability of alternative energy generation and at the same time help us to move further towards our large-scale renewable energy target. I know that those opposite have never supported this program, in the same way as they have never supported measures to help save households money on their electricity bills. They have voted against legislation that delivers energy savings in Canberra homes. But this

government is delivering large-scale renewable energy at an affordable price to consumers, with \$240 million of broader economic benefit into our economy. We are proud of our achievements. Those opposite stand condemned for their lack of vision, foresight and willingness to understand where energy generation is heading into the future.

Visitor

MADAM SPEAKER: I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of former Deputy Chief Minister Mr David Lamont. Welcome back to the Assembly.

Questions without notice

Budget—taxation

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, in the December 2014 half-yearly performance report to the Assembly it was reported that the compliance revenue year to date result was 147 per cent for the year to date target for 31 December 2014. It was noted that this was due to higher than expected payroll tax and land tax revenue collected. Minister, what is the value of the year to date result for compliance revenue per inspector due to payroll tax and land tax compliance?

MR BARR: The first thing I can say clearly is that the additional revenue inspectors that were part of a previous ACT government budget are obviously working very hard to ensure that taxpayers in the territory meet their obligations. When people meet their obligations to pay their fair share of tax, it allows the government to have the lowest possible tax rates for all other honest taxpayers.

Of course, the vast majority of taxpayers do the right thing. There are some who, with a little bit of assistance, do the right thing and there are a very small number who persistently and wilfully seek to evade their taxation responsibilities. It is pleasing to see that those extra compliance efforts on behalf of hardworking Canberrans and honest taxpayers are paying some dividends.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Treasurer, how many compliance inspectors are there and what is the total amount collected from payroll tax and land tax as a result of their actions as at 31 December 2014?

MR BARR: We put an additional five inspectors into the team, which takes the number to over 20. The information that the member seeks will be available in the consolidated financial statements that I will table tomorrow.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Treasurer, how much of this is a result of legislation changes you made as part of the 2014-15 budget?

MR BARR: Very little, because most of those changes did not come into effect until 1 January, certainly in relation to payroll. But in relation to land tax there were some changes. That is, of course, the level of land tax collection for the six months. The first six months of the fiscal year will be reported in the consolidated statements that I will table tomorrow.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Treasurer, what other reasons were there for the better than expected result in payroll and land tax?

MR BARR: The revenue officers are working closely with taxpayers and with industry associations to ensure that there is effective communication of people's taxation obligations. I think it is fair to say that their efforts in engaging proactively with taxpayers are generating a better result. It is always preferable that people understand and meet their tax obligations. I repeat the point I made earlier: those who do the right thing, and they are the overwhelming majority, ensure that tax rates can be kept as low as possible. But we have an obligation to every Canberra ratepayer and every Canberra taxpayer to ensure that the law is upheld and that people pay their fair share of tax. If the Liberal Party want to be the party that supports tax cheats and tax avoiders, let them go for it.

Health—bush healing farm

MR COE: My question is for the Minister for Health. Minister, is the Ngunnawal bush healing farm safe for contractors to undertake work, despite the asbestos?

MR CORBELL: I am advised that the Ngunnawal bush healing farm is safe for work as long as it is undertaken in accordance with the approved asbestos management arrangements for the site.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe, a supplementary.

MR COE: Minister, is the asbestos at the site limited to the structures or is it spread across the property?

MR CORBELL: There are a number of instances of asbestos present at the site. That includes the dwelling that has been occupied by the caretaker, which is constructed of asbestos sheeting and needs to be managed in a responsible way. There are also instances of asbestos waste, bonded asbestos material as waste, in various locations across the property.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Minister, what notification is required when asbestos is present at a construction or work site?

MR CORBELL: It will depend on what type of notification to what parties Mr Hanson is referring to.

MADAM SPEAKER: Do you have a supplementary question, Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: I do have a supplementary question, and it is: have all contractors who have worked at the Ngunnawal bush healing farm been advised of the presence of asbestos?

MR CORBELL: My understanding is that all people who are engaged or who are proposed to be engaged at the site will be appropriately informed of all relevant occupational health and safety matters at the site, including matters relating to asbestos.

Children and young people—out of home care

MS PORTER: My question is to the Minister for Children and Young People. Minister, you have recently launched a new out of home care strategy called “A step up for our kids”. Why is this new approach necessary and what does the strategy propose?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Porter for her question and her interest. Whilst I will go into the detail in the answer, I want to put forward the amount of work that Minister Burch did on this project before I was able to take responsibility. For most of us, Canberra is a great place to live in. It is a city full of brilliant possibilities waiting to be realised. But not everybody is able to make the most of these opportunities. Some children and young people face challenges many of us cannot even start to imagine.

As is the case nationally, the ACT community is facing a significant number of challenges when it comes to providing out of home care services. These include an increasing number of children and young people entering care. On average, the number of children and young people in care has increased by around five per cent per year over the last decade, with no evidence to indicate that this pattern will moderate without significant intervention. Of particular concern is the significant over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in care, which currently stands at around one-quarter of all children in the ACT care system.

In the ACT, like other jurisdictions, we struggle to gain and retain adequate numbers of suitable carers, leading to difficulty in matching children and young people with the right care in the right home. More than half the children and young people in care reside with kinship carers. In the ACT this is preferred. However, the ageing profile of kinship carers means that nearly 60 per cent are aged over 50. We need to create a more financially sustainable system. Across Australia the growth in the numbers of children and young people entering care is mirrored by a disproportionate growth in out of home care and child protection services.

Finally, outcomes for children and young people who have been in care are generally poorer than for the broader community, whether socially, in education attainment or in employment participation. We know that adults who exit the care system are much less likely to be employed and are at greater risk of mental illness, drug and alcohol

abuse and domestic violence. Most concerning of all, though, is the fact that adults who have experienced out of home care are more likely to have children themselves who become subject to some form of abuse, trauma or neglect.

As I have said, Madam Speaker, the ACT is not alone. These challenges are faced by out of home care services across Australia. Here in the ACT we are stepping up for vulnerable children, young people and their families. The government's new \$16 million strategy "A step up for our kids" will transform our support for the community's most vulnerable children and young people.

At the heart of the strategy is a simple aim, which is to give children in care better lives. We are investing in a range of new services for vulnerable children and young people to give children the most stable, productive lives possible and, in doing so, truly putting their needs at the centre.

There are many initiatives within "A step up for our kids": creating a continuum of care; providing training to carers and professionals to better take into account the trauma children and young people have endured; and placing more of an emphasis on securing a permanent home for a child or young person.

We want to improve the education, health, employment and social outcomes of children and young people in out of home care. By doing this we will address the major challenges faced by out of home care services and create a more sustainable system for the long term but, most importantly, help children and young people take a step up in their lives.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, what difference will "A step up for our kids" make for children in care?

MR GENTLEMAN: "A step up for our kids" is about investing in the future of our most vulnerable children and young people. It is about keeping kids at home where possible and preventing disadvantage for future generations. "A step up for our kids" creates an environment that goes further than before in delivering the right kind of support to children and young people, and at the right time in their lives. We want to make quite sure that children are given every possible chance to stay with their families and, where that is not possible, they have all the support they need to build new lives.

The system will be based on trauma informed support that better takes into account the trauma endured by a child or young person who has experienced abuse and neglect. The professional support for children coming into care through a new approach to therapeutic assessments will assess this trauma and recast services around the needs of the child or young person.

We are going to create more stable lives for children in care by enabling organisations to provide a continuum of care and support that stays with the child as they grow, rather than making them move from one service provider to another when

circumstances change. This increased stability will also be seen in the placing of a greater emphasis on creating a permanent home for a child in care through more investment in permanency and reducing the amount of time that children must wait before a permanent, secure placement can be arranged. The increased stability will also be seen as children enter adulthood, with the carer subsidy payment continuing for young people until the age of 21, where this is appropriate.

I believe that “A step up for our kids” will make a considerable difference in the lives of vulnerable children and young people living in the out of home care system.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Fitzharris.

MS FITZHARRIS: Minister, what difference will “A step up for our kids” make for carers?

MR GENTLEMAN: “A step up for our kids” is also about better supporting foster carers and kinship carers as valued partners in the care system. Carers are at the heart of support for children and young people in care. Carers provide the love, support and stability that vulnerable children and young people need as they rebuild and go forward with their lives. We are stepping up for foster carers, more so than ever before, with a more equitable system of support, the better provision of information and a more streamlined process.

In recent years we have invested in our relationships with carers, but we realise that sometimes a carer may not want to come to us with their concerns. This is why we are funding an independent advocacy service for carers to assist them in resolving issues with agencies. This is the first service of its kind in the ACT.

In stable homes, children are supported and given a home past the age of 18. The strategy looks to mirror this support by extending the period for which carer subsidy payments can be made, where appropriate, through to the age of 21, rather than stopping at 18. The strategy will set out the framework for improving the timeliness of decision-making processes affecting the carer, child or young person and carers will be able to secure permanency earlier than has been possible in the past.

Madam Speaker, kinship carers are the biggest providers of support for children and young people in care and we are stepping up for kinship carers. Kinship carers may often not have the full breadth of information for supporting children that foster carers do and we will address this matter through enhanced support and training opportunities. “A step up for our kids” will mean better support for kinship carers so that they can do the best for the children in their care.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, over the lifetime of the strategy, what outcomes would you expect to see for children in care?

MR GENTLEMAN: As I have mentioned, “A step up for our kids” requires a significant cultural change in the way out of home care services are delivered in the ACT. We are working to build the foundations of a new system of care and I expect

transition to this new system to take two to three years, by which time we will begin to see significant evidence of change for children, young people and their families.

“A step up for our kids” will benefit the wider community by supporting vulnerable children and young people to enjoy better life outcomes. A community is only as strong, safe and connected as its members, of course. We want to make sure that the strategy will strengthen outcomes for children at risk of entering care through a number of key initiatives. These include placement prevention services, reunification services, the Karinya House mother and baby unit upgrade, supported contact services, and parent-child interaction programs. Where a child cannot safely return to their family, their out of home care providers will provide a continuum of care in achieving a long-term stable environment and providing appropriate support services for the child.

We are strengthening accountability and transparency to ensure a high functioning care system to deliver these services. This will include setting up an interim children’s and youth services council that will oversee these reforms. The council will be chaired by Ms Bev Orr OAM, one of Australia’s leading foster care advocates.

We have designed a system that provides not only a place to live but a place to grow and recover. “A step up for our kids” will break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage for the next generation of care leavers, providing them with a foundation for a happy, productive adulthood.

“A step up for our kids” is a five-year strategy, and I look forward to providing the Assembly with updates as key milestones are achieved.

Mr Barr: I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice Canberra Institute of Technology—Auslan

MS BURCH: In response to the questions on Auslan, I indicated there would be an NDIA statement tomorrow; it is actually next week. I wanted to clear that up. Also, I have additional information on interpreters. We have two accredited and registered professional Auslan interpreters and five paraprofessional Auslan interpreters. Interpreter services that are available in the ACT include the Deaf Society of New South Wales, Auslan Services and the National Auslan Interpreter Booking and Payment Service.

Environment—Mugga Lane tip

MR CORBELL: Yesterday in question time Ms Lawder and Mr Wall asked me a number of questions in relation to odours coming from the landfill site at Mugga Lane. I can advise members in response to Ms Lawder’s first question that the Health Directorate is responsible for the government’s ambient air quality monitoring network, which consists of three ambient monitoring stations at Monash, Civic and Florey. The pollutants measured by these monitoring stations are not designed to detect the types of odours coming from the landfill; nevertheless the odours coming

from the landfill are associated with works being undertaken by ACT NOWaste as a one-off project and are not associated with the day-to-day operation of the landfill, which is authorised by the EPA. The recent ACT NOWaste project has raised a number of issues regarding the operational control of the site and the EPA is working closely with TAMS to resolve any outstanding issues.

In respect of the third question about the number of re-profiling works undertaken by NOWaste, this work is outside the normal day-to-day operation and scope of the landfill. To reduce the impacts of the re-profiling works, undertakings were given to the EPA to continue to operate odour suppression measures for the duration of the re-profiling works. A key component in reducing the odour impact on the community of this one-off work was a commitment to reduce the duration that the landfill cell was open. This was subsequently impacted upon due to inclement weather, which Minister Rattenbury highlighted yesterday.

Territory and municipal services—playground maintenance

MRS JONES (Molonglo) (3.27): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the importance of local suburban playgrounds to children, families and the broader community;
- (b) that they are a core municipal service and maintenance and renewal is paramount;
- (c) that they promote an active lifestyle for children and adults and contribute to the physical and mental wellbeing of the community; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) publish a meaningful maintenance schedule, along with a renewal plan and the list of playgrounds intended to be removed across the city; and
- (b) conduct genuine and meaningful community consultation for each playground that is scheduled for maintenance, an upgrade or identified for removal.

This is not the first time I have come into this place to talk about the value and importance of local playgrounds for children, families, carers, grandparents and the community as a whole. Community playgrounds contribute to the physical and mental wellbeing of many families across Canberra. The reason I have brought on this motion today is that I am quite concerned about how playgrounds in Canberra are being viewed by this minister and what the future may hold for them.

Only a few short weeks ago the residents of Narrabundah were surprised to find that an ACT government notice had been posted on a beloved local playground at Rocky

Knob, informing them that the playground was to be removed. There was not any other warning, planning or, to my knowledge, community consultation. The locals were very distressed and I was contacted by several residents about this. Let me tell you what some said. Sally said:

When notices first went up explaining that Rocky Knob playground was to be closed and it had “passed its use-by date” I was so saddened. My back gate opens onto the playground. My family grew up playing on the equipment and my grandchildren spent many happy hours there too, so it has always been very much a part of my life.

For a short while perhaps it was under-used, but now there are many young families moving into the area and when I am gardening it is lovely to hear the birds and the sounds of the children having fun in the fresh air, using the equipment and the mums and dads talking. Also I often see teenagers sitting there chatting to each other and enjoying the peace and quiet.

I do so hope the playground can be restored and would so appreciate if the government could please liaise with the communities before taking such drastic action. Also the barrier which has been erected around the equipment is incredibly ugly; the grass is growing long and could become a fire hazard. Do you think we could be given some sort of idea as to when work might be carried out and I hope our trees are safe too? Thank you for taking an interest in this matter.

Gillian said:

This was an important community facility. It was well loved. There was a complete lack of community consultation and it is impossible for children to cross Caley Crescent to get to another local playground.

I wrote to the minister on Friday and by Monday he had backflipped. I was pleased to receive notification that he had also taken a trip to see the playground and advised that it would no longer be removed but would undergo some safety rectifications—which I understand are expected to cost around \$2,000—and that it will remain a local community facility for the residents of Narrabundah.

It is really great that the minister took a trip to see this playground and worked to find a solution to keep it open. However, it deeply worries me that without the influence of local members of the community and me this playground may well have disappeared—a community facility no longer available for the suburb, a place of play and respite no longer available for the ratepaying residents.

I wonder whether this approach will continue. When it comes to maintaining playgrounds across Canberra, I wonder whether the minister will enlighten us as to the policy he has signed off on which allows such drastic decisions to be made, apparently without his knowledge and certainly without the knowledge of local residents.

Are we now in a situation where if residents do not kick up a fuss we could see playgrounds disappearing within a week and the removal of playgrounds that might

need limited remediation? Will older playgrounds just be signposted and removed without consultation and without concern for the hole it may leave for the families who use them?

I am sure those sitting opposite would all agree that playgrounds are an important part of family life in Canberra. In fact, I recall Mr Rattenbury assuring us all last year here in the Assembly that the government was committed to “improving recreational facilities across the city”. Those were his words and his commitment last year. Yet now we see that improving some recreational facilities may not be such a genuine commitment; rather, they will be removed if they need some work.

I believe \$450,000 has been spent on dog parks, yet this was a \$2,000 repair. How much has been spent on the new “bikes are just like cars” campaign on our TVs and how much of that could have gone into parks? And what would have been the cost of removing this park? It would probably have been fairly substantial.

Minister Rattenbury told us last year that his department was responsible for maintaining and caring for 507 playgrounds across the city. However, recently in the *Canberra Times* he was quoted as saying that the department cares for 490 playgrounds. Minister, I wonder whether 17 playgrounds have disappeared in the middle of the night, taken away because they need some upkeep. Has the “green grinch” come out again to steal playgrounds from children? Is the new policy approach when a playground comes up for maintenance or renewal to rip it out instead of doing work on it?

