



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

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Thursday, 7 October 2021

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Questions without notice
Budget—infrastructure

MS LEE: My question is to the Chief Minister in his capacity as Treasurer. Chief Minister, you have struggled to deliver infrastructure for years, announcing and re-announcing many projects, such as the hospital rebuild. You have fallen short of your own infrastructure spend in the 2019-20 budget by a staggering \$250 million. Yesterday's budget announcement was a four per cent increase in infrastructure spending over four years, claiming that this would turbocharge the economy. Chief Minister, what have you done as the minister responsible for major projects in Canberra to enhance your directorate's project management capability to see this modest increase is actually delivered?

MR BARR: The budget does contain a very significant infrastructure program. In fact, I draw the Leader of the Opposition's attention to the net new capital that is contained within the new policy decisions of the budget, table 3.2.1, which sees \$455 million in new capital over the forward estimates period. That is net of the capital provisions that are provided across the forward estimates.

In looking at the detail of the program, Madam Speaker, you will see that new works are a smaller proportion than they have been in previous budgets because there is a strong ongoing program. The government has been very clear in the 10-year infrastructure plan that we have put forward what the priority projects were, and we have drawn from that infrastructure program for the projects that have received funding.

Ms Lee: A point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lee, a point of order.

Ms Lee: The question specifically was what the Chief Minister, in his capacity as minister responsible for major projects, has done to enhance the directorate's capability. I ask that he be relevant to that.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think he is talking about the infrastructure forward plan and its ability to be delivered. Mr Barr.

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would draw the Leader of the Opposition's attention to the initiatives contained within the budget papers, including those specifically for Major Projects Canberra that include some additional resourcing for the agency, scaling that agency up in line with the scaled up infrastructure program.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary, Ms Lee.

MS LEE: Minister, how will a modest four per cent increase in infrastructure spending over four years turbocharge our economy?

MR BARR: It is not a four per cent increase.

Ms Lee: What is it?

MR BARR: It is significantly greater than that. I do not know where the Leader of the Opposition got that figure from. It is certainly not drawn from the budget papers.

Ms Lee: Your budget papers.

MR BARR: It is not drawn from the budget papers.

Ms Lee: Then what is it?

MR BARR: I mentioned that in answer to your first question. The net new capital is nearly \$500 million of a \$5 billion program.

Ms Lee: What is it as a percentage?

MR BARR: If you quickly did the maths, Madam Speaker, you might work out that nearly \$500 million in net new capital in a \$5 billion program would be closer to 10 per cent. But look, that the Leader of the Opposition has perhaps failed in her first test as shadow treasurer might demonstrate something about the weakness of her reply to the budget last night and what we have seen today.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

MR BARR: It is not just the infrastructure program that is contained within the budget to turbocharge our city's economic recovery. We are confident that a \$5 billion infrastructure program continues to build the infrastructure that our city needs, support more than 15,000 jobs in the construction industry and has a significant flow-on benefit across the entire economy, targeting 250,000 jobs in our economy by the end of 2025.

MRS JONES: A supplementary.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, do your delivery forecasts factor in the things that you normally blame for your under-delivery of the infrastructure program, such as rain and industry capacity?

MR BARR: There has been some adjustment in the program to reflect border closures associated with the pandemic both internally within Australia and, perhaps more significantly, the Australian border having been closed for several years. There are contingencies associated with each major project. What has generally been the case is that the practical completion of projects precedes the financial completion, including the defect period, for particular projects, often by many months. When you are on a 12-monthly cycle that can often mean that practical completion occurs in one financial year and financial completion, after a defect period and a remedy period, occurs in the following financial year.

The government continues to work closely with key industry stakeholders across the

range of major infrastructure projects. The infrastructure program has more than 250 projects in it. They range in size from sub-million to tens of millions of dollars to hundreds of millions of dollars. So different projects have different risk profiles, different contingencies. Every single government in Australia faces some of the same challenges around program delivery, and there are always events that occur that are beyond the control of a government or, indeed, a successful tenderer in the delivery of a project.

Budget—infrastructure

MRS JONES: My question is to the Treasurer: in February 2021 you estimated that the infrastructure investment program for 2022-23 would be \$1.11 billion. In yesterday's budget, you announced \$1.56 billion for total infrastructure investment, including provisions for 2022-23. However, you acknowledged, and I quote from page 280 of the budget outlook, that the forecast for 2022-23 infrastructure investment is only \$1.07 billion. This forecast represents a \$45 million reduction for 2022-23 from the last budget. Why, Treasurer, is the 2022-23 program \$45 million less when Canberrans need investment the most on the path to recovery?

MR BARR: You will see in table 3.7.1—the summary of the general government sector investment program, the five-year program—that a significant capital delivery provision is set aside. The government has the capital works reserve, which ensures that projects that are running ahead of schedule are able to draw upon that reserve in order to continue ahead of schedule.

