



Debates

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Wednesday, 18 November 2015

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MADAM SPEAKER (Mrs Dunne) took the chair at 10 am and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

Administration and Procedure—Standing Committee Statement by Chair

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a brief statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure in response to the resolution of the Assembly of 29 October which referred a proposed new standing order to refer certain petitions to the relevant standing committee to the committee for its consideration.

The Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure discussed the proposal, which would automatically refer petitions containing over 500 signatures to the relevant standing committee of the Assembly. It noted that there may be an impact on the requirements for a minister to respond to a petition within three months should a committee decide to conduct an inquiry into the petition, but the committee supported the proposed new standing order. I thank members.

Public Accounts—Standing Committee Report 21

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (10.02): I present the following report:

Public Accounts—Standing Committee—Report 21—*Review of Auditor-General's Report No. 5 of 2014: Capital Works Reporting*, dated 18 November 2015, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is a report, again from the Auditor-General, that was delivered to the Assembly in 2014. We received it on 27 June. The committee had a briefing from the Auditor-General in September 2014. We did not receive a government response to the report until September 2015, more than a year after we had the briefing from the Auditor-General. This was one of the reports that got caught up in the government's changing, without them telling anybody, of the way they would deal with Auditor-General's reports and respond to them.

In the main, the government said that they accepted the recommendations and had started to progress them. With that in mind, given the length of time and the fact that the government had said they agreed with all the recommendations and were implementing them, the committee has taken the view that what we would like is a report, by the last sitting day in May, of the progress that the government has made on

implementing the recommendations of the Auditor-General. That is recommendation 1, which is also the only recommendation in the report.

I thank members for their assistance in compiling this report and getting it to the Assembly. I also thank Dr Andrea Cullen, who was here at the start, and Ms Kate Harkins, who is the assistant secretary, who was here at the end, with the support of Greg Hall and Lydia Chung.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Transport—public

MR COE (Ginninderra) (10.04): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes the recent report of the ACT Auditor-General, entitled *Public Transport: The Frequent Network* Report No. 9/2015, which details the ACT Government's failure to adequately implement and oversee the Frequent Network. In particular, the Auditor-General's report highlights, amongst other things, that:
 - (a) a significant number of buses will need to be added to the ACTION bus fleet if the goals of *Transport for Canberra* are to be achieved;
 - (b) a strong benefit-to-cost ratio of 3.59 exists for a bus based Frequent Network;
 - (c) a very significant part of the Frequent Network may never be served by light rail;
 - (d) poor governance and administrative arrangements have led to a Transport for Canberra Implementation Working Group meeting on nine occasions, despite the terms of reference for the group stating it should have met on 18 occasions;
 - (e) the Transport for Canberra Implementation Working Group has not met since December 2014, when oversight for *Transport for Canberra* was passed to the Parking Coordination Group and the Roads Coordination Group. However, there is no evidence that the Frequent Network has been considered by either of the groups;
 - (f) no risk assessment has been completed by the Environment and Planning Directorate with respect to the implementation of *Transport for Canberra*;
 - (g) the ACT Government has failed to report annually on the progress of *Transport for Canberra*;
 - (h) the only Transport for Canberra Report Card, released in September 2014, contains inaccurate and ambiguous information; and

- (i) a target to have 10.5% of Canberrans using public transport to get to work by 2016 will not be met;
- (2) further notes that, because of these failures, public transport patronage in Canberra has decreased; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to cancel its light rail project and commit to providing adequate investment and oversight of the ACTION bus network.

The recently released Auditor-General's report into the frequent network is a damning assessment of the ACT government's handling of public transport in the territory. The report has a look at the implementation of the transport for Canberra plan released by the territory government in March of 2012. A cornerstone of this plan was the establishment of the frequent network. This network was designed to be the backbone of Canberra's transport system by providing for permanent public transport corridors serviced at a frequency of no greater than 15 minutes. Primarily, we think of the frequent network in terms of the intertown red and blue rapid series, in effect Gungahlin to the city, Belconnen to the city, and Tuggeranong to the city through Woden.

However, less than four years after the release of the transport for Canberra plan, a report from the ACT Auditor-General has called into question the implementation of this frequent network. Amongst other things, the report finds that the Minister for Capital Metro, Mr Corbell, failed to effectively monitor the transport for Canberra implementation working group set up within his directorate. As a result, this implementation working group did not meet as required. Minister Corbell also failed to release an annual report in 2013, as was required.

The way that Mr Corbell deflected responsibility for his role in the oversight and implementation of transport for Canberra came out in question time yesterday. The fact is that, as the Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development, Mr Corbell had control over transport planning from the release of the transport for Canberra plan until July of 2014. Mr Corbell initially released this policy in March of 2012, and many problems identified by the Auditor-General stem from his failings in implementing that policy over those two years. Most worryingly, the minister who developed, launched and implemented the transport for Canberra plan is now in control of a \$783 million light rail project.

The now Minister for Planning, Mr Gentleman, released a transport for Canberra report card last year which was riddled with errors and ambiguity. Yesterday in question time Mr Gentleman did not even accept responsibility or provide any information as to why an inaccurate report card was made public on his watch. Some inaccuracies are quite blatant. For instance, the report notes that a commitment to embed rapid corridors in the territory plan has been achieved. It has not. It simply has not been achieved. How a minister could allow these errors to be publicly released is concerning. A 2015 annual report card on transport for Canberra has yet to be released. When is the 2015 report card coming?

The Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Mr Rattenbury, is failing to build and modernise the ACTION bus fleet as required by the transport for Canberra plan. This was seen earlier in the year when a new weekday timetable had to be put on hold because ACTION did not have enough buses to run the proposed timetable. And just a week ago we saw a situation where there were not even enough bus drivers to run a regular weekday afternoon shift. Failing to replace old buses and add new ones impacts the effective implementation of the frequent network. In effect, it erodes confidence in public transport in Canberra.

Both the Auditor-General and MRCagney, in their separate reviews, stress concerns that the ACT government will not have enough buses to implement the transport for Canberra plan. For the first time, we are beginning to see the opportunity cost of light rail hurt public transport in the ACT. Since the release of transport for Canberra, this government has pumped more than \$50 million into capital metro. More than \$50 million has already been spent on capital metro, and this is separate from the \$783 million which is stated as a construction cost. And of course this is a project that will carry only one per cent of Canberrans in peak hours. All the while, ACTION's fleet replacement program has all but stalled. Perhaps instead of spending money on cardboard trams, Mr Rattenbury should be investing in steel buses. Maybe then we would have enough buses to implement timetable upgrades which benefit all Canberrans.

Ultimately, the failings of these ministers have led to transport for Canberra's targets not being met. For 2016 this government had a target of achieving 10.5 per cent of Canberrans using public transport to get to work. However, recent estimates for 2015 indicate that just 6.9 per cent of Canberrans use public transport to go to work. Consequently, for the 2014-15 financial year, ACTION boardings per capita have reached one of the lowest ever levels. Indeed, under Mr Rattenbury, ACTION boardings per capita have been on a steady decline, and in actual fact ACTION boardings in general have been on a steady decline.

When discussing the targets in the transport for Canberra plan as it was released, Mr Corbell stated:

... we are setting ourselves a new benchmark to demonstrate performance ...

We are setting ourselves a new benchmark to demonstrate performance! On these numbers, the government has performed extremely poorly and Canberrans should be very disappointed. The government have had the chance to demonstrate performance and they have failed. Instead of having 10½ per cent of Canberrans on public transport, we have 6.9 per cent and we are going backwards.

Since releasing transport for Canberra, the government has gone on to commit to light rail. The decision to build light rail is another error on behalf of this government when it comes to public transport. The Auditor-General's report picks up on a number of issues associated with light rail. Notably—indeed, on five occasions—the Auditor-General references a cost-benefit ratio of 3.59 for a bus-based frequent network. Light rail, of course, has an inflated cost-benefit ratio of just 1.2. With buses

and the frequent network at present, it is 3.59; with light rail, it is 1.2. In effect, if the government were to put that \$800 million they are spending on light rail in buses, the return on investment would be over \$2½ billion. For light rail we are looking at just \$1 billion as a return on investment.

Transport for Canberra is the second report completed by the ACT government which backs investment in the bus network over light rail. It complements the government's submission to Infrastructure Australia in August of 2012 which described light rail as "economically marginal" before comprehensively showing that the bus network would produce a greater return on investment for all Canberrans. Perhaps when the Minister for Planning next decides to release a report card on transport for Canberra, if indeed there is another report card, it should read: "Government documents supporting buses."

The Auditor-General also notes that a very significant part of the frequent network will never be served by light rail. Even if the fanciful, inconvenient, ineffective, unaffordable and impracticable light rail master plan is built, only a quarter of Canberrans would live within walking distance of one of the proposed tram stops. To put this in perspective, close to 98 per cent of Canberrans live within walking distance of a bus stop. Let me reiterate that, Madam Speaker: 98 per cent of Canberrans live within walking distance of a bus stop; in contrast, with light rail we are looking at just two, three or four per cent of Canberrans living within walking distance of a proposed tram stop.

As I have previously noted, the problem with the light rail master plan, other than the one that I have already mentioned, is that it effectively replaces the two best buses in the ACTION network, the red and blue rapids. The government's plan is to spend billions and billions of dollars to replace the two best buses in the network. The red and blue rapids, I believe, are quite well regarded by our community. To think that all the money should be poured into replacing those is folly. If we are going to be spending more money on public transport, it should be on improving suburban bus connections and improving suburban bus routes rather than on these trunk services.

The Auditor-General notes the advice from Dr Geoffrey Clifton, a transport planner from the University of Sydney. Most tellingly, Dr Clifton highlights that the presumption of a direct and beneficial correlation between transport developments and demand for higher density land usage is contestable. In effect, Dr Clifton is saying that there is no guarantee that land prices are going to go up if you construct public transport such as light rail. It would be interesting therefore to see what assumptions the government made in the capital metro full business case about the \$381 million of land use benefits. Sadly, the government refuses to release this information and these assumptions.

On this issue, I would simply say that Northbourne Avenue is already, obviously, a desirable place to live. There is no shortage of apartment buildings which have been constructed in recent years on Northbourne Avenue. Whether you look at Axis, Space, Space 2, the Avenue, IQ, Phoenix, James Court, Haig or many other apartment buildings, these have all been constructed without light rail. It is folly for the government to say that you need to construct light rail in order to attract investment

on Northbourne Avenue. Investment can happen on Northbourne Avenue without light rail if the land is made available.

The government have been quiet in recent times about the land use benefits of light rail. In fact, we hardly hear them talk about it at all now. Developing Northbourne Avenue was the main slogan of the government at the beginning of the year. It came after their argument that light rail was a transport solution was criticised by Infrastructure Australia and the Productivity Commission. Since then, the government have focused the debate firstly on jobs and more recently on congestion. In effect, they went to transport but then that was discredited. Then they went to beefing up Northbourne, and then that was shot down. Then they went on to jobs, and that has been contested. Then they went on to the health benefits of light rail because people would have to walk a long way to get to a tram stop. And now they are talking about congestion. This is a government that does not have a very good narrative when it comes to light rail. For people using it from Gungahlin all the way to the city it is going to lead to slower travel times than current bus services.

On the issue of congestion, I am happy to point out to the government that analysis has shown that implementing light rail will not ease congestion. In fact, the government's own environmental impact statement, released by capital metro, clearly shows that congestion is getting worse at intersections on Northbourne Avenue as a result of light rail.

In fact, Mr Rattenbury's own department, TAMS—I understand Roads ACT may now be governed by Mr Gentleman—has noted a concern with the assessments contained in the EIS because there is no significant difference in the overall traffic network with the introduction of light rail. In effect, Roads ACT say that light rail will not ease congestion and there is no evidence to say it will. Furthermore, studies by Parsons Brinckerhoff on the proposed city to Russell route have concluded:

The introduction of the Project within the City extent of the network generally leads to further impacts to general traffic. Whilst some impacts to general traffic are expected and in some instances encouraged to facilitate a mode shift to public transport, in several locations, predominately along Northbourne Avenue and Constitution Avenue, delays and queues could compromise the performance of the wider road network.

“Delays and queues could compromise the performance of the wider road network.” This is not easing congestion; this is adding to congestion. That again brings into question the very assumptions used to get to the BCR of 1.2. The government put all their eggs in this light rail basket, saying, “It is going to ease congestion. It is going to be faster. It is going to drive better land uses.” The truth is that Dr Clifton said the land use argument is folly and Parsons Brinckerhoff and Roads ACT have said it is going to increase congestion. We also know that it is going to lead to a slower commute for people in Gungahlin, not only from Gungahlin to the city but from door to door when you add the connections as well.

If this government were serious about congestion, they would reconsider their decision to go ahead with light rail and instead focus on genuine improvements to the public transport system we currently have, which services 98 per cent of Canberrans

rather than just three per cent who happen to live within walking distance of a light rail route. I urge members to support my motion.

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) (10.20): I thank Mr Coe for bringing the motion here today. I do not agree with the comments in his anti-light rail speech and anti-light rail motion moved in the Assembly today. Interestingly, there is a quite detailed body of evidence that would not support the propositions that Mr Coe has put forward today, particularly with regard to land value uplift on light rail corridors. There is a vast amount of evidence that shows that those special transport corridors in almost all jurisdictions around the world have seen significant returns in land value uplift.

With regard to the TOD principles—that is, transport-orientated design—it is important to note that the Planning Institute of Australia have a paper on transport-orientated design, as do many other planners in different jurisdictions around the world, which shows that transport-orientated design is the way forward to enliven suburbs and create employment. Madam Speaker, I move the amendment circulated in my name to Mr Coe’s motion:

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

“(1) notes that:

- (a) the recent Auditor-General’s report *Public Transport: The Frequent Network*, Report No. 9/2015, contains a range of recommendations and findings;
- (b) the Government response to the final report prepared by MRCagney as part of the ACTION expenditure review which outlines improvements to the operation of ACTION;
- (c) on 26 October 2015, the ACT Government announced the creation of Transport Canberra, a new transport agency for the ACT bringing together the Capital Metro Agency and ACTION and that this agency would begin operating from 1 July 2016;
- (d) Transport Canberra will deliver a high quality public transport system that is convenient, efficient, affordable, reliable and integrated;
- (e) Canberra’s population growth and increasing congestion requires investment to ensure Canberra remains a liveable, modern, sustainable city;
- (f) the Light Rail Network plan demonstrates that the ACT Government is planning ahead for Canberra’s current and future transport infrastructure needs; and
- (g) delivery of light rail in the ACT will result in more buses, more services, more often as bus kilometres freed up from light rail routes are reallocated across the city; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) continue to work towards a convenient, efficient, affordable, reliable and integrated transport network for the Territory; and
- (b) respond to the Auditor-General's Report in more detail by February of 2016."

Canberra is growing quickly as it becomes a vibrant and diverse international city. The population is expected to increase to over half a million people in the next two decades. This will present significant opportunities for growing our city and its economy, but we must ensure that we do not make the mistakes of other cities by not investing in public transport infrastructure and future-proofing our city.

The ACT government has a long-term vision for a truly sustainable livable city and it is looking at the changes we need to make now to ensure Canberra continues to provide a good quality of life for its residents over the next 50 years. It is critical that government plans for a growing Canberra. The consequences of not doing so are costly in terms of time, lost productivity and a diminished quality of life and environment.

Inadequate transport infrastructure planning for the growth of cities can be seen through the hours of congestion commuters sit in every single week in cities like Sydney and Melbourne. I do not understand how the opposition and, in particular, Mr Coe fail to see this. The increasing costs of congestion and the burden of continually building major roads to keep pace with growth will steadily increase in the future and threaten the current high quality of life that we enjoy in Canberra.

We cannot build our way out of these challenges simply by building more roads. Proper investment and focus on public transport will be the only way to effectively manage congestion over the next 25 years. Infrastructure Australia has also recently noted these future challenges. It found that, without additional investment, the total cost of road congestion in the ACT will increase from \$208 million per annum in 2011 to \$703 million per annum in 2031. The economic, social and environmental impacts of increasing travel times will have wide-ranging impacts on our city if we do not do something about it now.

Stagnant transport policy relying solely on private motor vehicles and road investment will result in higher congestion, more time spent commuting each day, higher greenhouse emissions and a lower quality of life for Canberrans. As such, the government is committed to improving public transport to manage Canberra's growth, reduce congestion and protect our livability.

Canberrans deserve a convenient, integrated, reliable, efficient and affordable public transport network to meet their needs for the future. Analysis undertaken by the ACT government highlights that the capital metro project will bring approximately \$1 billion in benefits to the ACT in the form of transportation, environmental and social benefits, as well as through sustainable urban development. I was very pleased to hear Mr Coe re-announce that dollar figure—\$1 billion—back to the government through the light rail project.

Mr Coe: It's not back to the government, Mick; get it right.

MR GENTLEMAN: The project is expected to support about 3,500 jobs, with many of these jobs expected to be filled by local industry. Mr Coe interjects and says it does not all come back to the government. I have just explained that it is expected also to come back through industry.

Madam Speaker, I also see great opportunities for apprenticeships and training through the capital metro project, providing our youth with even more opportunities into the future. This also presents opportunities for the knowledge gained through the stage 1 construction of the project to be used into the future with future stages of light rail expansion.

The government recently released the light rail network plan which explores how the light rail network will be expanded across Canberra in the future in a way that best services the city. Light rail is being considered in Canberra's busiest public transport corridors where high capacity, high frequency rapid transport services are required. These corridors include the first stage between Gungahlin and the city; the parliamentary triangle; Woden to the city; the city to eastern connections, including the Canberra Airport and Fyshwick; Tuggeranong to Woden; Kippax and Belconnen to the city; and Molonglo to the city.

The government is eager for the community to have their say on the light rail network and community consultation is currently underway until 11 December.

The government welcomes the Auditor-General's review on the frequent network and consideration of the report will further inform the significant work undertaken to enhance the provision of public transport in the ACT. A formal government response to the Auditor-General's report and recommendations will be tabled in the ACT Legislative Assembly in early 2016.

To ensure we get the best from this public transport network, the ACT government has created transport Canberra, which will bring together ACTION and capital metro light rail from 1 July 2016. This will streamline our approach to delivering public transport in line with public expectations and ensure that decisions are coordinated, that timetabling, routes and ticketing are complementary, and that future investment decisions support and maximise the performance of the entire public transport network.

The new transport Canberra agency will work to combine smart ticketing for light rail and buses and also help coordinate rail and bus routes around the city. Work has already advanced to ensure that there is a one ticket, one network approach across buses and light rail. Transport Canberra's mandate is to deliver the ACT government's vision for a quality public transport system that is convenient, efficient, affordable, reliable and integrated. The government will continue to build upon its recent successes and implement an integrated public transport network that meets Canberra's needs now and over the next 25 years.

Investment by the government has provided significant additional infrastructure and services that have enhanced public transport access for passengers and enhanced journey options. Such measures include investing in bus shelter upgrades and a range of access options to maximise the use of walking and cycling and relieve pressures on city centre parking facilities. The government also recognises the importance of a public transport system that maximises choice and provides better access options to meet the needs of all potential users such as bike and ride and park and ride. These facilities provide opportunities to extend the reach of public transport by encouraging a convenient transfer to public transport and reducing overall car travel.

Already the government has provided 19 park and ride facilities across Canberra. Recent survey findings suggest that park and ride is a particularly popular choice for trips along the blue and red rapid corridors where users can transfer to public transport and avoid the cost of parking at their final destination. We have seen quite a dramatic change since pay parking came into the parliamentary triangle with the use of park and ride. I often quote the figures down at the Calwell park and ride. It was very lightly used until pay parking came into the parliamentary triangle and it is now being used very frequently. In many of these locations additional Xpresso and feeder bus services are expanding the attractiveness and reach of the network and providing more opportunities to transfer between services.

Currently over 80 per cent of ACTION buses are fitted with bike racks. In order to maximise the use of existing facilities, ACTION is continuing to explore options to increase the percentage of buses that can carry bikes and increase the number of people biking and riding. There are some challenges across that, especially with the size of some of the ACTION buses. Their length does not support bike racks, but we are doing the best that we can to push them out as far as possible.

Providing a public transport system that is ready for the future also means effectively directing bus resources to where they can best serve passenger needs and improving the efficiency of the network. The introduction of light rail also provides an important opportunity to reallocate bus kilometres freed up by stage 1 of the light rail network. Of course, you do not hear these comments from Mr Coe. Transport Canberra will ensure bus services are planned and integrated with the proposed light rail. It means that many of those services, especially during the first stage of light rail, will be freed up to service other bus locations across the territory. Planning is underway for bus stations at Gungahlin and Dickson to integrate with light rail as well.

Developing the public transport network over the coming decades will necessitate exploring funding and partnership opportunities, such as with the commonwealth government, for high priority light rail corridors. Importantly, the government has already taken steps in investigating the potential for funding contributions from the commonwealth and recently submitted to Infrastructure Australia's early consideration for key public transport improvements for inclusion within its infrastructure priority list. Such improvements could potentially be combined with large scale urban renewal, including higher density development, which will promote productivity and economic growth around Canberra over the next 25 years.

I commend the amendment to the motion which I have moved today. The government is working towards the best infrastructure outcomes for the territory and will succeed in improving the lives of all residents through forward planning.

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) (10.31): I welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter today, both as a Greens member of this place and also having regard to the various responsibilities I have for transport policy in my ministerial capacity. It is important that this Assembly focuses on public transport and on how we can improve it for the future.

Sustainable transport will be a key part of our city's future. High quality, reliable and frequent public transport is essential to making sure our city develops in a way that maintains its livability, its economic prosperity and its social equity. Quality public transport, and transport corridors, are needed not just as a transport solution but as a planning tool, to help us evolve into a more compact and dense city, with all the advantages that come with that.

Think, for example, about the recent report from the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development which showed the ACT economy will lose up to \$419 million a year in avoidable social congestion costs by 2030 if we do not take action now. Or think of the fact that in the next 35 years it is expected there will be more than 220,000 extra Canberrans living and travelling in our city. By 2040, under a business as usual approach, there will be 124,000 extra cars on the road.

I think all of us know that this type of growth is not sustainable under a business as usual approach, and to try and accommodate this type of growth with a focus on private car use would be a folly. A plan that focuses on sustainable transport is the smart and long-term approach to these challenges. So, from my point of view, it is absolutely critical that the government gets its approach to public transport planning right. I take this opportunity to thank the Auditor-General and her office for their work on the *Public transport: the frequent network* audit report.

I am happy to talk about the issues in Mr Coe's motion. Mostly, his motion reflects issues raised in the auditor's report. As I said, these are important issues, and I will talk about them further in a moment. Mr Coe's motion goes awry, I think, when it tries to draw a conclusion that the government should cancel its light rail project. Somehow, for the Canberra Liberals, having the Auditor-General critique the frequent network and make recommendations translates into the general need to cancel light rail. This is a non-sequitur, and of course the Auditor-General did not say anything about this.

This highlights one of the problems with the Liberal Party's approach. There is no sophistication in their response to any of the genuine issues facing the territory or the government. Everything has to fit into their black and white campaign prism of "stop light rail".

There is an irony in this motion from Mr Coe. The Liberal Party have been perpetually hostile towards sustainable and public transport initiatives. They have been hostile towards the transport for Canberra plan and the sustainable transport strategies that it embraces. Yet when the Auditor-General critiques the implementation of this plan, suddenly Mr Coe is interested in it. I would argue that the Canberra Liberals do not actually want the sustainable transport aspects of the transport for Canberra plan implemented, and are not really interested in improving public transport. Anyone with a history in this Assembly will know that.

Let me give a historical example from 2009. At that time the government introduced a \$1 million trial of the Redex bus service, which, as most of us would know, is now the red rapid or the 200 route. The trial came from the Greens and Labor parliamentary—

Mr Coe: You called it “express”.

MR RATTENBURY: I have not even started the example and Mr Coe is interjecting. It is going to hurt more when I get to his hypocrisy that this example reveals.

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Coe! Mr Coe, come to order.

MR RATTENBURY: The trial came from the Greens and Labor parliamentary agreement. That red rapid service is now one of the most successful routes in the network. In his comments earlier today Mr Coe described it as one of the two best buses in the network. It is certainly one of our most successful, carrying a large number of people between Gungahlin and the city. It has been continually improved to try to meet the demand. The next stage is upgrading that route to become Canberra’s first light rail line.

I hear Mr Coe talk about this red rapid service and how successful it is. In fact he says it works so well that it would be silly to replace it with light rail. What did Mr Coe and the Liberal Party think of this Redex or red rapid initiative at the time we introduced it? They were completely against it. Mr Coe went to great lengths to try to point out all the reasons it should not happen, and all the things that he claimed were wrong with it. He said it mirrored routes that already existed—the 51, 52 and 59 services. He said it would have to contend with traffic and lights and would not be rapid. He said it would mean people would have to interchange instead of getting a single bus. Here is a quote from Mr Coe in relation to the red rapid—

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Coe! You will have an opportunity to speak.

MR RATTENBURY: Here is the quote:

It seems absurd to me that anyone would actually use this service.

Let me repeat that:

It seems absurd to me that anyone would actually use this service.

He also raised the favourite old parochial argument that the red rapid comes at the expense of services to elsewhere. “Why doesn’t the government care about west Belconnen?” he asked.

If these arguments sound familiar, it is because they are all the exact same arguments that Mr Coe is now recycling and using to argue against light rail from Gungahlin to the city. He says exactly the same things: that people will not interchange; it mirrors other routes; it will be slow; what about other areas; and so on. How did all of these arguments stack up in relation to the red rapid service? Not very well at all. They were all wrong. They have been outed as the anti-public transport hyperbole that they were. The red rapid is now an extremely popular and well-patronised service, and Mr Coe will admit that himself. In fact he has done so today—conveniently pretending that he never opposed it with the familiar gusto that we see him oppose light rail with today.

The Liberal Party have just moved one step along. They could not stop the red rapid, so now they oppose the next public transport improvement for Gungahlin—light rail—using all of the same spurious arguments. The Liberal Party have been attacking public transport initiatives for so long that the projects they attack have come to fruition and have in fact proven them to be wrong.

The fact remains that light rail is a long-term, sustainable transport and planning solution for our growing city. It is the right strategic choice for Canberra’s public transport spine, particularly considering its outstanding qualities in terms of encouraging urban renewal, compatibility with renewable energy, its comfort and reliability, its ability to attract new patronage, and its suitability to denser urban environments.

I noted that earlier Mr Coe talked about the fact that the government did not have a very good narrative, and that it kept changing. He cited various lines of discussion that the government has undertaken in the past two years. The bottom line is that that is inconvenient for Mr Coe, in that there is not a single narrative. There are a series of benefits that come from this. So the government keeps talking about different things because there are a range of benefits there. That does not suit the single narrative of “it’s good” or “it’s bad”, but it does reflect the true narrative that this is a large, complex project with a range of benefits and a range of consequences, and that is why there is a range of issues being discussed.

Let me turn to some of the issues raised in the Auditor-General’s report, and mirrored to some degree in Mr Coe’s motion. The Auditor-General makes a lot of pertinent and accurate observations. I agree with her that there are improvements that need to happen to ensure the public transport elements of the transport for Canberra plan are properly implemented. I welcome her findings and recommendations. Members will know that the Greens have always pushed hard on public transport policy, and we have pushed hard on government to ensure that they live up to the promises and

rhetoric in their plans and announcements. There is no doubt that there is work for the government to do, in both coordination and investment. But I do believe that the government is heading in the right direction and taking their public transport improvements seriously.

Minister Gentleman has already spoken to some degree about the government's response to the auditor's report. Mr Barr has made several commitments to public transport in recent weeks which are significant. In cooperation with the Chief Minister I recently announced a major operational restructure which will see the commencement of a new transport Canberra agency. We also announced a significant investment in the bus network.

I will touch on some of the specific points raised in Mr Coe's motion. The Auditor-General said that a significant number of new buses are needed to meet the transport for Canberra mode shift targets. This is an accurate finding by the auditor. Not only does the fleet need to expand but the territory needs new depot space to house these buses. I can assure the Assembly that, with respect to these investments, as the minister responsible for ACTION I am bringing these issues to the budget cabinet for consideration in the upcoming budget.

I also noted that Mr Coe, I think, made the comment that the fleet replacement strategy has stalled. I can assure members that that is not the case. In fact 30 Scania Euro 6 rigid buses were delivered during 2014-15, and another 38 Euro 6 buses are due for delivery during 2015-17. So that program is continuing. Those buses are coming onto the road on a regular basis, and we are using those both to replace older buses and augment the existing fleet.

Mr Coe notes that the frequent network has a benefit-cost ratio of 3.59. This figure was determined from the work done for the government on its public transport strategic network in 2010. It reflects the benefits of investing in public transport and transport corridors. It is not an either-or comparison with light rail, as light rail forms part of that frequent network. What it says is that it is worth investing in the public network that the government has planned.

Mr Coe says that a significant part of the frequent network may never be served by light rail. Just to be clear, the Auditor-General raised the point about the larger frequent network to emphasise the need to embed transport corridors in the territory plan, and I agree with this. The Auditor-General's comments are not about the government's recently released light rail network plan, which I do expect that the government can implement, if it shows sustained commitment.

To clarify, the frequent network, as it is set out in transport for Canberra, is a larger network than the rapid network. The rapid network is the spine of the network—where light rail is likely to go—and the frequent network includes more local services, which are likely to be buses, and which will connect to the rapid spine.

Mr Coe in his motion tries to make the link and say that public transport patronage has decreased because of failures identified by the Auditor-General. Again, this is an unjustified leap. This is not a finding of the Auditor-General. Patronage changes are

complicated. ACTION tells me, for example, that adult patronage has grown while tertiary student patronage has fallen, probably reflecting the fact that a lot of students now live in accommodation close to the universities. We have seen in recent years concerted efforts to build more on-campus accommodation. In light of that, obviously, university students will not be taking the buses. So I think it is a little more nuanced than has been suggested in this place today. There are a range of other factors as well, including the comparative ease and cost of using different transport modes.

Various other findings of the Auditor-General are already being dealt with. For example the Auditor-General noted that there needs to be a data survey to get better data about transport patterns and mode shifts. I strongly agree with this recommendation and am pleased to reiterate for the Assembly that one of the initiatives in the transport improvement plan announced recently by the Chief Minister and me is a public transport survey which will serve exactly this purpose.

