



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Wednesday, 1 June 2022

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Wednesday, 1 June 2022

Ministerial arrangements	1
Questions without notice:	
Building—combustible cladding	1
Calwell High School—safety	2
Sport—Community Wellbeing	2
Influenza—vaccination	3
Labor Party—Labor Club donations	5
Trees—urban canopy	8
Economy—federal government	9
ACT Health—elective surgery	11
Gungahlin—swimming pool	12
ACT Health—nurses	13
Land—Macnamara	14
Access Canberra—Dickson service centre	15
Government—infrastructure investment	17

Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism) (2.00): Minister Vassarotti has had to leave the Assembly so is not present for question time. Minister Berry will take questions in relation to homelessness and housing services, and Minister Gentleman will assist members in relation to the environment, heritage, sustainable building and construction.

Questions without notice

Building—combustible cladding

MS LEE: Madam Speaker, my question is to Minister Gentleman, acting on behalf of Minister Vassarotti, Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction. Minister, your government has known about the extremely hazardous combustible cladding issue in Canberra for over five years now. Why is it taking your government so long to help Canberrans with this issue?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Lee for the question. We did take action quite early, when we found out about the impacts of combustible cladding.

Ms Lee: What was that?

MR GENTLEMAN: I was the building minister at the time. We worked with ministers in other jurisdictions at the building ministers' forum—

Ms Lee interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lee.

MR GENTLEMAN: to ensure that we could bring about a safe recommendation for Canberra residents and took action immediately.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, to the question. No commentary.

MS LEE: Sorry, Madam Speaker. I just have to get my head around that. Minister, why won't you finalise the details of the combustible cladding remediation loan scheme? You announced it in July.

MR GENTLEMAN: I understand that Minister Vassarotti is working through that at the moment, so I will take the detail on notice.

MR CAIN: Minister, why won't your government agree to waive development application fees for remediation works?

MR GENTLEMAN: The work that we are doing to facilitate the removal of

combustible cladding is around the loan scheme that Minister Vassarotti has announced already. That is the detail of the work that she is doing.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

Calwell High School—safety

MR HANSON: My question is to the minister for education. Following the forced closure of Calwell High School due to safety concerns, it has been revealed that the school will face a special purpose review. The special purpose review will examine student learning and engagement, teaching practices, leadership practices and organisational practices. Minister, who is conducting the review, what are the terms of reference and what is the time frame for reporting?

MS BERRY: Yes, Mr Hanson is correct; a review into Calwell High School has begun, and a number of expert education members across the country have been engaged in that review. The review has already begun—it started yesterday, I believe—and will be completed next week. I do not have the actual names of the people on the review, but I can get that information for Mr Hanson before the end of question time today.

MR HANSON: Minister, could you perhaps provide the terms of reference as well, if you do not have that to hand. Minister, will you commit to making the findings of that review public as soon as they are provided to the government?

MS BERRY: I will, if it is appropriate to do so, but it is an internal review for the school to be able to utilise. If there are aspects of that review that are appropriate for public release, then I will do that.

MS LEE: Minister, why won't you conduct a system-wide review across all schools?

MS BERRY: Our schools are great schools, and we have been working very hard with our school communities in our public school system to understand some of the concerns that have been happening over the last couple of years, particularly regarding the teaching workforce crisis. We have set up a task force, and engaged with and listened to the expertise within our school communities about the kinds of things we can do as a community, as a government and as a school system to support our schools through what has been a very difficult time; and to overcome a teaching shortage that is existing across the country, and from which the ACT government is not immune.

Sport—Community Wellbeing

MR DAVIS: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, one element of my resolution that this Assembly passed in April last year which I am most excited to see come to fruition is the development of a new 10-year strategic plan for sports and recreation that is due mid year. Could the minister please update us on the consultation process for that strategic plan?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Davis for the question. Members will know that in the ACT there was a 10-year strategic plan for sport, which finished in 2020. Unfortunately, there were a number of factors—environmental factors and the international health pandemic—that impacted on the development of a strategic plan. However, when I met with the sporting organisations at the end of the 2019-20 year, when we were in the middle of a bushfire season, it was our commitment together to work on a strategic plan. Of course, COVID-19 did put a pause on that.

We were able to begin the work on the development of a sports strategic plan. The consultation has continued with the development of that. Kinetica Group was engaged to develop a strategy in consultation with sports communities and a range of other stakeholders—the ACT Youth Advisory Council, the LGBTIQ community representatives, Outdoors NSW & ACT and disability organisations to name a few. It is intended that the sports strategic plan will be released in the second half of this year.