Mrs Jones would do well to understand the difference between physical completion and financial completion. Often, given there can be defect periods that run for six to 12 months, the financial completion of a project will be several months—sometimes even a year—after the physical construction work is complete, because, rightly, the government will want from its successful tenderer to see the quality of the project and to ensure that any defects are addressed. That is why the fiscal program and profile can be somewhat different from the physical completion of infrastructure works. So the fiscal profile that you see in the budget will reflect that defect period and the fact that financial completion will occur many months after the physical completion of works.

MRS JONES: Minister, which projects are ahead of schedule and drawing on the finances outlined in your answer to the last question?

MR BARR: There were several that did, in fact, run ahead of schedule that were able to be budget-managed within the allocation of the individual directorate. This, of course, was pre the lockdown. An example was the Acton waterfront project, but it has now obviously been set back by the lockdown and by border closures. But pre-lockdown there were a number of projects in a number of directorates running ahead of schedule.

Mrs Jones: Which ones?

MR BARR: I do not have the list in my head, but I am aware through the budget rounds that many projects were running ahead of schedule.

MS LEE: Treasurer, why does your forecast investment program actually fall by \$21 million over the four years of forward estimates?

MR BARR: This has been the same question the sixth time over, so I will give the same answer—because there is a difference between physical and financial completion of projects and, depending on the nature of the project and the level of the defect period, it is quite often the case that financial completion occurs in the fiscal year following the physical completion of a project.

Business—support

MR DAVIS: My question is to the Minister for Business and Better Regulation. Minister, as the ACT Greens spokesperson for business, I have been engaging with a number of small Canberra businesses throughout the lockdown, particularly in my electorate of Brindabella, to better understand how the government can support them. A few businesses have raised concerns with me about the design and implementation of the government's business support payments. Specifically, I understand that businesses who operate in multiple locations with different staff and different client bases but trade under one ABN would only be eligible for one payment. Can you confirm that that is the case?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Davis for the question. The business supports program is, as we know, the largest grants program delivered in ACT government history. We have been able to provide funds to thousands of Canberra businesses during lockdown. It has been in a fifty-fifty funding partnership with the commonwealth government, with over \$160 million paid to local businesses so far.

Importantly, the funding parameters, the thresholds and the eligibility requirements have been set as part of that agreement with the commonwealth. So it is right, Mr Davis, that a business owner can apply for one business support grant per ABN. This was a parameter that was one of the requirements. It is standard across the commonwealth's agreements with other jurisdictions using similar fifty-fifty funded schemes, and it is a feature of the equivalent program in New South Wales.

We cannot speak for the commonwealth on why they have this standard requirement, but I can give some examples from our perspective of why it might make sense. The ABN is the only way for us to know that an entity is a separate business. Setting up the grants to allow for multiple grants per ABN would have significantly increased the complexity of administration and compliance. It is hard to see how we could have consistently and accurately verified distinct and separate business operations operating under the one ABN. We would have had to assess the eligibility, size and sector of each of the businesses operating under the sole ABN. It would have created complex questions regarding equity and appropriateness. For example, would a service provider that also retails products—a hair salon or a mechanic—be considered to be two separate businesses? (*Time expired.*)

MR DAVIS: Minister, that being the case, what other supports can the ACT government offer in addition to these cash payments to small businesses operating in multiple locations but under one ABN?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Davis for the question. A business with one ABN that has multiple operations sounds like it may well be a larger business. It is important to note that an employing business, no matter its size, will receive at least \$40,000 in business support payments. But if it is a larger business, it could be receiving up to \$100,000, with the additional \$60,000 for businesses with a turnover, say, of more than \$10 million. But it tapers down from there as well.

On top of that, if a business happens to be in the hospitality, the arts, the tourism, the fitness, or the accommodation sectors, there are additional top-up payments as well. The ACT government also has a number of fee waivers and other schemes. The business hardship scheme is due to come online very soon. I would encourage all businesses to sign up to our business newsletter.

MS CLAY: Minister, can you run through the new, additional investments that were made in yesterday's budget to support Canberra's small businesses?

MS CHEYNE: There were significant investments in our budget to support small businesses. As noted, we already have \$290 million available for the COVID-19 business support grants, of which more than \$160 million has been paid. On top of that, the best thing for businesses in our community is for our community to be safe. That is through vaccinations. They are absolutely interrelated.

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MS CHEYNE: There is a reason that we have had dogged determination regarding our vaccination status, and it is this—to Mrs Jones, who is laughing, for whatever reason—a safe community provides confidence. It provides confidence for the business community, and that equals consumer confidence—confidence in going to businesses. And it equals visitor confidence as well as workforce confidence as we open up.

We are also considering measures that do not necessarily have a dollar figure attached to them, such as procurement policies, as a government, and how to make doing business with government easier. But to complement this, and it is detailed in the budget papers, the government's priority remains supporting long-term economic growth and the diversification of the territory's economy. We want a strong economy and we want to create jobs. The two go hand in hand. Having both attracts more people here, whether they are living here, working here or visiting. That results in more people spending in our local businesses.