I also note that the Auditor-General points out that ACTION buses are being delivered at the desired frequency on rapid services but not on the frequent local services which feed into the rapid services. Again I note the recent announcement by the Chief Minister and me that there will be a considerable reinvestment in the bus network of all the bus kilometres saved through the introduction of light rail. This is a significant investment in the bus network, intended to increase bus services right across Canberra and to achieve improvements such as more frequent feeder buses.

While I do agree that the Auditor-General has provided useful recommendations and analysis of the implementation of the transport for Canberra frequent network, I cannot agree to Mr Coe's motion. It just makes an obsessive call to cancel light rail. Really, the issues are rather more complicated than that and require a thoughtful response, and the government has started positively in its response to these issues.

I think it is worth reflecting on the improvements that have been announced and that are underway. Certainly in question time yesterday I discussed many of the improvements that have been made to the ACTION network, because this is not an either-or discussion. We need an integrated transport system in this city. That is what the government is setting out to do, and that is why I will be supporting Mr Gentleman's amendment today, which speaks to these points that have been reflected both in my comments and in the points that he made in introducing the amendment.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Health, Minister for the Environment and Minister for Capital Metro) (10.45): I am pleased to rise to support Minister Gentleman's amendment to Mr Coe's motion this morning.

Mr Gentleman's amendment speaks to the importance of an integrated response to what is a very challenging and difficult issue for our city. Our over-reliance on the use of private motor vehicles presents significant challenges for the delivery of public transport in our city, and it also highlights the complexity of achieving a successful modal shift from the private motor vehicle to other forms of transport provision. But we do understand—or we should—the importance of making this transition.

First and foremost, of course, is the importance of ensuring that the road network, which will continue to perform a critical role in the overall transport task for the city, is able to operate more effectively and efficiently. Reducing congestion by having more people use public transport means that the road network operates better. This is a point that is often missed in the debate. Achieving a modal split of, say, 80 per cent of journeys to work by private motor vehicle rather than 90 per cent would have an enormous benefit across the system as a whole. It would improve the overall effectiveness of it and also defer the need for significant augmentation to a later time, in terms of infrastructure development.

Mr Gentleman outlined in his amendment the importance of the establishment of transport Canberra. Canberrans have told the government that we need to get more focused on the delivery of the transport task and that we need to coordinate the delivery of the multiple modes to make sure that they are flexible, that they are responsive and that they are integrated to deliver the best possible transport choices for Canberrans. The establishment of transport Canberra allows the government to do that. It is consistent with the approach, of course, adopted by many other city and state jurisdictions, and one which is critically important for the future management of transport in the ACT.

Of course, the arrival of light rail infrastructure is consistent with the broader planning strategy and transport strategy for the city, which is recognising the desirability of fast, frequent, reliable and permanent right of way for public transport along our main transport corridors.

Gungahlin to the city is one of the key congested corridors in the city. The Infrastructure Australia audits confirmed that, and there is a need to respond to the challenges faced by congestion along this key corridor, as it is to look at the other areas where congestion is going to be significant in the short to medium term. That includes corridors like the city through to the airport, and the parliamentary triangle, out along Canberra Avenue. These are all significant areas for congestion growth, if we continue as business as usual. The government is committed to not continuing as business as usual. We need to think about better ways of delivering transport for our city.

Mr Gentleman's amendment makes the very important observation that the delivery of light rail infrastructure means that there is more capacity within the existing ACTION fleet, and the existing ACTION network, to reallocate bus kilometres to other parts of the city, in terms of service delivery. We know that the experience of light rail in other jurisdictions backs this up. Growth in light rail patronage also leads to growth in bus patronage. That has been the experience of jurisdictions and cities like the Gold Coast. So identifying that there will be a significant freeing up—indeed up to a million kilometres of service delivery each and every year—as a result of the delivery of capital metro means that there will be more buses and more services more often, that can be allocated to other areas of growth and demand across the city as a whole.

Ultimately, we need to stop thinking about the delivery of public transport provision in the context of a government bus company designing its own network and delivering its own services to its own service standards. Instead transport Canberra is there to identify what the standards should be, the levels of frequency and reliability and the overall network planning to meet growth and demand as Canberra itself grows.

The service providers, whether it be ACTION or whether it be the preferred provider of the light rail service, will need to meet those standards. That is the great opportunity presented to us with the establishment of capital metro—moving to that multiple service provider, trying to address and respond to key performance criteria and key network planning decisions made by an agency dedicated to that task; not the day-to-day operational tasks of public transport provision but through the strategic planning tasks. That, of course, is one of the great and significant steps that come from the establishment of transport Canberra.

I commend Mr Gentleman for his amendment. It highlights the importance of the steps that the government is seeking to take to deliver better public transport for our city, and it is of course a much more considered and thoughtful approach than we see from those opposite.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (10.51): I will conclude debate on both the amendment and the original motion. It is hard to know where to begin when you have such content provided or such content sparked by those opposite. One thing I do want to note, of course, is the difference between Mr Rattenbury's speech versus Mr Gentleman's. For all Mr Rattenbury's faults, as we would see, at least his speeches are consistent. They are always consistent. He is always banging on for the Greens cause, and good on him for doing that.

In contrast, if you compare Mr Gentleman's speech today to his speech yesterday in response to a question on Majura Parkway, you will see a complete contradiction in their approach. One, of course, is that we need to build more roads; roads are great; roads ease congestion. This was obviously written by Roads ACT. Then you have today's speech, which is all anti-roads and about roads leading to congestion.

Someone upstairs really does need to make sure these speeches come into harmony a little bit. Yesterday it was all about how Majura Parkway is going to ease pressure on the road network; it is going to reduce travel time from 20 minutes down to seven minutes; congestion is going to be avoided as a result of road construction. Today it is the opposite. We are told that you cannot keep on building more roads. Roads lead to congestion. Roads simply fill up. There does need to be some finessing, I think, of Mr Gentleman's speeches.

It is interesting to hear Mr Rattenbury talk about the opposition's objections to the original Redex, as it was then. In committee hearings, when I put to ACTION that it is not really an express, it is not really a rapid express, eventually they did acknowledge that it is not, because it is stopping at least 14 times. Therefore, it is not really an express. And it was not really rapid at the time either, because it was not actually going particularly frequently.

My issues at the time were that it is simply adding additional buses on the same route, such as 51 and 52. It will get caught in traffic; it would be absurd to use it; and what about other areas? Let us see what the government has done with each of these. With respect to routes 51 and 52, since then they have actually integrated the 51 and 52 into the 200 series because they realised that people do not want to transfer. The Red Rapids turned into, in effect, an integrated bus network for all buses in Gungahlin. So actually the government did agree with my concerns. They took them on board and they actually integrated all the Gungahlin buses with that 200 series.

I said that they get caught in traffic. Is that not the very argument Mr Corbell just gave as to why we need to have designated transport corridors across Canberra so they do not get caught in traffic? Again, you would think that would be an agreement. I asked, "What about other areas?" Soon after I asked that in 2009, the government said, "We are going to do a Blue Rapid now as well to service other areas." In actual fact, at the time they said, "We are going to do a Green Rapid and numerous others."

But the government has addressed each of my concerns and in doing so I believe the inter-town bus service is actually pretty good in Canberra. It could be better. It could be significantly better. But it is actually, I think, the part of the bus network that has the highest level of satisfaction.

It is important to get transport planning right in the ACT, but unfortunately the Auditor-General's report says that the government is not getting transport planning right in the ACT. Yet this is the government that wants Canberrans to empower them with even more responsibility and even more money with regard to public transport.

The way that Minister Corbell and Mr Rattenbury spoke, you would think that they had been presiding over this magnificent network. You would think that they have just got so many runs on the board, they have kicked so many goals and therefore they can stand in this place and brag about their performance.

Since Mr Rattenbury became minister responsible for ACTION buses, patronage has gone from 18.2 million to 18.1 million to 17.8 million to 17.6 million: four years, a decrease in each year. That is what you get when you get a Greens transport minister. He can try to paint a different picture, but that is the reality. Over that same period we have seen marked increases in the cost of parking across Canberra. Yet patronage has gone from 18.2 to 18.1 to 17.8 to 17.6.

We also hear Minister Corbell talk about how we need to get people onto public transport and that if we got an 80-20 split that would be better for everyone, that it would ease congestion. What does that mean when you have actually had the percentage of Canberrans using ACTION to get to work decreasing? We are now at 6.9 per cent. When Mr Rattenbury took over, it was 7.8 per cent. But it has gone backwards. Taking Mr Corbell's point that an increase in mode share for public transport decreases congestion, using that same logic a decrease in mode share for public transport increases congestion.

Therefore, given that the mode share for ACTION buses has gone down since Mr Rattenbury became minister, under Minister Rattenbury's watch congestion has increased because the ACTION bus mode share has decreased. We now have only 6.9 per cent of people using ACTION to get to work. The target was 10.5 per cent by next year.

Yesterday was the first time the government has ever acknowledged that they are not going to get there. Mr Rattenbury said this in response to a question about whether we are going to make the 10.5 per cent target. It is extremely unfortunate that under this government's watch we have seen a decrease in public transport usage despite all their rhetoric.

One of the changes that I mentioned earlier was the integration of the 200 series into the Gungahlin routes. Part of the rationale for that was that people do not like transferring at Gungahlin bus station. They would rather stay on the same bus and go all the way through. That was the same point when this government abolished the 333s, which many Canberrans would remember, and they introduced an integrated 300 series.

In effect, buses in Belconnen and buses in Tuggeranong do a suburban route and then turn into the 333. The government did that because they said people do not like transferring. The Auditor-General's report states that there is a 55 per cent decrease in patronage when people have to transfer. Under a Labor government with a Greens minister, we have seen the 200 series integrated and we have seen the 300 series integrated to avoid transfers. Now what this government is doing is basing their entire transport policy on transfers.

Their entire light rail policy is dependent upon people either driving and parking, and then hopping on a tram, or getting a feeder bus and then hopping on a tram. The Auditor-General says that there will be a 55 per cent decrease in public transport usage when you have to transfer. This is a government that acknowledged that and therefore did away with the single 200 and did away with the single 333 by and large, albeit with a route 200 and route 300 that occasionally run. But by and large they have an integrated Gungahlin service and an integrated Belconnen and Tuggeranong service to avoid transfers.

There is a real disconnect with this government's transport planning. That is exactly what the Auditor-General says. This is a government that cannot plan properly and it is a government that cannot deliver transport properly. Given these home truths, given the facts of their own administration with regard to the integrated services, their inability to ease congestion or to get more people riding public transport, I would therefore think that those opposite would reject the amendment and vote for the original motion.

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.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Taxation—rates

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (11.05): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the Government's continued general rates increases is not revenue neutral;
- (b) the recently released Consolidated 2014-15 Annual Financial Statements showed a \$36 million general rates revenue gouge;
- (c) the Government's general rates revenue increase for 2014-2015 makes up 43% of total revenue increase for that year;
- (d) the Government's renegeing on its promise to phase out stamp duty;
- (e) the Government's continued inability to explain how their tax reforms will lead to general rates increases;
- (f) that Canberra homeowners and businesses already pay some of the highest general rates in the country; and
- (g) the Canberra Liberal's commitment to tackling housing affordability and cost of living pressures; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

(a) conduct an impact analysis on:

- (i) general rates increases and the financial impact on ACT households and businesses; and

- (ii) general rates increases and the cost of living impact on ACT households and businesses; and

(b) table this in the Assembly before the 2016-2017 ACT Budget.

A very important issue for people is the rates they pay, not just for where they live but for the businesses they work in. This is a community now that is coming to find the truth about the government's rates reform, which is that it is just a grab for cash. The startling revelation that the government is now reneging on its promise to phase out stamp duty to instead become the lowest charging jurisdiction on stamp duty will cause dismay among many people, particularly as they are bearing the pain of the enormous increases in rates that they have suffered over the past three years where we have seen on average a 45 per cent increase in the household rates people are paying.

Indeed, similar stories have emerged in people's businesses. Last time we had this debate I quoted a business in Fyshwick that had seen a 48 per cent increase in their rates, yet no additional service. They are no better off; they are simply paying more to a government that has not been able to manage its finances and are using the word "progressive". Read "progressive" here as giving certainty to government, not to the taxpayer. What we face is a situation where the government has made commitments; it is on a path, but it cannot tell us when that path will be completed and it cannot tell us what the milestones on that path are. But the guarantee that certain taxes would disappear—particularly conveyancing charges—has now gone out the window.

It is time that we that we took stock of what this means. My motion today calls on the government to conduct some impact analysis on the general rates increases and what their financial impacts have meant for ACT's households and the businesses that they own and work in. We then need to look at what that translates into also in cost of living impacts on both households and how that may affect how businesses are performing in the ACT. If taxpayers have less money, they are not going to the businesses to spend.

This is an important issue. The government looked down the eye of the camera at the last election and said, "We won't triple your rates," and yet we all know that rates are well and truly on their way to tripling. We have seen the general 45 per cent average increase across the board over the past couple of years. We saw that consolidated revenue showed a \$36 million general rates revenue gouge. It just keeps going up and up, but the trade-offs are not happening to the extent that the government said they would.

What we have to have, though, is some certainty for taxpayers and Canberra home owners and businesses. They already pay some of the highest general rates in the country. If we do the comparison with Queanbeyan, particularly for commercial rates, businesses are looking across the border and saying, "Well, it's a lot cheaper to operate there than it is in the ACT".

What we have to do is tackle housing affordability and cost of living pressures. It is the Canberra Liberals that are committed to that; not this government. We have seen over the past 15 years that all the government does is simply take the revenue from land and then squander it. The problem for the government is that we all know that the amount of available land is finite. Bureaucrats have put various estimates—one told me 12 to 15 years and another one said 20 years—on when all the usable land will be gone. Then

we are faced with the prospect of either going over the border and developing something like, perhaps, Kowen, which would be incredibly expensive given the distance and its particular geography, or we come back in to building around the town centres and Civic.

It is only the Canberra Liberals that have a policy to make that work, because it is only the Canberra Liberals that will get rid of lease variation charge on Civic and the town centres to enable people actually to do what the government claims they are in favour of—develop density in the town centres and Civic. Yet they are the party that have the policy that stops that. You only have to look at the amount of activity in Civic—the only cranes that have been on the horizon in Civic, in particular, were on deals that were done under the old system.

The densification of Braddon—and everybody seems to quote Braddon like it is an amazing success for the government—only occurred because the landholders, the landowners, changed their leases before the new system so they had the ability to do the sorts of developments that are occurring in Braddon. It is despite, or perhaps even in spite of, the government that Braddon has become the place it has. It has not happened because of the government, and it certainly has not happened because of the government's policy. We know, for instance, when the Chop Shop pop up wanted to occur it just caused more havoc inside planning and they had to try to work out what they were doing because they had no answer to it.

We face an interesting future. I notice the Chief Minister has just dropped his standard amendment—the first line is that the government is abolishing duty on conveyancing. Well, tell us when it is. You might be reducing it, but you are not abolishing it, because it grew. The take in the first quarter for this year grew. It was beyond your expectation and it will continue to be that way because you are addicted to this revenue. If you knew what you were doing, you would have the honesty to stand up and say, “Here's the timetable.” We get this standard guff that he is not responsible for the next government or the next Assembly, the ones coming up—and thank goodness for that, because we would not get the honesty that the people of the ACT deserve. They should be able to be told what the progress is on getting rid of a tax.

I think Mr Hanson has said it, and I have said several times, that I expect in next year's budget there will be a softening on the take. There will be some sort of pre-election soften. “We've achieved this. We've done this. We've done that. It's working.” Nobody believes it because every quarter they get their rates bills and it just goes up and they get nothing additional for it. If the ACT were a company with tens of billions of dollars in assets, 20,000 staff and a \$5 billion turnover and you were a shareholder—let's face it, the ratepayers and the constituents are the shareholders—you would be looking at your investment and going, “Where's the return?” The answer is there is no return from this government because they cannot pay for these reforms without burdening the taxpayer more and more, particularly the ratepayer. That makes the cost of living go up which makes the cost of doing business in the ACT go up. They have no genuine vision for the future of the ACT.

I acknowledge Mr Barr has come late to the party on innovation and diversifying the economy. This side has been talking for more than a decade about building the infrastructure that is required to genuinely diversify the ACT economy and broaden the tax base so we can share the burden rather than piling it on the shoulders of

ordinary ratepayers in the suburbs who see nothing for it. That is why I think it is important, given we have had now one term of these reforms, that before we move into the next phase for the 2016-17 budget that the government table in the Assembly the analysis that shows the impact of what they are doing.

We might have a little bit of honesty at the same time, and they might actually tell us what the schedule is for abolishing stamp duty. The minister notes in the amendment he will move:

... that the Government is abolishing duty on conveyances;

If you are abolishing it, what is the timetable? Tell us what the program is. Tell us when it is all gone so that people can say, "Well, okay, my rates have gone up but at least they've got rid of stamp duty." The problem is that rates are going up and stamp duty take is now on the increase and they are not getting rid of it. The Treasurer himself has been forced to admit that he cannot tell us when it will happen. He has done the pirouette, he has done the quickstep, he has done the foxtrot and he has done the tango through a number of committee hearings where it has changed. People are not hearing with any confidence from this government that they are committed to abolishing duty on conveyancing, because they are not. They cannot tell us, they will not tell us because they are not committed. "I've abolished stamp duty." It keeps going up. He cannot tell us. He cannot look anybody in the eye here and say, "This is the timetable for it."

Of course he can predict what will happen. He can give us a guideline. But he will not give us a guideline because as those taxes go, rates move inextricably towards tripling. It is very simple maths: if you get rid of all these taxes and you pile it up onto the rates bill, the rates must triple. He should have some conviction and have some honesty on the numbers that he must have. He must have asked for these numbers. We have tried to get them but, of course, they are always evasive. We got to the stage where members would remember that he had to collate a document. He had to invent a document to answer a motion in the Assembly because he either cannot or he will not tell the people of the ACT through this place what he is doing with their rates.

If he cannot do it, he is negligent because he should have done that work before we embarked upon this so-called tax reform. If he will not, you have to ask the question why. The answer is stark for all to see—it is in the Quinlan report—rates must triple to accommodate these changes.

We have had the first term. We are moving towards an election year—it is about 330 days until the next election. It is, I think, reasonable to ask for an analysis of what the impact has been. It is reasonable, I think, for the public to know what has happened to the finances and what is happening to their cost of living as a result of these changes. I think it is reasonable that the government table that before the next budget so people can see the results of these reforms.

If the government had the courage of their convictions, they would do that. I am sure if I turn over the Treasurer's amendment it will have some guff about, "We're going to tell you in the next budget what the next five years are." Nobody will believe it

because they have not kept their promises as outlined to start with. They have not been able to detail a time frame. They have not kept their commitment to phase out stamp duty, because they are not phasing out stamp duty. It is not happening. Either that or the Chief Minister misled the committee when he said, "Our objective now is to be the lowest taxing stamp duty jurisdiction in the country." If he is phasing it out, why did he tell the estimates committee that earlier in the year? If he is phasing it out, why did he not come clean and tell us the timetable?

Mr Gentleman: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Point of order. Sit down, Mr Smyth.

Mr Gentleman: Mr Smyth has just indicated that the Chief Minister misled the committee, therefore, the Assembly. I ask that he withdraw that.

MR SMYTH: No, I did not say that.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Would you repeat the words that you heard, Mr Gentleman.

Mr Gentleman: Mr Smyth said that the Chief Minister had misled the committee, Madam Deputy Speaker.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, will you withdraw, please.

MR SMYTH: I am happy to withdraw if you can tell me what words I am withdrawing. The member cannot repeat the words that I have said, but I would be happy for you to review the tape.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, I can do that, but Mr Gentleman did repeat the words that he heard you say.

MR SMYTH: I am sorry; I did not hear what Mr Gentleman said.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Gentleman, would you repeat those words, please.

Mr Gentleman: Madam Deputy Speaker, Mr Smyth said that the Chief Minister had misled the committee.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those are the words that—

MR SMYTH: No, no. I think what I said is he "may have". If you want to review the tape and—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will review the tape, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: I thought I was very careful in not saying that.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will review the tape later.

MR SMYTH: That is very kind, Madam Deputy Speaker. People should have certainty. The business community needs to know with certainty what will happen on their rates so they can do their forward planning. People need to know with certainty, for instance, when conveyancing is apparently going to be abolished. That may actually impact then on choices they make about downsizing, upsizing, moving, changing, whatever it is. But these reforms have left people with no certainty.

The Chief Minister will no doubt jump up and talk about progressivity. The government uses the word “progress”, says that this is a progressive tax, to cover the fact that it makes it easier for them. That is all this is about. This is making it easy for the government; it is to give them certainty. All it does is give the people of the ACT higher bills, whether it be for their residences or their businesses. It is not an unreasonable request that we conduct an impact analysis on these things and we work out what is happening with the cost of living as an impact of the government’s changes. It would not be unreasonable to have that before the budget next year. It gives the government some six months. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Urban Renewal and Minister for Tourism and Events) (11.19): I move:

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

“(1) notes:

- (a) that the Government is abolishing duty on conveyances;
- (b) that the Government is abolishing duty on insurance;
- (c) that duties on conveyances and insurance are two of the most unfair and inefficient taxes levied by governments;
- (d) that insurance duty will be abolished by 1 July 2016;
- (e) that stamp duty has been cut in every budget since 2012-2013 and will be cut in all forthcoming budgets delivered by this Government;
- (f) that the ACT Government was the first in the country to undertake such reform;
- (g) that households and businesses are already saving considerable sums on their insurance policies due to the cuts to insurance duty;
- (h) that home buyers are saving thousands of dollars in stamp duty, with a \$500 000 property currently incurring \$5900 less in stamp duty than before tax reform started in 2012;
- (i) that household and commercial general rates are a stable and efficient source of revenue;
- (j) that the Government’s taxation reforms are revenue neutral—with increases to rates funding decreases to other taxes;

- (k) that the Government's taxation reforms are making the Territory's taxes fairer, through reform to the rates system to make it more progressive, and through ensuring taxes are raised broadly across the community, instead of from residents who pay stamp duty;
- (l) that the Government's taxation reforms are making the Territory's taxes simpler through the abolition of taxes;
- (m) that the Government's taxation reforms are making the Territory's taxes more efficient, through a transition away from transaction-based taxes to land-based taxes;
- (n) that the Government's taxation reforms are making the ACT's own-source revenue base more stable and predictable, thereby helping the Government plan for spending on services and facilities for the Territory community;
- (o) that the Government has issued three phases of its Affordable Housing Action Plan, which is a comprehensive program that has helped improve housing affordability in the ACT;
- (p) that the Government offers a range of concessions available to help households on lower incomes, including discounts on rates, energy and water bills;
- (q) that the Government offers a range of targeted assistance to lower income households, including public housing, health care and transport;
- (r) that the Government has continued to support the Territory economy during the Commonwealth's cuts to jobs and spending, to ensure households continue to stay in work and have access to important community services;
- (s) that the Government issues a cost of living statement as part of the annual Territory budget, and that the budget papers indicate rates increases in coming years;
- (t) that the cost of living statement in the 2015-2016 Budget showed that ACT per capita taxation is below the national average;
- (u) that there is currently broad and sustained support around Australia, including from key stakeholders such as business, industry and social sector organisations, about the need for wide-ranging taxation reform in this country;
- (v) there has been long-standing advocacy for taxation reform from expert reviews, including by former Treasury Secretary, Ken Henry and former ACT Treasurer, Ted Quinlan;
- (w) that the Canberra Liberals continue to shirk engaging in a meaningful debate about taxation reform;
- (x) that the Canberra Liberals' focus on three-word slogans about tax reform is misleading the community about the impact of taxation reform;

- (y) that in this term the Canberra Liberals have yet to issue a meaningful and comprehensive program of taxation reform;
 - (z) that in this term the Canberra Liberals have yet to issue a policy about cost of living; and
 - (aa) that in this term the Canberra Liberals have yet to issue a policy about housing affordability; and
- (2) calls on the Government to:
- (a) maintain its commitment to reforming the Territory's taxation system;
 - (b) outline a program for the next five years of taxation reform, including analysis about rates increases on households and businesses; and
 - (c) table this five year program with the 2016-2017 ACT Budget.”.

My amendment seeks to remove all words after “this Assembly” and substitute the following in (1) under “Notes”:

- (a) that the Government is abolishing duty on conveyances;
- (b) that the Government is abolishing duty on insurance;
- (c) that duties on conveyances and insurance are two of the most unfair and inefficient taxes levied by governments;
- (d) that insurance duty will be abolished by 1 July 2016;
- (e) that stamp duty has been cut in every budget since 2012-2013 and will be cut in all forthcoming budgets delivered by this Government;
- (f) that the ACT Government was the first in the country to undertake such reform;

I note that other governments are now following. The amendment continues:

- (g) that households and businesses are already saving considerable sums on their insurance policies due to the cuts to insurance duty;
- (h) that home buyers are saving thousands of dollars in stamp duty, with a \$500 000 property currently incurring \$5900 less in stamp duty than before tax reform started in 2012;
- (i) that household and commercial general rates are a stable and efficient source of revenue;
- (j) that the Government's taxation reforms are revenue neutral—with increases to rates funding decreases to other taxes—

namely, stamp duty, insurance and payroll tax—

- (k) that the Government's taxation reforms are making the Territory's taxes fairer, through reform to the rates system to make it more progressive—

that is, not a flat rate of tax that Mr Smyth would seem to prefer—

and through ensuring taxes are raised broadly across the community, instead of from residents who pay stamp duty—

not concentrating a huge amount of the territory's own-source revenue from residents who pay stamp duty—

- (l) that the Government's taxation reforms are making the Territory's taxes simpler through the abolition of—

a number of taxes—

- (m) that the Government's taxation reforms are making the Territory's taxes more efficient, through a transition away from transaction-based taxes to land-based taxes;

- (n) that the Government's taxation reforms are making the ACT's own-source revenue base more stable and predictable, thereby helping the Government plan for spending on services and facilities for the Territory community—

again, a point that Mr Smyth seems oblivious to, that the people who benefit from stable revenue streams are those most disadvantaged in the community, but that is not a major concern for Mr Smyth, clearly—

- (o) that the Government has issued three phases of its Affordable Housing Action Plan, which is a comprehensive program that has helped improve housing affordability in the ACT;

- (p) that the Government offers range of concessions available to help households on lower incomes, including discounts on rates, energy and water bills;

- (q) that the Government offers a range of targeted assistance to lower income households, including public housing, health care, and transport—

assistance that is, of course, funded by a stable and predictable revenue base—

- (r) that the Government has continued to support the Territory economy during the Commonwealth's cuts to jobs and spending, to ensure households continue to stay in work and have access to important community services;

- (s) that the Government issues a cost of living statement as part of the annual Territory budget, and that the budget papers indicate rates increases—

over the forward estimates—

- (t) that the cost of living statement in the 2015-2016 Budget showed that ACT per capita taxation is below the national average;
- (u) that there is currently broad and sustained support around Australia, including from key stakeholders such as business, industry and social sector organisations, about the need for wide-ranging taxation reform in this country;

It might have escaped the shadow treasurer's notice that the Prime Minister and the Treasurer have announced a very big table for tax reform and that everything is on this very big table.

Mr Smyth: Yes, as it should be.

MR BARR: Except for the reforms that are being implemented here. The amendment continues:

- (v) there has been long-standing advocacy for taxation reform—

from a range of expert reviews, internationally, nationally and locally, including in the past five years by the former Treasury secretary, Ken Henry, and an ACT review led by former ACT Treasurer, Ted Quinlan. But here we get to the real crux of what this morning is about. In not quite 15 minutes we heard, and this is in the amendment:

- (w) that the Canberra Liberals continue to shirk engaging in a meaningful debate about taxation reform;

and there is not one alternative policy suggestion put forward, not one—

- (x) that the Canberra Liberals' focus on three-word slogans about tax reform is misleading the community about the impact of taxation reform;

Despite being the longest serving shadow treasurer in the history of the commonwealth, Mr Smyth has never put forward a meaningful and comprehensive program of taxation reform. The amendment continues:

- (y) that in this term the Canberra Liberals' have yet to issue a meaningful and comprehensive program of taxation reform;
- (z) that in this term the Canberra Liberals' have yet to issue a policy about cost of living; and
- (aa) that in this term the Canberra Liberals' have yet to issue a policy about housing affordability;

They are long on rhetoric, long on criticism, but there is nothing by way of an alternative policy.

My amendment calls on the government to:

- (a) maintain its commitment to reforming the Territory's taxation system;
- (b) outline a program for the next five years of taxation reform, including analysis about rates increases on households and businesses; and
- (c) table this five year program with the 2016-2017 ACT Budget.

The amendment that I have put forward outlines the government's commitment to taxation reform and notes the opposition's continued refusal to engage in anything more than slogans and repeating the same speech that has been given in this place ad nauseam in this parliamentary term. This reflects the position of the longest serving shadow treasurer in the history of Australia. It is not surprising but it is worth dwelling on just how little there has been from the opposition on tax in spite of this being one of the biggest issues of public policy debate in this country at this time.

Tax systems around the country are recognised as being in need of reform. It is recognised by the federal government. It is recognised by every credible economist and policy analyst. It is recognised by the media, by the public and even by a number of Liberal politicians elsewhere in Australia. Expert report after expert report in recent years and decades has advocated taxation reform. Here in the ACT we have actually got on with delivering it.

Mr Smyth's motion seems to have missed the fact that stamp duty has been cut significantly in every budget for which I have been Treasurer and it will continue to be cut in every budget that this government delivers. Insurance duty has also been cut. Insurance tax is one of the worst taxes levied by state and territory governments. It taxes a service, a good that households and businesses should have. And that is why over the past four years it has been cut from 10 per cent to two per cent and why it will be fully abolished on 1 July next year. An average household with home, contents and comprehensive car insurance with combined premiums of around 2½ thousand dollars a year is today \$200 a year better off as a result of those cuts and that will rise to \$250 after 1 July next year.

We have been cutting stamp duty in every budget. To give a quick indication of how households are benefiting, the buyer of a \$500,000 home is currently paying \$5,900 less in stamp duty than before tax reform. A buyer of a \$700,000 Canberra home is saving \$7,400 on what they would have paid prior to reform.