Playgrounds are a core municipal service. They are part of the basic services that residents expect from their local government—a local government which continues to increase rates over and above inflation, CPI or any other reasonable measure. People have a reasonable expectation that what is there will be maintained. People expect them to stay.

On the topic of Rocky Knob, those who know the history of self-government in the ACT will recall that Rocky Knob is also a site of historical significance in the ACT. Former members of this place, including Michael Moore, Bernard Collaery and Norm Jensen, will remember that this was a site that they did not want developed in a new way. The Residents Rally fought development in the area as part of their very formation. Bernard Collaery would not have entertained the removal of a local beloved playground.

Today I am calling on the government to do two things: firstly, publish a truly meaningful maintenance schedule—a schedule that identifies each playground, what stage of its lifecycle it is at, what the renewal plan is for each playground and what upgrades or revitalisations are required; and, of course, time lines for such work to be done.

Secondly, I call on the government to conduct genuine and meaningful community consultation on playground changes. It seems clear, with the debacle over Rocky Knob playground, that no community consultation took place at all. No-one had thought to ask the local residents what they wanted or needed in their local

playground. There was no evaluation carried out as to what the impact of removing this playground would be on kids and families, and it was a decision made in a vacuum of community input. Residents deserve better. Residents pay their rates and taxes in exchange for the maintenance and upkeep of their community, which of course includes their playgrounds—areas they have invested in sometimes because such facilities are available. They do not expect the government to take their money and close down basic community parks and the like thinking that no-one will notice.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Justice, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Transport Reform) (3.35): I am very happy to discuss this matter today. I thank Mrs Jones for bringing the discussion forward. There are two elements to the matter. One is the broader playground strategy. The second is the rather regrettable incident that took place around the Rocky Knob playground; I will come to that in a moment.

When it comes to local suburban playgrounds, I know that they are important to the families of Canberra, and I think that it is good to have a discussion about them here in the chamber. Despite the very personal nature of Mrs Jones's speech, I would like to assure her that, as both the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services and also the Minister for Sport and Recreation, I have a good understanding of the importance of play spaces to children and the Canberra community as a whole.

Play spaces, playgrounds and parks are a very significant part of Canberra's open space network. They have been since the creation of the city, and they continue to be one of the things that Canberrans love about living here. Play spaces are an integral part of encouraging an active lifestyle for Canberra citizens from a young age, and that has many beneficial effects throughout a person's life, particularly general health and wellbeing.

Every day, thousands of children and their families enjoy the high quality playgrounds that we have in this city. As the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, I am proud to work with our park staff to keep our playgrounds and parks clean and safe. Although I welcome Mrs Jones's interest in this issue, it is unfortunate that members of the Liberal Party continually try to talk this city down. We see that all the time when they say, "Oh, the city is unkempt," et cetera, et cetera. I know that the park staff are out there every single day, doing their best to keep this city to as high a standard as possible.

The National Capital Development Commission created a hierarchy for parks many decades ago as part of the concept of creating a "model city". This resulted in parks and playgrounds being located within a 400-metre radius of each and every house in Canberra. The design, size and diversity of the parks and their associated playgrounds use a three-tier model that includes small parks at local-suburban centres and larger parks at a neighbourhood level, with the largest parks being district parks such as the Kambah District Park, John Knight park in Belconnen, and the Yerrabi district park in Gungahlin. Seating is provided for carers at all play spaces, while picnic and barbecue facilities and public toilets are primarily located at the highest use town and district parks.

In addition, the National Arboretum provides the fantastic Pod playground, with giant acorns and banksia cone cubbies. This playground has quickly become one of the most popular spots in town for visitors and many of Canberra's families. These are just some of the one million visitors that have now been to the arboretum.

The park hierarchy has culminated in TAMS currently managing 486 playgrounds and 19 skate parks. That might go to the issue of the differing numbers which came up in Mrs Jones's remarks. However, TAMS is not the only directorate to build and manage playgrounds; this may also go the issue of numbers.

In my role as Minister for Sport and Recreation I have a strong interest in the design and management of recreational spaces referred to as community irrigated recreational parks. These community parks are smaller parks, generally containing barbecues, a half-size basketball court and seating. The first of these parks is located in Crace, with the next one under construction in Franklin. The education directorate manages playgrounds within schools, and the Community Services Directorate has some playgrounds at some of its ACT Housing properties.

I would also like to note that TAMS has a number of playgrounds which cater for children of all abilities, and there has been major fundraising to create Boundless, a purpose-built all-abilities playground in Grevillea Park designed for a range of ages and developmental stages. I note the comment Mrs Jones made yesterday in her feedback that she sought to provide around parking at the Boundless playground. I have taken this issue up before with the Community Services Directorate, who have led the development of that playground. I am aware of, and quite a few people have raised with me their concern about, the shortage of parking spaces at that location. I have specifically discussed this with the people involved in the development.

The answer to the question is in the provision of the correct number of parking spaces. Mrs Jones may wish to pay attention to this so that she knows the answer to the question in the future. The provision of parking spaces at Boundless was designed with a small car park nearby. Then, in recognition of the significant parklands in the area and the large number of parking spaces available across the road, a decision was taken to utilise and account for parking spaces across the road on the other side of Parkes Way.

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MR RATTENBURY: Before we stop, I will continue with the answer. There are on the other side of Parkes Way several hundred parking spaces attached to the Defence headquarters. There is then a full-scale pedestrian facility to get from those car parks, including pedestrian crossings and signalised traffic lights to move across—and pathways. So the answer provided to me by those who designed the Boundless playground was that their view was that, with those very many parking spaces within a couple of hundred metres walk, that was considered to provide adequate parking for the facility. Members may dispute that, but that is the origin and the basis on which the design of the site was put together by those who designed it.

Of course, as we know, Canberrans prefer to park closer than that. I have certainly been doing my best. The one bit of feedback I have had from the public, which I only got last week and will take up with CSD when I next have the chance, is that signage be provided to indicate that that parking is there and available. I think people have not realised how convenient that parking is relative to the site.

Mrs Jones: During the week it is full.

MR RATTENBURY: The feedback I have had is that predominantly the parking pressures arise on the weekends, and that is the basis on which that was designed. But members may wish to take that up with the Community Services Directorate.

Anyway, when it comes to the maintenance of playgrounds, as I was saying, the government continues to provide playgrounds and also to receive playgrounds as new suburbs come on stream. So the number of playgrounds continues to grow and they continue to provide an increased management issue in terms of maintenance.

In terms of the maintenance standard, all ACT public play spaces were designed and built in line with the Australian and ACT standards for play spaces in effect at the time of building. That is something that many members of the public send me questions about. They say, "It does not meet current standards." Well, they were designed to meet the standards of the time. TAMS are responsible for the provision of playground maintenance and conduct regular safety inspections at all playgrounds across the city. The Australian standards for playground inspections are not mandatory. However, TAMS endeavours to achieve the recommended standards as a minimum practice.

The frequency of the inspections varies, depending on the size and usage of each playground. High usage playgrounds, such as town and district parks, receive a more rigorous inspection program than smaller neighbourhood playgrounds. The number and type of inspections that each playground receives is regularly reviewed to keep pace with changes over time.

The Australian playground standards recommend a three-tiered approach to safety inspections. In Canberra, all playgrounds currently receive a level 1 inspection weekly or fortnightly, a level 2 inspection every one to three months, and an independently assessed level 3 major inspection annually. This inspection regime results in TAMS conducting in excess of 20,000 documented playground inspections each year. That is 20,000 inspections right across the city. There are varying levels, as I have just described, but members can see from that information that there is an extensive regime of ensuring that playgrounds are kept in good condition.

The delivery of the three types of inspections occurs across Canberra at different times and is affected by coinciding maintenance works. There is a need for flexibility in operational programs, and it is therefore not practical to publish a maintenance schedule as suggested by Mrs Jones. Any safety, maintenance, vandalism or cleanliness issues are addressed as they are identified during weekly or fortnightly inspections or from reports from the public. Minor repairs are usually addressed

within one week, or a work order is raised and addressed in order of priority. That can then take an amount of time, depending on the level of works that need to be done. For example, minor works can usually be done quite quickly. More significant works will need to go into a budget program and can take longer, with the necessity to be placed in the forward works program.

There is obviously much more to say about the program generally, but I wanted to provide that information to members by way of background.

When it comes to the Narrabundah playground, which has particularly provoked this matter, there are two elements to it. One is to perhaps provide a time line for Mrs Jones's benefit. On Friday, 23 January, local residents undertook a protest at Rocky Knob and WIN News ran a story. I had been sent a tweet message the day before, indicating that this issue was emerging; it was the first time it had come to my attention. Then the *Canberra Times* ran a story on Saturday the 24th. The Monday was a public holiday. I went to the playground site on the 27th with TAMS staff because I was not satisfied with the decision that had been taken.

So well before Mrs Jones wrote me a letter I had already gone to the site. I was not aware of the decision that had been taken; that was not something that I had authorised. Being a minister does not mean that you sign off on every single one of these decisions. We have a range of staff in our departments to whom we delegate these decisions. We do not sign off on all these day-to-day decisions, because that would be micromanaging the directorates, and there is simply not the time to do that. As the minister, where a decision is taken that I am not satisfied with, the job is for me to both perhaps address that particular decision and also look at the systemic issues behind it. That is why I went to the site on 27 January and asked TAMS to come back to me with some further options.

On Friday, 30 January, TAMS and I agreed an outcome, which was to undertake the repairs. I approved a media statement to this effect and I tweeted the person who had messaged me in the first instance with an indication that that was the decision and that she would be contacted by the department with more details in the near future.

On Sunday, 1 February, that media release went to the *Canberra Times*. On Monday, 2 February, the *Canberra Times* printed that story. Mrs Jones's letter was received at my office after the *Canberra Times* had printed this story. I sent a letter in response to Mrs Jones on Friday, 6 February.

That is the record of the time line of events. Mrs Jones can do with that as she will. I am sure she will continue to claim the credit for the reversal of the decision.

When it comes to Narrabundah playground, it will now be fixed. That was an isolated decision, but three playgrounds were identified in that process. That is not consistent with any government policy.

When it comes to actually having a strategy on playgrounds, there is, as I talked about, the ongoing maintenance program, the future of playgrounds in the ACT and how we deal with them as a bigger picture issue. What is the right way to proceed? Do we

want to keep as many? How do we upgrade them? What order should they be upgraded in? Do we have a bigger one in each suburb, with smaller ones perhaps even with natural play elements? There is a whole series of important questions that need to be addressed there.

I intend to have that conversation with the community. I have not started that conversation yet. I have asked TAMS to provide me with a range of options. Then I intend to undertake a community discussion, potentially with the assistance of other members of this place, and certainly in a very public way, about how we proceed on that. I think people have different expectations. Some people would rather see some of the old swings taken away and half-court basketball put in. Some people have suggested that they do not need a playground anymore because it is mostly older people in the area and that a bench they could sit at and have a cup of tea would be a better solution. There is a range of community views that Mrs Jones can talk about in her reply.

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MR RATTENBURY: She does not need to heckle across the top of me. Those conversations need to be had with the community, and that is what I intend to do.

I have circulated an amendment which goes to these very issues. It talks about what the government is continuing to do and it talks about the fact that the government is committed to undertaking community consultation in relation to developing a long-term playground strategy. That is the commitment I give.

I think that the situation in Narrabundah was regrettable. I am disappointed in the way the community found out about that, because that is not my expectation of how the community should hear about it or how they should be involved in the conversation. We have been able to find a much better solution in the short term for the Narrabundah community; I am pleased with the outcome. I appreciate that the TAMS staff went away, thought more about the issue and came back with new solutions. It is a much better outcome for the community and I look forward to having a broader discussion with the community about how we keep up a sustainable set of playgrounds in the ACT for the long term.

I move:

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

- “(d) that the Government will continue to implement its playground maintenance schedule consistent with Australian Standards which define requirements for maintenance inspections of playgrounds;
- (e) that the Government is currently developing a playground strategy that focuses on improving ACT play spaces, in line with Australian and ACT standards and best practice contemporary play space design, which aims to improve health and recreational outcomes and will be implemented subject to future budget funding; and

- (f) that the Government is committed to undertaking community consultation in relation to the playground strategy.”.

I commend the amendment to the Assembly.

MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (3.50): I am pleased to support my fellow Molonglo MLA Mrs Jones in her motion today expressing concern at what amounts to be a cavalier disregard for Canberra families. Of course I am referring to the Rocky Knob playground in Rocky Knob Park in Narrabundah, but it could happen to any playground in any suburb in Canberra. By the minister’s explanation, I am really intrigued as to how, with all of these evaluations going on, such an occurrence could happen. I would be interested in further updates on this from the minister.

Mrs Jones is well known for her advocacy for children’s services in this city. As a frequent user of such family resources as playgrounds, she is well versed in their popularity, their value and the role they play in developing healthy lifestyles for our young people.

When I first learnt of this playground closing, it came as somewhat of a surprise to me. The park area in which the play equipment is located is quite generous in size and no doubt provides valuable open space for the many families in the area to run and play. Clearly, the playground is a great local attraction. I had not heard of any community concerns as to its dangerous state and assumed it was just like so many of our local parks and open spaces, suffering from a lack of mowing and removal of noxious weeds and other debris and maintenance of equipment.

Indeed, it is like so many of our open spaces. It needs attention. The area is one that requires regular mowing and attention to eucalypt trees that shed bark and branches and, of course, the dreaded African lovegrass which this government appears to be reluctant to address. Like all equipment that is used frequently by children of all ages, it needs regular inspection and repair.

So the closing of the playground equipment came as a blunt surprise to many local families. But I think even more surprising than the sudden decision to close it was the just as quick decision to not close it. I say “surprising” because it took a minister to make an inspection and assess that it could be remediated for just a couple of thousand dollars to reverse the decision. Why did it require the minister himself to make the assessment? Surely others in his department are capable of such things. And why was the original decision to close it made, given that the repair cost was so small? It seems a careless and less than efficient way to run a department. The minister should not have to visit every playground to assess its condition.

If you go onto the government website you will see there is a schedule of supposedly planned upgrades and indications of what areas are to be remediated. I am not sure whether the Rocky Knob playground was listed in any of these upgrades but, as Mrs Jones has indicated in her motion, Mr Rattenbury needs to “publish a meaningful maintenance schedule, along with a renewal plan and the list of playgrounds intended to be removed across the city”. I would be interested to know how many actual playgrounds have been closed.

There is little point in having a website that outlines what the government is doing if, in fact, it does not do that. Again, it seems a poor use of taxpayer resources if there is supposed to be openness and transparency in government and certainly, in this instance, there is not. The key word in the motion is “meaningful”. The current schedule clearly is not meaningful. Mrs Jones goes on to say in her motion:

... conduct genuine and meaningful community consultation for each playground that is scheduled for maintenance, an upgrade or identified for removal.

If the government indeed does that, there will not be the need for parents to get upset; there will not be the need for the minister to intervene. But I am not confident that this government will do more than pay lip-service to the needs of families, especially in the older, established suburbs.

We know from the hundreds of complaints we get that lights are old and not working, that trees are overgrown, that the myriad of open grassed areas are weed infested and that footpaths, where they do exist, are often uneven and serious trip hazards. All those are to be expected in a city that is maturing. But, just like the schools that are gaining a bit of age, there seems to be no real awareness of the need for regular and also preventative maintenance.

The squeaky wheel syndrome is almost a hallmark of this government. They seem to operate on the basis of “We will just let things lapse” or, in the case of the playground, “We will just quietly shut it down and see what happens.” That is definitely not good enough.

The residents in Narrabundah and similar older suburbs, who, coincidentally, are also the victims of significant rate rises due to, in part, larger than average block sizes, are getting sick of being treated as second-class citizens. As they point out regularly to us, if the government can find a way to fund a tramway then they must be able to allocate resources for essential maintenance of local amenities. It should not require the intervention of a minister to determine whether a playground needs a couple of thousand dollars for repairs. The fact that it did goes to the heart of the inefficiencies and the lack of planning which are hallmarks of this tired government. I support this motion by Mrs Jones.

MS FITZHARRIS (Molonglo) (3.56): I welcome the opportunity today to respond to Mrs Jones’s motion regarding suburban playgrounds across Canberra and I speak in support of Minister Rattenbury’s amendment. I agree that playgrounds are important for children, for families and for the broader community. I agree they are a core municipal service and they must be maintained and renewed. I agree that they promote an active lifestyle for children and adults and contribute to our community’s wellbeing.