MR DAVIS: Minister there were a few groups that you outlined that you are consulting with. Would you be willing to table a full list of the community groups and sporting groups that the government intends to consult with?

MS BERRY: Yes, of course I can do that.

MR BRADDOCK: I have a supplementary question. Minister, how closely does the ACT government's upcoming strategic plan refer to the strategic plans for individual sports?

MS BERRY: Each sport generally has its own strategic plan and the advice from the Kinetica Group is about making sure that the strategic plan is an overview of sport and recreation across the ACT rather than the individual plans of each sporting organisation.

Influenza—vaccination

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the health minister. Minister, you have ruled out free flu vaccinations for Canberrans, apart from some priority groups like older people, in contrast to free flu shots being offered in every other jurisdiction. You have said that it is fine for Canberrans to cross the border to New South Wales to get free flu shots and that cost is not a barrier for most Canberrans. Minister, did you check with the New South Wales health minister that it was fine for Canberrans to get free flu shots in their state?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Castley for the question. Just to clarify, I was on radio and somebody texted in saying, "I understand that New South Wales is not requiring any check of residence or identity check in order to get the free flu vaccination. Does this mean people from Canberra can go to Queanbeyan and get their flu shot for free?" I responded: "Well, I imagine if there is no requirement for a residential check then yes, this does." I was not encouraging Canberrans to do this. I was simply responding to information that had been provided with a text in a common-sense way.

At no time have I encouraged Canberrans to go across the border to get a free flu vaccination. I have had a conversation with the New South Wales health minister. They are obviously considering their position in relation to this matter. I have been very clear about the ACT government's position on this at this time. I have also been clear that we continue to consider how we can support those who are most vulnerable to the worst outcomes of influenza and those who may face financial barriers to accessing flu vaccination to get a flu shot.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, for the sake of the Assembly understanding, why will you not provide the free flu shot to all Canberrans?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I did go through this in some detail in my ministerial statement this morning. One of the reasons—as Ms Castley alluded to in her first question—is that the uptake of flu vaccination in the ACT is very good in comparison to other parts of Australia, including more than half of those over 65 already having been vaccinated, and the very large increase in uptake that we have seen over the last two weeks. We have seen a 20 per cent increase in uptake in the space of the last two weeks.

We will continue to monitor it, as I have said, with a focus on supporting vaccination for those who are most vulnerable to poor outcomes from influenza. Of course, we will continue to encourage Canberrans to come forward and receive their flu vaccination. We thank those many employers who are providing vaccination programs for their staff.

Free flu vaccinations are already available for priority groups through the commonwealth's national immunisation program. I note that a consultation fee is applicable in some instances. We are encouraging, obviously, GPs to bulk-bill when people attend for a flu vaccination, particularly for those in the priority groups where the vaccine itself is free. I want to acknowledge that many GPs already do that.

Madam Speaker, the priority groups for a flu vaccination include children aged six months to less than five years, pregnant women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged six months and over, people aged 65 years and over and people with certain medical conditions.

The ACT government already provides free flu vaccinations to young children through its early childhood immunisation clinics and for pregnant women at antenatal clinics. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can access flu vaccination through Winnunga Nimmityjah, which is a really critical partner in delivering health services in the ACT. Indeed, more than 40 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over the age of 50 here in the ACT have already accessed flu vaccination. We are also offering free flu vaccinations for people with disability or mental health issues through the COVID access and sensory clinic.

MS LAWDER: Minister, what about those Canberrans for whom cost is a barrier and who are not part of the priority group, like older people or those with a disability?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Lawder for the question. As I have just

indicated, we are also offering free flu vaccinations for people with disability, people living with mental illness, their families, support staff, volunteers and carers through the access and sensory clinic at Weston Creek. We are looking at ways to expand to that. So far take-up has not been particularly significant in relation to that, but we have only just started to promote that opportunity. We are also ensuring that flu vaccine is available to health providers who support those who are hard to reach or the most vulnerable client groups, including Directions—

Ms Castley: On a point of order, the question was about those for whom cost is a barrier, not who can access it for free. What about those for whom there is a charge but they are too broke?

MADAM SPEAKER: The minister is within the policy area. It is in order.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thanks, Madam Speaker. Again, Ms Castley's understanding of this issue comes to the fore, because these groups are people who are not eligible under the national immunisation program but may have other barriers to access, including people from multicultural backgrounds and migrant and refugee backgrounds, through Companion House, through Directions and Interchange GP—those people who have other challenges in their lives that make it difficult for them to access mainstream health services but who are not eligible under the national immunisation program.