Our own-source revenue is transitioning away from transaction taxes to more efficient forms of taxation because rates are an efficient and fair way of raising revenue to fund the services and facilities our community needs. Prior to tax reform rates were increasing every year and had done so throughout the history of self-government and throughout the history of this city. That there will be an increase in rates every year has been a given for as long as all of us have been alive.

What has changed as part of the tax reform process is that an element of additional rates increases has funded the abolition of or reduction in three other taxes—insurance taxes, payroll taxes and stamp duty. And the benefits that have been delivered to businesses, particularly through the series of payroll tax cuts, amount to tens of thousands of dollars annually. Businesses, particularly small businesses in the ACT,

are exempt from payroll tax. Were they to move across the border to New South Wales they would be paying payroll tax if their payrolls were above the New South Wales threshold. And the differences between the ACT and New South Wales thresholds are very significant and growing. As I have flagged previously, the government will move the payroll tax-free threshold in the ACT to \$2 million in next year's budget.

Stamp duty will continue to be cut in each budget. I might add that there is a new dimension now to tax reform and to the pace of change on tax reform, and that is the proposition that the commonwealth have put forward in relation to the goods and services tax. It may well be that the Turnbull government will take an increase in the goods and services tax to the Australian people at the next federal election. As part of the offsetting measures for that increase in the goods and services tax, which I note has been modelled to be an impact of around \$4,000 per year on the average household, in terms of extra tax being collected—to offset that extra tax increase—the commonwealth has floated a range of propositions including increased compensation through the social security system and income tax cuts but they have also floated assistance to the states and territories to abolish a number of these inefficient taxes.

There is a scenario where the federal government takes a GST increase to the next federal election and wins the support of the Australian community for that tax increase, with a series of offsetting tax measures. If the Australian people vote for an increase in the GST and the Australian Senate passes a package that includes other offsetting tax cuts and that those offsetting tax cuts include payments to the states and territories to abolish a range of inefficient state and territory taxes, then stamp duty may, in fact, be abolished in the ACT more quickly than the two decades that the government has proposed for reform of stamp duty.

If that is the outcome of the federal election—the Turnbull government seeks a mandate for a GST increase, provides a package of compensation and a series of measures to assist the states and territories to abolish various inefficient taxes and receives the support of the Australian Senate for such a change—then the ACT government would not use our intergovernmental powers to block such a reform if all of those preconditions were met. It is taken to an election, it passes the Senate and the compensation package includes a range of measures to abolish a range of state and territory taxes, appropriate compensation and various other offsetting tax measures—if that receives the support of the Australian people and of the Australian Senate—and the package also includes changes and assistance to the states and territories to reduce our inefficient taxes, then we would not stand in the way of that if all of those preconditions are met.

I am not sure that all of those preconditions will be met. I do not know yet whether the Turnbull government will take an increase to the GST to the people, I do not know yet what range of compensatory measures they would put in place, but we will enter into this process with a view to wanting to continue and, in fact, accelerate the pace of tax reform. And if the commonwealth are going to assist through that process, then we will work with them if they secure a democratic mandate and the support of the Australian Senate and all of those other preconditions are in place. That would enable us to, in fact, accelerate the pace of tax reform in the territory, and that would be a good outcome.

In the meantime we will deliver a five-year forward projection for our tax reforms, based on no change in terms of the commonwealth's position. If the commonwealth change their taxation arrangements, then that will necessitate a response from the territory government. But we will cut stamp duty in every budget for which I am Treasurer and we look forward to continuing to do that in 2016-17.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (11.34): The opposition will not be agreeing to the amendment. As we often see from the Chief Minister, it is inaccurate. It does not reflect the true position. The reality is that at the last election the Canberra Liberals warned that under a Labor government the so-called tax reform of Mr Barr would triple rates. This was denied. There were statements issued and TV advertisements where they said, "No, no, not in this century, not in the next century" and so on. However, the reality is that with the current rate of tax increase, rates are on the path to tripling within 11.6 years because that is the compound effect of the increases we have seen to date.

As Mr Smyth said, there may be some tweak in the lead up to the election next year where all of a sudden it will not be going up at about 10 per cent a year; they will just cut it down to five per cent for that election period. But the people of Canberra are not so naive. Indeed, at the last election there were a number of people I spoke to who struggled to believe that the government would do something that was so cruel to so many families, to so many older people. But they have now got their rates bills. They now say, "You guys were right. They are doing this to us. We did not believe that they were this cruel."

This is a Labor government and a lot of these people were Labor supporters. They said, "We did not believe that Andrew Barr would be so cruel." But he has been. There were other people as well who said, "Even if they are going up, I do not mind paying more tax, because I support money going into our health system, education and so on." These same people are coming to us now saying, "I did not think that we would be spending a billion dollars of our ratepayers' money on a tram." If they roll this out across Canberra, it will be many billions of dollars. They are saying, "That is not what I thought my rates increases would be about—funding Mr Rattenbury and Mr Corbell and Mr Barr to build a tram."

But the reality is that there have been massive rate increases across the board. I look at some of the suburbs in my own electorate. In the past four years we have seen rate increases in places like Curtin at 53 per cent, Duffy 51 per cent, Fisher 50 per cent, Chapman 50 per cent, Yarralumla 63 per cent, Campbell 65 per cent, Ainslie 60 per cent, O'Connor 58 per cent, Downer 58 per cent and Crace 52 per cent. That is on top of already very high rate bills, the biggest in the country. For many Canberrans, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I have said in this place before, as has Mr Smyth, this is just simply unaffordable. There are people on fixed incomes, there are retirees—self-funded retirees and pensioners—there are struggling families, people trying to make ends meet who simply cannot afford these exponential increases that Mr Barr is taking out of ratepayers' pockets every year.

It is cruel and it is unfair. And, based on the budget projections, there is still about \$250 million to \$260 million of stamp duty revenue being collected by this government every year that Andrew Barr has again committed to dumping onto everybody's rates. At some stage that \$250 million to \$260 million every year will be put on our rates.

There will be then a position where, if you live in Curtin, Duffy or Fisher, there will be not simply 50 per cent increases. It will be many, many times more than that because there is only one way to do the maths. If you want to put an extra \$260 million of stamp duty on everybody's rates, there is no mathematical equation possible where that does not result in people's rates, on average across Canberra, having tripled. That is a fact.

Again what we saw was nasty, grubby little sneers from Mr Barr. It is his way of operating. He sneers across the chamber. Let me say very clearly that when Mr Barr says in his amendment: we have not seen the Liberals talk about tax; we have not seen them talk about housing affordability, that is not true. Let me give some examples, Madam Deputy Speaker. The lease variation charge is a massive tax on housing affordability. I will tell members exactly how it is. Mr Barr does not understand. If developers want to convert a lease that is in a town centre, in Civic or elsewhere, from a commercial property—it may be a vacant one because we know that there is a 15 or 16 per cent commercial office block vacancy rate in this town—into residential, they will be stung by this government in the order of \$40,000 or \$50,000 per apartment for doing that. We have spoken to developers. We have spoken to builders who want to do this. That is a massive tax on that unit development.

The reality is that Mr Barr does not like people who build in this city; he does not like people who are labelled developers. He sees them as the class enemy. The reality is, though, that if those people want to build in Civic, want to build in our town centres, then the additional cost is \$40,000 to \$50,000.

A number of things will happen arising from this. If the development goes ahead, which we know is not happening; it has basically come to a standstill since this tax was brought into place, but should it go ahead, what it means is that a lot of the cost from the lease variation charge will get pushed on to those units, those apartments that we know are exactly the part of the market that we are trying to target from a housing affordability perspective. It means that those apartments, those dwellings in Civic and in the town centres that are subject to the lease variation charge, are going to have a \$40,000 to \$50,000 tax applied to them.

We have said that we will repeal it. We will repeal it because it will help housing affordability. It will enable people to live in Civic and the town centres and spend less money on their apartments to do so. That is a good town planning outcome. That is a very good planning outcome rather than having high density out in places like Wright and Coombs. It will also activate and renew Civic and the town centres. Do not come in here and say that we have not talked about tax reform.

We have also talked about housing affordability in other areas and the variation 306 solar aspects. Again, the requirements for the solar aspects of variation 306 are adding, according to various industry groups, about \$40,000 to \$50,000 to the cost of houses. Mr Rattenbury is looking up. He understands this. Because of the requirements to build in certain ways, it is going to cost an extra \$40,000 to \$50,000 to build in many cases. That is another impost on housing affordability. We have said that we will not continue the lease variation charge in Civic and the town centres and the solar aspects of variation 306. We have also talked much about land release and the need to improve that.

We have made it very clear in the last term and consistently through this term that we will not be putting the \$250 million or \$260 million—it is going up it seems at about \$10 million every year—of stamp duty revenue onto people's rates. I cannot be clearer. So do not come into this place and say, "You have not talked about tax reform; you have not talked about housing affordability." It is the Canberra Liberals who have been talking about tax reform. Simply dumping everything onto everybody's rates is not a sophisticated tax reform. That is not a comprehensive tax reform. That is cruel; that is unfair; that is simplistic. That is causing an immense amount of concern and an immense amount of impost in terms of cost of living for Canberra families out in the suburbs, for retirees, for pensioners who simply cannot afford it.

What we are seeing from this government is a tax reform regime that is aimed at making life easier for the government. Be it about lease variation charge or be it about rates and stamp duty, the major concern is about how Andrew Barr can get as much money as he can into his pockets at the expense of people, at the expense of constituents out there in our suburbs.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we will not be supporting the amendment. I commend Mr Smyth again for bringing this matter before the Assembly. I commend him for the work he has been doing consistently. He may be this territory's longest serving shadow minister but I assure Mr Barr that he is likely to be the ACT's shortest serving Chief Minister.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (11.44): I will be supporting Mr Barr's amendment today because the ACT Greens believe that tax reform is a warranted policy for this territory. That is why we supported it when the Chief Minister brought tax reform forward at the end of last term and we have continued to make the case. We have looked at the work that has been done by a range of experts over the years on what taxes are inefficient, what taxes are more sustainable and what taxes are more reliable.

We know that government needs to make a certain amount of revenue to provide the services that this city wants and needs. That is what we are talking about here—producing revenue for government in order to be able to run the city and provide the services that our community expects. A range of experts across the board have provided ongoing, clear advice that moving away from transaction-based taxes to something like a land-based tax is a much more sustainable and efficient way to operate a tax system. That is the basis on which we have supported this policy direction and the basis on which we continue to do so. That is why we are seeing

moves to reduce and abolish the duty on conveyances and insurance, producing significant savings for households. We do not want a tax on things like insurance. That actually provides a disincentive for what is essentially a good thing for people to do, that is, take out insurance.

I note the figures cited by the Treasurer and Chief Minister in his amendment around stamp duty. There has been a reduction in stamp duty of \$5,900 since the tax reform started in 2012 for a \$500,000 property. That is a substantial saving, particularly for people who are endeavouring to buy their first house. That is very much the price range that first homebuyers are going in at, or perhaps a bit lower than that. They are saving a substantial amount of money at a time when they may be struggling the most to break into the housing market. This is not just about moving to a more efficient and sustainable tax system; there are very important social outcomes here.

Mr Hanson in his remarks used very emotive terms like “cruel”. That is simplistic and it reflects the way that he seeks to communicate with people. He talked about this being unfair on older people. If we look at the barriers to downsizing that things like stamp duty create, it is simply a very simplistic analysis on his part. If people are living in a house that is no longer suitable for them—perhaps a four-bedroom family house which was entirely appropriate at one time—and are attracted to living in a two-bedroom apartment or a townhouse or something a bit different to what they have lived in, they are looking at a very substantial stamp duty barrier. It actually provides a perverse incentive for those people. We are saying, “There is a barrier to you moving.” For me, the removal of stamp duty in this context is a very attractive opportunity and one that this series of tax reforms supports.

I will keep my remarks very short today because a lot has already been said in this debate. I think it is unfortunate that this significant tax reform has been reduced to the simplistic level that we now see. This is a good, long-term strategy for our city to move away from what everybody recognises are inefficient, transactional-type taxes and towards a sustainable land-based tax system that enables the government to plan for the long term and provide a reliable source of income for the provision of community services. That is why we support this approach and that is why I will be supporting Mr Barr’s amendment today.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (11.48): When Mr Rattenbury talks about access to housing, I refer him to the comments of a former Chief Minister who said, when commenting on what was his greatest regret from his time in office, “The decline in housing affordability in the ACT.” This is something that the Labor Party, supported by the Greens, over the past 15 years have contributed to. You may have concerns, Mr Rattenbury, but you have contributed to it through your party and through your own efforts.

The Urban Development Institute says that the two greatest impacts on the cost of housing are land and the fees and charges they pay. Which jurisdiction has that under the control of one form of government? The ACT. Logically, it would be much easier to ease that burden, particularly on first homebuyers, but it has gotten worse. Housing affordability is a significant problem in this territory and, in the words of a former Chief Minister, it is his greatest regret that they could not solve the problem, and you are not solving the problem now.

We go to what Mr Barr said. It is interesting because at the last estimates hearings Mr Barr said:

There is a policy argument to retain some level of stamp duty over the next couple of decades. We will need to consider at what level ...

If you read the amendment and try to believe that what the words say are true and accurate, the government is abolishing stamp duty on conveyancing. If he had said “reducing”, you might buy it. It is certainly not abolishing stamp duty on conveyancing. It is simply talk. The reality was exposed in estimates when the Chief Minister said, “We will need to consider at what level,” and not just in the short term but for the next couple of decades. This is year four of your reforms. If you are taking it a couple of decades from now that will be well past your end date. If your language is sloppy perhaps you should get up and correct it. He is saying, “We will need to consider.” He is not saying, “We will tail off the conveyancing.”

We have asked Mr Barr so many times to give us the rates and the program that they are considering, but they refuse to table it. And we know why. They are addicted to the revenue because they cannot control their spending. Particularly now we see a government desperate for the revenue so they can fund the folly of capital metro. It is quite clear. The policy states that they are abolishing stamp duty. The Chief Minister outs himself where he says:

There is a policy argument to retain some level of stamp duty over the next couple of decades. We will need to consider at what level ...

We have heard that every great economist says that stamp duty should go, yet now apparently there is a policy argument to retain it. One has to question what he is about. The reality is that you have got a minister who now does not even believe in his own statements. Apparently there is a policy argument to keep stamp duty over the next couple of decades. The reality is simply this: businesses and householders are paying through the nose for a government that will not keep its promises or cannot keep its promises. We saw the article about the Manuka newsagency, whose land value went from \$1.5 million to \$2.5 million. His rates went from—what was it?—\$72,000 to \$98,000. It is an awful lot of *Canberra Times* newspapers that you have to sell to make that up. Nobody believes that land value in Manuka has gone up by two-thirds in the past year. Nobody believes that, but this is a government desperate for cash because it cannot manage its finances.

Mr Barr said, “We have done nothing on the cost of living.” I think it was an amendment by me that got the cost of living statement put into the budget papers. It was something that, in a fit of honesty, they got right in the first instance until they realised: “Oh my God. We’ve actually outed ourselves and shown how bad it is.” So now we go to a number of scenarios so that you can ameliorate the impact and water down the truth, which is what they are keen to do.

It is kind of odd because we are almost in a position where the government is blaming the opposition for everything they have done: “Poor us.” Somebody said this morning that they always seem to blame us for their mistakes and things that they have done.

They are not acting like a government convinced in its reforms. Interestingly, paragraph (2)(b) of Mr Barr's amendment says:

outline a program for the next five years of taxation reform, including analysis about rates increases on households and businesses ...

The analysis, I suspect, will simply show that they have gone up. We want to know what the impacts have been. If they were genuine they would simply agree to my amendment. If you are going to do something, do it properly. Make sure you work out what the impacts of the increases have been, what the financial impacts are on households, and then the cost of living impacts on ACT businesses and households.

The government say, "Aren't you lucky? We've lifted the burden of insurance levies off you and all households are now \$250 better off." If you were paying \$1,000 in rates and your rates have gone up 45 per cent on average, you are now paying \$1,450. So there is a slight deficit there. You are actually \$200 worse off because of these reforms. It is as simple as that, Madam Deputy Speaker. Because they have not done the job properly over the past 15 years and because they have not diversified the economy, the only place they can pile the expense of the way that they run the government is on the rate payer.

The Chief Minister says that these reforms should be revenue neutral. If the reforms are revenue neutral then the rates must triple. All of the money that was in the taxes that are supposedly being abolished, and we now know there is a question mark over what "abolish" means—the value is abolished. It is not made up nearly enough by the growth in the market. There are dilemmas in the argument there from the Chief Minister as well.

We are familiar with the case of Manuka newsagency. I have quoted the case of a business in Fyshwick whose rates have gone up 48 per cent over the past three years. I will just finish by reading a couple of letters that I have received and I know Mr Barr has received. To quote from a constituent:

My sincere apologies if this sounds rude, but I speak on behalf of the entire ACT community who is devastated and shocked by the continuous increases in rates well above CPI.

Rates must decrease, not increase, as they are a complete waste of money for ACT residents. Infrastructure projects like light rail, while essential, should not be funded by additional burden on already struggling families.

I would like to point out that residents are willing to pay stamp duty as it is one off while ridiculous rates are a constant harassment. Labor will push ACT into recession due to ridiculous increases in parking, rego, and licences in addition to rates.

My family and friends were ACT Labor supporters but will never vote for them again ...

There is a second letter:

I would like to raise the issue of the large increase in ACT rates this year and the incompetent economic management by the ACT Labour Party. I have just received my new rates bill of \$1849.59 for our house in Macarthur. The rates for last year were \$1598.28 and so the new rates bill is an increase of 12.25% when wage growth is on average less than 3% at present. For the previous year our rates increased by 9.36%. So for the last 2 years, our rates have increased by 21.6% which is just ridiculous and unsustainable, especially for people who have retired from the workforce. When the light rail project has to be paid for, rates obviously have to substantially increase again and socialist ideals can only go so far before the whole ACT economy is in big trouble.

What is this labour government doing to ACT taxpayers? If possible, please raise this in the ACT Assembly and request an explanation from Mr Barr who is more concerned about Gay Marriage (as is the Greens) than the more important issues of creating jobs and growing the ACT economy.

Has Mr Barr walked around the Canberra Centre shopping centre lately as there are so many empty shops now that we are starting to look like a third world capital city than a first world one. Mr Barr needs to create an environment to encourage small businesses to start up and employ local young people. I have recently returned from many weeks in Europe and I am shocked by the state of the Canberra economy. Even Barcelona did not appear to have as many empty shops as Canberra.

There are many other letters. People are shocked by the rates increases. Here is one that says:

I note that my rates have increased from \$1205.15 in 2008/09 to \$2150.98 in 15/16, an increase of almost 79%(!!) in 7 years, making this an average increase of more than 11% per year.

The people of the ACT are entitled to know what the impact of the government's reforms is. The government should know. If they do not know then they should find out and they should support this motion.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 7

Noes 6

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

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Environment—weed management

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (12.02): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT Government has made substantial cuts to weed management funding in the 2015-2016 Budget;
- (b) the Auditor-General's Report on *Restoration of the Lower Cotter Catchment* (Report No. 3/2015) highlights that priority needs to be given to important and ongoing work including controlling major weeds in the ACT;
- (c) during the 2014-2015 Estimates hearings, representatives of the Conservation Council ACT Region gave evidence and highlighted the importance of weed management and that their biggest concern is that the cuts to the weeds budget do not appear to have any scientific evidence;
- (d) in the Assembly on 11 August 2015 Mr Rattenbury highlighted the important role of weed management and how controlling weeds "will reduce soil disturbances and encourage natural regeneration, which serves as a very powerful driver of improved water quality";
- (e) the ACT Weeds Advisory Group, a technical reference group established to oversee implementation of the ACT Weeds Strategy, has not met recently; and
- (f) there is a growing prevalence of weeds in urban, suburban and rural areas of the ACT, including African lovegrass, serrated tussock and Madagascan fireweed; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) reinstate the weed management funding cut in the 2015-2016 Budget;
- (b) reinstate meetings of the ACT Weeds Advisory Group; and
- (c) report back to the Assembly in February 2016 on progress of its weed management program.

A number of constituents and other stakeholders have raised their concerns with me about the government's cuts to the weed management funding in the 2015-16 budget. This was discussed in some detail during the estimates hearings earlier this year. We need adequate funding to control weeds in the ACT. By this I mean not just the ongoing or base funding; we need special project-based funding for new instances of weeds which are incursions into the ACT.

In the estimates hearings earlier this year, a representative of the ACT Conservation Council expressed their concern that the government's decision to cut the weed budget was not based on any scientific evidence or on any other evidence that environmental weed infestations in the ACT are under control. The cuts to the weed budget are all the more concerning when you add in the Auditor-General's report on the restoration of the lower Cotter catchment. This report highlighted that priority needed to be given to important and ongoing work, including controlling major weeds in the ACT. In the lower Cotter catchment area this included pine wildlings.

In the Assembly on 11 August 2015, Mr Rattenbury highlighted the important role of weed management and how controlling weeds "will reduce soil disturbances and encourage natural regeneration, which serves as a very powerful driver of improved water quality". While base funding may have been increased it does not mean that the current funding for weed management is adequate. I have been told that the ACT Weeds Advisory Group, a technical reference group established to oversee implementation of the ACT weeds strategy, has not met for some time. We need the technical expertise of this group to develop and inform weed management policy for the ACT.

Weeds are arguably one of the greatest threats to biodiversity, agricultural and landscape values in the ACT and more widely. The summary statistics for the 2014-15 invasive weeds operations plan show that a number of weed species in the ACT have large control areas, including serrated tussock, African lovegrass and Chilean needle grass. Recently, just last weekend, I saw an abundance of what appeared to be African lovegrass growing around Lake Tuggeranong. It looked like kilometres and kilometres of it. What are the government doing to address this issue when they are cutting funding to the weed management budget?

There are many adverse impacts on the environment of inadequate weed management. For example, it is said that African lovegrass has the potential to reach 100 per cent density, displacing and excluding almost all other vegetation. That is what I think I have seen around Lake Tuggeranong, and I am waiting for official confirmation of whether what I saw at Lake Tuggeranong was in fact African lovegrass.

African lovegrass has been increasingly encroaching on farmland, bushland and roadsides throughout the ACT and southern New South Wales over the past three decades. South Australia and Victoria are also affected. There have been a number of studies and meetings to discuss the problem. In the ACT, African lovegrass is in the environmental weed control operations plan, but it continues to spread, particularly through the southern suburbs and, as I have already mentioned, around Lake Tuggeranong, I believe. From an environmental point of view, African lovegrass has the ability to quickly take over native grasslands, forming a dense monoculture.

It is thought to have come to Australia via sailing ships from Africa, and it has thrived in our dry climate. Weed guideline fact sheets describe it as:

... a densely tufted, perennial (long-lived) grass growing from 30 to 120cm high. The leaves are dark green to blue-green, narrow, and 25 to 35cm long. The

flowering stems rise above the tufted leaves and carry a loose fanlike grey-green flower head. Seeds germinate in spring and autumn. Growth slows or ceases in winter and plants re-sprout the following spring as temperatures rise. Flowering begins in early summer and ripe seeds are present from January to March.

African lovegrass can vary in form, height and colour, so it is not easy for novices to identify. But once you learn to spot it, you may be able to spot it a mile away, and then perhaps use the ACT's weed spotter website to register it. If I have my sighting of African lovegrass around Lake Tuggeranong confirmed, I will be sure to lodge that on the weed spotter website. In fact, I would be able to lodge it thousands of times, I am sure, because there are so many African lovegrass plants growing around there. The information I have just read out is taken from the ACT Landcare website.

It is also said that the full impacts of African lovegrass on grasslands and woodlands will be catastrophic over time. A primary means of spreading seeds is transportation by vehicles as well as by mowing. We have spoken in the past about the importance of cleaning the mowing equipment. Some questions have been raised as to whether that is actually taking place. Mowing does appear to be carrying this species right up to the boundaries of our reserve areas, which means our reserves will remain continually under threat from African lovegrass. That of course is not the only weed that we are talking about here; it is only one of many weeds.

I reiterate that there does not appear to have been a scientific basis for the cuts to the weed management budget. The future management and control of weeds in the ACT, in our urban, suburban and rural areas, will become more and more difficult as a result of inadequate funding. The stop-start management of weeds is simply not good enough. We need consistent weed management funding, together with a strategy to manage weeds. This should be developed with regular input from the ACT Weeds Advisory Group.

Things such as the weed spotter website and a smart phone app that Canberrans can use to identify where they have seen weeds while out and about should make weed management easier. This was said by the Minister for the Environment recently during the annual reports hearings. It is one thing to have a weed spotter website; it is another to have the resources available to then go and fight those weeds and control them. Without adequate weed management funding, how will the government eradicate those weeds located using those weed spotter tools?

The Canberra Liberals want to ensure the protection and enhancement of ecosystems in the ACT. Stop-start management of weeds is not a good way to do that. We call on the government, through this motion today, to reinstate the weed management funding cut in the 2015-16 budget, to reinstate meetings of the ACT Weeds Advisory Group, and to report back to the Assembly in February 2016 on progress of its weed management program. Surely this is not too much to ask. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (12.11): I welcome the opportunity to discuss this important issue today as an excellent chance to outline what is actually happening as opposed to perhaps what some people are concerned is happening.

The government is committed to ensuring it delivers an effective and targeted annual environmental weeds control program for the territory. Environmental weeds can spread aggressively and cause damage to the environment, the economy and animal health. Impacts include smothering and destruction of native vegetation and degradation of habitat; the reduction of farm income through competition with desirable species and crops; poisoning of grazing animals; and the degradation of recreational amenity.

Within the framework of the ACT weeds strategy and with technical input from the Weeds Advisory Group, Territory and Municipal Services, TAMS, prioritises annual control works to protect high conservation value sites from weeds posing the highest risk. There is a level of triaging that goes on here. Some weeds are at a point where their spread is such that spending money trying to manage them would not necessarily be a good use of resources; protecting things like our key river corridors from initial incursions of certain species of weeds is obviously a much higher priority. That prioritisation is taking place all of the time by our rangers and land managers, who understand the importance of keeping particular species out.

That goes to, for example, recent incursions of Madagascan fireweed, which arrived in the ACT via imported turf from the north coast of New South Wales. TAMS has worked incredibly hard to control that initial incursion, because it is not a species that is present here in the ACT. I could reel off a long list of activities that have been undertaken, including physical removal; engagement of turfing contractors; trips to the actual turf farm on the New South Wales north coast to try and address this issue; discussions with the New South Wales government; and now a program that will continue over an extended five, six or seven-year period because we know that that is the period in which, despite the fact that all current incursions of Madagascan fireweed have been controlled and the actual day-to-day plants are gone, the seeds can remain dormant. That is a great example of tackling a weed, committing the resources to it, and being very clear that this is the target. The objective that we have is to prevent, in particular, new weeds getting established in the ACT.

In 2015-16, TAMS will deliver \$1.526 million of environmental weed control work throughout the territory, focusing on priority species for control such as serrated tussock, St John's wort, blackberry, African lovegrass and Chilean needle grass. As I mentioned, the government is also focused on managing new incursion species, such as Madagascan fireweed.

I can report that \$1.211 million, or 79 per cent of the total budget of \$1.526 million available to TAMS, is made up of recurrent funding. This represents a 60 per cent increase of recurrent funding from the previous budget of \$759,000, and a 136 per cent increase from the 2013-14 recurrent budget of \$513,000.

Ms Lawder's remarks showed a certain inconsistency. Right at the start she said that we need special project-based funding for new incursions and we need to have these hits of money coming in, but she later said that stop-start funding is not good. I agree with her on that: stop-starting funding for weed control is not a good outcome. It is what we have seen over the years. If we look at the actual funding for weeds, we have

seen a series of projects come and go. I will talk a bit more about details, but the bottom line is that having recurrent funding is what is important. And I say this to the stakeholders who are interested in this issue: we have had a 136 per cent increase in recurrent funding since the 2013-14 budget. That means that funding is locked into the budget; every single year that funding will be developed. Our land managers are not reliant on scraping around for project funding each year; they are getting a steady, sustained level of resourcing to enable them to tackle weeds in a steady and sustained way. That is what land managers are supposed to do, and that is what good policy is when it comes to dealing with things like weeds.

We know that we need to apply a longer term strategic planning outlook to weed control in the knowledge that funding will flow over a number of years. And we know that, to be successful, weed control must be a long-term proposition that looks to regularly revisit treated sites to ensure infestations are kept under control. It is pointless to spend money one year and then not be able to come back to a site the next year; you may as well have thrown the money away that you spent in year one. That is why moving to such a sustained level of recurrent funding is a major policy success for TAMS and for this government.

In previous years, the annual weeds budget has been considerably augmented by discrete initiative funding which looked to target a particular weed infestation problem. In 2011-12, for example, \$1.5 million was identified to address the build-up of willows and other woody weeds along our waterways. This funding has transformed areas of the Molonglo River and its tributaries: where once dead and dying willows were choking the riversides, now planted native species are afforded the chance to take their place. In the context of Ms Lawder's walking into this place and saying that funding has been cut, well, there was a project: \$1.5 million dollars, a very substantial amount of money. The work has been done; that money does not need to be spent anymore. Let us just be honest about what some of these projects have been.

In the period 2012-13 to 2014-15, \$1.380 million was injected to rid the new Molonglo River park of woody weeds such as willows and blackberries. Again, this work has completely transformed the local river environment and greatly enhanced its habitat values. But again the money has been spent, and that it is why it is not in this year's budget and why some of that project funding has dropped away despite the very significant increase in recurrent funding. In 2015-16, the investment in this Molonglo River park area has been reduced to \$200,000 as we reap the benefits of previous years' investments and focus on ongoing follow-up control.

While it is true that 2015-16 will see a smaller total spend on the control of environmental weeds due to the lapsing of initiative funding, it is important to remember that these initiatives run their course and infestations are knocked down. Less is required in ensuing years to ensure effective follow-up of infestation.

Ms Lawder's motion makes mention of the Auditor-General's report into the restoration of the lower Cotter catchment and references to the need for effective and targeted weed control. The government is in agreement with the Auditor-General and announced \$2.678 million over four years in the 2015-16 budget to improve its land

management capability in the lower Cotter catchment. This funding has allowed for the engagement of two new rangers to focus on land management activities in the catchment. These staff will, amongst other things, oversee the delivery of \$150,000 of weed control works in 2015-16, targeting pine wildlings and blackberry, but also hawthorn and St John's wort.