I know personally how important they are for children’s play and especially for parents’, often mums’, wellbeing. As many people in our community and in this chamber know, they are also lifeblood for stay-at-home mums and dads every day across the city. Every weekend many are busy, noisy places.

Playgrounds are the places people go to to let the kids run around, to explore, to get fresh air and to run off their energy. As a welcome circuit breaker, I have said many times in the middle of a barney, or a brewing barney, “Right, then; we’re off to the playground.” I have almost never had a “No.” But it is not just about the physical activity, as important as that is. The spontaneous nature of kids playing naturally with each other often sparks friendships and connections for parents. From my time at home with young kids, I know just how important these moments can be in getting through a day and getting through a week. I am sure many of these have resulted in enduring friendships between kids and parents.

On a city level, our open spaces and our playgrounds are one of the reasons that people say Canberra is such a great place to bring up kids. Playgrounds, including our skate parks, are a significant part of Canberra’s open space network and have been since the creation of the city. At a territory level, the way that playgrounds have been designed is to match their location—for example, small play areas at local neighbourhood parks, larger play spaces at central community parks and major play areas at district parks. The high-use district parks also have complementary facilities such as toilets and barbecues.

I asked some people today about their favourite playgrounds in the city and heard back from some people. From Tara Cheyne: she loves John Knight Memorial Park. From Karen Green: “The adventure playground at Tidbinbilla, especially the water play!” From Mark Scarborough in Gungahlin: “Forde is good ... Yerrabi and Springbank Rise because they have shade sails.” From Ian Hetherington: “The Gungahlin town park.” From Kylie Beer: “It was great to see a shade sail going in at Pod playground ... can we get some shade sail at Boundless too?” From Cal Bruton: “Yerrabi pond and Gungahlin College.”

Can I talk briefly about some of the playgrounds in my own local community, from the big ones to the little ones. From the large district playground at Yerrabi pond, a great playground that has a skate park, flying foxes, barbecues and picnic tables—most days, especially on the weekends, they are full and bustling, sometimes staked out early in the day for a community gathering—to the new and innovative approach to playgrounds that Minister Rattenbury mentioned, the community recreation irrigated park. The one at Crace is a magnet for kids and for grown-ups. The kids can play and grown-ups can use the exercise equipment. Everyone is running around. I see construction underway at Franklin and I am looking forward to more of these parks across the city. And the small playgrounds in our older suburbs and in our newer suburbs—from the lovely playground at the Platypus centre at Ngunnawal, which holds the paint and play weekly, to newer playgrounds in Bonner and Franklin where new residents meet one another. They encourage activity and active lifestyles, and they encourage community.

I agree that maintenance is important. I know that TAMS conduct a regular program of inspections, and they are often undertaken at different levels, as Minister Rattenbury said—weekly in high-use areas, fortnightly in medium-use areas and monthly or quarterly in low-use areas. This information is available for each type of playground and can be made publicly available to the Canberra community. There is

also a rigorous response system for public inquiries through Canberra Connect and fix my street. TAMS also apply the Australian and ACT playground safety standards and undertake regular assessments and use the information from these to develop an asset management plan.

Playground upgrades consider the need for providing accessible, diverse, stimulating and manageable play spaces which foster healthy, social, physical and mental child development. The government is focused on ensuring that our playgrounds are well maintained and safe for public use at all times. To achieve this, TAMS is also delivering an ongoing playground renewal program that focuses on improving ACT play spaces. Again, this program is in line with Australian and ACT standards as well as best practice contemporary play space design.

Community input is a primary factor in determining the end result of a playground renewal and is conducted routinely each time a full playground upgrade is planned. Community feedback also guides the design of each play space and may be sought on a range of issues, such as the type of equipment, whether there is artwork to be included, the design theme and so on. Each community is different and each play space is individually designed to meet the needs of the local community, wherever possible.

Similarly, where playgrounds require repair or removal due to age, safety or low usage, a sign will be erected at the playground advising the community of the intended repair or removal. Notices may also be posted in a variety of media, such as community notice boards, community newsletters, regional newspapers and media releases. The community will be invited to provide comment on the potential impact of any intended playground removal or upgrade. As the amendment notes, meaningful community consultation will be undertaken on all playground renewal or removals and information advising on the outcome of the consultation process will be made publicly available.

I talked about playgrounds briefly yesterday in my inaugural speech. I have spoken with Minister Rattenbury already and offered my help to him to work with the community and with local organisations to help inform the playground strategy he has mentioned today. I hope I can work across Canberra and hear from local parents and kids about what they want from their local playgrounds. I hope we can visit a range of playgrounds across the city and see the variety. I would also love to hear from people about the sorts of playgrounds they have visited in other cities and towns.

I am interested in exploring whether there are different sorts of playgrounds that we could consider establishing—natural playgrounds where kids can explore differently, say, with wood and rocks. There are more of these types of playgrounds being constructed across the country. Perhaps we can consider new ways of investing in and maintaining our parks. I know that Ms Berry and Ms Porter have spoken about the Holt community park carers in this place—locals looking after their own local park, taking stewardship and pride in their local areas. This is a great model and offers practical advantages as well as community building and social capital advantages. This is a great model that empowers our community.

As I mentioned yesterday, I hope there are more opportunities to address our community challenges through providing more community involvement as well as more private sector involvement. I am sure there are local businesses out there that have some capacity to support, directly or indirectly, our playgrounds. Let us see what we can do.

We also have challenges, as Minister Rattenbury has noted, to renew and refresh our playgrounds across the city. Different approaches and broader community input will be very welcome. I will look forward to working with the community and with the minister on improving our local playgrounds. I thank Mrs Jones for moving this motion today.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (4.04): I thank Mrs Jones for bringing forward this motion today. In my electorate of Brindabella there are a number of playgrounds on which the local communities would welcome consultation. I will mention four quick examples that Mr Rattenbury may be able to use in his consultations. I would be happy to work with him on this.

The treated pine play equipment at Beardsmore Place in Gowrie was removed some years ago. In correspondence I received from Minister Rattenbury he confirmed that this playground was due to be replaced during 2012-13 but said this had been deferred due to higher priorities.

Secondly, another constituent advised that he had contacted TAMS many years ago regarding rotting timber and general degradation of the playground in Newman-Morris Circuit in Oxley. He was advised then that the playground was in the top five per cent in the ACT in line for replacement, but this did not happen. I wrote to Minister Rattenbury on this issue. He replied to say that, although ageing, the equipment was safe and functional, before going on to say that the fort would be removed and replaced with natural play elements such as tree logs. It reminds me a little of Monty Python's four Yorkshiremen skit where you say: "Oh, you have tree logs to play on. Luxury. We only dreamed of having tree logs." I think they would actually prefer some play equipment to be installed there.

Thirdly, residents in Fadden near Fadden pond have also advised me—and I have already passed these comments on to Minister Rattenbury—that they feel some of the equipment at Fadden pond playground is not particularly suitable for very small children. For example, it is difficult for parents, grandparents or carers to get close to the equipment because of some rope equipment surrounding it. It is hard for them to help small children climb up and down the equipment. They would also like a shaded area, a barbecue and a picnic table to help enjoy the area at Fadden pond. I have consulted with residents in this area and that is what they would like.

Fourthly, Gordon park, near the pond, is another area where the flying fox has been problematic. Nearby residents, as well as people who come from further afield, have been disappointed when they find the flying fox closed. Consultation with the local community would help identify options for the future. I understand that in many cases vandalism and bad behaviour make some playgrounds unusable temporarily or in the longer term, and I understand that is the case with the flying fox. But these are basic

services that residents of Canberra expect to be maintained, replaced and renewed. I wanted to get “renewed” in there because it seems to be the word of the month.

With rates increasing, residents expect the level of services they receive to at least be maintained and not be going backwards. Constituents have also advised that the grass is frequently overgrown in playgrounds. They have said to me that it is higher than their children’s heads in some cases. I am not sure if that is perhaps exaggerating, but that is what they have said. Minister Rattenbury advises that public open spaces are mown every four weeks during the peak growing season. Given the hot sunny days and afternoon showers we had over summer, four weeks may not be nearly enough. Parents are concerned in some areas about snakes when the grass remains unmown in local parks and playgrounds.

I would like to thank the minister and his directorate for the ongoing work they do on our local parks and playgrounds. There is a lot of equipment to maintain and fix. But from what I hear from my constituents, they feel it is a matter of mistaken priorities for the government. One of my constituents may well be correct when he suggested that funding and resources that should be expended in local communities are being redirected into light rail and other pet projects of this government. I commend Mrs Jones for bringing forward this motion today.

MRS JONES (Molonglo) (4.08): In conclusion, I have read the amendment and I have some concerns with it, but I will get to that in a minute. Small parks matter just as much as big parks. People buy houses near small parks for the very purpose of visiting small parks. I understand that there is a hierarchy of park sizes, but I hope that does not translate in the minister’s mind to a hierarchy of parks’ importance.

Imagine a mother of a toddler, who has just had a newborn baby, whose partner or husband takes the car to work, and who has a very small park a block away from their house. That park may be the saving grace for that mother’s mental health in the months after having had a baby, even though it is a very small park, because it is a destination that she is able to walk to. After giving birth, women do not have the same physical capacity as women do when they are at their fittest, and it is very important that we do not accidentally fall into a trap of asserting that because a park is small it does not have the same value as a big park.

When I made appeals in this place for parks to be taken more seriously, I did not feel that I was being very seriously listened to. Nobody is suggesting that children’s parks in this town are not safely maintained. I have never suggested that, and I would not suggest that. I find it disingenuous that the minister comes in here on a regular basis asserting that my complaint is that parks are not being kept safely. That is not my intention; it is not my view. What I am suggesting is that I think it is surprising that a park, a local amenity, could be slated for closure, and a decision made, without the minister even being told.

I suggest that even though the minister does not have to micromanage the department, when significant decisions like that are made—and they are significant because they impact heavily on somebody’s daily life in the community—he should be informed and he should have significant policies in order to make sure that he is informed when such decisions are made.

Not knowing quite how many parks he looks after is one matter; that they are being looked after is fair enough, and I do agree. And if we are going to talk about Boundless and parking across the way, let me inform the minister that all week the car park at Russell offices is totally full. All week there are people going to Boundless and the car park at Boundless is also totally full, and people are parking on the grass.

It actually fills me with anxiety to imagine crossing six lanes of traffic, whether there are lights or not, with—

Mr Rattenbury: There are not six lanes of traffic; it is a bridge.

MRS JONES: Yes, there are. There are turning lanes in both directions and you would have to cross six individual lanes—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Lawder): Mrs Jones, address your remarks through the chair.

MRS JONES: to get across to that park. And if the other option is to go under the road, to walk a significant distance around the park with small babies and toddlers is actually really difficult. It is a very anxious matter.

The Boundless park was also designed for children with health concerns, with developmental delays—children who are harder to manage in many cases and whose parents are frazzled. I think the park is fantastic. I have been there many times. It is the only fully fenced park, apart from a couple of major older ones, that I have known in Canberra. It is so popular because it is a fenced park. I have raised in the Assembly that fully fenced parks are really helpful for parents, and I am really glad to see that there has been another one built.

I am simply raising the point that the parking is not adequate, and any decisions that have been made that assert that parking at Russell offices is good enough actually are not realistic. I am just putting that out there for the minister.

Can I recommend that the minister spend some time sitting in some of the local playgrounds observing children and observing the stress that parents go through in managing their children. Nobody, as I said, is complaining that safety is not checked. I think the department does a fantastic job in that regard, but I think that the minister in this case has been shown up as not quite knowing what is going on.

He mentioned that three playgrounds were identified in the process that identified Rocky Knob. Where are the other two playgrounds and are they planned to be closed as well? That is a question that I would love to have answered. I would love to help the minister to understand this area better. I have said before that I will go with the minister to a park, or invite the minister to a park. I do not intend to embarrass him. I really would like him to understand better how a huge chunk of people in the electorate live their lives. And I will continue to offer to go with the minister.

Can I also suggest that areas where residents are older are areas where a park may not be used much for a few years, but the inevitable change in a suburb means that ultimately younger families start moving in. We need to maintain parks in areas where there are older residents too, because when younger families manage to scrape together the money to move into an area they do not expect to find that a playground once lived in a grassy space and now does not because the government thought it was more important to spend money on TV ad campaigns about cars and bikes being exactly the same, when they could have been maintaining basic park equipment, which is a high expectation of local residents.

I am also deeply concerned about the minister doing a root-and-branch review of how parks are maintained. All I am asking for is that parks be kept and that a few be fenced. That is what I have said over a period. I am not asking for billions of dollars to be spent on parks; I am not. I am being very reasonable. I am very concerned that someone who so little understands the experience of trying to manage small children might accidentally have a root-and-branch review which creates a system that actually closes local small parks, which are very important, especially to people with small babies and toddlers, when they really struggle to cope on some days of the week.

A park is a very important part of a community, whether it is big or small. I am pleased to hear from Ms Fitzharris the concept which I have thought of for a long time, of businesses in local areas being allowed to invest in local parks. I think it is a great idea. There are plenty of businesses—cafes and the like—which would very happily buy a new piece of play equipment, even if it was from a list of approved equipment, to go into a park, and I really hope that that is a possibility for this government.

Going to the amendment to the motion, I am concerned about the statement made in paragraph (1)(e) that recreational outcomes and health improvements will be the main aim of the new system, but that it will be implemented subject to future budget funding.

Playgrounds that have been removed have been subject to future budget funding. Decisions that are made always seem to be made, of course, in relation to future budget funding. But it feels a little like, from a motion which was asking for more information for the community about the minister's and the department's plans, we are moving to a situation where the minister is saying, "I'm going to rewrite the policy; I'm going to do some community consultation."

Can I also add that mums with newborn babies, young families, do not very often have time to put in to public consultation. They are often stretched. I hope that their considerations are somehow taken into account and that we do not end up with a system so that, subject to budget funding, playgrounds either get closed and not replaced or we have a whole new system.

I do not think we will support the amendment because, even though I can agree with much of it, I am very concerned that it changes the nature of my request. My request was for more information for good citizens to know what is going on in their local area, and that has effectively been squashed by this amendment.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 8

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

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Ms Joy Burch—portfolio responsibilities Statement by Assistant Speaker

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Lawder): Yesterday I undertook to review the *Hansard* in relation to certain comments made by the Leader of the Opposition during the debate on the motion of no confidence in a minister. Having reviewed the transcript and considered the matter, I do not consider that the words spoken implied an imputation. Debates on no confidence motions are, by their nature, very robust, and whilst the words used were somewhat provocative I do not consider their use in the context of yesterday's debate an imputation of improper motive as set out in standing order 55.

Government—infrastructure projects

MS FITZHARRIS (Molonglo) (4.21): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that as Gungahlin has grown and developed as one of the ACT's newest regions the ACT Government has made significant investment in:
 - (a) education, health and community infrastructure and services;
 - (b) recreation infrastructure and services;
 - (c) roads and municipal infrastructure;
 - (d) generating employment in the Gungahlin Town Centre through the construction of the ACT Government office block; and
 - (e) public transport, especially in Capital Metro;

- (2) recognises that this investment in essential infrastructure and services has contributed to the growth of a vibrant and diverse community; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to continue to:
 - (a) engage with the Gungahlin community about what future infrastructure and services are needed; and
 - (b) invest in the Gungahlin region, especially through its commitment to the Gungahlin community to ease the day-to-day future burden on Gungahlin commuters through the delivery of the first stage of a reliable and fast mass public transport system—Capital Metro.

I am proud to be the first member elected to this place on such substantial support from the Gungahlin community. It is an honour and, as I said yesterday and again on the radio this morning, the representational role we have in this place is important to me, as I know it is important to all members. I am also pleased that my first motion in this place can be about the importance of the Gungahlin community for Canberra's future and the investments made by the government in this rapidly growing region.

Gungahlin is not only the place that I call home; it is also home to 47,000 other Canberrans. Just 20 years ago Gungahlin's population was in the hundreds. Today not only is Gungahlin a wonderful community but it has much high quality infrastructure and services as well. The combination of these things makes it a wonderful place to live.

Can I outline some of this investment? It includes quality schools for the thousands of students in the area, well-built places with fantastic teachers where our young people start on a lifetime of learning, places where economic opportunity is created and where young people become truly their best selves. It includes new sporting facilities and leisure centres, well-designed spaces where families can spend active weekends together, where communities can gather and where sports teams can play.

A new public service building is in progress. It will provide jobs in the construction phase and local public service jobs that do not require a commute and which will stimulate demand for all businesses in the Gungahlin town centre. Land has been released for a new cinema site and I look forward to work commencing this year. And now there is significant work on the capital metro investment plan which will link Gungahlin to Civic and reduce congestion along Northbourne Avenue and Flemington Road.