Canberra Health Services is also offering some people a flu vaccination when they present for other health care. That is primarily for people who are in a priority group and where it is appropriate in the setting. We are also considering other options to provide free flu vaccination should that be required in the local context, again, with an emphasis on those people who would have difficulty paying the relatively small cost of that flu vaccination, which I understand is about \$20 if you go to a pharmacist.

Labor Party—Labor Club donations

MR PARTON: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Treasurer and Chief Minister. Chief Minister, I refer to an ABC study of 10 May, which states:

But nowhere in Australia is the flow of gambling losses to political parties more extreme than in the ACT.

In the decade to June 2020, gambling-related groups poured some \$6.5 million into party coffers.

Of this, over \$6.27 million was donated to the ALP from gambling-related groups owned by the Labor Party itself.

A further \$6.48 million was transferred between ALP-owned associated entities.

“Associated entity” means any organisation controlled by or acting for the benefit of a political party.

Chief Minister, how much poker machine revenue from the Labor Clubs has been provided to the ACT Labor Party since you have been Treasurer or Chief Minister?

MR BARR: I believe none. I do not think we have taken any donations from those sources since 2012. I will double-check that. Clearly, we moved out of receiving support in terms of cash donations from clubs. We receive in-kind donations. The Labor Party does have policy committee and sub-branch meetings in various licensed clubs, so they are declared as an in-kind donation. I note that the Liberal Party continues to receive money from licensed clubs as well, which, presumably, are gambling sources under your definition of them, Mr Parton.

Mr Hanson: Not \$6 million of them.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

MR BARR: But we made a conscious decision to move away from that. What I will say, Madam Speaker, is that all of the sources of our funding are declared and transparent, unlike the sort of money that flows to the Liberal Party.

Ms Lee: What? Don't make unsubstantiated claims like that.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lee, that is enough.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, how much poker machine revenue has been provided to the ACT Labor Party through associated entities, including the 1973 Foundation, since you have been Treasurer or Chief Minister?

MR BARR: The 1973 Foundation is indeed an investment vehicle. It invests in profit, principally.

Mr Parton: That's not the way the ABC saw it.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Parton.

MR BARR: Not that different, as I understand it, from the funding sources received by the Canberra Liberals. We have moved away from money from the Canberra Labor Club. We now receive a portion of our funding through the 1973 Foundation, which has invested in non-gambling sources.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Hanson: Which was set up by pokie money.

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

MR BARR: It has invested in non-gambling sources, Madam Speaker.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members! I won't come to you again, Mr Hanson. You will

be warned next time.

MR BARR: What Mr Hanson is arguing is that the Labor Party should no longer receive any funding from any commercial source. Is that the argument?

Mr Parton: No.

Mr Hanson: No.

MR BARR: No, it is not. A decade ago, we moved away from this, but the agents of support for the gambling industry—

Mr Hanson: It was you, the Labor Clubs.

MR BARR: I remember the 2016 campaign.

Mr Hanson: It was your grubby little Labor Clubs.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

MR BARR: You, Mr Parton, and you, Mr Hanson, were arguing for more money and more policy leeway for the gambling industry to grow in this city. Since I have been Chief Minister it has gone the other way, and that is a good thing for this community.

MR HANSON: Chief Minister, was the 1973 Foundation established from the proceeds of pokies? If so, how many millions of dollars have been put into the 1973 Foundation through the Labor Clubs which support you?

MR BARR: The 1973 Foundation is an investment vehicle that took proceeds from the Canberra Labor Club—that is very clear—to move the Labor Party away from receipt of funding from gambling into different sources.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: That is exactly what has happened. You can laugh all you want. That is very public and clear. We no longer receive funding in the way that we used to. That is clear. That is exactly the policy shift—

Mr Hanson: They laundered it.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, you are warned. You need to withdraw that.

MR BARR: Yes. That is an outrageous slur. You must withdraw that. You are accusing us of laundering money. You must withdraw that. That is outrageous.

MADAM SPEAKER: Yes. Mr Barr, I will take that as a point of order. Mr Hanson, you will withdraw, and if I hear one more interjection from you, you will be named. Let's be very clear about that.

Mr Hanson: I withdraw.

MR BARR: That is about as grubby as it gets, Madam Speaker, and I am glad he has withdrawn. So he should. Disgraceful! Disgraceful behaviour. Using parliamentary privilege to suggest something like that is disgraceful and it is not worthy of this place.

Ms Lee: These double standards are just astounding.

MR BARR: And neither are your interjections, Ms Lee. Do better. Politics should be better than this.

Ms Lee: Hey! Don't lecture me, mate!