The reason we have done that is that we know that the lower Cotter catchment is an important area for land management, for several key reasons. The first is that it is the water catchment for the expanded Cotter Dam, and so it is important that we have good environmental controls in that area, that we are not seeing levels of run-off and sedimentation flowing into our water supply. The other is that we know it is a vulnerable landscape; it is still showing some effects from the very significant bushfires of 2003 and we know that a lot of the land out there was destabilised as a result of the loss of vegetation from the 2003 bushfires. That is why TAMS has worked to prioritise that area and get additional funds in there to ensure that those two points that I have just touched on are adequately addressed, and we have resourced our parks service to be able to do that job to a good standard.

The fight against weeds is not the responsibility of just government. TAMS works closely with the territory's rural community to provide guidance and advice on weeds management; where possible, works are coordinated to maximise the effect of control activities. Also announced in this year's budget was funding to boost TAMS's capacity to support ParkCare, a community-based environmental movement that has, for 26 years now, contributed to the management of the territory's reserve system. The 46 groups that make up the ParkCare and Landcare network contributed approximately 18,000 hours of work in our local environment in 2014-15, and a good proportion of that time was dedicated to environmental weed control work. This volunteer base of weed control work complements the bulk of the control work which is delivered by TAMS, and serves to also spread the message of the need to be vigilant on the spread of weeds in order that we may preserve the extent and quality of the bush capital's natural assets.

I would like to underline the fact that we have brought in a second ParkCare coordinator. The reason we did that is that we had so much community energy. We had groups that wanted more time and more support from the rangers, and we had new groups that wanted to form. By being able to appoint that second ParkCare ranger, we have been able to fulfil those things and we have really amplified the money that the government has available. That money—\$100,000 or so for a second ParkCare ranger—I could have spent just on environmental weeds. We could easily have added it into that line item of the budget. This is a smart investment by government because it actually amplifies that money; it taps the energy that is there in the community. Before anybody stands up and says, "This is just making it somebody else's problem," let me say that we know that people in the community want to be involved; they are enthusiastic, they have expertise and they can make a very significant contribution. This is a smart investment by government to tap into that energy and that enthusiasm and amplify our efforts across this city in partnership with our rangers.

Let me turn finally to the issue of the Weeds Advisory Group, raised in Ms Lawder's motion. I can confirm that the Weeds Advisory Group, set up to assist TAMS and the

Environment and Planning Directorate in the strategic and operational management of weeds in the ACT, most recently met on 27 February this year and it remains an active advisory group for both TAMS and EPD.

The February meeting resolved to amend the terms of reference of the group to ensure it remained focused on providing strategic advice to government on all matters related to weeds and weed control. The group also agreed to meet twice yearly, with the timing of the second meeting for this year currently being finalised. I understand that the group also communicates regularly via email to provide ongoing advice and coordination.

In closing, let me emphasise that the government recognises that an effective weed control program is an important element of its land management effort. Together with stakeholders such as the ParkCare and Landcare community and the territory's rural lessees, this government will continue to strengthen the resilience of our natural environment by controlling environmental weeds.

I move the amendment circulated in my name:

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

"(1) notes that:

- (a) the Government is committed to delivering an effective and targeted annual environmental weeds control program for the ACT;
- (b) recurrent base funding for environmental weed management is important for long term strategic planning, and has increased to \$1.2 million per annum, up from \$759 000 in 2014-2015 and \$513 000 in 2013-2014;
- (c) 79% of the total annual weeds budget is now recurrent funding;
- (d) additional funding for weed management was provided in the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 Budgets as part of the Enhanced Biodiversity Stewardship initiative;
- (e) the Government has committed ongoing funding for a dedicated ParkCare Coordinator to support volunteers in the ParkCare community to undertake bush regeneration and weed management work;
- (f) the Auditor-General's Report on Restoration of the Lower Cotter Catchment (Report No. 3/2015) highlights that priority needs to be given to important and ongoing work including controlling major weeds in the ACT;
- (g) the 2015-2016 Budget has allocated ongoing recurrent funding management of the Lower Cotter Catchment, including \$150 000 per annum for weeds management;
- (h) the ACT Weeds Advisory Group meets twice a year; and

- (i) the Government's environmental weed program focuses on priority species such as African lovegrass, serrated tussock, St John's Wort, blackberry, Chilean needle grass and new incursions, such as Madagascan fireweed; and
- (2) calls on the Minister to report back on progress on the weed management program on the last day of sitting in February 2016."

In this amendment I have sought to retain elements of the original motion put forward by Ms Lawder, but I have made clear the points that I have just made in my speech, including that the underlying money for weed control, the recurrent funding, which is what allows for long-term sustained work, has increased substantially, to \$1.2 million per annum, more than double what it was just two years ago—more than double. That is a significant investment in weeds control. Seventy-nine per cent of the total annual weeds budget is now recurrent funding so, again, we are not seeing that stop-start work that, as Ms Lawder rightly pointed out, is highly problematic when it comes to weed control. We have sustained ongoing funding.

I have noted in here the funding for the lower Cotter catchment and also the increased effort for ParkCare coordinators. Finally, I have undertaken, as Ms Lawder requested, to report back by the last sitting day in February 2016 on progress on weed management here in the ACT. I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (12.24): I will speak to the amendment and close. You have got to love it when Mr Rattenbury says that he substantially agrees with the motion and then says "omit all text after (1)" That obviously substantially agrees with the thrust of the motion.

There was some discussion in Mr Rattenbury's remarks about recurrent funding and not a stop-start approach. In a way, I think we are talking about the same thing, despite Mr Rattenbury trying to categorise it as not being the case. What we need is a good, solid recurrent funding base so that we can have ongoing maintenance and keep weeds under control. But there will be times when new weeds come into the ACT, and that is when you need what I would call project-based funding. The recurrent base should stay there; there should be some immediate injection of funds to help to try to control that new weed, that new incursion into the ACT. Then, potentially, if necessary, the recurrent funding may also have to increase slightly on an ongoing basis. Despite Mr Rattenbury's attempts, I do not think we are talking about something different. When I said we do not want a stop-start approach, I was referring to the fact that the recurrent funding and what I would call project-based funding, when you combine them together, appear to represent a substantial decrease in funding.

Mr Rattenbury also referred to the fact that the Weeds Advisory Group meets twice a year. He said it met in February. It would have to meet pretty soon to meet that timing of twice a year; there is not a lot of time left in the year. It is important to ensure that that group meets, to provide us with the scientific input into the management of the weeds.

What we also talked about in Mr Rattenbury's comments was the use of volunteers. There are many fantastic Landcare groups, friends of parklands groups and friends of grasslands groups. They are doing fantastic work throughout our urban, suburban and rural environment. There are a number of those groups. But I think they are feeling a bit betrayed. Their goodwill is being used to undertake weed removal projects. It happens all the time. Every day it seems as though there are groups out there undertaking weeding activities. Jerrabomberra wetlands is an example where volunteers go out and remove weeds. From what I hear, they feel a bit let down by the government's response. The government is, if you like, putting more and more pressure on those volunteer groups to undertake weed removal.

It is interesting that the environment directorate gives out grants for weed removal to some of those volunteer groups. Obviously the department itself is not able to keep up with the demand for weed removal. Some of the funding given to groups this year includes money to undertake woody weed removal and landscape restoration or to restore threatened natural grasslands. It is a bit of money over here and a bit of money over there. Perhaps one directorate does not know what the other one is doing. That is why in the past the Canberra Liberals have called for an integrated single nature conservation agency. Volunteers are enthusiastic; they are involved. It is important that we recognise the fantastic work the volunteers do, but the government must also play their part.

I have talked already about Lake Tuggeranong and what I believe is African lovegrass down there. I know that when I drive around down Long Gully Road near the Mugga Lane tip at a certain time of year the hills are ablaze with colour from St John's wort. Obviously weeds are getting out of control in the ACT. We have an overall cut to the budget for weeds management, despite an increase to the recurrent funding, despite growing concerns about weeds such as Chilean fireweed, African lovegrass and St John's wort. Blackberry is another one that we see all over our town. We need to focus on controlling these major weeds in the ACT.

I have had a number of constituents contact me. They have contacted the department, either through fix my street or through other methods, about other weeds in the ACT and have been told by park rangers and other people that they do not have a budget to control those weeds and they will have to do it themselves. That is a real problem for us.

We feel that the original motion is quite straightforward. It is quite reasonable. It calls on the government to reinstate the weed management funding that was cut in the 2015-16 budget. Patently we are not doing enough to control weeds in the ACT. The motion calls on the government to reinstate meetings of the ACT Weeds Advisory Group: twice a year has not quite been met yet this year and appears to be a drop from previous years. And it calls on the government to report back to the Assembly in February 2016. I think the points made in the motion are quite reasonable, and they stand. For that reason, we will not be supporting Mr Rattenbury's amendment.

Visitors

MADAM SPEAKER: I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of students and teachers from the Melrose High School learning support unit. Welcome to your Assembly.

Environment—weed management

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 7

Mr Barr
Ms Berry
Dr Bourke
Ms Burch

Ms Fitzharris
Mr Gentleman
Ms Porter
Mr Rattenbury

Mr Doszpot
Mrs Dunne
Mr Hanson
Mrs Jones

Ms Lawder
Mr Smyth
Mr Wall

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 12.34 to 2.30 pm.

Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Urban Renewal and Minister for Tourism and Events): Minister Rattenbury will be absent from question time today. I will endeavour to assist members with questions in his portfolio areas.

Questions without notice

Canberra Hospital—culture review

MR HANSON: True to form, my question is to the Minister for Health. On 17 June, minister, you announced a clinical training culture review into unacceptable behaviour at the Canberra Hospital. Of the two sessions run for hospital management, 37 executives and directors attended. Of the 17 sessions run only for hospital doctors, no-one turned up for 11 of the sessions. Over 90 per cent of invited doctors did not attend any session. Minister, how will cultural issues at Canberra Hospital be resolved if doctors are not part of the conversation?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Hanson for his question. It is the case that doctors do need to be part of the conversation, and many doctors are. But the review process was a voluntary process that engaged doctors. It was up to doctors to choose to engage with that, and multiple opportunities were provided to them. The government cannot compel doctors to engage in this process. What we know is that many doctors who feel that they have been part of a culture that displays inappropriate behaviour are often reluctant to talk about it for fear of recrimination. So it is of little surprise that this is the difficult dynamic that we are seeking to deal with.

I have been very encouraged by the engagement of senior doctors at the hospital and very encouraged by the engagement of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, the ACT chapter, who have strongly supported the response that the government has set out to the review. We will be working with all of our medical staff, their representative bodies, their industrial bodies and their professional bodies to make sure that we have as broad ranging a discussion as possible and that we are able to start to tackle these very difficult issues. It is for that reason, of course, that I have established the clinical culture committee, which has representatives of senior doctors, representatives of junior doctors and representatives of the executive leadership of the hospital, coming together and taking responsibility for the implementation of all of the recommendations outlined in the KPMG report.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Minister, why was the review specifically targeted only at doctors?

MR CORBELL: The review is a direct response to the issues raised about training culture at the hospital, in particular the training culture between senior doctors and junior doctors. That is why the review is focused in that way. That is where the issues were particularly identified. They arose out of a broader national discussion about the fact that this culture exists nationally across training in hospitals. When it comes to our key training hospital, which is the Canberra Hospital, the central focus is the relationship between the senior doctors and the junior doctors they train.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, have you met regarding this matter since the beginning of the review with the AMA regarding the cultural issue? If so, when?

MR CORBELL: Yes I have; earlier this month.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, what is the time line for an improvement and what will be the method of measuring improvement at the Canberra Hospital with regard to this cultural issue between doctors?

MR CORBELL: Appropriate parameters for measuring improvement will be one of the issues that I will be seeking further advice from the clinical culture committee on,

given that they are the people at the front line. But what I have said very clearly already, and what I am happy to restate in this place, is that this is not going to be a quick fix. It is not going to be an easy fix. The reason for that is that it is a deeply ingrained culture that dates back many decades and it is not going to be fixed in six weeks or three months. It simply is not. There is going to be a need for an enduring, ongoing engagement and conversation about appropriate behaviours between senior doctors and the junior doctors they train. That is the focus of the clinical culture committee and its responsibilities and accountability to me.

Schools—autism

MR DOSZPOT: My question is to the Minister for Education and Training. Minister, in the Shaddock report released today it suggests that current guidelines do not help teachers recognise when self-directed calming spaces evolve over time to become an inappropriate form of seclusion. In light of that finding, do you believe that there should be a reconsideration of the treatment given to the principal at the centre of this issue earlier this year?

MS BURCH: My answer is no.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, do you believe the policy guidelines are adequate considering that Professor Shaddock does not?

MS BURCH: I thank Mr Doszpot for his question. I remind Mr Doszpot of the questions that he put to Professor Shaddock when he had the opportunity at a 45-minute briefing this morning and the general responses from Professor Shaddock. As he said this morning and in his report, ACT schools have good policies and procedures in place, but they are dense and they are sometimes inaccessible. If a teacher—and he said this today at a press conference—is in the moment and needing a very quick frame in which to work, it is sometimes a bit hard to go into a website and find a very dense, multi-page policy.

It is very clear that we need to pull that out and make it simpler; to make it easier for students and parents and teachers alike to have a very clear understanding about the expectations around responses to challenging behaviours and complex needs of our students across our schools.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, what directions have you given your directorate to commence the redrafting of current guidelines?

MS BURCH: Education and Training—again, this is in the government's response—will say that they are already acting on a number of the recommendations. A lot of this work was already in place. There is a cycle of ongoing review and reconsideration across ETD and its policies. We will now look to this expert panel report and focus our attention on where some enhancements and where some strengthening of our approach can be put in place.

What I think it is worth putting on record, as Professor Shaddock has said himself during today's discussions, is that we are the first jurisdiction to invite across all our school sectors experts to come in and to have a look particularly at complex and challenging behaviours, not just disability, not just autism, but complex and challenging behaviours.

You do not necessarily need to be a child with a disability to demonstrate challenging behaviours. What this report goes to in some length is that children from disadvantaged backgrounds—from families with drug and alcohol problems, mental health problems, children suffering trauma—will display complex and challenging behaviours in schools.

I am very proud that this jurisdiction, with the independent and Catholic schools alike, takes this as an opportunity to build on our strong foundations and make the systems across all our schools the best we can for our kids.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, when will the necessary changes to guidelines be completed, and when will these guidelines be operational?

MS BURCH: ETD is seeing it as a priority to make these changes and to have them available as quickly as possible. Also, as I have said today and as I said to you in the briefing this morning, ETD will take the lead and carriage where it can in policy development. I know there is also some commentary about infrastructure and the design of the built form; where we can, we will take the lead on that and we will willingly offer it, provide it, to the independents and Catholic schools.

I have also made an announcement today that there will be an independent oversight body that will meet every three months and report to me. That oversight body will be in place for 12 months and then we will consider what we do; do we need that oversight body after that? So, every three months, I will get an update about how the implementation plan that will sit under this report will be progressed and delivered.

Disability services—staffing

MR WALL: My question is to the Minister for Disability. Minister, in 2001 the board of inquiry into disability services found, among many other things, that there was an unacceptably high usage and turnover of casual staff and an inability to attract and retain appropriately qualified staff, particularly with regard to supported accommodation or group homes. Is there a problem currently with staff being underprepared for working in the remaining Disability ACT-run group homes?

MS BURCH: Disability ACT has put in place a program for induction and training across the disability support officers. A casual workforce has been and will continue to be, I think, part of the workforce response in government and non-government sectors, whatever level of service delivery there is. There will always need to be

confidence in the providers that we source those casual staff from. There will always need to be good systems in place so that when casual staff come on, we address that and put it in place. I believe Disability ACT has that.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, will you guarantee that there is an appropriate number of suitably trained, adequately prepared disability support workers currently in the employ of Disability ACT? Is there sufficient expertise within the sector as we progress the NDIS transition?

MS BURCH: I believe that we do have the skills and expertise within Disability ACT. Certainly, if there are areas needing capacity development, they will step up and do that. We have made a decision here to get out of live, direct disability service provision, and we will do that by June of next year. That is a very big change. In that regard, it is about preparing the community sector and making sure that their organisations and their workforce have those systems in place. That is why we have continued to work with the community sector, with significant funds provided by the commonwealth, to make sure that the sector is indeed prepared.

Just recently, a week or so ago, I launched two great projects. One was Opening Doors, with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community a particular target, to make sure that organisations that respond to their needs are culturally safe and competent in delivering that service. The other was Ready4. That will be a partnership between RSM Bird, ACTCOSS and our local national disability service group. That is about working one on one with organisations. Where there are like-minded organisations with a common goal, we will come together and make sure that they have the skills ready to respond to community need.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Minister, does the government have a retention strategy to retain an adequate number of suitably trained and prepared staff to work in ACT group homes until the full transition of these services to the NDIS in 2017? If so, will you table this strategy in the Assembly?

MS BURCH: I refer those opposite back to the annual reports briefing where the transition from disability support to the community sector was discussed and there was some commentary about how we are supporting our staff, training opportunities and the like; are we making sure that those staff who want to stay within the business of service delivery in disability when it moves from government to the community know that that is put in place.

We have had conversations with all our staff. They are planning their own future. Some will deploy across the ACT public sector. Others will move into the community sector. Some may just take the opportunity perhaps to retire, to seek another bit of business.

When we look to the workforce, though, I would like to share with those opposite my frustration on the workforce strategy that the commonwealth government had carriage to deliver. At the most recent disability ministers council meeting a paper was put forward by the commonwealth. It was withdrawn by the commonwealth, and it was withdrawn because it was not up to scratch. The commonwealth themselves have identified that as we move to the NDIS there is a need for a 70,000-disability workforce and they are yet to deliver a comprehensive strategy that goes to that workforce issue.

If those opposite have a level of anxiety in many ways, take that concern to your federal counterpart because I took that concern to him very clearly and very directly last week.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Minister, is Disability ACT desperate for staff, as reported in the *Canberra Times* today?

MS BURCH: It is certainly my understanding that they have an adequate workforce, and that would be a mix of permanent workers, as they currently are, and agency staff.

Health—cancer treatment

MS PORTER: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, can you please update the Assembly on access to cancer treatment services in the ACT, particularly in relation to breast cancer.

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms Porter for her question. Yes, I can update the Assembly on some of the latest statistics on access to cancer treatment, in particular access to radiotherapy services here in the ACT. The most recent statistics were published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in the last week, and the report card, I am pleased to say, is a positive one. The ACT treated the highest proportions of prostate and breast cancers nationally. This has been attributed to having a high detection rate. The ACT also achieved the highest proportion of patients treated within the emergency time frame of one day, according a result of 98.5 per cent. This is consistent with our strong performances in other areas in this most critical of emergency care areas, which is timely intervention to help address the spread of cancer.

The report also found that 90 per cent of all patients who received radiotherapy in the ACT commenced their treatment within 24 days, which is well ahead of the national average waiting time of 31 days.

I am pleased to say that the ACT also recorded the best waiting time result for commencing treatment of breast cancer and lung cancer of all jurisdictions. That was a very pleasing result as well.

In terms of breast cancer patients, what we are seeing is a very strong focus on the delivery of breast cancer care here in the ACT. Our breast cancer service has a multidisciplinary approach and is attended by a wide range of people both in the public health setting and through private health providers. We have an excellent breast care nurse framework operating out of the Calvary Hospital. They are providing services for public patients across the ACT. ACT Health, together with the McGrath Foundation, are providing an advanced breast care nurse as well, this nurse providing a specialised service and ongoing relationship support to the patient, focusing on their needs and the needs of their families in responding to a diagnosis of breast cancer.

The good news for breast cancer patients is that the survival rates continue to improve in Australia, with 89 out of every 100 women diagnosed with invasive breast cancer now surviving five years or more beyond diagnosis. Here in the ACT we can attribute this to improved access to services that are staffed by first-rate clinicians and excellent performance against the targets nationally as outlined in the most recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the important work undertaken by BreastScreen ACT?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms Porter for her supplementary. Yes, having regular mammograms is perhaps the most important thing that a woman can do to detect breast cancer early and improve her chances of survival. We have free breast screening services available at a number of our community health clinics, and we participate in the national breast screening program, which actively encourages women between the ages of 50 and 74 to have a free mammogram every two years.

Sadly, 82 women from the over 15,000 screened by BreastScreen ACT were diagnosed with invasive breast cancer last calendar year. But we are putting in place some significant technological improvement in our screening devices, using higher quality digital screening that has the lowest micro dose of radiation available in Australia to make sure we get a good level of accuracy when it comes to breast screens. Of course, our breast screening is conducted by a team of highly trained specialist clinicians in radiology, surgery, radiography, nurse counselling and pathology.

In 2015 the BreastScreen ACT target was to screen 15,500 ACT-resident women, and that target was met. Indeed, it was exceeded with a figure of 15,649. We run an active promotions program reminding women of the importance of having a screen, and we use access to the electoral roll to send reminder letters to women in the target age group. In the most recent calendar year over 13,800 reminder letters were sent. Nationally the incidence of breast cancer in Indigenous communities is higher; however their mortality rate is lower. (*Time expired.*)

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Fitzharris.

MS FITZHARRIS: Minister, how are patients diagnosed with breast cancer supported by ACT Health and other organisations?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms Fitzharris for the supplementary. We provide support in two ways—first of all, an in-house support capability through the ACT-based cancer counselling services available to anyone diagnosed with breast cancer, as well as their families. This includes access to social workers, psychologists and a psychiatrist. But we also have strong connections with the broader community sector.

We have strong connections and funding arrangements with organisations like Bosom Buddies ACT who, this year, are celebrating 20 years of service to the ACT community. Over the past 20 years Bosom Buddies volunteers have supported women undergoing treatment for breast cancer and have actively promoted the importance of the early detection of breast cancer through their community awareness program.

The types of programs Bosom Buddies have delivered for people with breast cancer include personalised support via phone, in hospital, and visits. There is the blue buddy gift bag program that they provide, which has handmade drainage bags and underarm cushions made by women across the region, literature from all the other support groups and medical information from breast care nurses. Over 400 of these bags were provided to the hospital last year and that is a regular volume that we see most years. Then there are the breast awareness presentations to organisations large and small and their engagement with BreastScreen ACT to develop literature, show bags and other information for people undertaking the screening program.

For the past 20 years Bosom Buddies have provided thousands of local Canberra women with important support at what is a very difficult time. I would like to congratulate them in particular on their 20th anniversary.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the Australian Capital Territory and South East New South Wales Region Breast Cancer Treatment Group quality assurance program?

MR CORBELL: I thank Dr Bourke for the supplementary. Yes, the Australian Capital Territory and South East New South Wales Breast Cancer Treatment Group was formed in 1995. The breast cancer treatment quality assurance project was established in that year. It has been running ever since. It gives us evidence as to the effectiveness and efficacy of our breast cancer treatment program.

The project provides clinicians and the community with up-to-date information about breast cancer treatment options both in our city and in the surrounding region. Because it has done so now over the past 15 years, we have very strong trend information and data that can be drawn upon.

Participating clinicians receive annual individual reports on compliance with clinical practice guidelines and outcomes. This helps contribute towards the quality of care that they are able to deliver. The most recent 15-year report shows that compliance according to five quality indicators that cover a range of treatments for breast cancer has improved over the past 15 years. That is a result of the very strong framework we have in place as a result of this group's excellent work.

Gaming—casino

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, to what extent is your determination to expand the casino driving your government's policy for the clubs and gaming sector?

MR BARR: I am not sure that I have any determination to expand the casino.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Chief Minister, has your directorate been involved in the possible transfer of gaming machines from the Tradies and/or the Labor Club to the casino?

MR BARR: Not that I am aware of, no.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Chief Minister, are you aware of any plans for the Labor Club and/or the Tradies to move away from poker machines and for those machines to be allocated directly or indirectly to the casino?

MR BARR: I have no responsibility in relation to the Labor Club or the Tradies club, but I am not aware of anything in that regard, no.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Chief Minister, has your directorate been involved with negotiating with the Casino about the acquisition of gaming machines from a licensed club?

MR BARR: About the—

MR COE: Has your directorate been involved with the Casino about the acquisition of gaming machines from either the Labor Club or the Tradies?

MR BARR: Not that I am aware of. I am aware of public comments by the Casino that, were they to acquire poker machines, they would seek to do so via the trading scheme that is available. But it would, of course, require changes to the legislative framework for that to occur. So no, I am not aware of any discussions. And that would be ultimately a matter for those clubs, for which I have no responsibility at all.

Diversity ACT—funding

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Community Services. Diversity ACT is a community-based, not-for-profit organisation that supports gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex members of the Canberra community. Funding for DACT was announced in 2012, and later they were promised a demountable building. The government has cancelled their funding. I made a FOI request for documents relating to the funding and defunding of Diversity ACT and the charge for that FOI request was quoted as over \$10,000. Minister, why did the ACT government cancel funding for Diversity ACT and who made that decision?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Lawder for the question. The ACT government has been working with Diversity ACT to ensure that it is able to provide support services for LGBTIQ members in the ACT community. One way that the ACT government has responded to providing support is by establishing the ACT LGBTIQ Ministerial Advisory Council.

On the question of funding of Diversity ACT, when this question was under consideration the government took the decision to stay the provision of funding for Diversity ACT based on advice from the LGBTIQ Ministerial Advisory Council around broader issues of funding for this sector.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Minister, what happened to the demountable building that was promised by the government to Diversity ACT, and when will it be delivered?

MS BERRY: I will have to come back to the Assembly about what has happened to the demountable. The decision was made that Diversity ACT was not going to be provided with the demountable. But I will find out where—

Mr Coe: Or a container.

MS BERRY: the container and the demountable actually are.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, did you or a member of your staff or directorate telephone a member of the DACT board in relation to Ms Lawder's FOI request, and, if so, what was the purpose of that call?

MS BERRY: Sorry, Madam Speaker, I might have to get Mr Smyth to start the question again; I did not quite catch it.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, did you or a member of your staff or your directorate telephone a member of the DAT board in relation to Ms Lawder's FOI request and, if so, what was the purpose of that call?

MS BERRY: Certainly neither I nor my staff did. I would have to check on the directorate, but certainly not I or my staff, no.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, why was Ms Lawder's application for a remission of charges for this FOI request refused?

MS BERRY: I understand that the process for FOIs includes the directorate making an assessment on a cost that might be involved. If the cost is over and above what is deemed reasonable then the department would get back to the member who has made that FOI request and explain that to the member. I understand that that is the case. It was not a decision for me to make. That was a decision for the directorate to make. I can bring some more information on that back to the Assembly. The advice I have is that information has been provided back to the office of Ms Lawder as to the reasons why, or as to the cost of the FOI request, because of the broad scope of the request. I will get some more detail on that. I can probably provide some more detail to the Assembly.

Housing—investment

DR BOURKE: My question is to the Minister for Housing. Minister, how are the government's investments in housing and homelessness services supporting a fair and inclusive community?

MS BERRY: I thank Dr Bourke for his question. This question points to the fact that our commitment to inclusion and equality flows through in investments right across the government. Housing is one of the central foundations, particularly given how important a safe and stable home is for many other parts of life. This government's unprecedented public housing renewal program, our ongoing investment in our public housing stock and tenant support, and services for those experiencing homelessness show a clear response to this fact.

The figures from across the portfolio in 2015 include 22,096 people who were provided with safe, secure and affordable housing; 1,126 people who were housed in new tenancies, 97 per cent of whom were in priority or high need allocations; 132 new public housing dwellings delivered, 100 of which were newly built; \$11.1 million spent on refurbishing and upgrading properties, including improving the energy efficiency of homes and security for older tenants; almost \$3.5 million provided to Karinya House to offer supported accommodation to pregnant and postnatal women and their babies in support of the step up for our kids strategy; and Common Ground Canberra, which was opened in July, with 40 public spaces and affordable housing units with collocated support services, a building and community that was very warmly welcomed by Gungahlin.

An independent evaluation of the homelessness services sector was completed in 2014 and also found that more support in the form of early intervention, prevention and outreach services was resulting in better employment and education outcomes. It

showed that repeat homelessness was declining and the homelessness services sector was becoming increasingly integrated and better targeted—this despite the pressures that have been created by persistent demand. The development of new, modern, energy efficient, sustainable and adaptable dwellings under the public housing renewal program is also being progressed.

I have been strongly focused this year on managing the transition for our tenants and the different people involved in the LINCT group and joint champions groups. They are doing a great job. Let us also remember the enormous benefit of this program for our local economy. This program will support construction right across the territory, and we know that each of these directly supported jobs is in turn supporting other local jobs. At numerous levels our government's housing strategy delivers on our commitment to a fair and inclusive community and to Canberrans having jobs.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, how does the government's work in this area compare to other jurisdictions?

MS BERRY: The government's investment in housing and homelessness services is highly targeted. On a per capita basis, we typically invest more than other jurisdictions. The ACT provides 30 social housing dwellings for every 1,000 people in the territory, which is nearly double the national average. We spend an average of \$58 per capita on homelessness services, the highest amongst Australian jurisdictions, and nearly three times the \$19 spent in New South Wales.

In 2014-15 the total spent on specialist homelessness services was \$19.6 million. As I often explain to the Assembly, this means people experiencing or at risk of homelessness have access to quality support services: services which work with them to resolve the issues causing homelessness and assist in establishing secure accommodation.

The recent evaluation of reforms to the ACT specialist homelessness service system noted that between 20 and 30 per cent of clients in ACT-supported and short-term accommodation services had recently arrived in the ACT from interstate. Sadly, a significant number of those people have had to flee abusive homes elsewhere. The ACT also has the highest rates of short-term supported accommodation for those in crisis, such as women, children and those fleeing domestic and family violence. In 2014-15 the central intake service provided support to 1,643 individuals or family groups.

These various factors create pressure for our services but, together with the government, these support services respond to the needs of our community. And we do so more than anywhere else in Australia.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, what are some of the factors creating demand for public and community housing?