In my first speech yesterday I said that I was proud to represent such a vibrant, diverse and growing community. I would like to take the opportunity in this motion to draw the Assembly's attention to the detail of these significant investments that the Barr Labor government has made in Gungahlin. The soon-to-be-open public service building in the Gungahlin town centre will renew the town centre. Not only is it a building that will deliver great services but it is simply a great building. It will contain a childcare centre, an Access Canberra shopfront and also provide about 550 jobs for ACT government public servants. It is a sustainable building and it will be a great building for those people to work in.

I would also like to talk about the Gungahlin cinema, something that people in the local community told me they would really like to see locally in 2012, which is why I campaigned very hard for the ACT government to release land for this project. It is one missing piece of the puzzle. I thank the Chief Minister very much, in his capacity as Minister for Economic Development, for listening to that feedback and for releasing land for that project in 2012.

The Barr Labor government is undertaking a process of renewal and investment in our suburbs. No policy better outlines the government's commitment to jobs, infrastructure, growth and renewal in Gungahlin than the capital metro project. As a member of the Assembly that commutes daily from Gungahlin I have seen the congestion along Flemington Road and Northbourne Avenue. With Gungahlin's population continuing to grow, I am glad that Mr Corbell and Chief Minister Barr are seriously looking towards the future of transport in Canberra with investments in light rail.

Doing nothing is not an option for people who have to commute along Northbourne Avenue every morning and evening. Buses provide some temporary respite but not permanent relief. We need a way that takes vehicles off Northbourne Avenue so that Gungahlin residents can commute to work quickly while also reducing car dependency. Not every Gungahlin resident can easily commute using Gungahlin Drive and Majura Road and I am proud to stand up and support the benefits this will have for Gungahlin and argue against the short-sighted opposition to this essential investment.

On the topic of investments, I am also pleased by the attention Gungahlin has received in recent territory budgets. It shows that the ACT government recognises the need to invest in infrastructure to renew our suburbs. We will get the balance right in our transport infrastructure mix for public and private transport. A \$10 million investment over three years for the William Slim Drive and Barton Highway intersection will see signalisation installed for that roundabout and additional lanes. I know that this is very welcome for the people who live in Gungahlin and in Belconnen and who drive on this road every day.

An \$11.5 million investment to extend Horse Park Drive to Mirrabei Drive in north Gungahlin will complete this key arterial road. It is great for those residents of northern Gungahlin that they can now travel easily across the top of the region. In addition \$24 million has been spent to extend Horse Park Drive from Amaroo to Moncrieff and on installing and upgrading floodways and stormwater basins in Kenny.

Additional expenditure includes \$6 million to construct a water quality control pond to treat urban stormwater runoff from Jacka and Taylor; \$1 million on road design in Throsby to facilitate land release and development; \$5.3 million over three years to upgrade the Horse Park Drive and Anthony Rolfe Avenue intersection and to install services infrastructure in this area; and \$462,000 to extend the Gungaderra grasslands and Mulangarri nature reserve, vital environmental investments.

As I mentioned earlier, there is a new community recreation irrigated park in Franklin, with \$500,000 being committed to the development of this park adjacent to the

Franklin Early Childhood Centre. I am pleased to say that this work is well underway and due to be completed in early 2015. Another \$450,000 has been allocated to the future use study on the joint emergency services centre in Gungahlin and \$230,000 to upgrade computers and security in the public library complex in Gungahlin.

As a Gungahlin local I am also proud of the investments the Labor government has made in our community sporting facilities. The government invested \$28 million to build the Gungahlin Leisure Centre. It was money very well spent. It is a wonderful facility and I know that it is highly valued by my community. It is a diverse centre with a toddlers' pool, a children's water play area, and a lap pool and gym for adults. I know that it is an important part of the lives of many Gungahlin families, including my own. It is where our kids go for swimming lessons and where we spend many a weekend afternoon.

Sport is just as important in the lives of people in Gungahlin as it is in the rest of Canberra and, indeed, the rest of Australia. The investment the government is making in community irrigated space in Franklin and has already made in Crace will provide space for people to come together to enjoy the very real pleasure of shared sporting activities.

Our Labor government has also invested \$14 million to deliver the Gungahlin enclosed oval. It is a fantastic community facility. The competition quality lighting and turf make it an important part of the sporting pathway in our area. The large covered grandstand and public facilities make it an equally important part of our community space. With first-grade games played there throughout the winter season, it attracts people from all across the city.

I will also talk about investment in our schools. As someone who has had children and returned to the workforce as a working mum, I know that access to child care and quality early childhood education is essential. That is one of the reasons I am proud that this Labor government has invested in Gungahlin schools. We need well-funded 21st century schools if we want our city to grow. Continued investments by Labor governments have seen the development of the Franklin Early Childhood School, a \$30 million state-of-the-art facility offering schooling and childcare services for local families. Along with providing places from preschool to year 2, it also offers a 120-place childcare facility. The one drop-off is vital for many families.

Neville Bonner Primary School is a \$48 million investment which opened in 2013, providing for nearly 400 students. These two investments were not only delivered on time but also \$30 million under budget. The super schools at Amaroo and Harrison, teaching children from their very first school experiences all the way through until they move on to college, provide for over 2,200 students. Harrison Secondary School alone received a \$50 million investment. Gungahlin College has had \$75 million invested in it in order to give the best possible education to nearly 900 of Gungahlin's teenagers as they arrive at the end of their secondary education journey and step into adulthood.

I also mention the health investment in Gungahlin. The Gungahlin Community Health Centre is adjacent to the child and family centre, adjacent to Communities@Work,

and also the Centrelink offices. This local hub provides a real opportunity for these organisations to work together and to work with vulnerable families in particular across the region, cross-referencing each other as they provide wraparound services for vulnerable families.

As a local member, I am looking forward to working with all the school communities, in particular in Gungahlin. I am pleased to be part of a Labor government that has in its DNA to know how important it is to invest in our children and to prioritise education and health investment.

Gungahlin is a diverse community with people from many different backgrounds. It is also a community that is diverse by age, with the full range of accommodation needs that that comes with. Indeed the first retirement village in the region, The Grove at Ngunnawal, will open in coming years. I am also proud that the Labor government invested \$2.4 million for land release and infrastructure to support this new retirement village.

As I have noted in this motion, and as I indicated yesterday in my inaugural speech, I am looking forward to continuing to engage with the Gungahlin community on behalf of the Assembly. Since my election three weeks ago, I have visited the Communities@Work offices, spoken with local businesses, held a mobile office in the town centre, and tonight I will be attending the Gungahlin Community Council. I learn something new every day and I look forward to that continuing.

I finish on the point about investing in the future: investment to date has been significant. What these investments show is that this Barr Labor government know how to invest in the future. They know how to build a community. I congratulate the government on their investment in the future but I also know that that does not stop now. There has been great investment in our bus route, but I know that this is not sustainable in the long term. The investment in capital metro is real investment in our future—in our sustainable future—in our productivity and in our community.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Health, Minister for the Environment and Minister for Capital Metro) (4.33): I am very pleased to speak to Ms Fitzharris's motion on the infrastructure needs in Gungahlin. As one of the city's newest regions, it is right and appropriate that any government needs to make significant investment into a growing community in terms of both community facilities and infrastructure. We are a growing city. In the past hundred years we have grown from fewer than a thousand people and we are now fast approaching 400,000. We need to plan for the future. In Gungahlin, rapid population growth is projected to continue. We have already seen an increase from just over 300 to over 50,000 in the past 25 years. To put those projections into some perspective, we are anticipating that Canberra will need to accommodate double the growth experienced in Gungahlin over the next 15 years. We must plan our infrastructure provision, our transport planning and other service delivery in this context.

The north of our city is one of the final areas for greenfields expansion. Gungahlin suburbs are growing at five times the rate of the rest of the ACT. In 2013 ABS data

showed that Canberra's largest population increase occurred in Gungahlin suburbs: Crace saw a 58 per cent increase, Bonner a 43 per cent increase, and Casey a 40 per cent increase. These growing suburbs not only topped the territory's list but also took the top three spots nationally, according to the Housing Industry Association's 2014 report.

As a community, as a city, we do not have the space resources to continually spread outwards. We need to look at providing for a diversity of housing choices with good accesses to services and public transport, and that is why the government is closely linking our planning and transport strategies through the encouragement of transit-oriented development. We need to encourage urban infill and higher housing densities along high quality public transport routes.

We know the cost of urban infill is up to 130 per cent less than continuing greenfields development. The days of the quarter-acre block are well and truly behind us and we must look to providing a range of accommodation choices that suit the diverse needs of our community. We must use our land and resources more efficiently and we must ensure we can accommodate further increases in our population without impacting on quality of life or seeing a loss of valuable urban open space.

As with all town centres before it, Gungahlin is the focus of infrastructure investment to ensure that it is properly supported through its growth phase. The government is committed to a full program of community, recreational, business and educational infrastructure, including important projects, some of which Ms Fitzharris mentioned, including Gungahlin College, CIT Access, a community library, an aquatic and leisure centre, the enclosed oval, a community health centre and a range of other community spaces.

In addition we need to build transport infrastructure. The territory's traditional business-as-usual approach has been to build roads. In the past decade the territory has spent more than \$1.2 billion on road infrastructure, a figure often passed by without any notice or comment. When we build new roads and new suburbs there is, rightly, never any suggestion that the value of these roads lies only in the transport benefits they bring to the immediate residents. The new roads are vital to the successful development of the properties they service. They allow residents to get to work, to get to school, to do their shopping. All these activities have broader benefits to our economy.

Transport infrastructure is about more than just transport. Likewise, the benefits of new transport infrastructure like the capital metro light rail project extend beyond the simple mechanics of moving people from one location to another. The decision to proceed with light rail is not just about providing better public transport; it is the realisation that we cannot continue to build more roads for more cars. In a car-dependent city, more people means more cars and building more roads ultimately contributes to more congestion, less green space and increased social isolation.

As a city we are yet to suffer the most punishing effects of congestion, but we know what the consequences are and we know there is still an impact on Canberra. Congestion affects our productivity. The bureau of transport economics has estimated

the cost to the territory of over \$100 million a year projected to increase to \$200 million a year by 2020. Congestion will increasingly impact our community, and we know that without strategic interventions to improve transport infrastructure residents of Gungahlin will face peak travel times to the city centre of over 50 minutes by the year 2031.

We know we cannot continue to build more roads without balancing investments in public transport. With the population projected to reach over 600,000 over the next 40 years, the traditional approaches applied over the past simply will not meet the demands of the future. We need to refocus on our public transport infrastructure as well as on the benefits it brings. The capital metro light rail project is a major shift that we need in order to catalyse sustainable growth and increase the use of public transport. Buses on their own are not the response.

We are investing in a network where buses and light rail will be able to form part of an integrated public transport system that will support more sustainable patterns of development. The government's infrastructure program over the next four years is budgeted at \$2.5 billion out of a projected budget expenditure of more than \$20 billion.

Over the past decade the territory's economy has almost doubled in size. Now is the right time to make that long-term investment in a high quality, attractive and integrated public transport system. Light rail is an affordable and essential project for the territory in this context. It is the right choice for the new and growing suburbs of Gungahlin. We are learning from our lessons of the past and we need to plan for the future.

Capital metro will provide high quality public transport that will support the growth of this corridor from Gungahlin through to the city. When it reaches its full capacity, Gungahlin will be home to 90,000 residents. In addition, the city and the Northbourne Avenue corridor have the capacity for a range of higher density development, further absorbing predicted population growth while helping to revitalise inner urban areas.

The Gungahlin town centre itself has developed its own district character with a main-street style of development. This urban village atmosphere in Gungahlin makes it unique to other town centres, with recent mixed use development contributing to the emergence of a lively street-based town centre. The introduction of light rail into the Gungahlin town centre will add to this atmosphere because it will provide a fast, reliable transport option for the people using the terminus in Gungahlin every day.

The government recognises that the decisions are significant and we want to work with the Gungahlin community to understand all the issues at play. Last year the government supported the Gungahlin Community Council to hold its own inquiry by design workshop to explore the opportunities and challenges of introducing light rail into the town centre. The outcomes of that workshop demonstrate that discussion on light rail quickly leads to consideration of broader transport issues such as road access, park and ride placement, bus integration and cycling facilities. This whole-of-government approach to the future development of the Gungahlin town centre highlights our commitment to achieving the best possible outcomes for it.

The government has also recognised the need to generate employment in Gungahlin, as demonstrated by our commitment to build the new ACT government office building. On completion, this project will see approximately 600 additional people in the town centre every working day. That is great news for supporting the daytime trade of retailers in the Gungahlin town centre.

We need to diversify and support our economy. We need to improve access. We need to improve public transport. We need a more sustainable pattern of urban development. The type of infrastructure investment the ACT government is making highlights our commitment to achieving these outcomes. Capital metro highlights the capacity to transform the urban form of development in our city, the pattern of settlement, and to provide housing choice and accessibility and lays the foundation for a better public transport system across the city. I urge members to support Ms Fitzharris's motion.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (4.43): It is a pleasure to speak about a subject in which I have had a keen personal interest for many years. The construction, development and regeneration of Gungahlin is an issue which has always been of interest to the Assembly. Of course, much of what the member states in her motion are statements which we the opposition support. However, this motion is intended to be a wedge, albeit a poor one, about binding Gungahlin with the government's flawed light rail project.

I do not believe Gungahlin will be well served by the capital metro project. For decades Gungahlin has needed transport infrastructure and the government has been dragged kicking and screaming with no better example than the single-lane GDE, which was perhaps even implicitly mentioned in Ms Fitzharris's maiden speech yesterday. For years Gungahlin residents suffered thousands of hours of lost productivity due to the fact that the government refused to build the road infrastructure required. It was only when the Canberra Liberals announced the duplication of the road during the 2008 election campaign that the Labor government reacted and hastily committed to it as well. The GDE will always be an iconic reminder of this government's neglect of the people of Gungahlin.

The government will keep talking about light rail as being a boon for Canberra and especially Gungahlin. We strongly disagree. How many services, how much infrastructure and how much time will be lost because of this government's blind obsession with the Rattenbury-Corbell tram?

Paragraph (3)(a) of the motion states that the government will engage with the community. Well, they have not to date. They did not engage prior to light rail. They did not engage prior to the GDE. They did not engage prior to the multitude of other infrastructure mismanagement. Yet somehow we are expected to believe they are going to start listening and genuinely engage with the community.

Capital metro is not the silver bullet for Gungahlin the government likes to think it is. Instead, the government should be looking to make cheaper and simpler improvements to the ACTION bus network from Gungahlin to the city. This will have

the same impact on public transport as light rail, but it would, of course, come with a much cheaper price tag, allowing for the opportunity costs of light rail to be properly explored.

One of the best things to come out of the new ACTION network 14 was the inclusion of the route 202 bus. The 202 runs five times each morning and takes an average of 23 minutes to get from Gungahlin to the city bus interchange—a minimum time of 19 minutes and a maximum time of 24 minutes. Already that is faster than the proposed tram. Already you can go from the city to Gungahlin or Gungahlin to the city faster than what the government is proposing with the tram. Yet somehow the tram is going to be a real boon for productivity and for people's travel times. Already, without virtually any priority measures, you can get from Gungahlin to the city on a bus which is faster than a dedicated tram. The tram will have an average speed of 30 kilometres an hour. Imagine what you could do with some proper bus investment. The slowest bus leaves at 8.14 am, and that will be as quick as the fastest tram. It is these types of initiatives which Gungahlin residents should expect from their government.

A second change made by network 14 is the introduction of route 250, a limited-stop service from Gungahlin to Belconnen. I support this change, and it has made transport between Gungahlin, the University of Canberra and the Belconnen town centre far more appealing. With the 202 and the 250, the red rapid 200 series also successfully links Gungahlin to the city, Russell, Barton, Kingston and Fyshwick. Outside of peak hour, this service runs every 15 minutes and is the most patronised bus service in the ACTION bus network.

As we can see, Gungahlin has an array of attractive public transport options and much potential. Whilst it is not perfect and improvements can be made, the network itself is encouraging public transport usage. But it could be better. This is best illustrated by the recent patronage figures released by the Capital Metro Agency in the full business case. Capital metro will increase public transport patronage in the morning by about 400 or 500 passengers. That is why we are spending \$783 million—to get 400 or 500 more public transport users. We have a district of 50,000 people and we are talking about an extra 500 people on public transport after spending \$783 million. It is an extraordinary figure, and then you look at the opportunity cost of that \$783 million. When you look at the opportunity cost of the annual availability payment of that project, we are talking massive, massive sums here. It shows why almost every single person who writes to the *Canberra Times* or has written opinion pieces on this issue has been critical of the project.