We have an additional \$28 million on top of the COVID-19 emergency funding to help the medium to longer term recovery, including promoting and stimulating international trade, as our international borders open up, funding a range of initiatives focused on supporting innovative start-ups, attracting new investment, venture capital investment and more. *(Time expired.)*

Education—teachers

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. On 3 August this year you announced a taskforce to tackle serious teacher shortages that had been raised by the Australian Education Union. As you stated at the time, "A recent

survey conducted by the AEU ACT branch confirms what we already know, which is that this national teacher shortage is having an impact locally.” The budget actually notes a decrease in FTE numbers in the Education Directorate—from 6,553 last financial year to a predicted 6,365 this financial year—a fall of 188. Given the teacher shortage crisis facing Canberra’s schools, how much of this reduction is in frontline teachers?

MS BERRY: I will have to take that question on notice.

MR HANSON: Why is there a decrease of over a hundred Education Directorate staff in this budget at the same time as the AEU say there is a chronic shortage of teachers?

MS BERRY: The whole point of the work of the taskforce is to investigate why there is a teacher shortage in the ACT and what we can do in the ACT to address that. As we have said, it is a national issue, but of course the ACT is not immune to that.

MR PARTON: Minister, given the shortage of teachers, why would you not retain the temporary staff on a permanent basis to address the crisis?

MS BERRY: The taskforce has been set up to address exactly these types of questions about what we can do as far as making sure that we have the appropriate teaching workforce in the ACT.

Budget—education

DR PATERSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister, how is the 2021-22 ACT budget supporting student welfare and enhancing equity outcomes in our schools.

MS BERRY: I thank Dr Paterson for that question. The education budget this year is all about equity. We believe that every child, regardless of their background, should have the same opportunities to thrive and succeed in ACT public schools. This budget is delivering on the government’s Future of Education strategy, which is all about improving access, equity and inclusion for all students. A new \$11.5 million Future of Education Equity Fund will replace the Secondary School Bursary Scheme, and it will reach five times as many students. An additional 25 youth and social workers will be employed at a cost of \$7.4 million over the next four years, providing early intervention and support for students and their families.

We are also investing \$1.5 million for a two-year trial to provide 1,500 students with access to free breakfast and lunch for three days a week. These are progressive Labor values. These were all ACT Labor’s commitments, and now this government has committed to them through its budget announcements today. We know that children cannot learn without a full stomach, and this is about making sure that every child has the same equal chance to succeed.

DR PATERSON: Minister, what investments is the ACT government making to support and enhance early childhood education in the ACT?

MS BERRY: This budget also sees the government invest \$12.5 million over four years

to continue the ACT's nation-leading 10-year plan for early childhood education, called Set-up for Success. This includes additional funding for the targeted provision of three-year-old preschool for those children who need it most, because for children who experience disadvantage, early education plays a significant role in turning the curve on the level of inequality. No child should miss out on quality early childhood education because it is unaffordable.

We are also funding additional scholarships for early childhood teacher degrees and employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early year engagement officers. Educators, parents and students have told us that transitions make a difference between education settings and that these really matter, so the budget has also allowed us to develop a transition methodology and framework for children and young people, so that we can put the structures in place to make sure that those transitions are easier for everyone.

Investing in early childhood reduces inequality by giving children the best possible start in life. These are the core values of this government, and I am proud that the budget reflects these values.

Mr Hanson: Madam Speaker—

MR PETTERSSON: Madam Speaker—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Pettersson had the floor, though he didn't have the noise, but he had the floor.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what other ongoing initiatives in this year's budget are supporting students, teachers and school communities?

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Without the commentary, Mr Hanson.

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary. There is so much more in this budget for education than I have been able to mention, including investing more than \$21 million to ensure that public high school and college students continue to be provided with Chromebooks and providing internet access to students who need it. This takes the financial pressures away from parents and makes sure that all students have equal access to a technology-based education.

After a wildly successful trial, we have been able to continue to provide free legal services to public college students as well. This is particularly important as we have seen domestic and family violence increase during the pandemic.

We are also investing millions of dollars in school infrastructure, including expanding Margaret Hendry School and building a new high school in Taylor. Expansions also include nine new modular learning centres, design works for a new primary school at Strathnairn and a modernised Narrabundah College, additional funding to complete the new high school in Kenny, and funding to prepare to modernise Garran Primary School. The government is also investing \$99 million to upgrade existing public school facilities

to make sure they are great places to work and learn. These investments help ensure that every child has a place at their local public school.

Transport Canberra—ticketing system

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, there have been significant delays in delivering a new public transport ticketing system for Canberra. This was first promised in 2017, and this year the delivery date has gone from 2023 to 2024. Minister, how can you expect the public to have any confidence in your ability to deliver a new ticketing system when it will take more than seven years from the initial response to deliver something that already exists and is working in other states?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question regarding a new ticketing system for the ACT. It is more than just a ticketing system; it includes a passenger information capability. It will assist our transport planners at the back end of the system, as well, to connect with a range of other different systems.