MS BERRY: Housing affordability is a national challenge, and I know from the discussions with state and territory colleagues that I have had that every jurisdiction is grappling with housing affordability in one way or another. The high costs of housing are creating the demand for public and community housing. Some Canberrans feel this pressure greatly. For example, in the ACT we know more than 52 per cent of households in receipt of commonwealth rent assistance pay more than 30 per cent of their total household income in rent. This compares to a rate of 40.3 per cent nationally.

The need for action in this area is clear, and the ACT government has worked hard to improve housing affordability through a range of measures designed to better manage housing demand and improve housing supply, such as improving the efficiency of land supply, targeting aged and homelessness services, increasing the supply of rental accommodation and committing to 20 per cent affordable dwellings across all new developments.

The government has worked closely with developers and builders in implementing this requirement to ensure that it contributes effectively to building a fair and inclusive community. We also need the commonwealth to be engaged on housing affordability, as the powerful economic levers they hold have a strong influence in cities like ours.

First ministers have discussed reform at recent meetings, and the ACT is certainly willing to play a lead role in reforms which target affordability and reduce homelessness.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Fitzharris.

MS FITZHARRIS: Minister, what benefits will flow to tenants and housing services as 1,288 housing dwellings are replaced with more modern, efficient, fit-for-purpose homes?

MS BERRY: The 1,288 homes that we are replacing as part of the public housing renewal program will bring great benefits to tenants and housing services in the ACT. These homes will provide modern accommodation that will help us better align our public housing with the needs of tenants now and into the future.

We are spreading the replacement public housing across Canberra with a mix of different types of homes, taking in detached houses, compact homes, townhouses and apartments with some in small groups of up to 30 units. In line with the salt and pepper policy, which has always served Canberra well, we are breaking down concentrations of disadvantage and working to foster communities in which public housing is just like private housing and tenants are equals.

The homes that are being built through this program are being designed for the long term. Six-star energy ratings offer greater comfort and lower utility bills than the outdated buildings that are being replaced. The maintenance liability for the government will also improve over time. The small groups of public housing being delivered through the renewal program will cost much less to run and maintain than the large complexes that were built over 50 years ago.

The new housing will also allow us to better meet the diverse needs of our housing tenants and allow more people to age in familiar homes and communities. The majority of the homes are adaptable and are easily adjusted to support tenants living with a disability. This makes a huge difference to the quality of life of our tenants. It helps with some of the daily challenges that face tenants living in our older and larger complexes.

I am pleased to say that some of our tenants are already telling us that they are very happy having moved into their new homes.

Planning—variation 351

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for Planning and refers to his decision of 23 October to finalise variation to the territory plan No 351 without referring it to the relevant committee of the Legislative Assembly. Minister, why did you forgo an inquiry into the variation to territory plan 351 by the Standing Committee on Planning, Environment and Municipal Services before you finalised the plan?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mrs Jones for her question. The reason for not referring it to the committee was explained at the time I tabled the variation and put it out and that was that there were very few submissions and I felt the issues raised in those submissions had been addressed.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, who did you consult about and what did you consider in your decision to finalise variation 351 without an inquiry by the Standing Committee on Planning, Environment and Territory and Municipal Services?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mrs Jones for her supplementary question. There were a number of items and issues raised during the consultation period for 351. As I said, I felt that those issues had been well addressed, so it was appropriate to provide approval for the variation. This is a process that is used frequently when there are only a few submissions.

Mrs Jones: On a point of order, the question was about who was consulted and what was considered: not the process but who, and what issues.

MADAM SPEAKER: I uphold the point of order. I refer the minister to standing order 118(a) and ask him to directly answer the question.

MR GENTLEMAN: There were a number of community members consulted during that period. I do not have the full list in front of me, but I am certainly happy to come back with that list.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, was it always your intention not to send 351 to the planning committee although originally had you indicated to people that you were going to send it to the planning committee?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Coe for his question. The decision on whether it goes to the planning committee is usually made at the end of the consultative process and when the directorate has done all of the work that is appropriate for that variation. There are recommendations to me along that process as well. In that case, as I said, I did not send it to the committee.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, what feedback have you received since your decision to bypass the Standing Committee on Planning, Environment and Territory and Municipal Services?

MR GENTLEMAN: We have received quite a bit of correspondence in response to that, mainly supportive of the proposal for the variation to proceed. It is of course a very good outcome for west Belconnen. The proponent has gone through quite a large sum of consultation over the period. We have even had correspondence from the Conservation Council in the ACT, advising that they thought it would be appropriate that the variation proceed without going to committee as well.

Transport—light rail

MR COE: My question is to the Minister for Capital Metro. Minister, were any non-conforming bids submitted by consortia or members of a consortium in response to the requests for proposals put out by capital metro?

MR CORBELL: I would have to check the record and seek some advice from capital metro in relation to that matter.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, has a proposal, whether solicited or unsolicited—or requested or unrequested—been put to the government this year for a bus rapid transit system on Northbourne Avenue and/or elsewhere in Canberra?

MR CORBELL: Not to my knowledge.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, is the government actively considering the construction of bus rapid transit from Gungahlin to the city?

MR CORBELL: No.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, when will the successful consortium be announced?

MR CORBELL: When I told you yesterday, Mr Wall, that it would be announced.

Education—vocational

MS FITZHARRIS: My question is to the Minister for Education and Training. Minister, it has been 12 months since you announced the new skilled capital program. Can you please provide the Assembly with an update on how this program is helping students and training providers and driving a new vocational education and training system in the ACT?

MS BURCH: I thank Ms Fitzharris for her question. I am delighted to provide an update on our skilled capital program, which has been a very great success.

Skilled capital is the ACT's signature entitlement program. It complements the training provided at CIT and through the Australian apprenticeships user choice program, and provides the third main pathway to access government subsidised training here in the ACT.

The introduction of skilled capital is also consistent with our commitment to explore the benefits of contestability in VET under the national partnership agreement on skills reform. Most importantly, it is designed to respond to the ACT's economic needs on a continuous basis.

As I announced when I launched the program back in December last year, skilled capital will provide \$21 million over three years to skill Canberrans in the sectors that are the key drivers of our economy. Skilled capital is underpinned by a comprehensive evidence base to ensure the initiative is appropriately targeted to support high quality training in those areas of highest skills need. It is informed by extensive research that studied the experiences of other jurisdictions, as well as the extensive range of literature that supports best practice principles within the training sector.

This approach has ensured that the skilled capital initiative will increase access to training in the ACT in areas of skills need, provide students with the support they need to successfully complete their qualification, and reduce red tape for training providers.

Identifying skills needs is not something that is done once and then forgotten about. Rather, it is indeed a continuous process, which must adapt to changing economic conditions. As a result, the Education and Training Directorate is continuously reassessing the skills needs of the ACT, and targeting funding to qualifications that will ensure those needs are met.

Enrolments in skilled capital opened in February this year, with over 2,000 places available. In September this year 750 new places across 14 qualifications opened and between 50 and 90 places opened in each of the qualifications. This followed an

update of the skills needs list. To date, more than 2,000 additional new places will be released early in 2016 for the next major release. Since its launch in February, we have had over 1,900 skilled capital enrolments, with over 300 people already completing their qualifications.

Skilled capital has played an important role in engaging students from marginalised groups as well, which is underlined by the fact that 26 per cent of all skilled capital students have had fee concessions applied. Of all the students enrolled, over five per cent have been persons facing long-term unemployment, and about 3½ per cent were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

MADAM SPEAKER: Before I call Ms Fitzharris for the supplementary can I ask members to make sure that their devices are on silent. We all make this mistake from time to time, but it is a timely reminder. Ms Fitzharris on a supplementary question.

MS FITZHARRIS: Minister, how does yesterday's ministerial statement on Australian apprenticeships link with the skilled capital reform to enhance vocational education and training in the ACT?

MS BURCH: As I said yesterday, the Australian apprenticeships model in the ACT has remained largely unchanged for the past eight years. The changes we have made will bring it more into line with skilled capital and reflect our commitment to an evidence-informed approach to funded training. The revised approach ensures registered training organisations are paid fairly, students are encouraged not just to enrol but to complete their qualifications, and that the employment needs of our businesses as well as the economic needs of the ACT are being met effectively.

As with skilled capital, the new qualification prices under Australian apprenticeships are informed by a detailed understanding of the actual cost incurred by RTOs to deliver the qualification, as well as the degree to which the skills are needed here in the ACT. Higher priority qualifications are then funded at a higher proportion of the cost of training.

The new payment model ensures loadings are paid effectively to ensure target groups are incentivised appropriately. To complement this change, tuition fees are partially deregulated. As with skilled capital, this enables RTOs to charge different amounts for different qualifications and delivery modes.

Upon completing a qualification, skilled capital pays students a completion bonus. In surveys of skilled capital graduates, a majority have indicated that this bonus was a helpful incentive to completing their qualification. This approach has also been integrated into Australian apprenticeships. We look forward to assessing the impact of these changes on the delivery of Australian apprenticeships and anticipate very positive impacts on measures such as completion rates.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, how will the loadings in the new user choice funding enhance participation in VET in the ACT?

MS BURCH: I thank Dr Bourke for his interest in VET. The purpose of the loadings in the Australian apprenticeship model is to ensure that persons from marginalised groups are able to participate in training and successfully complete their qualifications. The loadings that were paid in the user choice program were set many years ago. The recent research found that three loadings—the small business loading, the mature age loading and the first qualification loading—were either not effective in targeting the government’s priorities or were not effectively incentivising target groups into training.

During the extensive consultation undertaken, RTOs indicated that there was no impact on training costs for these different students and that the loadings were not incentivising them to target those student cohorts. Subsequently, we have removed those loadings from the Australian apprenticeship model. Significantly, we have maintained the loadings that are paid to support some specific student groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students with a disability.

We have also introduced two new loadings. The first of these is the thin market loading, which ensures that RTOs are supported to deliver qualifications in areas of high skills need when there are few providers delivering training in those qualifications.

The second loading is aimed at the public provider. It acknowledges how important CIT is to the provision of Australian apprenticeships in the ACT and recognises the additional costs it incurs as the public provider of VET in the ACT. CIT has a broader social mandate than private RTOs and maintains substantial capital infrastructure to support a comprehensive delivery of training services to the ACT community. It is important that these additional costs are acknowledged in the funding they receive.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, how do these reforms position us nationally, and what matters will you be taking to this week’s COAG Industry Skills Council as a result?

MS BURCH: Thank you, Ms Porter, for your question. I am, indeed, very proud of the fact that the ACT has either met or exceeded all of the targets under the national partnership agreement on skills reform. While the national partnership continues through to 2017, as agreed between the commonwealth and state and territory governments, a review of the progress of the NP has been undertaken this year. The report is yet to be finalised, but a draft of the report will be subject to discussion at the COAG Industry Skills Council this Friday.

Importantly, the report acknowledges that jurisdictions had flexibility in implementing the objectives of skills reform and could set state and territory appropriate targets. The report demonstrates the success of the ACT in achieving its training objectives and agreed structural change milestones.

There are a number of additional reform initiatives on the agenda for the meeting this Friday. I will continue to underline how important it is for each state and territory to

retain flexibility in setting their training priorities in recognition of the vast differences between our labour markets and economies. In other words, I will work to ensure that everything we do takes into account the best interests of the ACT.

I will also work with my colleagues to ensure that all future reforms are done in accordance with a strong evidence base. We here in Australia are very fortunate to have both qualitative and quantitative data on our VET. The recent release of the new total VET activity dataset and the introduction of the unique student identifier are great examples of those reforms.

In closing, can I say that our SES volunteers and trained staff also take advantage of skills training and remind people in the Assembly that this week is ACTSES Week and today was WOW Day—wear orange Wednesday. I had the great pleasure of being at the SES awards last night and I take the opportunity to thank each and every one of those members of the SES for the fabulous work they do.

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

Education—vocational education and training

MS FITZHARRIS (Molonglo) (3.27): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the Australian Training Awards will take place on Thursday, 19 November in Hobart;
- (b) the ACT will be represented by a number of ACT trainees, apprentices and RTOs at the Australian Training Awards;
- (c) the ACT is well served by a high quality vocational education and training system;
- (d) access to high quality skills education is necessary to the ongoing economic and social prosperity of the community; and
- (e) the reform work the ACT Government has undertaken in the last 12 months in VET, namely:
 - (i) the introduction of the Skilled Capital initiative;
 - (ii) the *Review of Vocational Education and Training in ACT Public Schools: Future Directions*;
 - (iii) the ACT Australian Apprenticeships (User Choice) Program Final Report and the proposed Qualification Subsidy Amounts; and
 - (iv) the governance reforms to the Canberra Institute of Technology and the appointment of a CIT Board;

- (2) congratulates all ACT nominees at the Australian Training Awards; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to continue to:
 - (a) enhance the VET sector through reform and collaboration; and
 - (b) keep the Assembly informed of progress across the VET sector.

I am very pleased to be able to move this motion today on vocational education and training in the ACT. As we recently heard from the minister, many advances have been made in this sector. As some of you may know, tomorrow night the national training awards will be held in Hobart to recognise excellence in Australian apprenticeships and traineeships. These awards recognise not only learners but also the employers and trainers who give them the tools to excel. The training awards provide an opportunity to showcase the strengths of vocational education in Australia and to promote apprenticeships and traineeships as viable pathways for all students.

Last year the ACT punched well above its weight at the national training awards: Sally Moylan won the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student of the year award; Eylish Perry won the Australian school-based apprentice of the year award; Just Better Care Canberra won the Australian apprenticeships employer award; and Berwyn Clayton, a pioneer in research in the VET sector who started her career with 24 years of service at the Canberra Institute of Technology, won the lifetime achievement award. I wish the current ACT finalists the best of luck tomorrow.

The ACT is served by a high quality vocational and education training system. The performance of the ACT at last year's national awards should indicate to us all how strong our VET sector here is in the ACT. We all know about the fantastic work being done by more than 100 VET providers eligible to deliver government funded training in the ACT. This includes private providers, schools delivering VET, and CIT, our public and largest training provider.

The ACT's small size gives us considerable advantages; we are able to engage employers and other stakeholders quickly and effectively and are able to deliver the training needs our local employers will need into the future. Our close links with employers are vital to ensuring our VET sector is able to provide the training necessary to grow our economy and create the jobs of the future.

Indeed, earlier this year it was announced that CIT will soon provide brand new qualifications at bespoke training facilities in renewable wind technology. This will help establish the ACT as the premier knowledge and education hub of this emerging field in Australia, and it will fill a market gap when it comes to maintaining and operating renewable wind technologies. Wind energy will play a key role in the ACT's meeting its target of sourcing 90 per cent of Canberra's electricity from renewable sources by 2020, and this new CIT training qualification means Canberra can be at the forefront of the renewable energy sector, leading on policy and leading when it comes to equipping our young people with the skills needed for our future workforce.

So while the Joe Hockeys of this world lament the ugliness of wind turbines, here in the ACT we are reaping the rewards not only of clean wind energy but by equipping the next generation of workers with practical skills that ensure they are at the forefront of a rapidly growing global industry. For people with these qualifications and skills, the sky will be the limit in career opportunities.

Neoen, which operates the Hornsdale Windfarm, is funding 30 scholarships of \$5,000 each, showing just how valuable these skills will be to our local industry. Hornsdale is the biggest wind farm that will supply a third of Canberra's electricity needs within two years under a 20-year deal with the ACT government. They will also base their Asia Pacific business headquarters in Canberra as part of the deal. Last month Minister Simon Corbell opened the renewable energy skills centre of excellence at CIT Bruce, which will help students gain the technical skills necessary for a rewarding career in the growing renewable energy industry.

I understand these skills are in such short supply in Australia that there may be times when technicians have to be brought in from overseas to help maintain this technology. This qualification will be particularly valuable as we grow our renewable energy industry. This is just one example of the Labor government enhancing our VET sector through reform and collaboration.

In the ACT we are fortunate to have a government that recognises the importance of a strong, public VET provider. As a result, we are able to rely on CIT to deliver high quality VET programs across a range of industry areas. In particular, we can rely on CIT to deliver training in areas that the economy needs that might not be appealing to private providers due to higher overheads. This includes qualifications in the traditional trades with high delivery costs, as well as qualifications in areas such as automotive, landscaping and IT where delivery costs can be high and enrolment numbers relatively low.

In addition, the ACT government has been exploring the benefits of contestability and increased consumer choice in the VET market. The introduction of skilled capital has increased the amount of contestable VET funding available and supports a vibrant, private training market in the ACT, as the minister just outlined. It helps links businesses and organisations with skilled workers.

We must remember that VET, unlike higher education, is open to everyone. We need to find ways of focusing on each individual student, building on their individual strengths and catering to their individual learning styles. This can pose special challenges because training must ensure that students from vastly different backgrounds and with a range of abilities are able to meet the same training outcomes. As the only public provider of VET in the ACT, CIT in particular plays a vital role in community development by providing pathways and access into education for members of the community as well as providing a wide range of support services for students.

CIT has contributed to the social capital of the ACT in a range of ways including: general education, including second chance year 12 programs, English language

programs, and access 10, an alternative year 10 program to traditional schooling; the CIT Yurauna Centre, which provides dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching and support, enhancing employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and providing access and opportunity for disadvantaged members of the community, including provision of training of young parents through a partnership with ETD and the Canberra College Cares initiatives, as well as the street shops program partnership with the Canberra Ted Noffs Foundation aimed at engaging youth at risk; and then there is the return to work for women program.

Skilled capital improves access and support for those experiencing disadvantage and maximising success for students by better aligning funding for training to areas of skill need. The success of our VET system compared to our peers across the country is a testament to its quality. As I previously mentioned, CIT students win awards year after year, both locally and nationally. Just a few months ago Minister Burch travelled to India to promote the ACT's capability in VET to enhance collaborative education arrangements. This resulted in the signing of two memoranda of understanding between CIT and educational institutions and other commitments to work collaboratively to develop skills across several key areas in India.

This government remains committed to ensuring the ACT has a high quality VET system that delivers the best possible outcomes and is able to apply learning from other jurisdictions, both in Australia and abroad, to its continuous improvement. I congratulate Minister Burch on the recent reform work that has been done to ensure we have a strong VET sector, including the *Review of vocational education and training in ACT public schools: future directions* final report and response.

This was an opportunity to take a closer look at the intersection of our secondary schooling and training systems, that is, where vocational education and training is offered to students in ACT secondary schools. Young people have an entitlement to high quality education and training, and I look forward to the reforms outlined in this review being implemented to improve outcomes for our secondary students.

The Australian apprenticeships user choice review will also help improve outcomes for apprentices and trainees in the ACT. The ACT allocates approximately \$13 million annually in Australian apprenticeship or user choice funds and currently funds 5,229 apprentices and trainees. Because of the scope of this program, it is imperative that these funds be managed effectively and responsibly. It is also important that the user choice program continues to be flexible and responsive to the needs of employers and the ACT economy, and that it reflects our training needs and priorities.

Minister Burch has already spoken in this place extensively about this review and how it will encourage increased enrolments and completion of qualifications. It will play a key role in supporting a vibrant VET sector in the ACT and will ensure that the training needs of students and local businesses are met.

Minister Burch has also worked hard to improve CIT governance with the CIT act amended in 2014 to replace the CIT advisory council with the governing board to better enable CIT to meet the twin objectives of operating as a public provider of

vocational education and training and operating with greater commercial and entrepreneurial focus in an increasingly contestable training marketplace. The CIT board commenced operation on 1 July 2015 and is vital to positioning CIT for success in increasingly competitive training and higher education markets.

We tend to associate growth and innovation with a strong higher education sector and, as a result, can sometimes overlook the contribution made by VET. The benefits of VET are clear when we look at economies that both are highly innovative and boast low levels of income inequality. VET in general and apprenticeships and traineeships in particular must be seen as viable career pathways for all students. It is the countries in northern Europe, such as Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany and Austria that have best weathered the economic crisis that battered European shores. All have dynamic and well-funded VET sectors. They also boast the lowest levels of youth unemployment, according to the OECD, and better youth engagement.

The benefits to society at large are clear: citizens who are engaged and gainfully employed are empowered to be stronger contributors to society and to support safer communities. They also have better health outcomes, which is especially important for our public healthcare system. Finally, they contribute to the economy steadily throughout their careers both as taxpayers and as consumers.

Reform and collaboration are vital to the future of our VET system as well, and as the needs of industry change, so should the focus of the training sector to ensure those needs are met. Flexibility of training provision and informed choice for industry and students is vital to maximise training outcomes and to maximise the productivity of the ACT workforce.

The reforms the ACT government has initiated are vital to ensure the ACT training sector provides quality opportunities for people, access to flexible training to enhance their career prospects and training in areas of highest needs to best provide the skills needed by industry, students and the ACT economy now and into the future.

Engagement with key stakeholders enables government and training providers to ensure subsidised training is delivered in areas of skills need, maximising the return on government investment and training. The training needs of industry and business are evolving. How we respond will require increased sophistication and flexibility. This really highlights that VET students—including apprentices and trainees—are the future of our industries and services.

Expenditure on VET is an investment in our future quality of life and allows us to see the interconnections between education, skills, jobs, community safety, health outcomes and productivity. Access to high quality skills education is undoubtedly necessary to the ongoing economic and social prosperity of our community.

Once again I congratulate our ACT nominees and wish them all the best of luck at the Australian training awards tomorrow. I look forward to Minister Burch continuing to keep the Assembly informed on the great progress the ACT is making to ensure our VET sector is agile and responsive to the needs of our community, industry and students.

MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (3.40): I thank Ms Fitzharris for bringing on this motion for debate today. I know from our membership of the education and training committee that she appreciates and understands the importance of a sound vocational education sector and credible and innovative service delivery.

There is no doubt that future success for any of the ACT's young people who have just completed their year 12 certificate, their HSC or even the International Baccalaureate depends on the decisions they make towards a career of their choice. Integral to that is the quality of the educational resources on offer.

Here in the ACT we have some respectable completion rates for students and we know that there is a strong uptake of courses. Vocational education in schools is of increasing importance and links well with the advancements in training to the wider community. The delivery of vocational education while students are completing their year 12 certificate is growing in importance and popularity. The ETD supports Australian school-based apprentices in work-based learning, broadening opportunities through the school apprentices across ACT government program. In the latest annual report there were 130 ASBAs supported to work in 47 schools. The ETD annual report also tells us that there were over 25,000 government funded students undertaking VET programs in 2014, and 100 RTOs.

Ms Fitzharris's motion also refers to the national training awards being held in Hobart on Friday. In September I was pleased to attend the 2015 ACT Training Excellence Awards at the Hotel Realm. The winners there will presumably be eligible for the national awards in the relevant categories. I congratulate them all on their success thus far and join with other members in this place in wishing them good luck in Tasmania.

I will touch upon some of the 2015 winners. There was a very emotional presentation of the Norm Fisher award, which was posthumously awarded to the late Adrian Marron. The John Scott memorial award went to Jerome de Rose. The ACT apprentice of the year was Supi Mailei. The ACT apprentice (trainee) of the year was Samantha Marks-Galea.

The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student of the year was Rachel Hounsell-Carey. The ACT vocational student of the year was Hanna Darmody. The ACT school-based apprentice of the year certificate III was Hana Chapman-Speering. The ACT school-based apprentice of the year certificate II was Nicholas Neeson.

The ACT vocational student of the year was Teagan Pate. The ACT VET teacher-trainer of the year was Melissa Dinn. The ACT industry collaboration award went to Transformed Pty Ltd. The ACT large employer of the year went to Wilson Security. The ACT large registered training organisation of the year was the Canberra Institute of Technology. The ACT small registered training organisation of the year was the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre. The ACT VET in schools excellence award went to Gungahlin College.

As the minister said yesterday in this place, we depend on apprentices and trainees in all aspects of our daily lives. It is interesting that elsewhere in her speech she talked about better industry engagement and the importance of closer stakeholder relationships. I would support those sentiments strongly. A reputable VET sector in which the community and industry can put their faith and trust is vital for a territory the size of ours. There need to be trust and transparency in the system for those receiving the training and delivering the training, and the general public also must have that trust, confidence and assurance.

When we plug in a toaster or turn on a tap, we want to know that the wiring has been installed safely and correctly; we want to be certain that the tap will turn off and on, and water will be delivered from a safe source. We take all of these things for granted in modern society, and we can afford to have that attitude because we know that there are qualified people responsible for delivering these services.

There are 100 RTOs in Canberra currently, all delivering certified training in one form or another and in one field or industry or another. I believe we have been fortunate—and I will stand corrected if it is not the case—that we have avoided the scams and scandals that have been attached to educational courses in other cities. Hospitality courses and trade courses have damaged Australia's reputation as a training provider in some overseas countries and have caused many students to lose money and valuable time in gaining a qualification. As important as better industry engagement is, of equal significance is better service delivery and open and honest communication with apprentices and students undertaking training.

In Canberra we have one large publicly funded RTO, and that is CIT. I have been known to question quite strongly some of their practices and policies, their fee structure and their staff management. I have challenged them to explain why some courses are abandoned while others continue. But above all of that probing, I also believe it is vitally important that Canberra's own Institute of Technology be the best it can be to deliver quality education and training, and it is incumbent on all of us in this place to ensure that it is and to help it get there and stay there.

Some years ago I fought to prevent CIT merging with the University of Canberra. The government at the time seemed very keen on such a merger. I said at the time that it would be disastrous for both institutions, and I am still of that view today. I am pleased that the merger did not proceed and I believe CIT is the better for it.

Ms Fitzharris's motion mentions the new governance arrangements at CIT. The new board chair was appointed in July and I understand there are still a couple of vacancies to be filled. I also note the new board and governance arrangements for CIT Solutions. I recall at the time querying how the two would work together but I understand there is now a clearly defined responsibility pathway. I welcome the new arrangements and I wish the new board every success.

I trust and would urge the new board of CIT to satisfy themselves, as I am sure they will, that their students are happy in their training, and that they believe they are receiving quality education and are being well supported. I hope that CIT's failings in not being as open and as communicative as they might or should be with their staff

and their students is in the past. I look to the new board to set the standard and provide a new commitment to the delivery of quality education here in the ACT.

The campus modernisation being undertaken at CIT is yet to be tested. I await the outcome of the final plans for Tuggeranong and to see whether students and staff are well supported through that transition. But I accept that the institute needs to keep pace with the demands of a Canberra and beyond workforce.

Skilled capital's skills and training policy directions paper has all the right words and includes all the things it needs to focus on. It is up to this government to now match the rhetoric with real delivery. It is not something for which they have a hugely successful track record but we can all live in hope. In the interim there are ongoing committee inquiries that are also shining a light on what needs to be improved in vocational education. When the committee concludes its hearings and the committee's findings are determined, that will also add to the body of work ensuring that the ACT vocational sector is truly Australia's best and most innovative, because that is where we should be and should aspire to be.

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) (3.48): I am pleased to be able to speak to Ms Fitzharris's motion today. It is an important motion this afternoon about vocational education and training in the ACT. Can I also add my congratulations to the ACT trainees, apprentices and registered training organisations who will be attending the Australian Training Awards in Hobart tomorrow.

Good vocational education is an essential feature of a healthy economy. Any strong, growing economy needs well-trained, highly skilled, good quality tradespeople such as plumbers, bricklayers, electricians, plasterers and, of course, mechanics. These are the trades that are so essential to our built environment and the ongoing economic and social prosperity of our community.

As Ms Fitzharris's motion points out, the ACT is particularly well served by a high quality vocational education and training system. As this Assembly knows, I have a particular interest in the automotive trades. I would like to draw particular attention to the very good work done by the Canberra Institute of Technology in the automotive trades area. I was a student there some time ago.

CIT offers automotive technicians, apprentices and trainees wanting to enter the automotive industry an opportunity to learn their skills in a contemporary setting on the latest equipment, late model cars and engines. Experienced technicians can use CIT study to further develop and advance their careers by learning advanced diagnostic and repair skills. A wide range of career opportunities is available in the automotive trades. The practical hands-on approach used by CIT assists students to make informed choices about the career options available to them.

CIT automotive courses are not just about maintaining what is under the bonnet of cars. Courses offered at CIT also include options for maintaining motorcycles, diesel technology, forklifts, heavy commercial vehicles, automotive air conditioning and body work repair.

Early access training has enabled year 9 and 10 students from all feeder high schools to attend programs at the Lake Tuggeranong College trade training centre to undertake an accelerated pathway to the automotive industry. The training enables students to gain the preparation and competencies needed to prepare for an apprenticeship in the automotive industry. Approximately 80 students have completed the early access training since 2013.

Among the significant benefits on offer to automotive trades students at Lake Tuggeranong College are the significant partnerships that have been created with the automotive sector and CIT as a registered training organisation. These partnerships have succeeded in enabling students to access pathways to certificate III qualifications and apprenticeships in the industry.

This point is illustrated by the apprentice training agreement between Toyota and CIT, signed in 2009. The agreement established a Toyota national training facility at CIT's Fyshwick trade skills centre, where Toyota apprentices from Canberra and surrounding regions undertake Toyota-specific training under the supervision of CIT's highly qualified automotive teachers. In that regard, I will give a big shout-out to Colin Prest for the work that he has done there. This training provides students with fast-track apprenticeships with a flexible approach to allow advanced students to complete qualifications quickly. In 2010 numbers tripled, with several new dealerships joining the program.

CIT Fyshwick have also played host to Nissan master automotive technicians from all over Australia as the company upgrades their employee skill sets to include the latest in automotive technologies related to the maintenance of electric and hybrid vehicles. CIT offers the certificate IV in automotive technology, with competencies in hybrid and electrical technology, and has access to a range of hybrid and electric vehicles, so that students are given real-world, hands-on experience with the technologies. This has included learning how to depower and test high voltage battery units and service high voltage components.

I am pleased to note that in February next year the Belconnen trades skills centre will commence providing vocational training opportunities in the automotive trades to students from seven schools in the Belconnen cluster area.

I also give a shout-out to those automotive workshops in Tuggeranong that have been working with Lake Tuggeranong College, and also to the CIT in providing job opportunities for those students. That work continues. We get to see an opportunity for students in Tuggeranong to take different routes through their educational careers. They might get a bit bored in school sometimes. It gives them the opportunity to learn some other skills that they are particularly interested in.

CIT and Lake Tuggeranong College have also worked with Auto Skills Australia, which is the group that sets the competencies for those skill levels and certificate levels throughout Australia. It is great to see that work recognised, giving the opportunity for those students to obtain parts of that certificate-level competency before they go into those apprenticeships.