Why is it that Infrastructure Australia under Julia Gillard and Kevin Rudd said no to this project? Why did they say no? Why did they say it is not even worthy of investigation?

Mr Corbell: That is a misrepresentation.

MR COE: That is what we heard from Infrastructure Australia. Infrastructure Australia clearly said in their 2013 briefing note that it is hard to justify investment in light rail when the very same proposal said bus investment is better. That is what the

government's proposal to Infrastructure Australia said. It said light rail will deliver \$2.30 per dollar invested, buses will deliver \$4.80 per dollar invested, "But we'd like you to go with light rail." Well, not surprisingly, Infrastructure Australia said it is hard to justify putting money in light rail when buses are going to deliver double the economic return. And that is when it was \$2.40 or \$2.30. Now the BCR is down to \$1.20, and even that has some fanciful figures in it. We are down to \$1.20.

Minister Corbell does not like this because he sees the tram as his little baby—his little baby going at 30 kilometres an hour past the logging of the 521 trees that will have been murdered. I am sure in a past life Mr Rattenbury would have been chaining himself to those 521 eucalyptus elata, but not today. Mr Rattenbury is going to be there with the steel chainsaw, chopping them down. It is absolutely extraordinary. You have Mr Rattenbury advocating for the chopping down of 521 trees along the Northbourne median. The hypocrisy here is pretty special. If this was in Tasmania, you would have 500 Greens chaining themselves to these very trees. In a past life, the planning activist opposition shadow minister, Mr Corbell, would have been at the community meetings saying, "Save our open space. Save our open space." But here he is, 15 years on, with the steel chainsaw, chopping down the eucalyptus elata and taking pleasure out of it.

Mr Corbell: Were you in high school then?

MR COE: In actual fact, I was in high school at the time.

Mr Corbell: You need to live a little bit more, Alistair.

MR COE: It is interesting that in those 15 years I think my life has changed somewhat more than Mr Corbell's. The only thing that has not changed is the hypocrisy of those opposite. The hypocrisy of those opposite is simply extraordinary. In times gone by we had Minister Corbell and Minister Hargreaves talking about how bad light rail was and how busways were the way forward. Busways were the only viable alternative in the ACT. Here is Mr Corbell a few years on talking about light rail as being the great saviour.

I wonder whether it is linked to Mr Corbell's vote and the fact that he realises this is his twilight term in the Assembly and he is contemplating what will be his legacy: perhaps a binding contract to lock a generation of Canberrans into a \$100 million annual availability payment! It is a shame that legacy will come at the expense of so many forgone opportunities because of the arrogance and determination of Minister Corbell.

It is interesting to discuss in this place the project and light rail because suddenly everyone opposite is starting to take credit for light rail. "It's all because of me that we're getting light rail. It's all because of me that this project's happening." Well, I am afraid it is not. It is not because of any of you; it is because of the man on the crossbench, and we all know that. We all know that just after the 2012 election there was Mr Rattenbury—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Dr Bourke): A point of order, Mr Corbell.

Mr Corbell: I appreciate this is a wide-ranging debate, Mr Assistant Speaker, but the motion is actually about infrastructure in Gungahlin. As fascinating and amusing as Mr Coe's diatribe is on the political dynamics in this place, the focus is infrastructure for the people of Gungahlin. Perhaps you could draw him to order, Mr Assistant Speaker.

Mr Wall: On the point of order, Mr Assistant Speaker, Mr Coe is debating the merits of light rail, which is one of the largest pieces of infrastructure this government has committed to for the people of Gungahlin.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Coe, continue.

MR COE: I pledge to remain relevant to the motion, Mr Assistant Speaker.

The genesis of this infrastructure project for Gungahlin is the Labor-Greens agreement. There they were just after the 2012 election, in the government media room with Mr Rattenbury in the middle, Mr Barr on one side and Ms Gallagher on the other, all with big smiles, saying: "We've committed to four years in office. Oh, and by the way, we're going to spend \$783 million on a tram." That is the genesis of this project. It is not a member here in this chamber right now. It is not a member of the Labor Party. It is the Greens who are the genesis of this project.

The Canberra Liberals unashamedly say this is not the best way to spend \$783 million of capital. It is simply not. Whether you look at it from a planning point of view, a transport point of view, a financial point of view or an economic point of view, it simply does not stack up.

If you want density up and down Northbourne Avenue, we have already seen that. We have seen that with many different apartment buildings—with the Axis, Space, Space 2, Avenue, Phoenix, IQ apartments and many others. Density can happen up and down Northbourne Avenue without light rail. All that needs to happen is that the government needs to free up land on Northbourne Avenue and we will get the density there.

What is more, people who live on Northbourne Avenue are very well served by buses which run up and down Northbourne Avenue. In fact, they are the best served people in the ACT when it comes to buses and public transport. There will be fewer opportunities after the construction of light rail.

The Canberra Liberals firmly believe there are many opportunities for infrastructure, whether it be transport infrastructure, social infrastructure, education infrastructure, health infrastructure or any other forms of infrastructure, in Gungahlin. We have to realise that by spending \$783 million on light rail we are forgoing a lot of those other types of infrastructure which could be invested in that community.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Urban Renewal and Minister for Tourism and Events) (4.58): I thank Ms Fitzharris for bringing this motion to the Assembly this

afternoon and for raising, once again, the range of important infrastructure investments the government has undertaken and, indeed, plans to undertake for the people of Gungahlin.

I think it is fair to say that when Canberrans think about Gungahlin, what they consider first is the vibrancy of the area and its sense of newness. In many ways, that is an understandable impression. Gungahlin is our city's fastest growing area, and it has been for some time. It is home to almost 50,000 people now. Within six years that number will be 72,000.

I think most people who live in Gungahlin would agree with me that the real essence of Gungahlin is its sense of place. Gungahlin was first gazetted in the 1960s. In half a century, it has grown its own identity and it has grown its own community. These communities do not grow in a void. They need infrastructure to take root and flourish. Schools, roads, healthcare facilities, sporting facilities, parks and community facilities deliver a Canberra quality of life but also provide space for individuals and families to come together, to interact and to form the unique combination that gives each of our town centres, particularly Gungahlin, its distinctive identity.

My government, and the Labor governments which have preceded us, are and have been firmly committed to making sure that Gungahlin has the infrastructure it needs and deserves. A growing community needs good transport options to help people move about and to reach all of the wonderful experiences that our city has to offer.

In the last budget alone, this Labor government invested nearly \$52 million in local Gungahlin road initiatives to help make sure that people in Gungahlin have the even better road network that they need.

But transport is about more than roads. We recognise that good public transport is a crucial part of making sure that everyone is included in our communities and that everyone has the opportunity to get to work and to access services. Last year the government completed the Gungahlin town centre bus facilities project upgrade, which included a \$3.3 million project to upgrade public transport around the town centre. This has included a new major bus station, new stops, seating, shelter and real-time bus information displays. As others have observed in this debate, there are also new ACTION bus services, including the 202, a non-stop route to the city, and the 250 direct service to the Belconnen town centre.

Of course, the government is committed to and will invest in building Canberra's first light rail line. This is a crucial piece of infrastructure which will help Gungahlin to continue to grow but, importantly, will also help shape that growth. Fast, reliable capital metro services will mean that the light rail travel time from Gungahlin to the city will be just 25 minutes, making sure that people in Gungahlin have convenient access to Canberra's heart.

The government is and remains committed to making sure that people in Gungahlin have easy access to Canberra's main areas of employment. There are a number of transport projects underway—consisting of many hundreds of millions of dollars, Mr Coe—that are assisting a variety of different transport modes to ensure that people in Gungahlin have access, and easy access, to Canberra's main areas of employment.

We are also very committed to making sure there are employment opportunities within the Gungahlin town centre itself and that people have access to the range of services they need in their own town centre. In a very short while—a matter of months—the government will be proud to open our new ACT government office building on Gungahlin Place. This office will house over 600 ACT government staff, providing job opportunities in the Gungahlin town centre and helping to drive economic growth amongst the range of small businesses that are located in the town centre. This office will also hold the very first Access Canberra shopfront. This is important because it ensures that there is no wrong door for the people of Gungahlin when it comes to discussions with government. It is a one-stop shop for all of their ACT government needs.

The new office, though, will be more than just a hub for employment and access to government; there will be a 90-place childcare centre, cafe and retail space. The government's investment will contribute to Gungahlin's community space and create a real focal point for the community.

A core part of living in a strong community is access to quality health care. The government has been very proud to invest in the health of the Gungahlin community by building the Gungahlin Community Health Centre, an \$18 million ACT government investment that is located in the middle of the town centre and integrated with the child and family centre. The community health centre offers a wide range of services to people in Gungahlin. This includes community nursing; allied health services, including physiotherapy and podiatry; dental surgeries for children and young people; and a range of services for women and children, including a women's health nurse and a nutrition clinic.

Gungahlin has been Canberra's fastest growing area for some time. All indications are that it will continue to be for some time into the future. This side of the chamber is very proud to support that growth. We will keep supporting it in the future with new transport investments, with new investments in critical infrastructure for the town centre and also, importantly, through working in partnership with the private sector to attract new investment into the town centre. It is exciting to hear from a large number of developers across a variety of development fields, who are indicating their desire to invest in the town centre because the government is committed to capital metro, because we will be delivering this enhanced transport service that is attracting new investment to the Gungahlin town centre. That is a great opportunity for Gungahlin.

The town centre, one of the first areas connected to the national broadband network, has an advantage over other areas of Canberra—indeed, over most other areas of Australia, as unfortunately the national broadband network rollout has hit a bit of a wall in tech-head Abbott who has got in the way of that important national project being rolled out, in this city in particular. It is an advantage for Gungahlin and, together with the transport infrastructure, will provide real opportunities for private sector investment in the town centre. The ACT government, by locating staff in the town centre, has recognised the importance of supporting that growth through our decisions and ensuring that public sector deployment is fairly distributed across the ACT.

In the context of this morning's motion around federal public service employment, let me say there is not much of that in the Gungahlin town centre, which is why it was important for the ACT government to locate 600 of our staff in the Gungahlin town centre. That is why it is important that the ACT government has or will put 600 staff into the Gungahlin town centre. That is a commitment, as a proportion of our workforce, way in advance of anything the federal government has done. We will, of course, welcome new federal government employment in Canberra, full stop, but that employment would be fairly distributed around our city's town centres. That would be an important contribution that the federal government could make to economic growth in the ACT. I will not, however, hold my breath that the Canberra Liberals, and the Liberal Party nationally, will be supportive of that, because it is not in their DNA.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Minister for Planning, Minister for Roads and Parking, Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations, Minister for Children and Young People and Minister for Ageing) (5.08): I would like to thank my colleague Ms Fitzharris for bringing forward this afternoon the motion, which I support. Whilst the government is progressing planning along Northbourne Avenue, city to the lake, East Lake and commercial centres through our master plan program, there is still a significant focus on greenfields planning, land release and development in our new suburbs in Gungahlin and Molonglo. Importantly, greenfields areas, in particular Gungahlin, provide opportunities for housing choice and affordable housing while providing access to a wide range of services and social infrastructure that support a rapidly growing community. Specifically, the ACT planning strategy identifies the continuing growth of greenfields areas, in particular Gungahlin, and sets a target of 50 per cent of new homes to be provided in greenfields sites. Obviously from year to year the percentage of new homes in greenfields areas will change through the government's land release program.

Notwithstanding, it is clear that Gungahlin will continue to grow and be supported by a significant government investment in the form of schools, roads, public transport and other community infrastructure. Gungahlin's population was approximately 56,700 people in 2013, and this is expected to rise to an ultimate population of approximately 90,000 people over the next 20 to 30 years. Future residents will be housed in the new suburbs of Moncrieff, Throsby, Kenny, Taylor and Jacka, as well as within the town centre itself. This population will also support the continuing investment by the private sector in Gungahlin.

Demand for detached housing remains strong and every effort is being made to increase the supply of standard residential sites in greenfields estates. Over the next four years, to 2017-18, approximately 3,000 dwellings are proposed to be released in Gungahlin. Construction work has already commenced on building the infrastructure for the new suburbs of Jacka and Moncrieff. Notwithstanding, one of my and the community's concerns with greenfields development is to ensure that development occurs in a sustainable and socially responsible manner, in particular one that responds to climate change.

In relation to Gungahlin, environmental sustainability has been taken into account through the Gungahlin strategic assessment that was approved by the commonwealth

government in 2013. Significant conservation gains occurred through the creation of new nature reserves and the provision of funding for land management, research and monitoring of threatened species such as the superb parrot, the regent honeyeater, the striped legless lizard, the golden sun moth and the threatened ecological communities of box gum woodland and potentially natural temperate grassland.

One of Gungahlin's great benefits is its immediate access to nature reserves such as Mulligans Flat, a reserve enjoyed and used extensively not just by the residents of Gungahlin but by the whole Canberra community. What this means is that the extent of urban development in Gungahlin has been reduced, with significant environmental benefit, and the impacts of development are being appropriately managed, as well as training policies being updated accordingly.

The Environment and Planning Directorate is continuing to work to review policies to ensure that the territory plan and its codes can facilitate housing affordability, urban consolidation and sustainability.

In November 2010 a planning study was completed for the Gungahlin town centre. The outcomes of the planning study were then implemented, through territory plan variation 300, in 2011. The territory plan variation incorporated a suite of planning controls and changes that were recommended in the planning study to allow for mixed use development, much-needed employment opportunities and essential public infrastructure.

The town centre was originally designed with an urban village approach. This means that it provides a different shopping experience to other town centres in the ACT, with a cluster of six medium-sized retail blocks rather than a single, large shopping mall. This allows for more on-street retailing and a mix of dining and cafe options. Planning for the Gungahlin town centre recognised this as a significant point of difference to promote a more walkable and accessible town centre. The planning study was prepared at a time when almost half of the town centre land was developed or planned for development. It established a new street network and land use zoning with a strong focus on public transport and providing land for future employment opportunities.

I am pleased to add that several key development outcomes have been realised since the planning study was completed. These include the Gungahlin enclosed oval and Gungahlin Leisure Centre, both of which have been very enthusiastically received by the Gungahlin community. Alongside this we have also seen the opening of the state-of-the-art facilities at Gungahlin College, which incorporate a very well used public library with community IT facilities. In addition to this, a new community healthcare facility has been opened and the valley ponds have been developed and completed.

The ACT government is supporting the economic viability of the Gungahlin town centre by developing a state-of-the-art office building. In addition to providing over 8,000 square metres of office space to accommodate 650 staff, the development will also include a 90-place childcare centre, retail and commercial units, a cafe, A-grade car parking and the first Access Canberra shopfront. Construction of the four-storey office building is nearing completion and is expected to be ready for occupation in April this year.

Planning for the Gungahlin town centre has also considered how public transport could be implemented, identifying Hibberson Street as an important route for current and future public transport. Of course, capital metro is an important part of the ACT government's vision to deliver a truly sustainable and creative city, and it is an excellent example of how we are connecting Gungahlin to the rest of Canberra as part of the first stage of a reliable and fast mass public transport system.

I will go to some comments Mr Coe made earlier in his contribution to the debate in regard to the announcement of light rail for Canberra. He advised that the announcement was made in the government media room, with Simon Corbell, Katy Gallagher and Shane Rattenbury, post-election. However, if we do some research, on the ABC's web page we will see that well before the announcement by the government there was a title by ABC media "Labor backs light rail". It states:

ACT Labor is promising to build a light rail network through Canberra if it wins October's election.

The first stage of the Capital Metro project would include a 12 kilometre light rail route linking Gungahlin and Civic.

It later says:

... it will establish the ACT's first large-scale private sector partnership to plan, finance and develop the project.

There is some more comment from Mr Corbell, and then it has under the title "Time line concerns" that the Canberra Liberals "are yet to make any announcements around light rail and rapid public transport options for Gungahlin to the city".

Capital metro is more than just a transport solution for Gungahlin. It will also transform part of our city by supporting and encouraging smarter land use and housing solutions on what is the fastest growing corridor in Canberra. It will connect people with a public transport system that puts them first, eases congestion, reduces pollution and improves the quality of life. Capital metro will also build on the work already being undertaken by the ACT government on light rail, integrated land use and transport planning. But, most importantly, it will create jobs over there in Gungahlin for the people all across Canberra.