MR BARR: This sort of grubbiness. Politics should be better than this.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Barr, sit down, please. Ms Lee, you are now warned. The behaviour so far today, the interjections, has been well past the point of acceptability.

Ms Lee: I am not going to sit here and take lecturing from the minister.

MADAM SPEAKER: You are now warned. One more, Ms Lee, and both of you will be named and gone. My tolerance is exhausted.

Trees—urban canopy

MS CLAY: My question is to the minister for planning. The Greens have been campaigning for years to get 30 per cent tree canopy coverage, and variation 369 is a really important piece of reform that will help. Minister, you tabled draft variation 369 in the last sittings with some amendments. I have heard some concerns about where it will apply and what is exempted. Can you please tell me which blocks and areas will be covered by variation 369?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Clay for the question. Yes, the government is committed to cooling our city, and the provisions in Territory Plan variation 369 go a long way to providing shade and cooling through tree canopy requirements. So 369 will require single residential and multi-unit developments to have more planting space and tree canopy cover, which will contribute to the increase in both permeable surfaces and tree canopy coverage across the city.

I listened to the concerns of the community and industry before making some amendments to the variation, which I explained in my tabling statement in the last sittings. We do not want to disadvantage people who have purchased house and land packages in good faith. Often these homes are pre-designed, and changes now could potentially mean costly redesign of houses. With homebuyers and industry alike facing some challenges regarding increased costs, we want to make sure that does not roll out to them.

The amendment will mean that the new blocks in greenfields areas will not be subject to variation 369 at this time. However, development and redevelopment in our established suburbs will need to comply with the requirements set out in the variation

from 1 September this year. Commencement of the new Territory Plan in 2023 will mark the point at which this exemption finishes and all eligible blocks must comply with variation 369.

MS CLAY: Minister, when will we see the full package of reforms that will include new blocks in new estate development plans that are approved after 1 January 2020?

MR GENTLEMAN: Yes, at the completion of the Territory Plan in 2023, we will see that effect take place. We are also looking to expand requirements for living infrastructure in the Territory Plan, in the new one, so that our commercial zones can also be cooler and we can plan specifically for trees and green space when planning for new estates.

MR DAVIS: Minister, when can the community expect all of the legislative and reform work related to DV369 to be completed?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Davis for the question. As I said in the last two answers, it is a staged process. The variation takes effect on 1 September. There are some blocks, as explained, where it will not take effect until we have the new Territory Plan in 2023. There has been some discussion at community councils, I understand, about some confusion. To bring some clarity to that, I have asked the directorate to look at some technical amendments to ensure there is no confusion about which blocks are excluded from variation 369.

Economy—federal government

MR PETTERSSON: My question is for the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, can you please provide a brief update on ACT jobs and the economy, and how the ACT government will work with the new federal Labor government to create more jobs in Canberra.

MR BARR: I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. I am delighted to see that today's national accounts figures show that the ACT economy again grew. Our state final demand increased by 1.7 per cent in the March quarter, principally driven by strong household consumption, which increased three per cent in the quarter. That is further confirmation of the strength of the economic recovery in the territory. State final demand is now up 3.2 per cent over the year—one of the strongest rates of economic growth of any of the Australian states or territories.

Currently, we have 234,500 people in employment, with a participation rate of 70.7 per cent—one of the highest workforce participation rates in Australia. Unemployment is at 3.1 per cent. There are 11,500 job vacancies currently in the territory, and only 7,600 unemployed people. What this means is that we have one of the strongest labour markets in Australia, and we have pushed the boundaries of what constitutes full employment, thanks to a greatly diversified economy. So from here we need to commit to creating more good, secure, local jobs, further lowering that unemployment rate to increase the workforce participation rate and to finally see some real wage growth.

We need to invest more in TAFE and university places. It is great to see the federal

government committing to that. We need to work with business to invest in renewables. It is great to see a federal government commitment to that. We need to invest more in the care economy—aged care and childcare, in particular. We need to make childcare cheaper. That will support workforce participation. And we need to support better pay and conditions for workers. Those were all policies that were front and centre of the last federal election campaign. These federal policies, combined with the ACT government's own actions will drive our economic recovery. (*Time expired.*)

MR PETTERSSON: Chief Minister, how significant is the tertiary sector to Canberra's economy, and how does the election result impact the sector in the ACT?