This is a large and complex procurement. It has been going for some years, but we are currently in the procurement process with a market sounding that is being undertaken. That is being assessed at the moment, before we move to the next stage. It is looking very promising at the moment. We are very confident that it will deliver a ticketing system that will provide a nation-leading capability, not just by providing tap-on, tap-off with a credit card, like Sydney, but going well beyond that with an account-based ticketing system with a whole variety of different ways that will enable access to public transport.

Ticketing is potentially a barrier for people to use public transport. We hope that by providing a more flexible and user-centred system that we can achieve even higher patronage levels on our public transport system in the future. We are also, as part of that work, consulting with our new TCCS accessibility reference group, which is made up of organisations and people representing people with disability, older Canberrans, young people, families, and those from our multicultural community as well, to make sure that, as we progress with projects like this, they have input into the design and we can make sure that they are as accessible as possible.

Once we have got a delivery partner on board then we will be working closely with them to make sure the ticketing system is designed in a way that is user-centred, to make sure that we can encourage even more people to use public transport in Canberra.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Parton, a supplementary.

MR PARTON: Minister, why have you consistently failed to deliver this project? Can you actually guarantee that it will be delivered, or will it go the way of the courts database upgrade, the ED wait times promises, the land release targets and the rebuild of the Canberra theatre?

MR STEEL: I think I have been very clear that we are out there in the market right now for this. We have been asking providers to come forward to deliver this system for Canberra. We have the market sounding process underway, and we are looking forward

to it reaching the next stage. Canberrans can see that piece of work progressing through the stages of the procurement process on the Tenders ACT website.

MR CAIN: A supplementary.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: Minister, why does the government not purchase a system in use in another Australian state?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. As I have outlined in the answer to the first question, it will need to connect to a range of different systems. There is not just an off-the-shelf solution with many of these IT infrastructure projects. We are, of course, talking with other jurisdictions about what they are doing, but we do not want to sign up to a system that is going to be outdated from day one. We want a system that is going to be a modern, flexible ticketing system that will last us a long period of time and meet the specific needs of the community.

The other important thing is that we get value for money through this process. That is why to date we have not actually been able to procure this—because we want to make sure that we get value for money through the process. We are going through the market sounding at the moment. We hope to get a provider that can deliver us a ticketing system that meets our needs but also delivers value for money for the territory.

Arts—Statement of Ambition

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for the Arts: I was really pleased to see your statement of ambition to make Canberra the arts capital of Australia, and I am also delighted to see all the arts funding in one place for the first time. But my quick analysis shows that over \$95 million of more than \$163 million in recurrent and capital funds over the next term will be spent on buildings. What proportion of the total arts budget will be spent on artists to make art?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Clay for the question and her acknowledgement and support of the statement of ambition. This is not about us and them or funding something versus something else; what the statement of ambition makes abundantly clear—and it is one of the reasons why we have been so transparent with the funding—is that this is about us all rising up together. A high tide lifts all boats, and that is exactly what we are trying to do here. It is about enhancing each other. The arts sector is ecosystem and everybody—

Opposition members interjecting—

MS CHEYNE: I cannot believe that the opposition is laughing about the arts—actually, no—I can.

Mrs Jones: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, is there a standing order that refers to being misrepresented by the minister when answering her question?

MADAM SPEAKER: No. The best way to deal with that is not to have any laughter

and not to have any interjections while someone is on their feet. Ms Cheyne.

MS CHEYNE: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is about everyone reaping the benefits of the ecosystem. It results in a more sustainable arts sector and it results in a growing arts sector. I will get to the specifics of Ms Clay's question, but I would also encourage her to not take a narrow view of the funding but to recognise this ecosystem and that everything supports everything else.

We already have an enormous amount of funding that goes directly to artists in terms of our arts grants funding. We have a long and proud history of that—our arts activities funding, our ACT screen arts funding, our HOMEFRONT Program—but there are also indirect opportunities as well, such as through the ACT Events Fund or through the community events or the major events that we hold. (*Time expired.*)

MS CLAY: Minister, what policies and procedures will you put in place to ensure that artists are paid first and paid fairly at industry rates on any project that involves government funding, such as the expo?

MS CHEYNE: We are looking forward to engaging very strongly with the community on our arts policy our arts funding model and the arts expo. I note that we already pay artists fairly. And it is not just about paying artists; it is also about supporting our arts workers.

I note that Ms Clay referenced in her media release that the budget supports the creation of admin jobs instead of artists. I would like to reflect that admin jobs in the sector are still arts jobs and are no less worthy. Our arts organisation and our cultural facilities—and, indeed, the arts expo—are going to rely on those arts workers. But absolutely we will work very closely with the sector in ensuring that ACT artists are supported. This is about growing the ACT arts sector, and we will.

MS LAWDER: Madam Speaker—

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lawder. I have given the call to Ms Lawder and standing order 43 makes accommodation for this. I am not being difficult, for those who have difficulty rising quickly to their feet.

MS LAWDER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, what is the average price of a piece of public art, given that you have allocated \$200,000 for a public art forum by women and/or non-binary individuals, or are you expecting women and non-binary individuals to produce their art for less than others?