MS FITZHARRIS (Molonglo) (5.17), in reply: Thank you to my colleagues who have supported this motion today, my first motion in this Assembly. As I said, I am pleased to move it about my local community. I thank Minister Corbell, the Chief Minister and Minister Gentleman for their support, and also I note Mr Coe's comment that he has been interested in Gungahlin for a long time. But I also note that no other members of the Canberra Liberals from Molonglo spoke to this motion at all. I note that Mr Doszpot is in the chamber but the Canberra Liberals have taken such a strong interest in Gungahlin that none of their Molonglo members saw fit to come and speak to this motion.

This motion is not a wedge—

Mr Coe: You'll be speaking on every motion, then.

MS FITZHARRIS: I would have expected that a Molonglo member from the Canberra Liberals could have been here to also express their concerns about Gungahlin as well.

Mr Coe: Hard-hitting.

MS FITZHARRIS: I will keep trying. As I noted in the motion, this government has invested significantly in Gungahlin—education, health and community infrastructure and services, recreation infrastructure and services and roads and municipal infrastructure—in generating employment in the town centre. As the Chief Minister has said, the investment between the ACT government office block and capital metro has provided a real stimulus to private sector interests to come into Gungahlin and indicate their strong intention to make major investments in the town centre.

This government has not neglected Gungahlin. I outlined millions of dollars worth of investment in Gungahlin, particularly in the last 10 years, and the overwhelming feedback I have from people living in Gungahlin is that they love it. They love the amenity and they love the physical infrastructure the government has invested in and the fact that it has helped to build a strong community.

Minister Corbell also talked about capital metro, and I note that, as it has been in the past, this was a robust discussion. I look forward to that debate continuing. As I said yesterday, I believe that capital metro is the public transport system we need for our future, and I believe we can afford it.

Mr Coe made this debate about choices and priorities, and I agree—let us have that debate. It is about choices and priorities. ACT Labor has made a significant choice to invest in capital metro and the first stage of the Gungahlin to city route. Mr Coe also made a comment, which Mr Gentleman alluded to, about what is driving the capital metro project. I was doorknocking in Gungahlin the very morning in September 2012 when the ACT government made the announcement that they would be investing in light rail. It was very clear from that announcement that this was an investment in a study that would lead to the construction of the light rail project. Does Mr Coe think that we should not be delivering on our election commitments from 2012? I will be very happy to have a debate with whomever the candidate might be from the Canberra Liberals in Gungahlin at the next election on ACT Labor committing to its commitment to deliver light rail.

Again, I thank my colleagues for their support of this motion today, my first motion in this Assembly—and I am pleased to have been able to move it—about my local community, and I thank them for their support. I commend the motion.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 8

Mr Barr
Ms Berry
Dr Bourke
Ms Burch
Mr Corbell

Ms Fitzharris
Mr Gentleman
Ms Porter
Mr Rattenbury

Mr Coe
Mr Doszpot
Mrs Dunne
Mr Hanson
Mrs Jones

Ms Lawder
Mr Smyth
Mr Wall

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Government—tendering arrangements

MR WALL (Brindabella) (5.25): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the importance of locally owned and operated small, medium and family business investment to the ACT economy;
- (b) the low weighting given to local small, medium and family businesses in the tender assessment process for ACT Government contracts;
- (c) CityWide Service Solutions, a wholly owned subsidiary of Melbourne City Council, have recently been awarded the contract for dryland grass mowing along arterial roads and connecting roads in the ACT;
- (d) the impact on local small, medium and family business as a result of contracts being awarded to interstate and overseas contractors; and
- (e) the flow on effect to the ACT economy as a result of keeping contracts local; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) outline the long term economic impact to the ACT as a result of allowing contracts to move interstate and overseas;
- (b) review the process that allowed CityWide Service Solutions to be awarded the contract for dryland grass mowing along arterial roads and connecting roads in the ACT with a review to be tabled in the Assembly by the last sitting day of March 2015; and
- (c) ensure that a fair weighting is given to local small, medium and family business in the tender assessment process for ACT Government contracts.

The motion I bring to this place today goes to the heart of why I got involved in politics in the first place. It goes to the heart of everything that is wrong with the way this Labor government treat local businesses, particularly locally owned small and medium businesses here in the ACT.

The latest statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics state that there are over 24,000 small businesses registered in the ACT. From both sides of the chamber it has been widely acknowledged that small businesses are the driving force of our economy. Survival rates for locally owned businesses are grim. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, of the businesses operating in June 2009, the lowest survival rate for all the states and territories was seen here in the ACT, with a rate of 60.3 per cent—that is, almost 40 per cent of businesses that were operational here in 2009 no longer have their doors open today.

It is extremely disturbing to see the Chief Minister announce that there will soon be a dedicated business advocate—not for the fact that the government will now have an advocate-type role but more for the fact that this has been a glaring omission in the past 16 years of government and we are only now recognising a need. According to the Chief Minister’s statement yesterday, the advocate’s first job will be to “work with local industry to identify improvements to government procurement processes”. The Chief Minister said:

I am particularly concerned to ensure that our rules and regulations are not designed around compliance capacity or the needs of big players in a way which distorts the procurement process against ... local firms.

The Chief Minister went on to say:

Our local businesses tell me they do not need protection or any special advantages. They just need a fair go when they compete for government work ... The advocate will work exclusively in the interests of the ACT business community to ensure work that can and should be done by ACT businesses stays in the ACT.

Unfortunately, this announcement comes a little late for some locally owned businesses that I have recently come across who are pretty unhappy with the way that they have been treated over a number of years. The cynic in me says that this is just another way to pay lip-service to local business. It is simply not enough to talk the talk. This government by now should well and truly be able to walk the walk. The case is yet to be made by the Chief Minister as to what the business advocate will be able to do that the members opposite are not. I fear this is simply another announcement in order to turn around what has been a less than impressive start to Mr Barr’s term as Chief Minister.

To stem the downward trend of survival rates in the ACT for local businesses, for them to survive and thrive, government policies need to be structured to encourage new businesses to start up and allow established businesses already in the marketplace to thrive.

One such policy is ensuring that a genuine weighting in the tender process is given to locally owned and operated businesses—not just to offer a leg-up but to give genuine recognition to the flow-on effects of a business based in the ACT region being given the opportunity over an interstate or overseas player.

The issue that brought this motion to the fore today is centred on the contract for grass mowing in the ACT. One of the most common complaints that come through my office from constituents is complaints about the mowing of our public grass—grass on the verges, grass on the roadsides, our footpath edges, laneways, playgrounds and parks. Too much grass and not enough mowing is the prevalent theme.

Recently the ACT government awarded a contract to mow the grass along arterial roads to a new contractor. It is not unusual, nor is it surprising, you might think. That is until we dig a little deeper and discover that the successful tender was awarded to a wholly owned subsidiary of the Melbourne City Council. Every time jobs and employment opportunities get taken away from ACT operators and employees, it is another move in the wrong direction for the ACT's economy. That is an absolute fact.

The ACT government argue that this contract provided value for money for ACT taxpayers, but in actual fact the negative impact on our economy of this decision is far reaching. Firstly, the profits that the contractor may make will leave the territory. In this instance they will be heading to prop up the Melbourne City Council. Secondly, the purchase of new equipment or servicing of equipment will likely be done outside the territory. Thirdly, any of the administration work, accounting or legal work that a local contractor would employ a local professional to undertake will undoubtedly be done interstate.

The minister, Shane Rattenbury, yesterday answered a question that we asked without notice during question time querying the tender process. His response was that Citywide came in at around half the price, “so they provide better value for money because they have economies of scale”.

I disagree with this statement and believe that this speaks to the heart of the matter here today. This statement shows that the minister, and consequently the government, believes that adequate weighting is given to locally owned businesses in the tender process. But, as I have already outlined, this is simply is not the case. This is wrong and highlights how very little the minister and his ACT Labor colleagues know about doing business from a business perspective.

I believe we are creating a false economy if we continue to award contracts without adequate weighting for local business. Even if employees for the contract in question today are sourced from the ACT, they will only just replace the jobs that have been lost from the previous locally owned business that had held the contract. What about the loss of the actual business itself that lost out in the tender process and the loss to the local economy because the local contractor was forced out of work? I need to stress here that I am not simply advocating that once a company wins a government contract they should never lose the contract; instead a much more serious assessment needs to be given to locally owned and locally operated proposals.

In recent weeks I have spent time with one of the previous contractors, a hardworking Canberra taxpayer who is doing his best to get ahead despite the roadblocks put in his way by this government. It is a true small business that operates from home and wears many hats. The operator, like everyone else interested in tendering for the latest package of work with TAMS, was informed at a compulsory industry briefing meeting that no one contractor would be awarded more than one contract. Yet it seems in this instance that Citywide has been awarded more than one contract, being successful for all three work packages.

If in fact operators were told that they would only win a maximum of one package of work, this then informs their pricing for the tender. Efficiencies that may be gained by winning multiple work packages cannot be included in their proposal. Likewise the opportunity for operators to be creative and collaborate has been denied. Questions do need to be asked as to whether Citywide was informed of the same conditions and whether or not all tenderers were competing on a level playing field.

To add insult to injury, Citywide have previously been successful tenderers for a mowing contract. And this is where the value for money argument that the government keep pushing comes unstuck. Citywide did not complete the contract for the agreed price. In fact, my understanding is that they could not come close to completing the job for the price for which they tendered. So the excess work was given to local contractors at an hourly rate—an hourly rate that I imagine is far in excess of what a fixed price contract, or the next best tender option, would have provided. How on earth can this government justify this kind of debacle as value for money for ACT taxpayers?

If the due diligence was being done effectively and efficiently, alarm bells most definitely should have been ringing when, in the 2012 tender submission, Citywide provided the price. As most people would expect, when it sounds too good to be true, it most likely is.

According to the service agreement that Citywide entered into with Territory and Municipal Services in 2012, they had tendered that the dryland mowing in Yarralumla and Deakin would take approximately 27 hours to complete, and submitted a tendered price of \$229.20 including GST to do that body of work. That is less than \$8.50 per hour. Those good unionists on the opposite side of the chamber would recognise that \$8.50 an hour is well below what any award rate would be for a mowing contractor in the territory, let alone the cost that would be involved by the time you factor in the operating cost of machinery. It is simply not possible to provide that work for that price. This should have set alarm bells ringing within the department when assessing tender proposals, but, alas, the ACT government took the bait at the expense of a local operator.

Again, in 2015, Citywide have been given a mowing package in the ACT at the expense of local operators simply because they have submitted what the industry recognises as the cheapest price, but they believe it is unrealistic for the scale of the job and the stringent conditions which TAMS and the ACT government require any contractor to adhere to.

I urge members to support this motion today and, by doing so, support our local economy, support our local business sector and support the creation of local jobs.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Urban Renewal and Minister for Tourism and Events) (5.35): I move:

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

- “(b) that yesterday, the Chief Minister announced that the ACT Government will create a new position of Local Industry Advocate to work with local industry to identify improvements to government procurement processes;
 - (c) Access Canberra, our new one-stop-shop to cut red tape has already started making life easier for small and large businesses; and
 - (d) that the ACT Government’s vision for growing Canberra’s economy is built on three strategic imperatives—fostering the right business environment, supporting business investment, and accelerating business innovation; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to maintain economic activity, to encourage investment and, above all, to grow jobs.”.

I thank Mr Wall for his motion today as it provides an opportunity to talk about some of the measures that my government is taking to make it easier for local businesses to win ACT government contracts. The measures we have introduced have been consistent with the ACT government’s interstate obligations and also obligations that this country has in various free trade agreements that place limits on the capacity of the territory government to favour some local suppliers over other entrants in an open tender process.

In light of all of those constraints, 18 months ago the government introduced a local SME weighting for goods and services procurements, announced in April 2012 as part of our business development strategy. Last year the government implemented further reforms to help support the local construction industry. An example of this was some of the “ready now” smaller value projects that were released to the market before the passage of the budget made funding available for larger projects. The government adjusted its pre-qualification system by adding three new thresholds and requiring tenderers to have pre-qualification categories for a project’s annual spend instead of for its full value. This made it easier for a large number of small businesses to be eligible to bid for various ACT government construction contracts.

Yesterday in the Assembly I announced the government’s next reform in this area—the introduction of a local industry advocate to assist local businesses in the government procurement of goods, services and capital works. Part of the local industry advocate’s role will be to work with government directorates to ensure that work that can be done by local businesses stays in the local region, building capability and economic activity in our city. But I want to make this point very clearly today:

no-one in local industry has ever told me that they need special advantages. No-one is asking for special advantages. They are asking for a level playing field when they compete for government contracts.

I am pleased the industry stakeholders from across a wide variety of industry sectors in the ACT who I consulted with in advance of making the announcement of the local industry advocate are very positive about this role. They have provided feedback that this reform will improve business confidence. As we know, improved confidence is a very important economic indicator. When businesses are more confident, they are more likely to invest and employ staff.

The first job of the local industry advocate will be to work with local industry players to recommend where further improvements can be made to government procurement processes. I need to stress here that we operate within an environment of free trade agreements, signed by our national government, between our country and other countries, and there are requirements under the Australian Constitution for free trade between the Australian states and territories. So there are limits on this.

I would like our advocate to focus on areas where requests for tender, policies or even legislation, where that is possible, are geared to larger companies and make it more difficult for smaller and local firms, where these might be addressed and where we might have more innovative solutions that will achieve the outcomes that we desire.

One of my priorities as Chief Minister, as I am sure members are aware, is to have a greater focus on regulatory reform and to drive red tape reduction. One of my first decisions as Chief Minister was to establish a new one-stop shop called Access Canberra to better connect small and larger businesses to ACT government services. This new agency brings together shopfronts and regulatory bodies from across the ACT public service into a single agency. The important thing here is that from a business perspective there is one place to go to get all of your approvals—not the previous arrangements where you had to go to four or five or sometimes six or seven different areas of government.

This single agency will make it easier for business, but, importantly, it also makes it easier for community organisations and individuals who might want to stage an event or an activity that requires a range of ACT government permits and approvals. This will make it easier for business, community organisations and individuals to work with ACT government. In simple terms, Access Canberra is there to be a leader and an enabler for business and to encourage local organisations to innovate, invest and grow whilst continuing to provide the appropriate protections for citizens and the community in their important regulatory roles.

While it is in its early days, the service is available for small, medium and large businesses, community groups and individuals who seek access to permits, approvals and licences that are needed to establish a new business, expand a business, run an event in the territory or run a larger event in the territory. During this establishment phase, Access Canberra is engaging with a wide variety of stakeholders—organisations and individual businesses—to discuss how engagement with ACT government directorates can be streamlined.

I have had the opportunity to meet with the Access Canberra team this week to get a sense of the feedback and the engagement so far. I am pleased to advise the Assembly that it has been very positive. There is, of course, more work to do, and the Access Canberra team know they have a big task ahead of them. But the cultural change we are seeking is happening, and the practical change from the perspective of a business or individual in the community is that there is now a one-stop shop, and that is important.

Having an agency like Access Canberra enables us to quickly identify inefficient regulations and to provide advice on changes that are needed. Already Access Canberra is making a difference to individual businesses. Through cooperative work across many agencies, the process, for example, for applying for outdoor eating permits has been made much easier for business. Now on the ACT government webpage is a simple one-click approach to finding out all there is to know and making an application if you are in the business of feeding people outdoors. This is just one example of how Access Canberra will make life easier for individuals and businesses in the ACT.

In the coming sitting weeks I look forward to updating the Assembly on further progress that Access Canberra has made to cut red tape and to make life easier for small businesses in the territory.

To conclude my comments this afternoon, I want to acknowledge the importance of continued policy development in relation to the government's business development strategy. As I said in response to a question in question time today, the 2012 document was never intended to be a static document; the policy framework will continue to evolve as certain milestones are achieved and new initiatives are brought forward. As I indicated on Tuesday in my speech on government priorities, we will be updating the business development strategy. We continue our focus, though, on those three strategic imperatives that I outlined at the launch of that policy initiative and have reiterated previously—that is, around the government's intent to foster the right business environment, support business investment and accelerate business innovation.

As I alluded to in question time today, it is very pleasing to see the announcement of a recent new investor in the ACT economy now taking on a six-year \$8 million sponsorship of the ACT Brumbies. The Brumbies were without a sponsor. They are an important part of our community, they employ people, and their activities in our community generate a significant social and economic benefit. It is terrific to see a new entrant, a new investor in the ACT, committing for the long term to a core asset for this community in the Brumbies. That is fantastic to see.