In conclusion I thank my colleague Ms Fitzharris for bringing this important motion to the Assembly today and take this opportunity to thank all of the staff at CIT for the excellent work they do in making sure that those who work in the automotive trades have up-to-date, good quality training. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (3.54): I will be supporting Ms Fitzharris's motion that is before us today, calling as it does on the government to continue to enhance the vocational education and training sector through reform and collaboration.

We are extremely fortunate in the ACT to have strong and robust relationships with our local VET providers, and enhancing collaboration in particular is an achievable outcome that has many benefits for both our local students and those who may come to the ACT to advance their education.

As the "Canberra-create your future" website's "Learn" page describes it, VET courses develop specific knowledge and skills through hands-on learning across a large number of careers and industries. Qualifications range from certificate II to advanced diplomas and are provided by government institutions—for us, the CIT—as well as private institutions. There are a range of private registered training organisations in the ACT that, when considering the scope of the CIT's offerings, combine to provide an incredible range of career-focused certificates.

The ACT Greens believe that learning is a lifelong process fostered in both formal education and informal settings, from early childhood through adult life, and VET sits well with that belief. We want to see a range of accessible education and training programs offering new opportunities to adults at all stages of their life, including those re-entering the workforce and adjusting to changed circumstances, with a particular focus on numeracy and literacy. We also want the government to support a high quality vocational education system which offers new skills or reskilling for future occupations, including those industries emerging in the green economy.

We are seeing courses offered in line with this at CIT, with certificates in conservation and land management, and environmental monitoring and technology. We are also quite lucky to have the world respected Academy of Interactive Entertainment call Canberra home.

I do believe that we can continue to enhance this approach to the green economy, and I welcome recent initiatives from the Chief Minister in this space relating to new business development support, particularly in ICT. However, there is also greater potential to take advantage of emerging industry needs in relation to energy efficient buildings and sustainable design, which stretches from trade skills right through to architecture.

Government support in this area, ranging from programs such as the recently reviewed Australian apprenticeships user choice program, which provides training for approximately 6,000 students employed as Australian apprentices, to the skilled capital funded training initiative, which is designed to be responsive to training needs and market forces, could offer increased leadership. I believe we could seek to be ahead of the game and more innovative in this area. But I do acknowledge that these

programs have only just been reviewed and there is a range of changes underway in terms of subsidies and funding models.

I also note that the continued enhancement of the VET sector hinges on matters of quality and funding. We must maintain the appropriate level of oversight to all training providers, both CIT and private RTOs, to ensure either prevention or a quick response to unethical or unprofessional behaviour. We have seen recent concerns raised in this regard, in particular amongst a small number of international training providers. I was encouraged to hear the minister acknowledge in a recent statement that this is an issue.

On the issue of funding and money, I am talking about both federal funding chicanery and the cost for students to access quality programs and certificate qualifications. I appreciate that there is a fine balance in encouraging RTOs to engage with subsidy programs while also allowing them greater freedom to determine fees. The ACT Greens are keen to see the ongoing role of government bodies and oversight services in getting that balance right.

I would also like to wish all the best to the ACT trainees, apprentices and RTOs who are finalists at the Australian Training Awards: Hana Chapman-Speering, Hanna Darmody, Rachel Hounsell-Carey, Samantha Marks-Galea and others. I am sure that they will do the ACT proud, as other ACT finalists have previously done. As somebody said earlier in the debate, we certainly do punch above our weight in these areas. I believe that is a real and tangible result of our strong VET sector and our education system. I am pleased to support Ms Fitzharris's motion today.

MS BURCH (Brindabella—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Racing and Gaming and Minister for the Arts) (3.59): I would like to thank Ms Fitzharris for moving her motion and I start by adding, as I think everyone here does too, our best wishes for the trainees, apprentices, employers and trainers representing the ACT at the Australian Training Awards tomorrow night in Hobart. I will have the absolute pleasure of attending those awards in advance of the ministerial council meeting to be held the following day, Friday, in Hobart. I look forward to congratulating them in person for their achievements and I will pass on the Assembly's warm regards to them.

The ACT government has long recognised the important contribution of VET to our long-term economic prosperity and has been undertaking a number of reforms in the VET space. These reforms will make the system more responsive to the needs of students and employers and will help to ensure that the workforce meets the needs of the future with the skills for our economy.

In 2012 the government signed the national partnership agreement on skills reform with the Australian government. In signing this agreement, we committed to a high-quality transparent system built on access and equity which operates efficiently and effectively. The national partnership agreement underlines the importance of each jurisdiction in being able to undertake reforms that are best suited to its needs and economic priorities. While our commitments under the NP continue until the conclusion in 2017, I would like to take this opportunity to mention some of the milestones that we have recently achieved.

I have already spoken in this place about the enhancements we have recently made to the user choice program and to major initiatives undertaken by the Education and Training Directorate to improve stakeholder engagement. However, the pace of reform in the VET space is unrelenting and the ACT has achieved many more reform objectives worth noting. In March of this year, we introduced the ACT quality framework, including the release of a revised ACT funding agreement. The quality framework promotes excellence and transparency of VET in the ACT and seeks to ensure only the highest quality providers can deliver publicly funded VET in the ACT.

We recently completed a review of our VET schools program in which we committed to improving clarity and confidence for key stakeholders by clearly articulating the goals, visions and purpose of VET in our schools; increasing the quality of VET workplace experience by building efficiencies in how we deliver VET in schools and reducing red tape; ensuring ongoing compliance with national training standards and local reporting requirements; and finally by encouraging collaboration among schools and with CIT to maximise the effectiveness of VET in our schools.

We have made amendments to the CIT act that give CIT a new governance structure. Replacing the CIT's advisory council with a governing board demonstrates our commitment to supporting the public provider to remain strong in a more competitive environment and helps to ensure even greater accountability for public funds. The act clearly sets out CIT's mandate to continue to provide high quality vocational education and training, engaging and supporting the community, consulting and collaborating with business and industry and developing pathways for learners.

We have also introduced Skilled Capital, which I spoke about earlier during the day. It is ACT's signature employment program. It complements training provided at CIT and through the Australian apprenticeship user choice program. Skilled Capital will provide \$21 million over three years for the provision of high quality training in areas of identified skills need. Since applications for Skilled Capital opened in February, over 1,900 students have been approved and 300 have completed their qualifications. Skilled Capital is a dynamic program in which new targets are being developed once previous ones have been met. We have recently released an additional 750 new places across 14 qualifications.

We recognise that much work still needs to be done in renewing the VET sector in the ACT, but also across Australia. There will be significant discussions at the ministerial council meeting on Friday and ongoing VET reforms. The VET programs need to be responsive and nimble. We need to do more to ensure that VET is seen as a viable option for all students planning their careers. The ACT economy certainly needs people trained through our VET pathways.

To succeed in the economy of the future, workers will need new and different skills and knowledge. We must keep this in mind, not just with university programs but in the valuable vocational education and training sphere where students come from groups that are already vulnerable to structural economic changes.

Both at home and abroad, much research has been undertaken to explore what apprentices and trainees will need to succeed in the economies of the future. We know that the ACT, like every state and territory, has unique economic needs. This government is committed to ensuring that the interests and needs of ACT students and businesses are represented in all discussions with our peers from other states and territories.

We need to work harder to integrate soft skills into VET curricula and to ensure that graduates are able to excel in all aspects of a world of work, not just have the ability to perform discrete tasks. This will also allow VET graduates to access a broader range of career pathways and will help to ensure that they are able to weather economic disruptions. It will also contribute to better social and health outcomes.

We also need to provide students with broader knowledge to underpin the skills that they learn from VET. This will shorten the time they need to upskill or retrain to achieve further career progression. VET must be seen as a viable career pathway for all students. This can only be achieved with certain conditions in place. We know that we need high quality providers producing graduates with excellent outcomes. We also need to continue educating the VET students, their parents and their career advisers about the short and long-term benefits of VET.

The reforms we have made to ACT's VET system will help to ensure that we are well on the way to achieving these outcomes. A strong VET system benefits everyone and it offers individuals and families increased earnings and improved career prospects, and affords them the capacity to meaningfully contribute to the local economy and, more importantly, to the community. It ensures that businesses are able to meet their current and future skills needs, and it allows our local economy to benefit from the productivity and creativity only VET educated workers can bring to a workplace.

In short, a strong VET system will help make the ACT an even better place to live and work. I look forward to congratulating the successes of ACT representatives in the national training awards on Thursday night and working with my ministerial colleagues as we continue to progress the VET reforms. I want to thank Ms Fitzharris for bringing on this motion for discussion and for the general agreement from all in this place about the importance of VET for our community.

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (4.06): I thank Ms Fitzharris for bringing this motion to the Assembly. I welcome the ongoing contribution of this government and CIT in partnership with industry, to ensure that we have the best vocational education and training sector in the country. I congratulate Minister Burch on her work and commitment to continually improving vocational education and training in Canberra and keeping it relevant to the emerging needs of industry and the needs of our students.

Initiatives over the past year included the Skilled Capital initiative, a future directions review of vocational education and training in ACT public schools, the ACT Australian apprenticeships user choice program final report and the proposed qualification subsidy amounts, the reforms to the Canberra Institute of Technology governance and the appointment of a CIT board.

I also note the Canberra community's fondness for our CIT. CIT has many connections to the lives of Canberrans who may have started their post-school studies there or had family members, sons and daughters complete CIT courses perhaps before going on to successful careers or even further studies. Many have taught at CIT, as I did. I taught dental assistants before my election. Those opposite may find this hard to believe after a decade of listening to themselves spout despair, doom and gloom, and growl at any mention of CIT. They have been trying to drag down one of our great educational institutions and its staff with cheap political pot shots as a way of trying to get at this government.

I am hoping, although I am continually disappointed by them, that some time well before October 2016 the Canberra Liberals might actually produce a policy for CIT and announce their intentions towards it. They failed to announce a CIT policy before the 2012 election. The implication many took from that was that the Liberals were planning a wholesale slash and burn of CIT, its facilities and its staff. This would have opened the way for some of the fly-by-night shonky operators other Liberal state governments have let into their vacated or privatised TAFE spaces in Victoria and New South Wales.

I invite the Canberra Liberals to tell us that is not so. I hope that their education spokesperson or shadow minister in the lead-up to the next election will make a firm commitment to the future of CIT and investment in the quality vocational education and training we enjoy in the ACT. The future of the Canberra community and our economy is intimately involved with the future of the CIT. Our community values the many courses offered, from the very vocationally oriented courses to the great variety of more recreational and special interest courses.

These all help make possible the fulfilment of the education for life ethos that so many Canberrans have embraced and that contributes to our dynamic society and our diversified economy. The clever, connected and creative city that we are becoming under this government relies on many factors including quality vocational education in our city which is producing the skilled tradies and specialists, as Mr Gentleman mentioned, with the knowhow to finish projects and make plans work.

We are justifiably proud of the talented graduates we are turning out from our great universities and we are equally proud of the graduates from CIT who keep this city running. Through our investment in CIT this Labor government is also investing in our diversified economy and the long-term future of Canberra.

Experience has shown us that we cannot rely on the federal Liberal government to care for Canberra or for the needs of our business community, which includes a skilled workforce. In contrast, the ACT government launched our growth, diversification and jobs, a business development strategy for the ACT in 2012. Through it, we are growing our economic base and growing local employment. We are promoting Canberra to the region, the nation and the world to expand and diversify our economic base.

Marketing CIT's expertise in vocational education is part of the plan, with Minister Burch recently promoting CIT in India and signing MOUs with several Indian educational institutions. Of course, CIT already attracts a range of international students who come here to complete CIT courses, further boosting our economy. CIT is also part of our regional economy and community, attracting cross-border students to study who in turn also contribute to our economy. Our economic fortunes are shared. If the region is doing well so is Canberra, and vice versa.

The combined Canberra region population is forecast to be over 800,000 by 2030. Our economic prosperity will continue to be closely linked. Already we have more than 44,000 students in Canberra at CIT and the five universities here. One in nine of our residents works or studies at a university or CIT in the ACT.

I spoke last night of the recent renewable energy day at the sustainability hub at the CIT Bruce campus in my electorate of Ginninderra. It is a wonderful example of CIT's being integral to meeting our region's industry needs while creating training and qualifications to meet students' needs in emerging industries. At the same time, CIT is helping to diversify our economy with the launch of CIT Bruce's renewable energy skills centre of excellence. Through partnership with industry, it will meet the training needs of the Canberra region renewable energy industry initially and over time it may come to serve a much larger industry base as currently there are no comparable courses available in Australia.

From semester one next year it will offer training to operate and maintain wind energy systems including the turbines that dot the region. Collaboration with energy industry companies will give students access to hands-on experience as they study and graduate with industry-relevant qualifications. In the future CIT Bruce plans to offer training and qualifications in areas of renewable technology such as solar, microgrids and battery technologies.

SERREE, which stands for the south-east region of renewable energy excellence, was one of the sponsors of the renewable energy day, along with Windlab, one of the winners of the ACT's wind auction, and the CIT. The SERREE industry cluster is an initiative of Regional Development Australia ACT and NSW branches covering the Canberra region. The SERREE network has over 500 members including renewable energy businesses, researchers, interested community members, educators and governments collaborating on renewable energy in our region. It includes wind farms, solar businesses, a diverse range of stakeholders and other renewable energy interests in our region.

SERREE has launched maps of renewable energy trails across the region with Canberra as the hub. Current trails cover Canberra renewable energy installations including the largest geothermal heat pump in the southern hemisphere at Geoscience Australia and CIT. The snowy loop trail includes hydroelectricity at Jindabyne and solar at Royalla. The northern loop visits wind farms east and north of Goulburn. The eastern loop goes to wind farms east of Lake George and the Woodlawn bioreactor. SERREE's plan is to further develop these trails with interpretive signage integrating them with the other regional tourist drives covering gourmet food areas and areas of cultural interest.

This is one of the exciting initiatives that CIT is involved in, serving industry needs and giving our young people careers in emerging industries. The economic development of the Canberra region depends upon the quality education we can provide including, importantly, the quality of our vocational education and training at CIT.

MS FITZHARRIS (Molonglo) (4.15), in reply: I thank members for their support of this motion today. I was very pleased to hear the unanimous support for the government's work to continue enhancing the VET sector, both through reform and collaboration, and the quite clear support for the work underway particularly through our large public provider, CIT.

I make a few comments about some of the comments that were made earlier in the debate. I thank Mr Doszpot for his acknowledgement of our work in the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs, particularly the ongoing committee inquiry into the VET sector in regard to youth employment and youth opportunities.

I also note that every speaker congratulated previous winners of the national training awards. I also note their best wishes for all the ACT students who will be considered at the awards tomorrow evening, and we look forward to hearing about their successes and to Minister Burch recounting some of the stories she hears while she is there representing the ACT government. I know many of the stories that come out of these awards. Last year Sally Moylan and Just Better Care Canberra won awards spread across the Canberra community. It is just another way of advocating the importance of the VET sector in Canberra both for skills-based training for students and also for industry.

I note also members' support for the recent governance reforms at CIT and the reason for these reforms: to enable the CIT to be an agile competitor in an increasingly competitive marketplace for vocational education and training services. I also note members' support for VET in schools as well, which is providing pathways for students. I am sure all of us went to school—certainly I did go to school many years ago now—with people who did not quite fit into the school system and could not see a path through for their education.

Reforms over many years, especially the reforms in the ACT over the past couple of years, really provide students who may not fit within a traditional schooling system with opportunities to excel at things that they are good at, things that they are interested in. Mr Rattenbury and Dr Bourke noted the real hands-on experience in training courses that can provide them a career pathway for life.

I note, as always, Mr Gentleman's outstanding advocacy for the automotive trades. There is no-one quite like him in this place. He seeks every opportunity to advocate, and tell us all about, the contribution of this sector to our community more broadly, both to the economy and to the recreation sector as well. I congratulate him again for taking this opportunity. Mr Gentleman also mentioned how important it is, particularly for students taking this path, that they have choice and, more importantly

than just choice, informed choice. He highlighted that this was something that CIT is very good at providing and also recognised the importance of this choice being available to students in high schools and colleges throughout Canberra as they consider what their future holds for them.

I thank Mr Rattenbury for his acknowledgement of the importance of lifelong and accessible learning for all members of our community—younger people, older people, people looking to return to work. There was discussion also about the importance of a focus on literacy and numeracy for vulnerable and marginalised groups in our community and how important it is to have clear pathways through vocational education and training providers.

I also note the significant discussion around particularly CIT's role in encouraging broadly and providing nation-leading courses in the renewable energy sector, which is really going to enable the ACT to build on the many, many layers of this sector; encouraging this sector to grow within the ACT; encouraging ACT companies to reach out across Australia and the world through our renewable energy targets, our renewable energy training; and the ability of the CIT to be able to provide this exceptional training for the first time in Australia.

There is also a growing movement in terms of sustainable housing, sustainable design. I note Mr Rattenbury's comment that there is potential opportunity for CIT to provide more courses in energy efficient buildings and building design as well, which I think really is the way of the future.

I thank members for their support. I particularly acknowledge Minster Burch's answers to my questions during question time on this important sector and really highlighting for us the need for reform in this sector. I thank everybody for their unanimous support of reform in this sector. It is not a sector that can stand still but one that needs to be nimble, that needs to respond to the changing needs of our economy, to grow in technology throughout the economy, throughout our schooling system, and the real advantages and opportunities that that provides for us.

On the VET sector, I spoke at a forum on the weekend with Stephen Kakulas and Peter Whiteford from ANU. One of the things they talked about in terms of ensuring that we have prosperity, particularly inclusive prosperity, across our community was the opportunities provided through education. Peter Whiteford, in particular, highlighted the importance of vocational education and training as something we must always be looking to reform and encourage, because it provides so many more options for our students and for our businesses to enable them to grow as well. I thank members for their support today.

Motion agreed to.

Children and young people—autism spectrum disorder

MR WALL (Brindabella) (4.21): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) affects around one in 160 children, with boys four times more likely to be affected than girls;
- (b) that the current approach adopted by the ACT Government to address the needs of ASD students in ACT government schools is not adequate;
- (c) the importance of early diagnosis and early intervention therapy for children with ASD; and
- (d) the lack of post school options available for young adults with ASD; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to implement a Whole of Government strategy to improve the outcomes for families and individuals with ASD, as a priority.

I am very pleased to bring this motion to this place today. This motion highlights the unique needs of people with autism spectrum disorder, and in my view these needs are not being met by the current government. Autism Spectrum Disorder, or ASD, is a developmental disability that affects how a person communicates and relates to the world around them and other people. People with ASD are affected in different ways while there are some similarities in behaviours.

If we look at the most recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which we must acknowledge is now ageing a little bit, we see an increase in the diagnosis rates of ASD. Data from the Australian bureau of stats also shows that in 2012 five per cent of children with autism attended school and did not experience any educational restrictions. Of the 95 per cent of children who did experience some restrictions, six per cent were not able to attend school because of their disability and 44 per cent needed to attend either a special class in a mainstream school or a special school. For children with autism who were attending school, 86 per cent reported having difficulty at school, the majority of whom had difficulty with fitting in socially, learning and communication.

In 2009 the review of special education in the ACT, also referred to as the Shaddock review, outlined 68 possible options for the future of special education in ACT schools as a basis from which to develop a comprehensive plan to improve services to students with a disability. Six years on, Professor Shaddock has been called upon to provide another review, this time into complex needs and challenging behaviours in schools. The questions remain: what is different now, where are we now and what has actually been achieved?

The 2009 review talked about implementing policies that supported the pivotal role of classroom teachers, including increasing numbers and seniority of consultants in the inclusion support program. Six years on, that discussion is still taking place. In fact, a more worrying picture has emerged. According to Professor Shaddock's most recent report, 70 per cent of teachers surveyed said that they had not received support when dealing with students with challenging behaviours and 48 per cent said they did not feel they had adequate training. The end message is the same as it was six years ago: teachers need more support to ensure the needs of all students are met and met well.

At this point I would like to pay tribute to my colleague Mr Doszpot and the great work he and his office are doing in highlighting some of these concerns and his ongoing recognition of the need to support students with special needs, in particular those with autism spectrum disorder, and other developmental disorders and ongoing interest in early intervention practices.

It is no secret that early diagnosis and early intervention of autism are key. The failure of the current Labor government to prepare for changes to the provision of services, in particular in relation to early intervention services, is well documented here in the ACT. In 2014 as we headed towards the start of the ACT's commencement as a trial site for the national disability insurance scheme, it became very apparent that this was also a time of great anxiety for families with young children accessing or hoping to access government-provided early intervention services and therapy services for autism spectrum disorder. In the lead-up to the withdrawal of service provision by government, there was a complete lack of forward planning by Minister Burch and her directorate.

I reiterate my belief that this service provision should come from the private sector and that government should not play a part. However this was neither the issue nor the problem at the time. What was the problem was that families were left in the dark and completely stunned by the lack of suitable substitute providers. The complete disregard of families and the lack of consultation at that time were staggering. Thankfully, this episode is now part of history and service providers are now in place. But history must never forget the lessons that can be learned from that experience.

It is also no secret in this place that the Canberra Liberals are very supportive of early intervention services, and we are big fans of the model proposed by the AEIOU Foundation, as it is a proven model of early intervention service provision. Much of the research that surrounds early intervention for children with ASD is that there is no-one-size-fits-all solution and that many and varied solutions are on offer. Each of these options has varying amounts of research and evidence to back them up. However, there is consensus that key elements shape a successful early intervention program.

I have previously provided the following evidence in this place, but it is timely that this is repeated and reiterated to members of the Assembly. An autism-specific curriculum, such as the one provided by AEIOU, which has a focus on attention, compliance, imitation, language and social skills, which has highly supportive teaching environments dealing with the need for predictability and routine and which has the capacity to support challenging behaviours, obsessions and rituals, has proven a success. The addition of support for children as they transition in and out of the program as well as support for family members and a partnership with the professionals involved in treatments have proven to deliver success for the families and the children themselves.

AEIOU have done some modelling around the impact of their early intervention programs and what changes they may have on the quality of life of an individual over a lifetime. For the purposes of the study, individuals were broken into three different

groups depending on the severity of their disorder. For the purpose of this explanation, group 1 was children with a severe intellectual impairment, likely to be non-verbal and suffering from significant behavioural issues and anxieties. That forms about 20 per cent of the childhood population of autistic kids. Group 2 was made up of children with mild to moderate intellectual impairment and likely to experience difficulties with language and communication, particularly in social settings. Group, group 3 was children with a high-functioning autism. While not suffering from intellectual disabilities, these individuals can experience difficulties in other areas of their lives, and the long-term impacts can be often quite severe. This, again, forms about 20 per cent of children with the diagnosis.

In the education years of the children of group 2 who did not undertake an early intervention program, 80 per cent of them required full-time special education, with the balance of them entering into a mainstream school but still requiring regular special ed compared to only 40 per cent of children who received early intervention requiring full-time special education with 60 per cent managing to enter mainstream schooling.

Of the children in group 3 who did not receive early intervention support, only 20 per cent managed to attend a mainstream school without any additional support, while 65 per cent of those who received early intervention were able to enter mainstream schooling without any other support or assistance. Later in life, employment prospects of those individuals who went through an early intervention program are significantly improved, with 95 per cent of those belonging to group 3 and 70 per cent of those from group 2 going on to mainstream employment at or above minimum wage.

The most significant improvements can be found and measured in living independence for individuals in group 1. Eighty per cent of those individuals who did not receive any early intervention are expected to require full-time care compared to only half that number for individuals who received early intervention in those formative years. There are significant improvements in these figures across all groups, with 70 per cent of those classified as group 3 and who received early intervention support managing to live completely independently.

To put these benefits into dollar terms, over the lifetime of an individual with autism, the savings to the community and government for a group 3 individual are estimated to be at around \$750,000 ranging through to over \$1.3 million in savings to the community for an individual who belong to group 1. This highlights that early intervention is the best recipe for improving lifelong outcomes and the life trajectory for young people with autism. The ACT faces enormous challenges when it comes to post-school options for children with a disability, and the evidence of the possible success of a program such as AEIOU cannot be discounted or discredited.

To conclude, it is imperative that the government take heed of the numerous reports and the evidence before them and actively seek a whole-of-government solution for those with autism within our community. This is not a problem that will go away and it is not a problem that can be swept under the carpet. We cannot simply ignore the need for a more detailed, proactive approach to ensure young children diagnosed with

autism in Canberra today have the best possible chance at having a happy and fulfilled life, filled with meaning and purpose. Therefore, I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (4.31): I am pleased to be able to speak on this motion today on behalf of the Greens. Mr Wall's motion makes statements about the importance of early diagnosis and early intervention for children and students with autism that I think we can all agree with, but I was less certain about the origins of this motion and specific changes that Mr Wall was referring to today, particularly in light of the fact that much of the service delivery to children and families with autism is now delivered through the NDIS.

The reported incidence of autism spectrum disorder has been on the rise over the past few decades right across the world, and the understanding of, and the treatment of, autism disorders has become rather more sophisticated. There is no doubt that children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder do respond very well to early intervention environments that provide consistent, routine-based and visually supported environments for children.

Specific and targeted input into a child's learning environment can help reduce their anxiety and help prevent or reduce other behaviours commonly associated with autism in early years: rituals and obsession, sensory-seeking behaviours, and concern about changes in routine and environments. Alleviating the pressure on a child in regard to their environment can assist with their language and educational outcomes and, ultimately, their capacity to integrate into a mainstream educational environment and the community.

Children with autism do often have behaviours very challenging for parents, carers and educators to manage, underpinned by their poor play skills, poor social skills, obsession with objects or routines and the aversions to particular textures or tastes of food that make mealtimes difficult. It can be very confronting and exhausting for parents to manage the distress, screaming, shutting down and self-comforting behaviour like rocking and seeking out sensory experiences.

Children with autism also have language learning and communication patterns that mean their therapeutic responses on this front are quite specific to their disorder. Educational and therapeutic responses for children with autism need to be tailored to their needs, and child development professionals now have a high level of expertise in managing these issues.

ASD can be identified in children as young as two, and often between age two and four years, as language and behaviour do not follow the normal pattern of development. Developmentally, the years between two and five are very important as there is so much capacity for learning in those years. Assessment and planning for therapeutic programming are very important and need to happen in a timely fashion.

With the transition to the NDIS, the intention is that, along with other children with other disabilities, people with autism are provided with support packages that meet their individual needs, right through from early intervention to post-school planning

and care. These new funding arrangements also extend well beyond school, and the NDIS is rightly being labelled a generational game changer in that the funding support will now follow the person rather than the service.

While the ACT government still have some oversight over the quality of the services that are being provided and ensuring that those services meet service standards, they are increasingly not becoming the service provider of services for people with autism. Indeed, the ACT government will only really be involved at the assessment end, with multidisciplinary assessments still being provided through Therapy ACT this year and then the newly formed ACT child development service in 2016. This new service is intended to focus on the early identification of developmental delays and will conduct assessments of children between zero and six years, and autism assessments up to 12 years.

But, in terms of therapeutic responses and management, the plan is that individuals with autism will access individual support packages through the NDIS. This is an outcome that, subject to service providers being in the field, will allow an element of choice for those families seeking support. In the case of autism, this seems especially pertinent, as we know that families favour different models of intervention for their children, both while young and as they get older. I hope that, as the NDIS is bedded down, parents find that those options become real for them, and I think there is an onus on the government to keep an eye on the rollout of the NDIS with regard to the real outcomes for families on the ground. Governments need to make sure that families are able to access the services they need, and that they can reach agreement on their service plans through positive engagement with the NDIA.

The government also plays an oversight role in terms of the implementation of the disability service standards, ensuring that services provided by both government and non-government agencies are delivered in a high quality way, support the development of people with a disability and enable people with a disability to be supported in their integration into the community.

Part 1(b) of Mr Wall's motion raises the point that the management of children with ASD in the education system is "not adequate"; and 1(d) relates to post-school options. I think it is fair to say that on this issue today is an interesting day to make that call, as we have just seen the minister for education respond comprehensively to a report on students with complex needs and challenging behaviours in all ACT schools.

In relation to Mr Wall's point, I can only agree that we should, as a community and as the government, continue to look at the needs of children with ASD and other complex needs extremely closely. This is a very difficult area of both complex pedagogy and simple but profound child-centric philosophy that cannot ever be ignored or treated with complacency. I am therefore reassured by the overarching findings and recommendations of Emeritus Professor Shaddock that, while there is work to be done to ensure a consistent, cohesive and genuinely collaborative approach to students with these needs, the ACT has a solid foundation already.

I am further encouraged by the minister's announcement of acceptance of the vast majority of the recommendations and her commitment to increase funding, and that

there will be ongoing oversight and review of implementation through an oversight committee which will be chaired by Professor Shaddock. I hope that all other relevant stakeholders will also be engaged and kept abreast of these changes.

In relation to Mr Wall's concerns about post-school options, I also agree with the general concern in this area, but I believe this is a point that could well be shared for many students. The ACT Greens, including my former colleague Meredith Hunter, undertook significant community engagement and work on this issue in the last Assembly. This translated to an in-depth range of election priorities and a specific item in this Assembly's parliamentary agreement which sees all students with disability in years 9 and 10 who attend ETD schools being able to be supported by the work experience and social placement program.

I would also like to acknowledge the commitments and work of my Labor colleagues in this area, such as the payroll tax exemptions of 2013-14 and 2014-15 financial years, which provided up to \$4,000 to eligible employers who hire a recent school leaver with a qualifying disability. This initiative was designed to help increase the opportunity of young people with disability to participate in employment.

From memory, the Canberra Liberals submitted a rather undercooked and poorly costed proposal for children with ASD, and I have not seen anything much more tangible since the last election.

There are other initiatives in this space, including the existing and continuing disability education coordinators in every school, and other programs that will seek to provide support for students to develop skills to support their participation in the workplace, provide support in the workplace, and develop employment sustainability. This is all in the context of the NDIS, and we must acknowledge that many of the future services in the area of disability and education and training will not be delivered by the ACT government.

While I thank Mr Wall for the motion and the opportunity to reflect on these matters in the Assembly today, I am not able to support the motion in the form it was presented. I will be supporting Ms Burch's amendment, as I think that it captures the current status of where services to people with autism are up to, as it refers to the NDIS, the child development service and the recently completed expert panel review undertaken by Tony Shaddock and his colleagues.