MS CHEYNE: I somewhat reject the premise of that question. This is a significant investment and it responds to the community's feedback that not only do we not have enough public art in the ACT which reflects women or non-binary persons as the subject but also not enough public art created by women or non-binary persons.

The price of public art can absolutely depend on the type of the artwork, and it ranges in the ACT. I can take on notice what the average is, but I truly do not think there is a lot of value in talking about what the average is, particularly noting that public art is funded depending on the size but also the time in history. Therefore, what we paid for

a piece of public art some time ago may not be what we would be paying for it today. So I am not sure I will take that bit on notice, because I am not convinced of the value in doing so.

Mrs Jones: On a point of clarification, did the minister take that on notice or not? Can we have that clarified?

MS CHEYNE: No.

Budget—Alexander Maconochie Centre

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, in the last budget, \$34 million was allocated for the creation of a reintegration centre for the AMC, an additional \$97,000 was put aside for design and planning, and there was \$1.7 million for soil rectification. In March 2021 the centre was put on hold. This year a line item titled “reintegration pathways” is offset to a total of negative \$39 million. Minister, why was the reintegration centre put on hold, and does the offset mean that the money has been allocated to something else? Where has the capital investment gone?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mrs Kikkert for the question. The corrections budget items invest in improved reintegration and wellbeing initiatives to enhance services and support available to detainees at the AMC. They also fund the facilitation of critical repairs and improvements to AMC following some storm damage. It will of course involve furthering work to optimise the utilisation of the existing transitional release centre, and consolidating the work being done to modernise and improve programs and services available to detainees—building better pathways for those leaving the AMC as well.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, is the actual construction of the reintegration centre building being funded for this year, next year or the year after that?

MR GENTLEMAN: It is on hold at the moment. We are looking at whether to go forward with the extra work at the integration centre or seek some other, better opportunities for detainees.

MR HANSON: Minister, why have you scrapped this investment into justice reinvestment so soon after announcing it?

MR GENTLEMAN: It has not been scrapped.

Budget—work health and safety

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety. How is the ACT government supporting safe workplaces with the ACT budget?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Pettersson for his question and his interest in workplace safety across the ACT. The budget includes significant funding support for WorkSafe ACT. Since WorkSafe ACT became an independent agency in July 2020, the commissioner and her office have worked to create a regulatory body that is strong

and fair. This year's budget is delivering additional jobs, increasing WorkSafe's operational capacity. This will allow for the engagement of additional inspectors to ensure improved compliance and enforcement across priority industries in the territory and facilitate increased engagement and education.

This is important and will ensure that WorkSafe ACT are able to respond to some of the ACT government's key commitments under the parliamentary and governing agreement, including amending work health and safety laws and regulations. WorkSafe ACT will also play an important role in keeping the ACT government's major infrastructure projects safe. This includes light rail stage 2 and the Canberra Hospital expansion. A massive increase in residential construction work in the coming year is expected, and, because of this, WorkSafe will be very busy. I am extremely pleased to be able to deliver increased funding for WorkSafe ACT in the budget.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what has WorkSafe ACT been doing during this COVID-19 outbreak to keep workplaces and the community safe?

MR GENTLEMAN: WorkSafe ACT has been working extremely hard to keep workplaces safe during the pandemic and the current lockdown. Since the return of construction on 3 September, WorkSafe has been conducting proactive compliance campaigns to ensure PCBUs meet their work health and safety obligations and to enforce COVID-19 requirements for working during the lockdown. The WorkSafe commissioner has reported that they are generally seeing a high level of compliance but that there have been some worrying instances of noncompliance with both COVID and general safety requirements in the residential construction sector.

WorkSafe ACT conducted two dedicated proactive campaigns in the residential construction sector—one in Taylor on Tuesday, 21 September, and one in Throsby on Thursday, 23 September. In Taylor, 43 sites were visited, with 81 notices issued. In Throsby, 38 sites were visited with 73 notices issued. Notices are issued for COVID-19 compliance breaches as well as for safety issues such as site security, trip hazards and risk of falls. Without the important work of WorkSafe, these behaviours could have contributed to a further spread of COVID-19 in the community, so I want to commend our WorkSafe commissioner for her agency's response to the lockdown and acknowledge her excellent workforce capability management at the beginning of the lockdown. I am pleased that the government can support this excellent work through the 2021-22 budget.

MS ORR: Minister, what additional support is in the budget for workplace safety initiatives?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Orr for her interest in workplace safety, as well. The budget provides funding to implement the recommendations from the Secure Local Jobs Advisory Council review of the operations of the secure local jobs code. The recommendations were provided to me at the end of last year, outlining a plan for enhancing the secure local jobs code. We want to ensure that the code remains nationally, and that we only do business with ethical suppliers. This funding will grow and support the secure local jobs code branch to deliver important policy work and strengthen the powers of the secure local jobs code registrar. The review recommended that a two-stage procurement policy be adopted, and this work is already under way. I

look forward to delivering legislation to the Assembly with Minister Steel in the near future. This budget's additional funding will support the implementation of the two-stage procurement policy.