This amendment calls on the ACT government to continue our focus on encouraging investment, maintaining economic activity and, above all, growing jobs in our economy. That is exactly what we will do. We will be single-minded in our determination to attract that investment and to resist all calls from those opposite for an austerity agenda for this community. We are not in the business of slashing jobs, dramatically withdrawing services and not investing in our economy because those opposite have some sort of fetish about deficits. We remain committed to our policy

agenda to support this economy, maintain economic activity, encourage investment and support jobs. We will do so in the ways that we have outlined. I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Justice, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Transport Reform) (5.45): I will add a few brief remarks in addition to Mr Barr. I will focus much more on the specifics of the issue that Mr Wall raised—the Citywide contract and how that came about. I have provided some information to the Assembly, but, for the purposes of this debate, I should touch on a couple of those points.

As I said, and as I told the Assembly yesterday, Citywide were successful in securing the arterial road mowing contract through a competitive tendering process. As I said yesterday, that was undertaken and evaluated on a number of criteria. Those criteria include a weighting for local companies and then a range of other factors around value for money for the ACT. As Mr Wall noted in his comments today, I did say that Citywide came in at around half the price of other tenderers.

Local business was a consideration in the procurement processes, with locally owned businesses scoring higher against this criterion. But even with that weighting for Canberra-based companies, Citywide rated much higher and provided better value for money.

I think there are some difficult questions here. I have quite a bit of sympathy for the argument that Mr Wall is making. There is obviously an attraction and a position I support in ensuring that local companies are given that extra bit of opportunity. The difficult question for this Assembly to reflect on is how much more the ACT taxpayer should be required to pay in order to source a specifically local company. How much weighting should be given to local business, and therefore what will the extra cost be to the ACT government and therefore the taxpayers who foot the bill for these things? These are difficult questions. I would be quite open to hearing the various views that are in the chamber.

It is quite clear that Citywide have been operating in the ACT for a number of years. They employ local staff, including over 15 local staff, to deliver mowing services in the territory. They also employ local subcontractors to assist in delivering the mowing program along arterial roads. So with some of the work that Citywide has been awarded, quite a proportion of that income goes back to locals through either direct employment or the subcontracting process.

This is a complex equation that I would be interested to hear Mr Wall's views on. How much more should we be willing to pay and what should that local weighting be? There is a tension here between getting the best possible value for money versus using the local contractors. I am happy to have that discussion further as we seek to get the balance right and also make sure that we get the job done here in the ACT.

We have had an extraordinary season when it comes to mowing. I have said publicly that I am not satisfied with the look and feel of the city at the moment. I think we are behind. As I also have said in the chamber this week, the bulk of the mowing is

actually done by TAMS, through staff employed directly by TAMS. It is only the arterial road contract that has gone to Citywide. The ACT government has its own fleet of 80 mowers; they are now going six days a week. We have upped that during this season in order to keep up with the mowing; they are going at it six days a week in order to keep the grass under control. We have seen a lot of rain. We have seen very good growing conditions for grass, and we do have some catching up to do. I have asked TAMS to work even harder to make sure that work gets done and look at whether we need to put extra resources into getting the mowing sorted out so that we can improve the current state of play.

The other issue is the weeds. We have experienced similar problems with weeds growing on median strips and the like. I have similarly asked TAMS to give me some information on what can be done to step up the work to bring that under control. In a number of parts of town, I am disappointed in the way the city is looking.

As you move around the city you can see the areas that are going very well. I was in Tuggeranong in the last few days and large swathes of the south side of the city are looking very good; they have just been mowed. But we are clearly behind in Belconnen and Gungahlin. The work began in those areas on Saturday, and I hope that we will see a significant improvement over the coming days as the work gets done in that area.

I just wanted to add those few remarks. I support the amendment Mr Barr has moved, but I wanted to particularly comment on the specifics of the questions that were being posed around the history, the background to the allocation of that contract and the state of the mowing performance in the ACT.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (5.51): I rise briefly to reiterate a concern which Mr Wall flagged in this place with regard to the industry briefing Mr Wall described. As an opposition we were advised that at that meeting the contractors were told they could not win more than one parcel of work. Therefore, that affected the pricing of what they submitted. If they could have won two or three parcels of work, the fixed costs would have been spread across more than one parcel; therefore, they could have delivered additional mowing at a relatively low marginal cost. That is a very important point to make.

In contrast to the advice that these contractors received that they could only win one parcel of work, Citywide won three parcels of work. It is no wonder they were able to get economies of scale because they won three parcels of work despite the fact that at the industry briefing people were told they could only win one parcel of work. Were Citywide informed in advance that they could win more than one parcel of work? If so, were other operators informed that they could win more than one parcel of work? If not, the entire tender process could be in jeopardy.

Mr Wall asked a question about this in the Assembly yesterday and raised it in the Assembly again just then. Mr Rattenbury, as the minister responsible, spoke up about various issues with mowing, but he did not touch on that extremely important issue. It is an extremely important issue. We on this side will happily give Mr Rattenbury leave to speak a second time in this debate to clarify whether people at the industry briefing were told they could only win one parcel of work.

That is a very important point. I very much hope for the sake of all the contractors that lost work, all the people that are now unemployed and all the business that the territory has lost as a result of this decision, that Mr Rattenbury will clarify it right now. His inability to do this, despite it being raised in question time yesterday, is a real concern for this place. I call upon Mr Rattenbury, I urge Mr Rattenbury, to stand up now—to seek leave, which we will grant—and clarify whether the tender process is indeed fair and whether the information given to all possible applicants was indeed the same.

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (5.54): I rise this evening to speak in support of the amendment from Mr Barr. As members here may be aware or may recall, I spent 16 years working in my own small business, operating a dental practice here in Canberra. The announcement of this new local industry advocate is something that many people in small businesses around Canberra will be congratulating the government for. This is an advocate that is going to be able to work with local industry, to assist local industry to access government procurement contracts and get a hand up but not a handout.

I draw to members' attention the statements of one particular industry group that came out describing the industry advocate as a boost for growth and jobs. That is the Master Builders Association of the ACT. What did the master builders have to say about the industry advocate? John Miller, Executive Director of the Master Builders Association of the ACT, said:

Master Builders strongly backs the Chief Minister Andrew Barr's announcement of the new position today.

He went on to say:

The announcement shows the Chief Minister has listened to industry concerns and acted ...

For too long work that can be done by Canberra's builders has been exported at the expense of local jobs and wider economic benefits flowing to our community ...

Master Builders has been working to inform the Chief Minister and his government about these concerns which were highlighted with the release of our Procurement Policy late last year.

Mr Miller went on to say:

Canberra's builders are strong supporters of the Chief Minister's push for more and better community infrastructure for the Canberra community and the ACT's broader strategy to harness the economic gains the building industry can deliver.

Canberra builders are strong supporters of the Chief Minister's push for more and better community infrastructure for the Canberra community and the ACT's broader strategy to harness the economic gains the building industry can deliver.

Master Builders looks forward to working with the Local Industry Advocate to create opportunities for local firms to compete on a level playing field for the opportunity to deliver the Chief Minister's vision for iconic infrastructure projects that will underpin a stronger building industry, economic growth, more jobs and increased and a more liveable and connected Canberra community.

I move to Access Canberra, an initiative which I have been talking about with small business people over the last month. This is where the ACT government has brought together a lot of shopfront and regulatory functions in a one-stop shop for licences, approvals and permits. As a former small business owner, I can say that this is a particularly helpful piece of policy which means that instead of going from department to person to inspector to directorate, you can get it all done in the one place. I commend the government for this initiative.

Of course, when we reflect upon the debate we had this morning about what the Liberals are planning to do to Belconnen, to Belconnen small businesses, we can see the most obvious of contrasts between Labor policy and Liberal tragedy.

MR WALL (Brindabella) (5.58): It is disappointing that Mr Rattenbury, the minister responsible, has not seized the opportunity to clarify for members of the Assembly what exactly was provided at the industry briefing, what conditions potential tenderers were told they must adhere to and what opportunities they had to win multiple bodies of work when it came to the mowing package in the ACT. I hope an answer is forthcoming shortly, but it would not surprise me if it is simply dodged and ignored.

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 WALL: The Chief Minister had the opportunity in his speech to explain to the Assembly why it is absolutely essential that the business advocate is appointed and why that office is being created. I asked during my speech: what can this advocate do that members of the government and professional members of the ACT public service could not already do or have not already been doing over the past 16 years? It is disappointing that this is another case of rhetoric and promises and yet a lack of substance and physical policy change that will deliver for ACT small businesses.

It seems they are more interested in pursuing the ideological project of a \$783 million tram going from the city to Gungahlin that is promising to deliver to the ACT economy an ambitious \$1.20 return for every dollar spent. It is also worthy of mentioning at this point the policy the Master Builders have put forward that identifies from their research that every dollar spent in the local construction industry returns 2.9 times that to the ACT economy. When we are talking about to what extent we should be supporting local business and giving them consideration through government procurement processes, the Master Builders would certainly be an authoritative voice when it comes to procurement, tendering and where the economic benefits lie.

A lot of questions remain over the Citywide contract. It has been given to a company that previously undercut local operators and then failed to complete the work as promised for the price at which they tendered. Here we are again, three years down the track, with Citywide being handed a substantial contract to complete mowing in the territory that they won by undercutting local contractors. I do not disrespect anyone in the lawn mowing industry when I say it is a fairly elementary style of work. There is no innovation in technology that will see lawn mowing being done at twice the speed for half the cost. It is a manual task that requires an operator on a machine heading down verges and nature strips through our local suburbs cutting grass. The thought that a Melbourne government-owned entity is able to do this job for half of what a local small business can should certainly be raising substantial questions as to whether this tender is legitimate or whether it is simply there to capture the work and come back to government in a number of months to try to renegotiate the terms of it.

It would be fair to local businesses, local operators and local contractors that have missed out on this body of work that the government take the position—this relies on Mr Rattenbury as the minister—where they take a stand and say under no circumstances will they renegotiate with Citywide should there be a discrepancy in the tender price for the package of work they have taken. That is a fair statement that should come from the government. They should say, “We will take the tender on face value, but we’re not going to be revisiting it at the expense of local operators.”

To add a bit more context to what kind of a business we have contracted, Citywide is owned by the Melbourne City Council. I guess this move could be seen as Mr Rattenbury, the minister for TAMS, saying, “The Melbourne council can do it better than what I can.” It is an interesting thought that the City of Melbourne is more capable of mowing lawns than the ACT and the ACT government. Members should look at the board of Citywide—it is stacked with Labor members. The chairman of the board is none other than former Labor Premier John Brumby. Is it a case of jobs for the boys?

Mr Barr interjecting—

MR WALL: The Chief Minister is laughing. I think it is fair that this is explained. Again, if the due diligence was done effectively, the history of Citywide, particularly in their operations in Melbourne, would have raised some serious questions. *A Current Affair* did an expose in October or November last year on Citywide, who were procured to do general waste and recycling collection through some of the Melbourne council areas. Instead of sending two trucks down the street to pick up general waste in one and recyclables in the other and sending them to the appropriate destinations, one truck was sent down the street which picked up both general waste and the recycling in the same truck which was taken directly to landfill. This is the history this business has.

Some serious questions are raised around the process of this tender, the due diligence put in to securing this tender and to the consideration that is given more broadly to local businesses in the ACT. We all need to remember that businesses that operate in the ACT region employ local Canberrans. They support other Canberra businesses, and the money and profits these jobs can generate stays here in the local community as opposed to supporting interstate governments.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 8

Mr Barr
Ms Berry
Dr Bourke
Ms Burch
Mr Corbell

Ms Fitzharris
Mr Gentleman
Ms Porter
Mr Rattenbury

Mr Coe
Mr Doszpot
Mrs Dunne
Mr Hanson
Mrs Jones

Ms Lawder
Mr Smyth
Mr Wall

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Government—tendering arrangements

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Justice, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Transport Reform): I seek leave to provide some information that Mr Wall was seeking during the debate.

Leave granted.

MR RATTENBURY: I am able to provide an update on the content of the briefing that was provided for the mowing contract. I am advised that during the tender briefing for the interested contracting parties the government indicated they were seeking not to give more than two parcels of the contract to any one contractor. The reason given for that during the briefing was that the government did not want to put all its eggs in one basket. The feedback from people at that meeting was that contractors were interested in bidding for up to three parcels. They wanted to be able to bid for the whole package in one go.

So in the written tender documentation that was circulated—it was publicly available on the ACT government procurement website—clause 1.1.2 of the tender documentation indicated that tenderers may tender for one, two or three packages. I am happy to table that document in the Assembly, but I do not have a copy available to me at the moment. I am happy to table it or I am happy to send it to members directly by email.

Transport—light rail

MR COE (Ginninderra) (6.10): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes a Tree Inventory Report completed for the ACT Government found that:
 - (a) there were 531 *Eucalyptus elata* trees located within the median strip between Alinga and Mouat Streets on Northbourne Avenue;
 - (b) 75% of these trees exhibited good or fair health; and
 - (c) 65% of these trees had a useful life expectancy of 20 years or greater;
- (2) notes that in order to construct Capital Metro, it is likely all these trees will have to be chopped down; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to cancel the Capital Metro Light Rail project.

I have moved this motion because I am concerned about the capital metro project.

Mr Rattenbury: Shock!

MR COE: I am pleased to bring this first light rail motion for the year to the Assembly. It will be the first of many; the first of many. Strap yourselves in. We are in for a good time. Of course, I always enjoy debating light rail. However, that is not to take away from the seriousness of this issue. In standing up here and fighting against light rail, I am standing up for Canberra taxpayers, Canberrans who do not want \$800 million spent on a tram that will only carry one per cent of Canberrans to and from work on any given day.

I hear this day after day: Canberrans have been slugged enough already, through the tripling of rates, through fees, charges, taxes and fines. Now this government wants to impose an additional \$100 million hole in the territory's budget for the next 20 years. That is one of the reasons why we are fighting light rail.

Life has become tougher for the government to proceed with light rail since we last met in this chamber in the previous sitting. The deficit has increased by 132 per cent. Even excluding the Mr Fluffy clean-up, the deficit has increased by over \$50 million. As we said when the Chief Minister handed down his budget last year, this is not the time to be proceeding with a dubious infrastructure project solely to retain the support of Mr Rattenbury.

Still, defiantly, blindly and arrogantly the government continues to push ahead with light rail at full steam. Since we last met, last year, the government has spent close to \$7 million in advancing capital metro. No doubt part of this money was spent on a large cardboard tram which seems to serve no purpose. In fact, I think the cardboard tram at Coleman Court is as close to light rail as Weston Creek residents are ever going to get to light rail. They just did not think it would be that light and not on rails.

It goes without saying that the money could have been better spent. The problems could have been eased in our emergency department and in elective surgery waiting times. It could have been used for the benefit of urban amenity. Footpaths could have

been fixed. Roads could have been swept. Potholes could have been mended and grass could have been mown. This government cannot cut the grass but it can cut the trees. It shows just how wrong its priorities are and how hypocritical this government can be.

Canberrans rightly take pride in their tree-lined median of Northbourne Avenue. I am not saying that we need to lock up every tree in Canberra, nor am I saying we need to lock up every tree along Northbourne Avenue. But we need to make sure there is a compelling case, a compelling case, for why we need to chop down hundreds of trees which form an integral part of the gateway to Canberra and, indeed, the integrity of the bush capital.

It is the first real glimpse of Canberra that people get. The trees do, at the moment, make for quite an impressive entrance into the city. I do not think anyone could argue with that. Certainly, these trees do not need to be chopped down for a light rail service that will carry one per cent of Canberrans to and from work in the morning.

Let me repeat the facts about light rail: an \$800 million capital cost, a \$100 million annual availability payment, a \$23 million operational cost, one per cent of Canberrans to use the system in the morning and zero trees on Northbourne Avenue. All we will get is some grass—some native grasses. That is meant to be the little bit of sugar for the good people of Canberra. Do not worry; you will get some native grasses.

This is a dodgy proposition and it has, of course, been criticised by many people. As has long been known, the only way for this government to build light rail is to chop down almost every tree on Northbourne Avenue. The government admits this in the full business case. The business case contemplates:

Approximately 350 existing trees most likely to be removed due to light rail construction.

It contemplates 350 trees. That is Mr Rattenbury's legacy—chopping down 350 trees. Just imagine, Madam Speaker, if somebody else in this place proposed chopping down 350 trees somewhere else. Imagine if somebody proposed to go to Black Mountain Peninsula and chop down 350 trees. Imagine if somebody said they were going to go to a nature reserve and chop down 350 trees.