MR BARR: Tertiary education is a very significant part of our economy. One of the things we can absolutely conclude from the federal election result is that the war on Australian universities is over. After a decade of treating universities as badly as the Australian Public Service was treated—sometimes, even worse: slashing funding and damaging Australia's brand internationally as a great destination for study and making it even harder to attract new students to our nation—the sweeping away of that rotten coalition government last month paves the way for a renaissance and recovery of the Australian university sector! It is a key economic priority for this jurisdiction and, indeed, international tertiary education is a major part of almost all state and territory economies. So I am delighted that the war on universities will end, and that the new federal government is committed to investing more in universities—more study opportunities for Australians, more certainty for universities, and a desire to work with them to grow our nation's research and development base and to lead to a smarter Australia.

What sort of federal government wants to divest from one of the biggest and most significant industries in Australia? The previous coalition government. Why would they not support a smarter Australia? I think we got a bit of an insight with the sort of federal campaign that was run by that coalition of parties. It is such an amazing thing for this nation now that the war on universities is over.

MS ORR: Chief Minister, given that the Australian Public Service is another major employer in Canberra, what does a change of government mean for the APS, and the flow-on effects for the ACT economy more broadly?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Orr for the question. What it means, principally, is value and respect, which was completely absent from the treatment of the Australian Public Service by the former federal government. The APS sustained, over nearly a decade, outsourcing, decentralisation and a denuding of its core capacity—all for purely ideological reasons. The new federal government is committed to building a stronger and more efficient Australian Public Service that delivers better outcomes for the community and that can offer frank and fearless advice to the federal government. That means working constructively with the men and women who make up the Australian Public Service and the unions who strengthen the public sector, and includes fair and equitable conditions and genuine bargaining to achieve better outcomes across the public sector.

So, this is good news for Canberra and good news for the many public servants who

work across the Australian government. A strengthened public sector is good for Canberra's economy. It is also good for the many non-government sectors that work in partnership with the Commonwealth, and indeed the small businesses and others who benefit from a strong ACT economy and a robust public sector. I think Canberrans are sick of the APS being used as a political football—decentralising it and using it as a space to find funds to fund pork-barrelling in other electorates. Hopefully, that era is over and behind us, and we can move forward with a stronger Australian Public Service that will mean a stronger nation.

ACT Health—elective surgery

MS LAWDER: My question is to the health minister. Last month, in May, you flagged suspending elective surgeries given the public health system is struggling with high demand and COVID cases. A question time brief prepared for you in late February revealed that, when you suspended non-essential elective surgeries in March 2020, that resulted in more than 1,500 patients becoming overdue for surgery just four months later—representing one quarter of the total waitlist. This year, how many patients have missed out on their surgery since you suspended the operations last month?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Lawder for the question. It is always a difficult choice to delay elective surgery. We know that that really means a difficult time for people. That is why we did everything we could to avoid having to make that decision. I want to be clear that the delays in elective surgery this time are not a full suspension of category 2 and 3 elective surgery. That did happen for Calvary Public Hospital earlier in the year in response to the beginning of the Omicron wave. It is now more of a case by case, we need to slow down elective surgery in order to be able to do all of the other things that our health system needs to do with the workforce challenges that our health system is facing and that every health system across the country is facing. I would refer members to this morning's *AM* story on ABC about the Victorian health system and what other areas of our economy are facing. This is a reality that we have to deal with. It is not something that any of us want to do, to delay elective surgery.

I would also point out to Ms Lawder—she referenced the 2020 reduction in elective surgery—that the AIHW data that the *Canberra Times* reported on today indicated that the ACT had the biggest increase in hospital separations for any part of any jurisdiction in the country the following year, because we worked really hard to catch up. We got through that backlog and caught up. Unfortunately, the impact of the Delta wave and the impact of the Omicron wave have seen the number of people waiting increase again.

Ms Castley: A point of order, Madam Speaker. The question was how many patients have missed out on their surgery since operations were suspended or slowed down? How many patients?

MADAM SPEAKER: The minister was in the policy area. You have got two seconds left, Minister.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am happy to take on notice

the detail of that.

MS LAWDER: Minister, what category are those patients and when will their surgeries take place?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Lawder for the supplementary. We try extremely hard not to delay category 1 elective surgery. That is an absolute last resort, but I cannot say that it never happens. Most of those people would be in the category 2 and category 3 elective surgeries. Of course, we will try to catch up on those as quickly as we can. That is why we have made arrangements—and we funded it in the budget review—to shift some elective surgery from the public system into the private system. We are continuing to work with our private hospital partners to ensure that we get through as much public surgery work as we possibly can, given the resource constraints that every health system—every jurisdiction—is facing across the country.

We put in specific additional resources to shift some of that activity into the private hospitals so that we could get through as much as possible. We will continue to monitor this. We will catch up as quickly as we can, but we know we are going to have some constraints next financial year as well. We are implementing the digital health record right across our public health and hospital system next financial year, in the second half of this year. That is a massive, massive effort that is going to require some reduction in elective surgery at Canberra Hospital. We are working through how we make up for that and how we work with our private hospital partners around that.