The pandemic has shown us that secure jobs are safe jobs. As a government, we do everything in our power to support secure jobs. This includes using our contractual powers. I am glad that this budget demonstrates the government's ongoing commitment to secure local jobs.

Budget—Canberra theatre complex

MS LAWDER: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for the Arts. Minister, in 2014 a feasibility study for a potential new theatre was announced, which accounted for approximately \$200,000 between the 2015 and 2017 financial years. In the 2017-18 budget, \$100,000 was dedicated to a Canberra theatre complex community consultation. In the 2018-19 budget, approximately \$1.1 million was committed to the early planning of the new Canberra theatre. In the 2020-21 budget, another \$400,000 was dedicated to the early planning of the new Canberra theatre complex. In the statement of ambition released last Thursday, there is \$2.7 million set aside for the new Canberra theatre centre site investigation and planning. Minister, how much will go on planning a new theatre before a sod is turned?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Lawder for her question and for her support for the redevelopment of the Canberra theatre. This is a very important project for us here in the ACT. It is one that we reference regularly because it is a really significant infrastructure project but also it is going to contribute to the wellbeing of this city and it supports our statement of ambition to be recognised as Australia's arts capital.

There are particular processes that are required for the commencement of such a significant build. Ms Lawder is right, or to an extent right, that the government is providing \$2.779 million in capital funding over two years for the preparations—site investigation, planning and the business case for the Canberra Theatre Centre expansion and redevelopment.

The redevelopment of the theatre will enable it to host a larger number and range of local, national and international events. The site investigations—

Ms Lawder: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, resume your seat, please.

Ms Lawder: Whilst I am enjoying the description, the question was: how much will be spent in total on the planning for the build? The minister has failed to answer that to this point.

MS CHEYNE: To answer Ms Lawder's question, the site investigations and the planning work inform the business case. The business case considers the range of delivery models and commercial opportunities that are going to be within the urban renewal context of the Canberra Theatre Centre and the broader precinct. That includes CMAG. There is still a bit of time to go, but we are going to get this right so that it is

the best it can be.

MS LAWDER: Minister, will a new Canberra theatre be completed for the ACT arts expo scheduled to occur in 2023-24?

MS CHEYNE: First of all, artsACT describe it as being likely in 2023-24. Major Events at this time still do not know what the future is exactly going to look like, but we are committed to holding a major ACT arts expo. The Canberra Theatre Centre is central to that, as is the broader precinct. Activating the broader precinct in a range of ways is something that the budget also reflects, including the significant investment in project and capital funding for CMAG to really enliven the precinct.

Mrs Jones: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, resume your seat.

Mrs Jones: My point of order is on relevance. The minister has outlined lots of things, but, on relevance, will it be completed by the 2023-24 expo? Assuming it goes ahead, will it be completed? There has been no answer there.

MADAM SPEAKER: The minister still has over a minute to answer.

MS CHEYNE: As I mentioned, there still is a way to go in terms of the site investigations and planning, and then the business case, but I hope that by the end of this term of government things will be well progressed with the Canberra Theatre Centre.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, can you confirm that the new Canberra theatre will be completed by 2028, the election after the next?

MS CHEYNE: It is all subject to the planning work that we are proudly investing in, because we are going to deliver the Canberra Theatre Centre. It is one of our major infrastructure projects, just like the Canberra Hospital and light rail; it is a jewel in our infrastructure projects, and we look forward to delivering it.

Budget—small business

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, in your budget speech you said you wanted to support all Canberrans who most need support, yet there was nothing in the budget beyond the financial schemes we already know about for the tens of thousands of struggling small businesses earning under \$75,000, and their families, not eligible for support. You also said that you want to protect every Canberra job, yet the September job vacancy data shows that we are the only jurisdiction to have fewer job ads now than pre-pandemic. Chief Minister, will you be extending the ACT mum and dad small business support?

MR BARR: Firstly, the single largest initiative in the budget—the current initiative in dollar terms—is the business support grants. There is no other initiative larger than those grants. For those who have a turnover under \$75,000, the COVID disaster payments are the income support—the agreement with the commonwealth government,

for the delivery of the COVID supports.

In relation to ongoing business support, our supports extend beyond 70 and 80 per cent vaccination levels. Commonwealth supports are cut off. They are progressively wound down in a matter of weeks at those levels. What I would like, Madam Speaker, is at least some policy consistency from the Liberal Party. When Josh Frydenberg says, “Our economy has bounced back strongly before once restrictions are eased and is well positioned to do so again, and the commonwealth will cease funding business support programs at 80 per cent full vaccination in line with the national plan to reopen”—

Mr Hanson: Madam Speaker, on a point of order—

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat; there is a point of order.

Mr Hanson: I would ask whether you can rule on whether Mr Barr is in breach of standing order 118 and should not debate the subject to which a question refers. It sounds like he is entering a debate on the matter.

MADAM SPEAKER: The question was around business support and he is describing the allocation of business support in the scope in which it is applied.