MS BURCH (Brindabella—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Racing and Gaming and Minister for the Arts) (4.40): I thank Mr Wall for moving his motion. I appreciate the genuine concern that everyone in this place has to ensure the best opportunities and outcomes for all children in the ACT, particularly those with autism spectrum disorder, their families and the broader community. The government, however, cannot support the motion in its current form. I will be moving an amendment circulated in my name.

While this motion may be well intended, it omits more than it includes. It does strike me as odd that a motion criticising the government's approach to addressing the needs of students with ASD in our schools makes no mention of the expert panel review on

students with complex and challenging behaviour, given that I committed way back in April to tabling the report and the government's response in the Assembly by the last sitting day of the year.

I also note that members opposite took up my invitation made to Mr Smyth last week of a briefing this morning on the expert panel's finding and the government's response. I know that they were provided with an embargoed copy of the report and the government's response yesterday afternoon. I am sure that they are as proud as I am that Professor Shaddock and the panel recognised the strength of the ACT school system and the outstanding result that we achieve on many measures.

Yet while I remain puzzled as to why this motion did not make mention of the expert panel, I am even more astonished that it makes no mention of the reforms underway under the national disability insurance scheme. Perhaps those opposite have missed the transition to the NDIS. But, then again, Mr Wall was the person who declared proudly in this Assembly that his approach was to provide "a loaded, misinformed commentary"—go to *Hansard* to check that—when discussing the needs and concerns of families of children with developmental delay and autism. That, indeed, is an absolute shame.

Mr Wall has made extensive comments on the AEIOU, a model that has been by all accounts successful elsewhere. I would encourage Mr Wall to invite them to join the growing numbers of providers that are now registered on the national disability insurance website to put their money where their mouths are and to seek support. I would say that if they want to come and set up, Mr Wall should encourage them to do that.

The ACT government recognises that early diagnosis and intervention for children with autism is most effective and provides the best possible outcomes for children. This is why from the beginning of next year families with concerns about their child's development, including concerns with autism, will be able to access new support services. The child development service will commence with the child health medical officers, paediatricians, speech pathologists, social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists specialising in child development working together to provide assessment, intervention and support for families.

The child development service will provide an integrated service, including highly skilled staff providing autism assessment, support and education for families after a diagnosis is made and support to link families with the National Disability Insurance Agency. Appropriate intervention programs will also be provided. Perhaps the biggest change to the space will be the transformative opportunities that the introduction of the NDIS is bringing to people, including people with autism.

It is quite sad that the NDIS, the biggest reform to the way to disability services are delivered in our community, seems to have completely escaped Mr Wall's attention in this motion. I am sure that most of us in this building are aware that the ACT will be the first jurisdiction to accept all eligible participants to the NDIS. Our colleagues in other states are watching how we transition so they can pick up areas to learn from.

Already we have seen the number of providers in the ACT grow as a result of the NDIS. Parents now have a choice of service providers. A greater range of earlier intervention services with different service offerings will allow families to choose an intervention program that supports the individual needs of the child and their family. These services provide families with the knowledge, skills and support to meet the needs of their children, optimise their child's development and increase their ability to participate in family and community life.

We are well into our second year of the two-year NDIS trial and, as of September this year, 2,176 ACT residents have NDIS plans and a further 439 people have been assessed as eligible and will begin developing their plans. I will repeat that, Mr Assistant Speaker: from September of this year, 2,176 ACT residents have an NDIS plan. That provides opportunities that they have not had before. A further 439 people have been assessed as eligible and are developing their plans now.

Of the people who have transitioned to the NDIS, so far 26 per cent have a primary disability of autism and related disorders. This is the largest disability cohort in the scheme and reflects our decision to phase children into the NDIS first to ensure that they get the benefits of the NDIS as early as possible.

Mr Wall's motion refers to post-school options for young adults with ADS. I am happy to inform him of another opportunity which the NDIS is bringing to people in the ACT. This is the NDIS school leavers employment project. During 2015, the Education and Training Directorate participated in this project for students with a disability graduating from year 12. The program will provide supports for students to develop skills for participation in the workforce. It will also provide support in the workplace and develop employment sustainability.

The project has a number of stages. Firstly, the National Disability Insurance Agency provided training sessions for education staff from all ACT government high schools and colleges in preparation for the beginning of the project. The Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools were also involved in the training. In term 3 of this year the NDIA was invited to participate in individual learning plan meetings for students at Black Mountain School in years 11 and 12. This meeting provided an opportunity for students and their families to focus on planning for post-school options.

The Education and Training Directorate has assessed 48 year 12 students this year using an online assessment tool to assess their support needs. The NDIA is currently analysing the completed assessments to determine which students will be eligible for the program. The NDIA will then write to students and their families and their carers with the outcome.

The school leavers employment support—or SLES—packages will commence with the first quarter of 2016. Leading up to this, there will be workshops for young people to support them on their journey towards employment and to cover the period between school leaving and commencing their formal SLES packages.

The government also continues to provide other innovative models of service for children with a disability, including those with autism. In terms 3 and 4 of this school year allied health staff from Therapy ACT contributed to a collaborative research project at Black Mountain and Cranleigh schools. On my recent visit to Black Mountain School I saw this project in action. It was very, very encouraging and provided therapists and teachers alike with a great opportunity to learn from each other.

The project considered how an integrated model of teachers and therapists working together could support the learning needs of students with complex needs, including students with autism. Also in schools, the therapy assistants program has worked in the Tuggeranong network this year and will work with schools in the Belconnen network next year. This program involves allied health professional and therapy assistants working with teachers in schools and includes whole class programs, individual support and education for teachers. Children with developmental delays and disabilities, including autism, receive this valuable input in their school day.

The NDIS is presenting fantastic opportunities to people with disabilities, including people with autism and their families and carers. We are seeing a growth in services and innovation that is fundamentally changing the way people with a disability are treated. Under the NDIS, people with autism will be able to choose the support and services that they need to engage in life and the community.

I thank Mr Wall for the opportunity to inform the Assembly of the good work that the ACT Labor government is doing for children with autism, their families and their carers across the school community and across the broader community. I move the amendment standing in my name:

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

- “(b) the importance of early diagnoses, early intervention therapy and support for ASD;
- (c) the role of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and that the ACT will be the first jurisdiction to fully transition to the scheme;
- (d) the new arrangements for support, including post school options, which will take place with the transition to the NDIS;
- (e) that, as of September this year, 2176 ACT residents have plans and another 439 have been deemed eligible and are developing plans through the NDIS;
- (f) the establishment of the Child Development Service which will commence in 2016;
- (g) that the Education and Training Directorate has 27.5 Learning Support Unit Classes and 30.5 Learning Support Unit (Autism) Classes in ACT government schools; and

- (h) the commissioning of an Expert Panel on Students with Complex Needs and Challenging Behaviour and the Government's response, which will be made available on 18 November 2015, with future updates to the Assembly, and
- (2) calls on the Government to:
- (a) continue the transition to the NDIS;
 - (b) continue to update the Assembly on the roll-out of the NDIS in line with previous resolutions of the Assembly; and
 - (c) write to the Australian Government to resolve, as a matter of urgency, how the NDIS will fund and support Information, Linkages and Coordination services.”.

I will be very disappointed if the Canberra Liberals do not support this because it merely reflects the currency of the situation around disability support here in the ACT. It recognises, unlike Mr Wall's motion, the role of the national disability insurance scheme and the fact that the ACT will be the first jurisdiction to fully transition to the scheme.

It also notes the new arrangements for support, including post-school options that will take place with a transition to the NDIS. It captures the data that we have to hand. Over 2,000 people here in the ACT now have a plan. Another 400 are deemed eligible and are working their plans with the NDIA. It recognises the establishment of the child development service that will commence in January of next year and it also highlights that across our Education and Training Directorate we have 27 learning support unit classes and 30 support unit autism classes across our schools.

The amendment also recognises that being made public today was the report of the expert panel on students with complex and challenging behaviours, along with the government response. I will also provide future updates to the Assembly on this.

The amendment calls on me to continue our transition to the NDIS, which will mean more opportunities for people in our community with a disability. But it also calls on me to write to the Australian government to resolve, as a matter of urgency, how the NDIA will fund and support the information linkages and coordination services here in the ACT. This is a vital service for all people with a disability, including young children with autism. It would provide a much valued addition. This needs to be put in place. It needs to be put in place without too much more lagging behind the decision-making of the commonwealth government. I urge all in this chamber to support my amendment.

MR WALL (Brindabella) (4.53): I will speak to the amendment and close the debate. I am happy to have brought this motion to the Assembly today to highlight the needs broadly of people in our community with autism and other spectrum disorders. I think it is important that it is front of mind for all members of this Assembly as often as possible. We should be aware of the needs of young people in their early stages of life,

aware of what services are currently on offer and aware of the shortfalls. We should be constantly trying to improve the services that are delivered to people in our community.

The role of the opposition largely is a role of scrutiny: to scrutinise the work that government is doing. Bringing motions like this to this place today gives the opposition an opportunity not just to talk about where we think some areas for improvement are or where alternative policies are but to bring to the forefront the issues that affect these people in our community.

I am not surprised that Minister Burch has moved an amendment that seeks to omit virtually all of my motion and replace it with all her own words, but that is the nature of things in this place. I will touch on a couple of points that Ms Burch raised. I refer, firstly, to AEIOU and her challenge for me to talk to them and tell them to put their money where their mouth is and come to the ACT. I am proud to say that that is the exact conversation I and my colleagues have been having with them for quite a sustained time. As far back as the last election, we were encouraging them to come here and set up in the ACT.

In one of my most recent conversations with the CEO of that organisation, he indicated that they have formally submitted a request for a grant to the ACT government for a block of land in Woden. So the fact remains that they are willing to come to Canberra. They want to provide services here. They want to help young children with autism in Canberra. All they need is a little assistance and a sign of goodwill and good faith from the ACT Labor government that they are welcome here, because for so long there has been debate in this place about their being an exclusive private provider.

The government has seen the light. They recognise that there is a space for the private sector when it comes to providing services for people with a disability. That is why I support their move as a government to exit this space of being a front-line service provider. The way is now clear for organisations like AEIOU to come and set up here in Canberra. I will watch with great hope for land to be granted to that organisation so many Canberra families have the opportunity for access to the first-class early intervention service that they provide.

Minister Burch dismissed much of the content of our motion for failing to make reference to the most recent report delivered by Professor Tony Shaddock today. To clarify the position, that report was provided to the opposition at about this time yesterday, at about 5 pm. It was in the afternoon. Motions were due to be presented in the Assembly by 12.30 yesterday. The copy that the minister provided to us was under embargo. It would have been a breach to start detailing that in a motion to be publicised before the minister had the opportunity to brief the opposition, to brief education specialists, to brief the public service and to present her report publicly herself.

I think it is a bit rich and a bit ripe for this minister to criticise me and the members of the opposition for failing to do that when it would have been a complete breach of the terms under which she agreed to share that report with us. I think it is only appropriate that the record reflect that.

To sum up, I hope—I really do hope—that the minister brings to her work in this portfolio space more empathy and more humility than she does when she comes into a debate on this topic in the Assembly. The disability space, particularly when you are dealing with young children with autism, requires patience, it requires encouragement and it requires a great, great deal of humility to get the best out of them. On today's showing, she fails to show that she is capable of that in this place. I only hope that her work as a minister is better than the performance we see from her in this chamber.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Arts—policy framework

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (4.58): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the importance of providing equal coverage and support to a broad range of art forms in our city;
- (b) the value of the arts as the underlying element to our city's economic prosperity and social well-being;
- (c) the Minister's inability and failure to list the policy goals and outcomes achieved as a consequence of her 2012 Arts Policy Framework; and
- (d) the Minister's second Arts Policy Framework published in June 2015, which only included four principles and referred to existing artsACT and Cultural Facilities Corporation initiatives; and

(2) calls on the Minister to:

- (a) develop a consultation schedule with all arts communities in the ACT;
- (b) develop a consolidated list of actionable initiatives in support of her 2015 Arts Policy Framework with accompanying budgets, performance targets and timeframes; and
- (c) present these by the first sitting day in February 2016.

Mr Assistant Speaker, I am sure you will listen with interest; your love of the arts is well known. From those on your side, you are probably the person I see most at arts functions around the ACT, and you are to be congratulated on that. There is a fundamental question to ask about why we fund the arts and what do the arts return, therefore, to the community from that funding. From all the literature it is quite clear that the arts are a genuine driver of economies. Economies that accept that, harness that and use that to direct their economy and their funding do very well. That is why I say in part (1)(b) of my motion:

the value of the arts as the underlying element in our city's economic prosperity and social well-being.

Alain de Botton, the philosopher, says in his book *Art as Therapy*:

Like other tools, art has the power to extend our capacities beyond those that nature has originally endowed us with. Art compensates us for certain inborn weaknesses, in this case of the mind rather than the body, weaknesses that we can refer to as psychological frailties.

This book proposes that art is a therapeutic medium that can help guide, exhort and console its viewers, enabling them to become better versions of themselves. You can take that definition and apply it to economies as well. You have art as a tool that helps individuals be whole, productive and participative, and it allows economies to be dynamic and to achieve great things. It is interesting that the recently-released research from Tourism Research Australia has detected a trend and says:

Continuing a trend which first emerged in 2013, visitors participating in arts and heritage activities increased strongly during the year:

art and craft workshops and studios—up 26% ...

heritage buildings sites or monuments—up 24% ...

festivals, fairs and cultural events—up 20% ...

botanic gardens—up 22% ...

All of those increases in those very specific categories are in the 20s, and some of them are in the high 20s. It could be a description of Canberra—the Botanic Gardens and our fairs, festivals, heritage building sites, monuments and art and craft workshops. Yet for this year of the report, Mr Assistant Speaker, you will be stunned to note that international visitor numbers to the ACT went down. We are not using the arts to our advantage in this community.

So you ask: why does that happen? It happens because we have a framework that means nothing. It is a nice glossy, the same as the 2012 version, but it does not actually say that we can harness the arts and use the arts to drive change in the ACT—to drive change in individuals and to drive change in our economy. That is very important because one of the things that the government have done—and they are to be congratulated—was to produce an economic overview of the arts in the ACT. What does it say? On page 1 it says:

The arts and culture sector directly added \$426m of value to the ACT's economy in 2012–13. This was equivalent to 1.3% of total value added by industry.

It continues:

Employment

There were 6,456 persons employed in the arts and cultural sector in the ACT in 2011. This was equivalent to 3.1% of ACT employment.

At last, after many years of being urged to do this, we have a baseline from which to establish whether or not the arts are doing well in the ACT. *Arts Nation: An Overview of Australian Arts, 2015 Edition* from the Australia Council for the Arts tells a very different story. Now, remember, cultural activity, arts and culture adds 1.3 per cent to the total value added by industry. For the rest of Australia, cultural activity is estimated to make up around four per cent of Australia's GDP. For the ACT it is 1.3 per cent; for the rest of Australia it is four per cent. We are lagging. If somebody can tell me that those figures refer to different things I am happy to take that and get more accurate figures. But from what I could find it would appear that we are running at about a third of what one would expect from the rest of the Australian economy. Under "Economic contribution" it says:

Australia's copyright industries have arts and cultural activity at their core.

On page 2 of the government's economic overview of the arts it lists the hierarchy of creative industries, which of course are the artistic and cultural activities. They are all listed there, and that is a good thing. According to the Australia Council, they generate over \$93 billion in economic activity. They extended it beyond the arts to arts and culture and it is \$93 billion, or 6.6 per cent of GDP, remembering that in the ACT it is 1.3 per cent. They say that in Australia the arts and culture sector is 6.6 per cent of GDP. At that rate we are running at about 20 per cent of the contribution that the rest of the economy gets. They go on to say that it employs eight per cent of the nation's workforce. *Arts Nation* from the arts council says that arts and cultural industries employ eight per cent of the workforce. In the ACT, it is 3.1 per cent—so three-eighths of what would have been expected. It goes on to say:

In addition to the core areas of arts activity, the cultural ecosystem includes film, television, radio, print media, design, museums, libraries, archives and environmental and other cultural heritage.

Again, that is contained in the diagram on page 2 of the overview of the arts in the ACT. It goes on to say:

The cultural sector contributes 4.0 percent of Australia's GDP, similar to levels in the United States, Canada and Spain.

So we have got this comparison where we clearly lag because we do not aspire to anything beyond arts funding in the arts framework. That is the reality. How do we know that? Because I asked the minister and the head of the arts at a hearing and they could not tell me what the 2012 arts framework had delivered for the ACT. All they could say was—and I refer members to *Hansard*—"No, we cannot table a formal development of a policy. We can table implementations of directions that are set out within the framework." Not one single policy came from the arts framework. Indeed, when the truth came out it was apparent that all that had changed was the way they funded the arts. The arts policy framework principally is the driver of our arts funding.

So there you go. In the first arts framework all they did was change the way they fund things. The second arts framework came out in June. What have we done in the past five or six months? It is important to understand that the arts are very much important in driving innovation. One individual has written: "Creativity is fundamental to innovation and business growth, playing an integral role in the social and economic fabric of Canberra. Working together and making connections are essential to achieving our vision for an arts and creative industry sector that is valued locally, nationally and globally." Creativity seems to drive innovation and technology, according to this person. That person is actually Andrew Barr, the Chief Minister of the ACT. It is here in his document "Connect, Create, Collaborate: DESIGN Canberra 2015".

Around the world, people are seeing design as a form of art in its own right. For instance, the museum of the arts in Berlin recently added architecture and design as faculties because they see them as an art form. You only have to look at the FINK gallery and the design of those magnificent jugs that we get from the FINK gallery. It is design, but it is art. But then you have to look at what drives creativity. If it is creativity that is fundamental to innovation, how do you break that down? The expert in this field is David Throsby, an Australian who wrote the book *The Economics of Cultural Policy*. It is a great read if you are bored one night and you want to know about economics and culture. Mr Throsby says:

Once a logical sequence can be established, beginning with art and proceeding through artistic creativity, creativity in general, innovation, technological progress, competitive advantage, and leading in due course to growth in incomes, exports, employment and other indicators of economic success ...

Further down it goes on:

Since in many developed countries the cultural industries can indeed be shown to have grown faster than other sectors such as manufacturing and agriculture over the past decade or so when measured in terms of value of output or levels of employment ...

There you are. Rhetoric is converted into fact. So what do we know? From the comparison of the government's own study into the size of the economy, we are underperforming by two-thirds. That is the best outcome. It might be as low as 20 per cent. Here is an area that we can grow, but when you go to the minister's arts policy framework for 2015, I do not think it mentions business. I do not think it is even in there. It is certainly not in the principles and it is certainly not in the case studies. If it is simply art for art's sake, okay, let us admit that, but we have got a Chief Minister who actually believes creativity drives innovation and economy. We have got a tool, but we have got a minister who is incapable of using that tool to the greater advantage of all.

Art and culture improve personal wellbeing. People who are more well in themselves are able to participate and are more productive. It is a logical sequence. But we are not using the funding that we have to improve that. I recall at one estimates hearing the Childers Group said, "We cannot engage with the department of education again

under the responsibility of this minister and ensure that we are in the schools, helping drive art, helping drive creativity, which builds resilience in our students and makes them more productive as well.”

Again, the *Securing Australia's Future—Australia's Competitive Advantage* final report from the Australian Council of Learned Academics was released in the past couple of days. On pages 52 and 53 there is a chart that says:

Government performance matters to industry with a range of respondents ... saying government policies have a high to very high impact on industry growth ...

Particularly in the arts. Indeed, in the chart it says that in a survey on the importance of government policy on industry growth in the arts, 60 per cent of respondents—the highest—rated it as very high. Sixty per cent said that government policy was very important. Yet we have a policy void in the minister. There is a policy void in the document. There is no coordination with other activities to ensure that we get the benefits that we should as a community and as individuals. So an opportunity goes begging. There is a section in this report, starting at page 106, that looks at cultural institutions. This is a really interesting line:

Cultural policy has never just been about ‘the arts’ but about creating citizens.

Citizens who participate and play a role in their community. It says:

Another important related problem is that the cultural or creative industries have been a peripheral concern of the arts and cultural funding bodies ...

And that is continuing with this minister. Then we look at how the British saw it. An influential UK report on the review of creativity in business by Cox in 2005 “positioned design as a bridge between the arts and the engineering sciences”. So if we can make those links, we can all benefit. There was an interesting article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* recently. On 26 March, under the heading “How an Australian building’s unique design inspired a scientific breakthrough”, it was reported:

... Andrey Miroshnichenko drives past the Nishi building in Canberra every day on his way to work.

But the ANU physicist now looks at the building in a whole new light after he and a team of researchers were able to re-create its unusual zigzagging exterior on a small scale to provide the breakthrough they needed on their quest to put a perfect bend in light.

Art-inspiring scientific outcomes: who would have thought? If we go back to the report from Tourism Research Australia recently, they say they have detected a trend that says people want art and craft. They want culture, they want heritage, they want festivals and fairs and they want botanic gardens. We have all that in spades in this city, but our visitation is going down. That is to the shame of the tourism minister, but I think it is particularly to the shame of the arts minister.

We have the national institutions that no other city can have. Only a national capital can really have them, whether it be the art gallery, the War Memorial, the Portrait Gallery, the Museum, the National Library or Questacon—whatever they are. But we are obviously not utilising them. That includes the Botanic Gardens and the collections that the CSIRO hold, for instance. What we need from the minister are policy and outcomes. Part (2) of my motion calls on the minister to develop a schedule and report back to the Assembly in February. They have had enough time. (*Time expired.*)

MS BURCH (Brindabella—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Racing and Gaming and Minister for the Arts) (5.13): I rise today to speak to Mr Smyth's motion on arts in this place. It is almost an annual motion. Again, I thank him for the opportunity to come to the Assembly and talk about the strengths of our arts sector and the significant outcomes achieved by this government in supporting arts in the city and the surrounds.

Let me again, as I have done many times before, recognise the 2012 arts policy framework as that: a framework. It reflected the government's continuing commitment to the local arts sector, outlined our priorities and articulated the guiding vision, the principles and the activities that supported those priorities. The principles of the framework contributed to every decision artsACT made about funding, made about the projects and made about the fundamental changes to the arts landscape.

In preparing and implementing the 2012 arts policy framework—Mr Smyth is very, quick to speak ill of it, I must say, and of the officials that crafted that framework—the ACT government looked broadly at the work of artsACT and considered all the elements to be addressed. The principles of the framework were incorporated into the everyday work of artsACT and were included in the funding guidelines and communicated at every opportunity to the sector. They informed the significant projects and drove change to the arts landscape in the ACT.

The 2015 arts policy, which I publicly released this year along with the economic overview of arts in the ACT, outlines the vision, values and principles which artsACT operates within to make sure that it is a lively and informed arts community. It is clearly stated in our ACT arts policy that our vision is for Canberra to be a diverse and dynamic arts ecology, valued locally, nationally and globally. Artists, art organisations, art workers and audiences are all elements of the arts ecology in our region.

Mr Smyth in his motion calls on the government to develop a consultative schedule with all the arts communities here in the ACT. I take a moment to clearly outline the level of consultation that was held with the arts community in the development of the ACT arts policy. The first step was the appointment of an independent reference group. The specific goal of this reference group was to guide the consultation process. Following the establishment of this group, artsACT commenced consultation with local arts organisations, artists and the public.

A community forum was attended by more than 65 people. A sector workshop was attended by over 30 people. A Facebook group was established with young and emerging artists. An online survey was completed by more than 100 participants and 26 thoughtful and considered written submissions were received. Overall, more than 300 individuals and organisations were engaged in this consultation process.

I am very pleased to report that I have had an overwhelmingly positive response to the ACT arts policy. The support of the policy is reflected in a sense of ownership by the arts sector. Recently I attended the launch of the Canberra International Film Festival and the announcement of the Academy of Interactive Entertainment's sponsorship of the festival. At the launch the festival general manager, Dr Andrew Pike, spoke highly of the arts policy. He further took the time to write to me, and I quote from his letter:

I was also very pleased to have had an opportunity in your presence to express the high regard I have for ACT Arts Policy. I had the pleasure of lobbying for that Policy ... when I was on the artsACT Cultural Council, and I am very proud of its significant difference from other arts policies and the empowerment that it gives to many people in the community. It is certainly an approach to the arts and the broad community that I am doing my best to embrace in the running of the Festival.

That is a direct quote from the general manager of the International Film Festival. To this end, the community consultation was an essential part of the project, and artsACT did a fantastic job engaging with artists and the community during the development of this policy.

Since the release of the policy, artsACT has had regular conversations with representatives from across the arts sector to identify where efforts should be focused during this initial stage of implementation. ArtsACT will also be undertaking more regular forums to discuss particular issues with the community more broadly and with particular sectors.

Alongside the development of artsACT policy, the government compiled an economic overview of arts in the ACT to assess the contribution arts and the cultural sector make to the ACT's economy. The report shows that the arts contribute directly to the ACT economy in a number of ways, including employment, cultural tourism and education. It shows that arts and culture are, indeed, an important part of the lives of individuals as well as the whole economic and social fabric of Canberra.

Let me run through a few of the key findings of this economic study. It showed that in 2012-13 the direct input of the arts and the cultural sector in the ACT was estimated to be \$974 million, of which the arts was responsible for \$361 million. The arts and cultural sector directly added \$426 million of value to the economy. This was equivalent to 1.3 per cent of the total value added by industry. Of this, \$162 million was associated with the arts. Further, the arts and cultural sector in the ACT employed 6,456 persons in 2011, and this was equivalent to 3.1 per cent of ACT employment.

Canberrans spend approximately \$211 million per year on cultural activities, which is a higher per capita level than other capital cities. In 2013-14 nearly 350,000 people

attended events at venues such as the Canberra Theatre Centre or the Canberra Museum and Gallery. In 2013 more than 412,000 people attended events hosted by ACT arts organisations supported by artsACT. The ACT has more than 3,000 higher education students studying creative arts.

As I had thought, Mr Smyth came in and read, as he does, from experts, including again David Throsby, who is well regarded and renowned, and I am not dismissing the contribution of Mr Throsby, because he is understood and recognised. But Mr Smyth continues time and time again to criticise my office, me personally and my officials as he did last time he brought on this debate in this place. I quote from *Hansard*, just to go to the disrespect that Mr Smyth has. The quote from *Hansard* is:

I suspect that if her office or her officials had spent a fraction of the time on arts policy that they spent on reading my very valuable reflections on the value of arts, then what a policy we would have here today. We would not be having this debate.

So vain is Mr Smyth that he feels that my office, the officials, need to spend more time listening to him than listening to the arts community here in the ACT. But what Mr Smyth, through you, Mr Assistant Speaker, cannot do, no matter what his quotes or his insults are, is deny that the Canberra Liberals' position on the arts is either to ban it or indeed to censor it; not to value the arts as an underlying element of our economic prosperity and social wellbeing at all.

We have a fantastic arts policy, one which we have received high praise for. We on this side of the Assembly recognise the value of our arts ecology by making sure it is a thriving community. We know that those opposite have one view on arts, and that is to ban it. I go back to one other quote from the Canberra Liberals. Mr Hanson, as leader of the Canberra Liberals, has said, and I quote from *Hansard*:

We are very consistent. Ban all public art.

That is the Canberra Liberals' view. They are very consistent. They have a view to ban all public art. What a vision for our city!

Unlike the Canberra Liberals, the ACT government recognises that arts and culture are an integral part of the lives of individuals as well as the whole social economic fabric of Canberra. Arts help to define our community's identity and give expression to the community values. Creativity is fundamental to innovation and business growth. We are incredibly fortunate that the Canberra region has many diverse arts and arts organisations that provide inspiration and opportunity for residents within Canberra and beyond, and consultation has been undertaken to create the new arts policy and make sure that there is a lively and informed arts community.

Again I refer to the consultation that happened through this arts policy, set up and driven through an independent panel of our local artists. In many ways the policy that we have in place, that Mr Smyth is so critical and dismissive of, has been driven by over 300 voices of our arts community here in the ACT.

In closing, I look forward to coming back to this place in early 2016 and sharing the fabulous work of artsACT and what they do to engage support and to consult with arts providers and artists in the ACT and indeed the incredible contribution that each one of them has made. I thank and acknowledge the work of artsACT, the officials that Mr Smyth is so keen to disrespect and dismiss. The officials of artsACT work hard, engage with our local community and provide the support that our local arts sector needs.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Dr Bourke): You have an amendment, Ms Burch?

MS BURCH: I will not be supporting Mr Smyth's motion. That is fairly clear from my comments. I move:

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

- “(b) the value of the arts as an underlying element to our city's economic prosperity and social wellbeing;
- (c) the public release this year of the Economic Overview of the Arts in the ACT and the recognition of the enormous contribution the arts make to the Canberra economy;
- (d) the Minister's on-going commitment to developing and supporting the arts in the Territory and the continued consultation with the arts sector to support the objectives of the ACT Arts Policy; and
- (e) the positive feedback that has been received from the ACT arts community on the ACT Arts Policy; and

(2) calls on the Minister to:

- (a) inform the Assembly of the continued consultation process with the ACT arts community; and
- (b) provide an update to the Assembly in early 2016 on the progress of working with the arts community on continued implementation of the ACT Arts Policy.”.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (5.25): I was hesitating. I thought Mrs Jones might want to stand and talk about the Nazi strippers one more time, but it seems she has—

Mrs Jones: Happy to discuss the Nazi strippers any time.

MR RATTENBURY: You do seem unhealthily obsessed by it.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss arts in the chamber this afternoon, with Mr Smyth bringing forward his motion. The motion focuses on the 2012 and 2015 arts policy frameworks, which have been the primary arts policy documents for the territory over the past four years, and presumably will continue to be into the next couple of years. It is familiar turf for Mr Smyth to express his view that there are insufficiently detailed reporting mechanisms embedded in the arts portfolio.

Part 1 of the motion notes:

- (a) the importance of providing equal coverage and support to a broad range of art forms in our city;

This is obviously an agreeable sentiment. Part 1(b) notes the value of the arts to our city's economic prosperity and its social wellbeing—again, an agreeable sentiment.