I can assure Ms Lawder that when we committed to doing 60,000 elective surgeries over this four years we meant that and we will do everything in our power to achieve that target.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, will the number of patients who have had their surgery suspended or delayed this time be more than 1,500, like it was in 2020?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I do not believe that it will. It does depend on what time frame you are looking at. Obviously, we had the initial delay in the suspension of category 2 and 3 elective surgeries at Calvary Public Hospital in Bruce. My understanding is that about 500 elective surgeries at that time were postponed as a result of that decision. If you include that, I still do not think we will get to 1,500 elective surgeries having been delayed, but that may be the case. My understanding is that we will definitely not meet our 14,800 target for this financial year. It may be that we do not even get to 14,000. We are still working through exactly what those numbers will look like. We are doing everything we can to get through as much activity as we can with the workforce challenges that every jurisdiction is facing.

Gungahlin—swimming pool

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, can you please provide an update on the Gungahlin Leisure Centre 50-metre pool maintenance and repair?

MS BERRY: Thank you, Mr Braddock. I know that Mr Braddock and other members for Yerrabi are interested in the progress on the Gungahlin Leisure Centre pool. I can

say that Kynetic Construction and Management Services, which is the contractor, has been working hard to continue its restoration of the 50-metre pool. The tiling of that pool has commenced and is almost complete.

As members will know, the program pool closed on 16 May for routine maintenance work. Initially, the program pool was scheduled for closure for regular maintenance at the end of 2022, but the decision was made to close that pool earlier so that it would not interfere with the repair and remediation of the 50-metre pool rectification works. There was some moisture ingress within the eastern wall of the 50-metre pool, which has been rectified. The advice that has been received was that completing the maintenance work on the program pool as I said, would minimise the disruption to the 50-metre pool. So we now anticipate that the 50-metre pool repairs will be complete by the middle of this year.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, is there any indication as to when the program pool will be reopened?

MS BERRY: I am assuming that it is around the same time as the 50-metre pool will be back on deck. But if it is different to that, I will let the Assembly know.

MR DAVIS: Minister, can you assure the people of Tuggeranong that the same issues will not beset the Lakeside Leisure Centre pool in Tuggeranong, particularly given the planned investment in the new hydrotherapy pool at that location?

MS BERRY: Pools are notoriously challenging and can form leaks for a variety of different reasons. What I can assure the Tuggeranong community is that, should any issues arise—I am not aware of any, and there has recently been repairs and maintenance done at the Tuggeranong pool—they will be rectified and the community will be made aware of them. As I said, the maintenance program at Tuggeranong has been completed over the last couple of years and I understand that there are no issues at that pool.

ACT Health—nurses

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Minister for Health. Last month, on 17 May, the *Canberra Times* reported that, in March last year, there were 3,002 full-time nurses employed by Canberra Health Services. Twelve months later, in March this year, there were 3,280 employed, an increase of 278 nurses. However, 365 nursing staff either resigned or retired last year. Minister, if 278 extra nurses were employed, yet 365 nursing staff left, doesn't that mean Canberra is going backwards on nurse numbers?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Not surprisingly, it was a bit difficult to follow all of that math, so I will take the detail of the question on notice. But it is not true that Canberra is going backwards on nurse numbers.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, is this a long-term trend, with more nurses leaving the system than being employed?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, in the last 12 months, how many more nurses have we lost due to contracts ending or nurses being dismissed?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: A number of temporary contracts have come to an end over the COVID period. Again, I will take the detail of the question on notice, but I am not sure that it is getting to the point. I do have the workforce profile and headcount. This is for all of the workforce, but of course nurses are the most significant part of our health workforce. For the Canberra Health Services, we have seen an overall workforce increase between 2018-19 and 2021-22, to 16 February, of 15½ per cent. In FTE it is almost 12 per cent—an 11.9 per cent increase.

This tale that the Liberals are trying to spin, that somehow we are actually going backwards on workforce, backwards on the number of nurses, is absolutely untrue. It is another example of the Liberals being negative, negative, negative, and misusing numbers, trying to portray a story to Canberrans that is not true, and is not actually helpful for our nursing workforce.