Mr Hanson: On your ruling, he has talked about what he wanted to happen and a range of business supports that were not in the original question and he started debating that.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Hanson. I do not believe he has. I have made my ruling. The time has expired.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, what do you say to the small business owners, such as Natasha, Robert and Huni, all of whom have not received a cent and who told us last week that they do not know how they will survive? Do they not matter just as much as other Canberrans?

MR BARR: I would need some clarification of the statement “have not received a cent”, as in have they not applied for any support from the commonwealth or ACT governments through the schemes or have they not been eligible? We would need to understand the basis of that statement.

Ms Castley: They have applied and haven’t received anything.

MR BARR: Eligibility for the business supports require businesses to have a turnover above a certain level, consistent with the commonwealth, state and territory COVID support arrangements. For those who fell below that level, there is an alternate support program available.

Mrs Jones: They have applied but haven’t received it.

MR BARR: They have applied for it but they have not yet received a payment. That is the nature of the question?

Mrs Jones: So what do you say to them?

MR BARR: If that is the nature of the question then we can investigate individual cases. I do not know which program they have not received a cent from. The question is not clear in that regard. But if it relates to the business support grants and they have a turnover of over \$75,000 then they are in that scheme. If they have not yet been paid, then we can investigate the matter. If they fall below that threshold then the scheme to support them is the COVID disaster payments which are run by the commonwealth government. I would suggest that if they have not received payment through that scheme then we can assist them to make contact with Services Australia to ensure that they do receive payment under that scheme.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lee.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, what have you done specifically, or are you doing, to support the mental health of these small business owners, who are in severe distress because they have applied for these grants and have not received a single cent or word from your government?

MR BARR: Again, it is not clear from the question which grants, but there are business mental health support programs. They have been running. Hundreds of people have participated in the programs and there is mental health support available, jointly funded. There are also ACT government programs and there are programs being run by non-government organisations and, indeed, even some business organisations. Those programs are available.

Mrs Jones: Can you supply a list?

MR BARR: It is on the COVID-19 website, Madam Speaker.

Suburban Land Agency—revenue

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Canberra is experiencing an ongoing property boom with first homebuyers looking for a house and land being priced out of the market, yet the projected revenue for Suburban Land Agency land sales halved for this financial year. Given the restraints on land supply, the government not meeting its land release targets again and the high demand for house and land options, why is your government making the houses Canberrans overwhelmingly want unaffordable for so many?

MS BERRY: I do not agree with the premise of that question—that the government has responsibility for the price of a home in the ACT—a lot of that is driven by the market. The ACT government tries to do what it can to make sure we can release land in the ACT to meet the needs of all Canberrans. But releasing land is just one part of it, and the ACT government is only one part of the supply for housing and accommodation in the ACT, because the private sector also provides a number of housing and accommodation options.

The government's indicative land release program identifies the spaces in the ACT where we are building homes, and we have that very important target of 70 per cent densification and 30 per cent greenfields to make sure we continue to be the city that

everybody loves—the bush capital.

MR CAIN: Minister, why has the projected revenue for Suburban Land Agency land sales halved for this financial year?

MS BERRY: There are a number of reasons why that could be the case, and it has been unfortunately impacted by COVID-19. In fact, last year our predictions for land sales in the ACT were quite dire, and the Suburban Land Agency was predicting—and so was everyone else in the country—that land sales would plummet and people would not purchase houses. But they did. What we are seeing now is an increase. It seems that people are deciding to purchase homes rather than purchase cars or go on holiday, which is great for the ACT because the Suburban Land Agency is building fantastic suburbs all across our city where people want to live.

Our latest suburb in Whitlam at Molonglo is a very popular place, with its first residents moving in just over the last month. It is a really wonderful place to live and an example of how the Suburban Land Agency is working with the community to make sure we build homes in suburbs that people want to live in.

MR PARTON: Minister, why are you unable to deliver the blocks that you project year after year? How much more will we see the house prices soar in the ACT as a result?

MS BERRY: I have already explained a number of times in this place about our policy direction of moving towards 70 per cent densification and 30 per cent greenfield. The work that goes into making sure that greenfields are available for people to live in takes a number of years—land just does not become available for development. Unlike the Liberals, we take care in identifying land that suits the needs of Canberrans but also maintains the city that we love and cherish as the bush capital.

Work health and safety—silica dust

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the minister for workplace health and safety. Minister, the parliamentary and governing agreement mentions the introduction of new regulations to protect tradespeople from silica dust. Can you please provide an update on progress on introducing these new regulations?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Braddock for his question. It is an important question as we work through being able to support people in the construction industry regarding these dangerous products. The government has committed in the parliamentary and governing agreement to create regulations to protect workers from silica dust exposure. There is increasing evidence of the widespread and devastating effects of silica dust. Just last week I met with a worker affected by silicosis. She has two young children and now faces the uncertainty of life with a debilitating disease. Her story is a confronting reminder that this disease destroys lives. I want to thank Joanna and the Australian Workers Union for their discussion and their continuing engagement on this important issue.

We are meeting, and we have met, with a number of employers. WorkSafe ACT and our WHS people are working on how we can go forward with protecting people against the impacts of silica dust. We have prohibitions in place on outside cutting—dry cutting,

for example—and we are looking at the legislative responsibility for introducing the safe practice around silica.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, can you provide an estimate as to when these new regulations might be in place?