However, I note that Mr Smyth asserts that arts are “the underlying element of economic prosperity and social wellbeing”. I think that is probably a bit of an overstatement. I possibly am misreading the text but I have read it three times to make sure. I have no doubt that Mr Smyth personally values the arts a great deal but I think I must be misreading the line because it actually says that it is “the underlying source of economic activity”.

ABS stats around the ACT's economic activity show that around 30 per cent of it comes from public administration and safety, another 10 per cent comes from professional, scientific and technical services, 10 per cent comes from construction, and seven per cent from education and training. Numbers aside, I certainly agree that the arts make a truly valuable contribution to both the ACT's economy and social wellbeing, a sentiment captured nicely in the first line of Minister Burch's amendment.

I move to the second point in the minister's amendment, the release this year of an economic overview of the arts in the ACT. Members have spoken to this already today. The review estimates the economic contribution of the arts in the ACT in 2012-13 at about \$361 million, which is obviously a very significant contribution. It also reflects on how many people are employed. More than 412,000 people attended events hosted by arts organisations supported by artsACT. Again we are seeing a large number of people attending events, although I am sure we would always strive for that number to be higher. I think these are all strong indicators of a healthy arts environment in the ACT.

I move to 2(b) of Mr Smyth's motion, which calls on the government to “develop a consolidated list of actionable initiatives ... with accompanying budgets, performance targets and time frames”. That is quite a prescriptive demand, and I am not sure what the value of such a document would be.

The initiatives under the strategy are the arts programs and performances and artworks that are produced through funding from artsACT. Twelve days ago Minister Burch announced the successful recipients of artsACT 2016 project funding. There is a range of them. I think that they demonstrate the concrete outputs that are being derived. That is certainly, to my mind, one of the key ways to gauge what is being produced in the ACT.

I also draw the Assembly's attention to page 29 of the 2015 arts policy framework, which states:

The priorities and actions which will see this Policy implemented are set out in the strategic plans of both artsACT and the CFC—

the Cultural Facilities Corporation—

Sitting alongside these strategic documents will be a number of operational plans which are to be developed by artsACT on issues such as: research and data; cultural infrastructure; communications; community arts and cultural development; and funding.

The artsACT strategic plan 2015-16 is particularly relevant to our discussion here this afternoon. It sets out the ways in which artsACT will judge the success or otherwise of the implementation of the arts policy framework. It commits artsACT to develop a research and data plan which will outline what data they would collect, how they would use the data and what they would report on. It commits artsACT to undertake an analysis of the sector to understand the economic and social impacts of the arts. That presumably refers to the economic overview that has already been released this year.

It commits artsACT to measures of success such as attendance and participation, the number of ACT performances held interstate or overseas, the number of artists funded by the Australia Council, the number of people visiting Canberra for the arts, the number of people employed in the arts sector in the ACT and the number of businesses in the ACT arts sector, amongst others. Presumably, these are the sorts of metrics that Mr Smyth is calling for when he says that we need to be able to more clearly measure and understand what is happening in the arts sector in the ACT, as his motion speaks to.

With respect to the implementation of the 2015 arts policy framework, we have started to see these numbers in the economic overview report. Given appropriate time, I am sure we will see further measures reported against in publications of artsACT.

If these metrics and reporting could be strengthened at all, I would be interested to know more about what people employed in the arts sector are paid and whether it is a living wage or is sufficient to attract and retain quality arts practitioners. The Childers Forum budget submission touched on this, stating:

The Government's objective should be to ensure that there are no professional arts workers employed by ACT Key Arts Organisations earning less than the average Australian wage. An investment in the salaries of ACT arts workers is an investment in the efficient and productive operation of ACT arts assets. Salaries commensurate with skills and experience ensure the retention of qualified people with necessary expertise, and promote sound management and development of strong policies within the facilities built by the ACT Government.

The research and data plan should include benchmarking salaries of professional arts managers within the ACT against the Community Service sector and with arts personnel in other states and territories.

I think that is a very interesting point. It is a well-worn joke that the arts is an underpaid industry. I think the Childers Forum make a useful point in observing that people should not have to starve for their art and that a decent salary is an important part of ensuring a healthy and vibrant arts sector here in the ACT.

Today I will be supporting Minister Burch's amendment and I certainly look forward to her update to the Assembly in 2016 on the continued implementation of the ACT arts policy framework.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, do you wish to speak to the amendment and close the debate?

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (5.33): I wish to speak to the amendment and close the debate, unless Mrs Dunne, a well-known art lover in the ACT, wants to say something; but I suspect not.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before you do that, I might go back to the point of order that was raised by Mr Gentleman, so that we can deal with that.

MR SMYTH: Yes, certainly.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I reviewed the tape. On that point of order, you clearly did say what Mr Gentleman thought you said, which was that Mr Barr had misled the committee. You clearly said that. I listened to the tape. I would ask you to withdraw that assertion, please.

MR SMYTH: I withdraw.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Mr Smyth. I am sorry to do that to you.

MR SMYTH: No, that is fine. I will review *Hansard* when it comes out. It will be fascinating. Mr Rattenbury, thank you very much for your contribution, as always.

Ms Burch: A point of order. I am not quite sure—

MR SMYTH: Can we stop the clock, please.

Ms Burch: I think Mr Smyth may have questioned your decision by referring to the fact that he will look at *Hansard* to check whether your comments were correct or not. I think that is disrespectful to the chair.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms Burch. Mr Smyth, could you clarify that statement?

MR SMYTH: Madam Deputy Speaker, I made it abundantly clear. I took your ruling and I withdrew. I said, "I will read *Hansard* with interest," or something. So I will read *Hansard*. If reading *Hansard* is now an offence then I will be guilty many times.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am sure that reading *Hansard* is not an offence, Mr Smyth. I am pleased that you did not mean to call my ruling into question.

MR SMYTH: Absolutely not, Madam Deputy Speaker.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please continue.

MR SMYTH: Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak to the arts motion. I am pleased Mr Rattenbury is here; I thank him for his contribution because he said, “What’s the value of the list?” The value of the list is that this minister never delivers, Mr Rattenbury. If you go back to the 2012 arts framework, and if you had listened to what I said at the start, when I asked them what was the outcome of the framework, all that the officials and the minister were able to say was they had modified the funding guidelines. The 2012 arts framework says:

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

It never happened, Mr Rattenbury. I asked for it, and they were not able to table it. I will read it again:

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

It did not happen, Madam Deputy Speaker. I acknowledge your presence; I see you and your husband at many arts functions. I know you are a keen lover of the arts, as are many in this place. For Mr Rattenbury’s benefit I will read it again:

... arts policy and the goals and outcomes associated with policy will be developed, and will guide the implementation and review of existing policies and programs.

It never happened, Mr Rattenbury. They could not table one, except to say, “We’ve modified the funding guidelines.” That is all they did—three years to develop a policy framework and all they did was to modify the funding guidelines.

I have great respect, minister, for the people who work in the arts fraternity, because they are the real drivers in the engine room of the current economy, and could be a much greater driver in the future economy. You raised what the Childers Group said in their budget submission, Mr Rattenbury. The estimates committee, when they raised that, when they spoke before us—I have not had time to find it—had a recommendation that said the government should do something about this, just as governments had helped the community sector go to Fair Work Australia. The response from the government was, “Well, that’s up to them.” I am paraphrasing it, but that is the basic gist of it. A lot of people were quite disappointed that the party and government that prides itself on supporting the worker took such an offhand approach to what was happening.

So we know what happened in 2013—absolutely nothing. I thank Ms Burch for her speech on the consultation process. It is there on page 9; a consultation report was developed. You would think you would turn the page and find out what has happened since, and what is going to happen. But it just says how it all fits together, and there is a chart that basically mirrors artsACT’s strategic plan. If we have abrogated the vision to the strategic plan of artsACT then so be it. But there is no implementation. As you read correctly, Mr Rattenbury, on page 29 it goes on to say:

The priorities and actions which will see this Policy implemented are set out in the strategic plans of both artsACT and the CFC.

They pre-existed. So we have policy that simply confirms the pre-existing strategic plans of artsACT and the Cultural Facilities Corporation, instead of leading the debate, setting up the framework and driving the work of the public servants.

It goes on to say, Mr Rattenbury—and this is why a list is important; you have to keep it basic for this minister because she does not perform very well:

Sitting alongside these strategic documents will be a number of operational plans which are to be developed by artsACT on issues such as: research and data; cultural infrastructure; communications; community arts and cultural development; and funding.

I would have thought that you could say, “We did the consultation, we released the framework, and here’s the progress to date.” This has been running for six months, but apparently nothing has happened, because the minister could not tell us what had been done. That is why a list is required, Mr Rattenbury, because you have to keep it very basic for this minister.

Mr Rattenbury, you said, “I thank the minister for the work that has been done in the report that shows the value of the arts,” but obviously you did not hear what I said about the underperformance of the arts. These numbers, whereby the ACT economy got \$426 million from the arts and cultural sector, were in 2012-13. The numbers I quoted for the national average, according to the Australia Council, were from 2010-11. So it is the year before, and it is still three to five times less than what you would expect.

That is the problem. We have this funding. We have a vibrant arts centre. We have the national institutions. We have local infrastructure, whether it be the half-built Belconnen Arts Centre; and I know Mrs Dunne has been advocating to get a theatre, a town hall, in the Belconnen precinct so that they can do the sorts of things that Mr Gentleman knows occur in Tuggeranong, because we have a facility there that has a theatre. Of course, there is no mention of that. We have the national infrastructure and we have territory infrastructure. Then there is the local infrastructure that exists in the community and the surrounding region. It is there, but it is not being tied together, it is not being utilised and it is certainly not being led. That is what is lacking here.

I will go through the numbers again, because obviously Mr Rattenbury missed them. The value of arts in 2012-13 to the ACT was \$426 million, 1.3 per cent of total value-added by industry. Nationally, cultural activity is estimated to make up around four per cent of Australia’s GDP. So we are way underperforming, Mr Rattenbury. If you are not concerned about it, I certainly am, because this is the money that comes in to fund education, health, police officers on the street and better infrastructure. The government’s own report says, with respect to employment, that this was equivalent to 3.1 per cent of ACT employment.

You must have missed this, Mr Rattenbury, so I will say it again: according to the Australia Council for the Arts, copyright industries that have arts and cultural activity at their core employ eight per cent of the nation's workforce. And it is not just in Australia. The cultural sector contributes four per cent of Australia's GDP, similar to levels in the United States, Canada and Spain. In the city that is home to the Australian story, that has Australia's cultural collecting institutions, that has some great authors, artists and dancers—Canberra leads the country in contemporary dance and contemporary glass blowing, which is why, when we were last in government we funded and started the work on the glassworks, because we know how important it is—why are we at a third of the national average? And why, in the framework—the old one, 2012, and the new one, 2015—is there no plan to deliver an increase in the number of people working, their output and their value to our economy?

Mr Rattenbury, you might then get better funding for arts workers. But there is no drive here. That is why we have kept it simple. That is why we have said, “Yes, minister, we want a list, because you're not very good at delivering. You didn't deliver in the 2012-15 framework, and we've got no confidence that you can deliver in the future.”

I will say it again; I will keep it simple. If you repeat it, somebody might hear it. The 2012 document states:

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

It never happened. The minister cannot recite them. She could not give them to the estimates or the annual reports committees, and it never happened. In the new document it says the same thing. It says:

Sitting alongside these strategic documents will be a number of operational plans which are to be developed by artsACT on issues such as: research and data; cultural infrastructure; communications; community arts and cultural development; and funding.

That is why we are asking for a list. It is an aide-memoire for the minister, who has been deficient in delivering in the past, and I suspect will be deficient in the future. You would have thought that, six months on from the delivery of this, the minister could come back here and say to us, “We have been able to deliver this.” But six months on, there is nothing. That, Mr Rattenbury, and that, members, is why we are moving this motion today. The motion is simple. It says, “Develop a consultation schedule with all arts communities in the ACT.” If there is a bit more consultation on the plan, some of these plans might be developed. It says, “Develop a consolidated list of actionable initiatives in support of her policy, with accompanying budgets, performance targets and time frames,” and that it should be given to us in February.

You would have thought, Madam Deputy Speaker, that eight months after you had delivered the framework, you might be able to tell us what you are going to do, when you are going to do it, how much it will cost and what we get from it. It is very simple. We will not be supporting the amendment because, yet again, Mr Rattenbury is working with the Labor government to let the minister off the hook. This is too

important to let go. From all the documents, whether it be the Australia Council comprising learned academics, individual learned academics, philosophers or other reports, and even the Chief Minister's own document, it is quite clear that art drives innovation. It is time that we took it seriously. (*Time expired.*)

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.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Ms Burch**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Free speech

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (5.48): I want to spend some time this evening in the adjournment debate reflecting on the nature of free speech in a similar way to my parliamentary colleagues Senator Eric Abetz and Mr Dominic Perrottet MLA. Many of my constituents have written to me to voice their concern about the referral of the Catholic Archbishop of Hobart, Julian Porteous, to the Tasmanian discrimination commissioner and the decision by that commissioner to essentially press charges for circulating a document through Tasmania's Catholic schools called "Don't mess with marriage".

Like the many constituents who have contacted me, I am perplexed not so much by the complaint but that the Tasmanian discrimination commissioner did not dismiss it as merely vexatious.

The notion that a leader of an organisation can express the views of that organisation—views that it has held for more than 2,000 years, views that are in accordance with Australian law—has left many to wonder what has happened in

Australia, the land of the fair go. What has happened to the notion of free speech in Australia? Has 1984 finally come to Australia?

In Australia, under the influence of the self-styled progressive parties—Labor and the Greens—we have seen attempts to curtail the expression of views that do not comply with the dominant zeitgeist. When Archbishop Porteous distributed the document that outlines the 2,000-year-old views of the Catholic Church, which are upheld by Australian law, Australian Marriage Equality put out a call for someone who was offended to take the matter to the discrimination commissioner. In an Orwellian twist, not one person to whom this document was distributed could bring themselves to take the matter to the discrimination commissioner; rather, it was a Greens candidate at the next federal election.

Noted commentator and compatriot Sam Gregg recently wrote on his blog:

I am coming to the conclusion that, for many Westerners today, the greatest crime of all is ... to hurt other people's feelings. When someone responds to your argument by saying "that offends me" or "that will offend X group" you know you are most likely dealing with someone who self-defines as a progressive. But the point of tolerance is to allow people to express different views and even disagree strongly, without killing each other. Appeal to tolerance, however, is now used in a progressive way to shut down discussion.

I could not agree more. The case of Archbishop Porteous being brought before the discrimination commissioner shows the level of intolerance of some and their desire to shut down discussion on the marriage debate.

The case of Archbishop Porteous demonstrates the desire of the parties of the left to silence their opponents not by the strength of their argument but by institutions of a so-called civil society. The fact that Labor and the Greens combined in the Senate last week to deny a debate on free speech issues surrounding this case shows just how low the so-called progressive parties have sunk in their desire to mute the voice of anyone who speaks out against their views.

The case of Archbishop Porteous shows the decline of public discourse in Australia. The case of Archbishop Porteous shows that we should be very afraid about the health of our democracy. As parliamentarians, we should be standing up for the rights of our fellow Australians to express themselves. Instead, many progressive parliamentarians seem to be participating in tearing down decent political discourse.

My challenge to all members in this place is to stand up for the rights of people to express their views even if we disagree with them.

Visitors

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I would like to welcome members of the returned services. You are very welcome.

Adjournment
Children's Week
Communities@Work

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (5.52): I would like to talk today about two recent events: Children's Week, which was 24 October to 1 November, and the Communities@Work graduation ceremony on 5 November.

Children's Week dates from 1954, when the United Nations General Assembly recommended that all countries institute Universal Children's Day, to be observed as a day of worldwide fraternity and understanding between children and activity promoting the welfare of the world's children, and that the observance of Universal Children's Day should be used for a concrete and effective expression of the support of governments for the purposes of UNICEF.

Children's Week committees in each state and territory seek to focus attention on the theme of Children's Week with due regard to the rights, needs and accomplishments of children and young people within the context of the family, the community and the world. The committees support and acknowledge government and community groups in their work for our children and young people.

I would like to quote from His Excellency General the Hon Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd), Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, who said:

Children are so precious to all of us, they represent our future, and they have the enthusiasm and potential to change our world and make it a better place.

Children's Week is not only a dedication to children, but also a week to recognise the substantial contribution that our communities make to children and their development. I would like to thank those organisations who go to great lengths each and every day to ensure our children are safe, are happy and have every opportunity for positive growth and development.

I particularly note a few organisations who took part in the recent Children's Week activities. They include, but are not limited to, Bonython Primary School and their P&C; Richardson Child Care and Education Centre; Caroline Chisholm School and after-school care; Communities@Work Appletree House Child Care & Education Centre; Communities@Work Greenway Child Care & Education Centre; Communities@Work Gordon out of school hours care; Communities@Work Chisholm out of school hours care; Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre; Honey Bee Family Day Care; Isabella Plains Child Care and Education Centre; Isabella Plains Early Childhood School; the Filipino Language School of Canberra; and the Australian Breastfeeding Association for the ACT region, and I would like to mention Megan Fox, who organised the picnic that the Australian Breastfeeding Association held. I would also like to acknowledge the Hon Margaret Reid AO, who is the ACT Children's Week patron.

During Children's Week I had the opportunity to visit one of the childcare centres in my electorate. I had a fantastic time, talking with the staff, talking with the children, and learning about the activities they undertake each day in "belonging, being and becoming", the words they use to identify the work they are doing each day.

On Thursday, 5 November, I had the privilege to attend the graduation ceremony for Communities@Work's Centre of Professional Learning & Education. My thanks to Chris Barry, the general manager of external relations; Lynne Harwood, the CEO; Lee Maiden, deputy CEO; and all the teachers, support staff and past and present students, in particular those who graduated at the ceremony I attended, who included Samantha-Jo Allen, Cheryl-Jane Gallagher, Molly O'Callaghan, Elizabeth Arellano, Ariella Guarino, Ashley Prideaux, Jaime Bonnett, Kara Hammell, Kerry Saxby-Junna, Rebecca Burgess, Hayley Hartig, Sophie Stanton, Rebecca Cargill, Diane Hunia, Rebecca Sultana, Janet Chandler, Gurpreet Kaur, Victoria Sutherland, Andrea Concepcion, Laura Kirkby, Akiko Takahashi, Giorgia Cox, Jessica Millard, Daniel Tedeschi, Maddison Cox, Amy Minchin, Brianna Thomas, Caroline Dalton, Sandra Norris, Yue Wang, Sarah Day, Saleena Nouaphay, Teri-Lee Webster, Josefa Demicoli, James Phillips, Zoe Fuller, Avril Pitt, John Hamilton, Daniel Schorn, Zaw Min Ohn Mar, Anita Senjic, Michaela Barbara, Sandra Henriques Costa, Esther Ramsey, Dimino Derkley, Songloc Ho, Emma Sims, Rhiannon Farrell, Phillipa McIntyre, Lisa Webster, Dhammi Gamage, Patricia Calderon-Perez, Katherine Whelan, Clarissa Hernandez and Leah Ramos.

I finish with a quote from Dr Seuss:

You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose. You're on your own. And you know what you know. And YOU are the guy who'll decide where to go.

My congratulations to those who graduated.

Visitors

MADAM SPEAKER: I would like to acknowledge the presence in the chamber of former member of the Legislative Assembly Mr Lou Westende and former member of the ACT advisory committee Mr Jim Leedman. Welcome to the Assembly.

Adjournment Mr Lou Westende OAM

MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (5.58): I tonight recognise and pay tribute to an important member of our Canberra community and a former member of the ACT Legislative Assembly. This significant Canberran was awarded a knighthood in the Order of Orange Nassau by Her Majesty Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands in 1995 in recognition of his work in enhancing the standing of the Dutch community in Australia. He also received an Order of Australia medal in the general division in January 1997 for service to the community and to business and commerce, the ACT Legislative Assembly, the ACT Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the National

Gallery of Australia. In May 2000 he was awarded l'Ordre Nationale du Merite by the President of the French Republic in recognition of his devotion to France and his contribution to the development of relations between France and Australia. In 2001 he was awarded a centenary medal for voluntary service to the ACT, to the ACT Legislative Assembly and to Dutch-Australian friendship.

I speak, of course, of Mr Laurus Vant Westende OAM, better known to us as Lou Westende. In a biography of him published in 2005 Lou describes himself as “Lou Westende, a migrant”. He grew up in the Netherlands during the Depression and the German occupation and then spent three years in Indonesia with the Netherlands marines.

Through these early experiences, he gained his love of freedom and independence and the determination and strong persistence that shaped his destiny. He arrived in Australia in 1951 as a 26-year-old immigrant to join his brother John in Melbourne. The brothers found their new life in Australia a happy contrast with post-war Netherlands. After working in various jobs, Lou gained a cadetship with Addressograph Multigraph in 1953, an American firm that marketed printing machines and office equipment. This was to provide him with a very rewarding business career that eventually brought him to Canberra.

I have struggled to condense Lou Westende's life into a mere five minutes of this adjournment debate, and I strongly urge people to read his biography called *Fulfilment and Success: The Story of Lou Westende—a migrant*. It is the fascinating story of Lou and Mandy Westende and their contribution to our city and to Australia.

I first got to know of Lou in 1974 when I, too, was transferred to Canberra to work for an office equipment company, and I admired his business acumen as a competitor. Over the years I followed his progress. In many ways our paths are similar: both being immigrants, starting our working life in office equipment, owning our own businesses and, of course, joining the Liberal Party and being elected to the ACT Assembly.

Tonight I am privileged as a friend and admirer to pay this tribute to Lou Westende OAM, just 10 days from his 90th birthday and in the company of other great contributors and former ACT Assembly members and close friends, Jim Leedman and Peter Kobold, as well as other great friends Ian Porteous, Len Goodman and Gary Dengate.

It is fitting to quote from Lou Westende's maiden speech that he gave in 1992:

I feel very honoured and privileged to be standing here as a member of the ACT Legislative Assembly but, more importantly, I am very conscious of the responsibilities that this honour and privilege entails. It is a responsibility that is indeed entrusted to all members of this Assembly by those who have placed us here—the people of the ACT—and we must never lose sight of this.

He went on in that speech to also talk of the need for strong leadership from government and a firm and strong commitment by every member of the community. Those words of 23 years ago echo to us today, especially to us in the Liberal Party because we know and appreciate the importance of strong leadership in government. We have not seen it for a while, but the Canberra Liberals will deliver it next October.

I and many others have been very inspired by the example of Lou Westende, his determination and persistence over the past 40 years. I hope we can celebrate Lou Westende's 91st birthday here in the Assembly on 28 November 2016 after a Liberal victory in the October 2016 elections. Lou Westende, the Liberal team in the ACT Legislative Assembly salutes you.

Maribyrnong school twilight fair

MR COE (Ginninderra) (6.02): I rise tonight to talk about the Maribyrnong Primary School twilight fair, which I was fortunate enough to attend last Friday. The fair contained many family-friendly fundraising activities, including the white elephant, plant, cake and book stalls, archery and both a live and silent auction. The live auction went off particularly well, and I would like to thank all those who donated and purchased auction items on the night. I know the school's P&C is very grateful for the help and donations they received from many organisations and individuals. Further events included a sideshow alley, which was run by students and staff from the grades 5 and 6 classes. Bells Amusements also provided a number of rides which were very much enjoyed by kids and parents alike.

Thankfully, after a day of very wet weather, the clouds cleared just in time for the fete starting at 4 pm. Proving that the timing was just perfect, a thunderstorm was to come in as soon as the fete finished up at 8 pm. As remarked to me after the fair, the weather gods were well and truly on the side of the fete organisers. The clear weather allowed for a good turnout, and I know the fair turned out to be a good fundraiser for the school heading into 2016.

The Maribyrnong Primary School twilight fair is only possible because of the hard work and dedication of the school's P&C, all of whom volunteered their time: Noel Florien, the president of the school's P&C, leads an active P&C committee which has worked tirelessly to put on the twilight fair this year. In particular, Sharon Hewson and Clare Madden took a leading role in organising the volunteers and events at this year's fair. I thank Sharon and Clare for the hard work they put in this year, which, of course, the immediate Maribyrnong Primary School community benefits from but also the broader community does, too.

Jennifer Howard, the school's principal, and Lauren Newman, the chair of the school's board, should also be acknowledged for the role they played and do play at the school on an ongoing basis. There are also many other parents, staff and students who went out of their way to help, whether at the fair itself or by baking or donating items prior to the event. Putting together a fete is truly a community event. To all those who volunteered or gave up time or money or anything else to contribute to the event, I thank you.

The Maribyrnong Primary School twilight fair was a wonderful way to end the week. I congratulate all those involved and I encourage members to attend the twilight fair next year. For more information about the school, I encourage members to visit their website at maribyrnongps.act.edu.au.

Hibberson Street, Gungahlin—survey

MS FITZHARRIS (Molonglo) (6.05): I rise to inform the Assembly tonight of the results from my survey on Hibberson Street in the Gungahlin town centre, which closed last week—the survey that is, not the street. In August I launched a survey to see what people think of Hibberson Street and whether it should be closed to traffic. I did this after numerous conversations with people, mostly at my mobile office on Hibberson Street, about the issues this busy road creates. Hibberson Street is the heart of the Gungahlin town centre. It is the centre for shopping, events, a place to meet friends. It is a busy road and a busy bus route.

Gungahlin will continue to grow by thousands of people each year, and we need to ensure that the Gungahlin town centre remains vibrant and welcoming while meeting the demands of our growing region.

In total, 720 people filled in my survey to have their say on the future of Hibberson Street and made suggestions about what the ACT government can do to make the Gungahlin town centre more vibrant. The survey asked people to state whether they would like to see Hibberson Street permanently closed to cars, turned into a shared zone like Bunda Street in Civic, closed off during the day or perhaps left like it is, or any other options.

The results show 74 per cent of respondents think Hibberson Street should be permanently closed to traffic or be a pedestrian-first area. It is clear that people want to see more feet on Hibberson Street. When asked what the best solution is, 49 per cent said it should be permanently closed to cars; 18 per cent liked the idea of a shared zone like Bunda Street; 15 per cent suggested closing it during the day only; eight per cent suggested another option such as making it a one-way street; and only 10 per cent wanted to see it left as it is. People also said they would be more likely to go into the town centre if there was less traffic.

I must say that I am proud that so many people took the time to engage with this issue, letting me know what they think the future of Hibberson Street should be. I hope this conversation will continue both within government and within the community. But I also understand that although this survey clearly shows a preference from the community on Hibberson Street, something like this cannot happen in isolation and it will not happen overnight. This would be a significant change if it were to occur.

If you have been to Gungahlin town centre lately, there is a lot going on there. It is also interesting to see the flow-on effect from small changes and how they impact on things like parking, traffic flow, safety and public transport. So it will be important to look at the town centre as a whole in considering potential changes to Hibberson Street.

There is a lot of development currently underway in the town centre with the excavation of the Woolies car park and the new Bunnings development. No doubt there is more to come, including new apartment blocks, roadworks, the bus interchange, capital metro and, of course, the cinema.

The ACT government is also in the middle of a consultation on the future of the proposed site for the new Gungahlin bus station, with the likely location selected as Gungahlin Place between Ernest Cavanagh Street and Hibberson Street. And, of course, there is light rail stage one, which will also come down Hibberson Street. All these elements will impact on the future of the street and the town centre.

For me, the next step will be to get more feedback from local businesses and community groups. I have spoken to many already, and I know there is some concern about the impact on access from closing Hibberson Street to cars permanently. I look forward to getting more feedback from local businesses and local community groups and continuing my conversation with the Minister for Planning, Mick Gentleman, about how we can advance this discussion and better understand any impact on traffic management and planning in the town centre.

I acknowledge today the great work Minister Gentleman has done on the statement of planning intent released earlier this week. He is spot on when he says we need to seize opportunities for urban renewal and make our city more accessible, inclusive, well designed and friendly. Actions to improve public places and streets need to involve conversations with the community on how we can collectively make better places for people. That is what I set out to do in this survey. I think any changes to the town centre should be about creating better places for people and vibrant public spaces that focus on pedestrians first.

The feedback in my survey and from my conversations so far aligns well with the extensive consultation undertaken by the minister, and I am excited to see this conversation about the town centre with the statement now released. The feedback has been great and shows that we have a very engaged community who love to have their say on local issues. It also highlights to me that Gungahlin residents want a main street which is vibrant, a reason for people to travel into the town centre.

As I said, there is and will continue to be a lot of development in the town centre over the next few months and years. Light rail and a more integrated transport system will also change the town centre in a positive way and, I believe, change Hibberson Street significantly.

I hope we can find a solution for the town centre that supports our region as it continues to grow. Hibberson Street will undoubtedly be at the centre of future planning but ultimately this is a whole-of-region issue that needs a holistic approach. I am proud the thoughts of the 720 people who filled in my survey will be included in future discussions.

Valedictory

MS BURCH (Brindabella—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Racing and Gaming and Minister for the Arts) (6.10), in reply: As I have a pair tomorrow from about 11 and this is my last night in the Assembly for this year, I take the opportunity to thank Assembly staff and to wish my caucus and cabinet colleagues a safe and refreshing break over the new year. I look forward to working with them again in this place in the new year.

I also take time to thank my office staff. Phil spent a significant amount of time with me but he is no longer here. Maria now heads up my office as chief of staff. Marc, Melinda, Brenton and Emma all serve me incredibly well here, as do the DLOs, Nance, Ali, Naveen, Annalise and Troy. Thanks to Chris and Kathryn who have supported me in my office and also interns Blake Bensley, who is here this week, and Monique and Thomas who spent some time with me.

In my office I have fabulous staff, as we all have. In my office we also have therapy pets. We have big Ted, little Ted, Marcie the unicorn, Randy the reindeer and Fred the AFP search dog that keep us all in order. And we do have Constable Kenny but perhaps we should not call him a pet too often because he is a 40-year-old constable with ACT Policing. At times in my office these therapy pets are known to wobble like a dingbat but that is okay; it is all part of the therapy in my office.

I again say it has been an interesting year. I thank my staff. They are great people. I believe I have got a great office. They are good company. We have good food and we are all addicted to a word and maths puzzle each and every day in my office. Well done to Marc, who is here, and to all those who are upstairs. I look forward to the next 12 months.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.13 pm.