Land—Macnamara

MR MILLIGAN: My question is directed to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Recently the land ballot for Macnamara opened with 51 blocks. By lunch time the same day, over 1,700 ballot entries were received. The demand for blocks of this land is extraordinary! Minister, will you release more land for detached housing to meet this level of demand?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Milligan for his question. Mr Milligan will know that the ACT government has been continuing with its development of land under the goals and aims set under the indicative land release program, and that in the last program we met within one per cent of the development required under that indicative land release program, which is a significant effort given the challenges over the last couple of years in providing developable land for the ACT community, also reminding members of this place that the Suburban Land Agency and the ACT government provide two per cent of the land for housing and development in the ACT. I think that that is important to remember. However, the ACT government has not held back on its land development. In fact, it has increased its indicative land release program, and the Suburban Land Agency has not taken its foot off the accelerator, and has continued at the same pace, despite the challenges of COVID-19 over the last couple of years, and the bushfires before that.

That land development work will continue, with the development of land that the ACT government is responsible for. We have not held back like private developers can. We have continued to provide land to the ACT community, and we will continue to do that.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, what do you say to the thousands of Canberrans who will not be able to get a block of land from this ballot?

MS BERRY: Again, as members of the opposition will understand, there are levers that are within the ACT government's control with regard to land supply.

Ms Lee: Yes, land release!

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lee, I have warned you; I am naming you. I move:

That Ms Lee be suspended from the service of the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Ms Lee was suspended at 2.44 pm for three sitting hours in accordance with standing order 204, and she withdrew from the chamber.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Berry, you may continue. You have a minute to go.

MS BERRY: As I was saying, the ACT government is continuing on with the levers that it has in its control with regard to land release. There are a lot of other complex issues that are affecting the ACT community, as well as the rest of Australia, with regard to affordability of land, and they includes interest rates and the tax levers that the federal government has in its control. We are continuing on with our job here in the ACT in the provision and supply of developable land, and we will continue to do that.

MR HANSON: I have a supplementary question. Minister, are you choosing not to release more land for detached housing because the Greens want over 70 per cent of people in high-density housing?

MS BERRY: No.

Access Canberra—Dickson service centre

MR CAIN: My question is to the minister for regulatory services. Minister, I am aware of several constituents who have called the Canberra Liberals over the past few weeks concerned about how the Access Canberra storefront at Dickson is not open for general transactions.

Wait times are concerningly high across the ACT. Some residents have told me that, even post-lockdown, they have had to wait up to four hours in a storefront and some have not even managed to complete their transaction in that time. Minister, considering the extraordinarily long wait times, why is the Dickson storefront closed for general transactions?

MS CHEYNE: I would note, for members' benefit, that I am the minister for better regulation, not regulatory services. I thank Mr Cain for the question. It is true that the Dickson service centre does remain closed, except for land titles transactions as well as a new initiative that we have just started with COTA, which I will go to shortly. But it is worth noting, as we have discussed many times here, that Access Canberra is not immune from the effects of COVID-19 and that at any one time Access Canberra employees, including those who service our shopfronts, are in isolation, or have caring responsibilities or might have COVID themselves.

While Dickson has largely remained closed, I would note that all four of the other service centres remain open, that they are all easily accessible by public transport, and that the wait times there are much lower than Mr Cain would have this Assembly believe. Our wait times are published on the Access Canberra website. I pulled it up—that is how quickly I was able to do it; I pulled it up while Mr Cain was speaking—and all of the wait times at the moment are under half an hour, with Tuggeranong being the shortest. I would also note that Wednesdays are our busiest day.

Going briefly to the trial that we are undertaking with the Council on the Ageing, we have heard that there is feedback from older Canberrans that they would like an appointment-based system where they would have a more specific time in which to attend and have already discussed with an Access Canberra contact centre employee about what they needed to bring for that appointment. It is less efficient—(*Time expired.*)

MR CAIN: Minister, why is the Dickson service centre named “Access Canberra Service Centre Dickson”—the same generic name as the full service centres in Gungahlin, Belconnen, Woden and Tuggeranong—and yet, as you said, it is only providing services for land titles?

MS CHEYNE: We have heard some extraordinary things today, Madam Speaker.

Mr Cain: Please answer the question.

MS CHEYNE: This one might take the cake. I would note that I am seven seconds into the answer, Madam Speaker.

Mr Cain: The misleading name, Minister.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cain, stop.

MS CHEYNE: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Ask a silly question; there you go.

Mr Hanson: Madam Speaker, on a point of order. She has to be direct. I note that in her previous answer she complained that Mr Cain had called her the minister for regulation instead of the minister for better regulation. She seems to care about labels. She thinks that they are important when they come to her. Why are they not important when they come to Access Canberra? I think it is a reasonable question.

MADAM SPEAKER: There is no point of order, Mr Hanson.