MR GENTLEMAN: Work is still underway on the consultation between industry—some major players, of course—government, Health and WorkSafe ACT. The legislative component is still a little while away, but I am very pleased that the consultative component is going well. I have heard from industry here in the ACT about their concerns—not just their concerns about any legislative requirement, but their concerns about being a proper employer in the ACT, providing the safety and training that are needed, and the study into silicosis that could be required through their workplaces. There is the aspect of employers in other jurisdictions, and therefore the cost that might be borne by them as well. We are working through that, too.

MR DAVIS: Minister, will there be consultation with industry on the development of these regulations? If so, what will that consultation look like?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Davis for his interest, too. Yes, there certainly has been, and continues to be, consultation. It is face to face between industry and me in some aspects, as well as with our WHS council and our WHS officials within the ACT government. I think that consultation is going really well. We have some concerns about cost, by way of looking at mandatory medical requirements for, if you like, invasive studies. It is an incredibly bad disease. The only real cure is a lung transplant, and that is very costly. We want to make sure that we can put in place the insurances that the industry may need, as well as the safety aspects for employees.

Budget—transport and active travel

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, how does the ACT budget's investments in roads and active travel meet the government's election commitments?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Orr for her question. The 2021-22 budget includes more than half a billion dollars of investment in roads along some of the ACT's key strategic transport corridors—from John Gorton Drive bridge connecting Molonglo to Belconnen, to the Monaro Highway connecting Tuggeranong to the city. This year's budget also invests \$45.7 million in active travel initiatives over the forward estimates. This grows our total pipeline of active travel projects to more than \$77 million.

This is a wellbeing budget, and we are investing in one of the key reasons why our city is so liveable—our fantastic cycling network. We are looking forward to starting that work and creating jobs. It includes funding to get on with delivering a number of our election commitments, including commencing construction of the Sulwood Drive shared path connection, starting feasibility work on the garden city cycle route linking Watson through to the city and the inner north. We have also funded the expansion of the successful age-friendly suburbs program to Reid, Scullin, Chifley and O'Connor, delivering path upgrades and accessibility improvements, particularly to support our older residents in Canberra but which will benefit everyone.

Path maintenance is also a key priority for the government, and in this year's budget we have committed an additional \$4 million in funding for shared-path and community-path maintenance over the next four years. This builds on the work that has been done this year to audit the state of every footpath in Canberra, which has been undertaken by our fantastic Jobs for Canberrans workforce.

MS ORR: Minister, what investments will take place in my electorate of Yerrabi?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Orr for her supplementary question. I am pleased to take this opportunity to provide an update on what the budget holds for roads and active travel in Gungahlin. Works will soon begin on improved intersections and shared paths in Kenny to support access to the new Kenny high school. This work includes installation of a roundabout on Albatross Crescent, signalisation at two intersections on Wells Station Drive, and the installation of bus bays to support the new high school, helping students to safely choose public transport and active travel when getting to and from school. We are also investing in Gungahlin by providing funding in the budget to deliver on the government's commitment to develop hybrid traffic models for the Gungahlin town centre. These models will support future strategic transport investments in the area, and they will help us to plan for better active travel connections as well as the future road network.

I would like to put on the record my thanks to Ms Orr for the work that she has been doing consulting in her electorate of Yerrabi and surveying local residents on the things that they would like to see improved about the local traffic network in Gungahlin. The results of this survey will be very useful as an input to the Gungahlin traffic models, once they are developed, and will allow us to test out the feasibility of different potential traffic interventions before we invest in them.

DR PATERSON: Minister, what does this mean for investments on Canberra's southside?

MR STEEL: Every region of Canberra's south is benefiting from transport investment in this year's budget. We are supporting the growing community of the Molonglo Valley by funding the construction of the remainder of John Gorton Drive and building the new bridge over the Molonglo River to provide an alternative access to Coppins Crossing. We are also duplicating William Hovell Drive from John Gorton Drive to Drake Brockman Drive. Both of these projects will see the construction of off-road shared paths for walking and cycling, linking in with the existing path networks in adjacent suburbs. We are also filling in other missing links in our path network in the Molonglo Valley and the Suburban Land Agency will be building the Coppins Crossing path in Coombs, connecting Coombs with our shared-path network.

For residents of Tuggeranong, upgrades to the Monaro Highway are on the way, with our budget delivering construction funding for the new grade-separated interchange at Lanyon Drive and the Monaro Highway. This is going to make the commute from Tuggeranong to the city safer. It will support the growing region and freight in the region, as well. In a joint project with the Australian government, we will also develop a corridor plan that identifies and prioritises future infrastructure upgrades in Canberra's south-west to deal with congestion, improve road safety and strengthen

opportunities for alternative forms of transport to private vehicles. Following the outcome of the corridor plan, specific upgrades will then proceed for design and construction in future budgets.

Mr Barr: Further questions can be placed on the notice paper.