Mr Corbell interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Corbell!

MR COE: Imagine if someone said, “We are going to go to the residential streets in Dickson, Braddon, Lyneham or O'Connor and chop down 350 trees.” Mr Rattenbury would be chaining himself to those trees. Instead, he has got the chainsaw. He has got the chainsaw.

Is this something that past members would have supported? Is this something that Dr Foskey would have supported? Is this something that Ms Tucker would have supported? Is this something that Ms Horodny would have supported? Is it something

that a Green anywhere else in the country would support? I doubt it. The government are so determined to go ahead with their ideological light rail project that every other principle that they had gets pushed aside—arrogantly and blindly pushed aside.

The motion that I move today discusses the last tree inventory report and the last tree study which the government has done. It was in 2010. Since then the government has commissioned some landscape architects to do some work, but there is a clear distinction between the work done by the landscape architects and the tree inventory report. In actual fact, it was the tree inventory report that suggested going to a landscape architect because they were different types of work.

In that 2010 report, the last time the trees were properly studied, there were 531 *Eucalyptus elata* trees located within the median strip between Alinga and Mouat streets on Northbourne Avenue. The report by the experts said that 75 per cent of these trees exhibited good or fair health and that 65 per cent of these trees had a useful life expectancy of 20 years or greater. That was in 2010.

Actually, that same report of 2010 suggests that doing a staged approach or a sporadic approach to replanting would be best so as never to have an impact whereby a whole block had trees removed at once. They did not want a whole block removed, let alone a whole street removed, Madam Speaker.

If a tree report like this was handed down for any other project in Canberra, any other private development in Canberra, any building proposal, any construction proposal whatsoever, there would be no way whatsoever that the government, including Mr Rattenbury, would disregard that report.

Yet that is exactly what is happening here. We have two standards. We have one standard when it suits them and another standard when it does not. We are seeing that with the planning bill which is being brought on tomorrow. There are two standards. We are seeing that with the trees. There are two standards. It goes on and on and on.

When you have two standards, that is what hypocrisy is; two standards, no consistency. The business case goes on to say that during the project it is conceivable that all existing median trees will require removal—that is, every tree on Northbourne Avenue will be chopped down to make way for light rail.

Of course, light rail is a project that will cost \$800 million but only carry one per cent of Canberrans. The government claims that the trees on Northbourne Avenue have to be replaced anyway, so why do we not we chop them down now. I should remind the government that trees are, of course, organic and will die. But they will die at different times. As the facts indicate, the trees on Northbourne Avenue are not dying and do not need to be replaced at this time. As of 2010 they had a 20-year life expectancy according to the expert, the last person to assess the health of the trees.

Madam Speaker, it is important that we have a look at what the 2010 report said. It was done by Homewood Consulting Pty Ltd and was prepared for the Department of Territory and Municipal Services. As noted in the motion, there are 531 *Eucalyptus elata* trees in the median strip between Alinga Street in the city and Mouat Street in

Lyneham. In effect, it is the busiest part of Northbourne Avenue as we know it between Dickson and the city. On these trees the report said:

The trees are performing well in the landscape. Over 75% of trees assessed exhibit 'Fair' or 'Good' health and over 65% have a Useful Life Expectancy of greater than 20 years.

The report then continues to say that 85 were recommended for removal. So in 2010 the government were advised they only needed to remove 16 per cent of the trees on Northbourne; just 16 per cent—not 100 per cent; 16 per cent. In reality over 340 of these trees could remain on the Northbourne median until 2030. By the time you replanted on an ongoing basis you would have many, many more there as well. In fact, the trees could survive so long that a majority of them probably would see this government spend its final \$100 million availability payment in 2039.

In actual fact, the trees would outlive the huge, huge repayments which the ACT government would be making under light rail. Madam Speaker, it is interesting to see how the government are spinning their argument about trees on Northbourne Avenue: they are dying anyway and they should be replaced. On their new website, released just three weeks ago, the government claim:

Assessments of the current trees, *Eucalyptus elata* along the median of Northbourne show they are in decline and not adapted to the drought conditions that Canberra experiences.

That is not what the tree expert said the last time it got assessed.

Mr Corbell interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: You will have your opportunity, Mr Corbell.

MR COE: After that, landscape architects came on board as a consequence of the 2010 report. The 2010 report suggested hiring landscape architects for additional and different work. However, the 2010 report and the empirical evidence which the Greens talk about are contrary to their policy on light rail. The advice that they are now publishing contradicts the 2010 report I mentioned earlier. Why is the 2010 report not on their website? Why is it not on the capital metro website? Why is it not on the TAMS website? Why did it take an FOI from me to actually get that report?

The capital metro website goes on to say:

The 2010 assessment noted 802 trees in the corridor and of these, 513 were noted as being in good health.

This is highly misleading. The 2010 report clearly identifies 531 *Eucalyptus elata* trees in the median between Alinga Street and Mouat Street, what we commonly think of as Northbourne Avenue. The government is trying to confuse all the trees in the corridor with the *Eucalyptus elata* on the Northbourne Avenue median between Dickson and the city. Of course, on the median over 75 per cent of these trees were in good health and over 65 per cent could survive to 2030 and beyond. These trees are not in poor health and should not be chopped down, except for a very good cause.

Madam Speaker, before I finish I would like to remind the government of another interesting aspect of the 2010 report. On page 25 the authors discuss the appropriate succession and replacement plan for trees in the corridor. I mentioned this earlier. They specifically noted that the entire removal of a group of trees, followed by a replanting with a suitable species, tends to have a drastic effect on the landscape and leads to the same problem occurring again.

If the government is convinced that these trees are dying, a big chop down and replant will only create further problems in the future. Of course, these problems will be magnified because of the light rail infrastructure which would interfere with the root structure. I think that the *Eucalyptus elata* trees provide an appropriate entry to Canberra on Northbourne Avenue. They should only be removed for a compelling reason. To date, we simply have not seen it. The government are proposing to chop down all the trees so that they can build their ill-conceived light rail project.

Contrary to what this government says, the trees on the Northbourne Avenue median are healthy, according to the 2010 report, and can survive until 2030 or beyond. Light rail will not deliver positive transport benefits for Canberra but will burn a hole in the territory's wallet for the next 20 years. We should not allow this light rail project to proceed and we should not allow the *Eucalyptus elata* trees to be chopped down simply because of a deal done between Shane Rattenbury and Simon Corbell.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Health, Minister for the Environment and Minister for Capital Metro) (6.26): Madam Speaker, I would draw your attention to the fact that Mr Coe continues to ignore your ruling about addressing members by their proper title. Today we have heard the crocodile tears from Mr Coe on trees and the terrible things that happen to trees when they have to be cut down. Where was the motion from Mr Coe when a significant number of mature oak trees had to be removed for the expansion and modernisation of Constitution Avenue? I am referring to the works that are underway right now outside this Legislative Assembly building, which have seen a significant number of mature oak trees removed for the expansion of Constitution Avenue.

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe!

MR CORBELL: Where was he? He was silent, Madam Speaker. He was silent.

Mr Rattenbury: That is a road. That is okay.

MR CORBELL: Because that is road; that is right, Mr Rattenbury. It is a road. But, perhaps more importantly, what Mr Coe does not say in his argument is that we know what his position is on public transport priority on Northbourne Avenue. He says that buses can do the job and he says, "Build a busway. Do not build light rail. Build a busway." He is on the record in this place as saying he would not build a busway by utilising an existing traffic lane on Northbourne Avenue; so he knows that means only one other thing. It means you have got to use the median strip or the verge. Guess what is on the median strip and the verge, Mr Coe.

Mr Rattenbury: Trees.

MR CORBELL: Trees, the trees that you are lamenting today are the exact trees that you would have to remove if you built bus rapid transit along Northbourne Avenue. What hypocrisy in this argument from Mr Coe. What a hypocritical argument. That, and that alone, should allow people to reflect on how sincere Mr Coe is about the issue of trees on Northbourne Avenue.

But then he compounds his problem by stating that the last study that looked at the health of each tree along Northbourne Avenue was done in 2010. He is wrong. It was done last year. It was done last year by qualified arborists and landscape architects. It examined the health and mapped every single tree on Northbourne Avenue, and the Federal Highway for that matter. Every single tree was individually mapped and its health individually assessed. So his claim is just wrong. I mean, he has effectively misled the Assembly, Mrs Dunne, but he has done so through ignorance.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order!

MR CORBELL: I beg your pardon; ignorance, Madam Speaker, rather than—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Corbell, withdraw the comment. Withdraw the comment of misleading and—

MR CORBELL: I withdraw the comment.

MADAM SPEAKER: withdraw the accusation of ignorance as well.

MR CORBELL: Madam Speaker, I withdraw the comment. The facts is that he was wrong. He was wrong. This study was undertaken last year. What did it conclude? It concluded that in 2010 there were 802 eucalypts and 513 were in good health. Guess how many were there last year? There were 484—just over half. Just over half.

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Coe!

MR CORBELL: Just over half, Madam Speaker, and the number of healthy trees is just over half of that half that was left—

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe, come to order!

MR CORBELL: and a significant number of them continue to be in decline. So in four years the amount of decline is nearly 50 per cent.

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe, come to order!

MR CORBELL: He does not like it, Madam Speaker, but he has been caught out—

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe, I warn you.

MR CORBELL: He has been caught out on the fact that a study was undertaken last year when he claimed the last one was back in 2010, caught out on the rate of decline, caught out on the fact that he has no real sincerity in his argument when he does not care about trees being cut down for road extensions, and caught out on the fact that his own plans for Northbourne Avenue would require significant tree removal. There is no sincerity in this man's argument. There is no legitimacy to the points that he makes. The government will not be supporting this motion today.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Rattenbury**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Adjournment

Motion by **Mr Corbell** proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Ms Sylvie Stern Captain Bede Tongs OAM, MM

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (6.31): I rise to also add my condolences to those expressed yesterday by Mr Rattenbury in relation to Sylvie. As we all know, Sylvie Stern died on 21 January after a battle with cancer. I knew her through her work at 2XX, as did Mr Rattenbury, where she interviewed me a number of times. I am sure she interviewed many people in this place a number of times. She was also, as Mr Rattenbury said, well known and loved by many in the arts community and inspired many. I also shared her love of domestic animals and, in particular, dogs. I spent time with Sylvie at the ACT Domestic Animal Services, where she was a regular dog walker.

I want to express my condolences to Zoe, Sylvie's partner, and to her family and many friends and also to her little dog. When I attended the funeral, her little dog was there. It was so sad, but you could see the dog was well loved by those who will continue to look after the dog.

I would also like to express my condolences to the family of Bede Tongs OAM, MM, who died on 14 January after a long battle with cancer also. He was a veteran of World War II and served in Papua New Guinea nine times, including being decorated with a military medal for action on the Kokoda Track. Bede worked hard over the last few years to raise awareness of what happened at Kokoda, and he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2014.

I worked with Bede mainly in relation to his support of the Duke of Edinburgh awards. I want to pass on my condolences to Bede's son, Gary, and all his family and his friends.

Both of these fine individuals leave behind family and friends who will, of course, miss them greatly. I know that both of these fine individuals, although they are no longer with us, have made a significant contribution to our society, and their legacy will live on.

Sport—tennis

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (6.34): In January I had the pleasure of opening the Australian seniors tennis championships at the Lyneham sports complex. I was able to witness the strength of this seniors competition with competitors travelling from across the country for the event. I also appreciated the excellent facilities we have invested in across the Lyneham sporting complex and how spectacular the new facilities under construction at Lyneham will be.

Tennis has a rich history in this country, and the sport is a cornerstone of our sporting identity. Names like Rosewall, Laver, Newcombe and Goolagong remind us of our great tennis history when we dominated world tennis. Now our attention turns to a new crop of players such as Sam Stosur and, of course, Canberra's own Nick Kyrgios, who based much of his Australian Open preparations at Lyneham.

Tennis is a sport for a lifetime. On any given afternoon around Canberra you will see hundreds of young children on local courts finetuning their skills and, like so many other Australians before them, falling in love with the sport. As you drive past these same clubs on an evening or in the mornings during the week, older participants are on the courts, engaged in pennant competitions, getting some coaching or just having a casual hit. But, importantly, they are enjoying the social interaction that is such a hallmark of the sport.

In fact, it is worth noting that two of our major social ills—social isolation and obesity—are at one step dealt with by going to tennis because you have a social network of people around you and you are certainly getting some regular exercise out there. Indeed, it is a sport for a lifetime. And that was very clear at the 2015 Australian Tennis Seniors Championships. In over two weeks of competition almost 800 players and their families were in Canberra for the event. Canberra is the active capital. Participation in an active lifestyle is supported by a diversity of quality facilities that invite physical activity—parks, paths, sportsgrounds, lakes, bushland and, of course, many tennis courts.

This year's championships were played at venues across Canberra, including Melba, Weston Creek and Belconnen tennis clubs. Significantly, this was the first major event to take place at the redeveloped Canberra Tennis Centre at Lyneham. This facility will be a true hub for tennis in the ACT and southern New South Wales, supporting athlete development and community participation.

In the forthcoming years this venue will also welcome an increased amount of elite content, including Challenger tournaments and a “dinosaur” Fed Cup title. Such elite events will be wonderful for people in Canberra and the region to again have access to top-flight tennis, which will be a boost for the sport locally, potentially inspiring the next Wally Masur or Nick Kyrgios to pick up a racquet. However, it is larger, participation-based events such as the Australian seniors tennis open championships that Canberra does so well.

Canberra is ideally suited to the hosting of such events, with great sporting facilities, quality accommodation, being easily accessible and having so many attractions, restaurants and bars to help fill any down time that participants might have. Canberra is a city of brilliant possibilities, and the many hundreds of visitors who came to Canberra for the championships certainly enjoyed their stay.

The ACT government is a proud supporter of tennis in the ACT, supporting local development, elite pathways and community facilities such as those at Lyneham. These include an investment of more than \$7 million in the Canberra Tennis Centre. I thank Tennis Seniors ACT for hosting the event and acknowledge the hard work of the volunteers and officials who made the event possible.

IGA East Row House

MR COE (Ginninderra) (6.38): I rise this evening to speak about IGA East Row House. IGA East Row House is a collaboration between IGA East Row and the Rooftop Foundation. The IGA East Row House organisation was established to support families who are in need of accommodation during medical treatment in Canberra.

The project will provide short to long-term accommodation to the families of individuals from regional areas who require hospital treatment for serious illness. Accommodation will be provided to assist those who are experiencing financial difficulties or have been unable to find appropriate accommodation. The organisation will also work closely with community organisations to provide support for families, including access to support when treatment has been completed. I understand at this stage the hope is that the facility will be located near to the Calvary hospital, in or around Bruce.

The IGA East Row House project was established to fill the gap in support for families of adult patients receiving treatment. Income for the project will be generated from the sale of merchandise through IGA East Row and eventually from IGAs across Australia.

I would like to place on the record my thanks to the major partners of the IGA Rooftop House project. They include IGA East Row, Trinity Law, Benchmark financial and business advisers, Transit Graphics and allinsure. I would also like to record my thanks to the other sponsors, including IGA Narrabundah, Gema Group, IGA Kingston, McWilliam’s, Shaw Vineyard Estate, IGA Lyneham, GIO Stadium, Yellow Tail, Guvera, Club Lime, ActewAGL, IGA Karabar,

IGA Hughes, Christopher and Katerina Maleganeas, Coopers, Audi Centre Canberra, Rogue Wines, Moppity Vineyards, Asahi Premium Beverages, Estate Wine Distributors and Pankhurst Wines.

In October last year, unfortunately I was unable to attend the inaugural IGA East Row House gala dinner. However, I note my colleagues Mr Wall and Mr Gentleman showed their support for the organisation through their attendance. The dinner was an opportunity for the organisation to raise much-needed funds as they continue to plan for the construction of accommodation for those in need.

The event was a sell-out and a testament to the hard work done by the driving force, Javid Osman, who was very well supported in an ongoing way by Mr Loc Luu. I congratulate all those involved in this exciting project. Providing accommodation and support for the families as they support their sick relatives is a wonderful way for the community to show its care for those in need. I encourage members to support the good work of IGA East Row House as the idea comes to fruition.

I understand that the organisation's next fundraising activity will be a charity golf day on 12 March. For more information about IGA East Row House, I recommend members visit their website at www.igaeastrowhouse.org.au.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.42 pm.