MS CHEYNE: It is an important opportunity to talk about exactly what is happening at the Dickson service centre. Yes, it is a service centre; yes, it remains a service centre. When conditions allow, we are looking forward to the Dickson service centre coming back online and being returned to normal operations.

This is an important trial. It is one in which we are proud to have been partnering with COTA. It is one that older Canberrans have called for and we are looking forward to seeing the results of that trial. While Access Canberra does remain affected by the COVID-19 conditions that are affecting all workforces across the community, this is

an appropriate opportunity to trial something different, to do something that is a bit innovative, and to see if it might be something that we could expand right across all of our service centres. Dickson is a service centre. It is still undertaking—

Mr Cain interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cain, I do not have to come back to you again.

MS CHEYNE: transactions. It is doing so at the moment in a booked appointment model. As soon as we can return to normal operations, we will consider that.

MR HANSON: Minister, will you advice what date the Dickson service centre will return to normal operations?

MS CHEYNE: I think I have thoroughly addressed this in my previous two answers.

Mr Cain interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cain, that is enough of the cross-interjections.

Government—infrastructure investment

MS ORR: My question is to the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister, how does a change of federal government impact investment in ACT infrastructure? How will the ACT government work with the federal Labor government to get a better deal for Canberra?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Orr for the question, I think it is clear the only way is up when it comes to infrastructure investment in the ACT. It is a pretty low base on which to build, given what the previous federal government was up to—or, in fact, not up to—when it came to investment in the ACT.

So the election of a new federal government is an opportunity to work more productively and collaboratively with the federal government. I have, again, made no secret of the fact that we will be seeking a larger and fairer share of commonwealth infrastructure investment. I have already written to the Prime Minister in relation to this and we have been engaging with various portfolio ministers, ahead of their swearing in and indeed, since they have been sworn in. This includes better engagement on the extension of Canberra's light rail network through the parliamentary triangle, noting, of course, the complexities that come with traversing through commonwealth land under the control of the National Capital Authority.

I think it is important to note that the new government has already committed to funding a range of infrastructure projects in partnership with the territory government, right across the ACT and we look forward to seeing more of this over the next three years.

MS ORR: Chief Minister, how does federal government investment in infrastructure projects support the ACT government's infrastructure planning?

MR BARR: Thank you. Well greater and fairer infrastructure funding puts the ACT government in a better position to forward plan our infrastructure program and to better meet the needs of our growing city. So it is pleasing to see a commitment already to support a range of infrastructure projects across health, education, climate action, sustainable transport and sport and recreation that complement our existing infrastructure program.

We welcome the commitment to invest \$15 million in the upgrade of the AIS Arena, a commonwealth owned asset that it is great to see the commonwealth government now taking responsibility for, given the previous coalition government let it run down over 10 years.

The community battery program is a great example of where ACT policy and federal policy will align. The community's batteries part of the federal program will work well with the Big Canberra Battery distributed network and will help increase storage capacity, reduce emissions and lower energy prices in the territory.

The urgent care clinic in Canberra's south, like our nurse led walk in centres, will be an important addition to public health provision in the territory and support better access to quality health care when people need it and where they need it.

The other projects that I have touched on this morning include partnering with the ACT government on the CIT Woden campus, the Gorman House upgrades, the Canberra Garden city cycle route and working with the University of Canberra—how about that, working with a university?—to support a major new sports arena for the university, for the community, and indeed, for some of our elite sporting teams.

It is that sort of collaboration and partnership that will see things get done in the ACT and after nearly 10 years of missing out year, after year, after year, under the miserable previous government when it came to infrastructure investment, things have changed, Madam Speaker. *(Time expired.)*

MR PETTERSSON: Chief Minister, what are some of the infrastructure priorities for the Canberra region more broadly?

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. It is fantastic to see that this region features strongly in the federal government infrastructure planning and priorities. And we are, of course, a major economic and services hub for a significant portion of South East New South Wales and the infrastructure and services inside the territory and surrounding the ACT are utilised by ACT and New South Wales residents.

So we have a shared interest in this, some of the priorities include a better rail service between Canberra and Sydney, upgrades to the Monaro and Barton Highways, better freight access into Canberra Airport. And so, the best news we have received on this front is that the member for Eden-Monaro, whose electorate entirely surrounds the ACT, re-elected with a massive swing in her favour, is the new Minister for Territories, Local Government and Regional Development. We could not have a better partner to support infrastructure in our part of Australia.

Again, another significant change, another significant change, from what we all had to suffer through over the last nine years! And those opposite are the only people in Canberra who are grumpy about this outcome.

I believe further questions can be placed on the notice paper, Madam Speaker.