



**QUESTION TIME**  
OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**HANSARD**

Edited proof transcript

Tuesday, 24 February 2026

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## **Questions without notice**

### **Cabinet ministers—conduct**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, the Financial Management Act sets out obligations that the ACT government must follow when it comes to the appropriation and spending of the territory's finances. Chief Minister, are you aware of any breaches of the Financial Management Act by any member of your cabinet, past or present?

**MR BARR:** No, I am not. I am sure that, had there been any, the matter would have been raised in this place at the time. If the specific nature of the question from the Leader of the Opposition relates to ministers, as distinct from directorate or territory agencies, I would be even more certain that the answer is no.

**MR PARTON:** Chief Minister, what steps would you take should a proven breach of the Financial Management Act come to your attention?

**MR BARR:** That is a hypothetical question. I would need to understand the context of the alleged breach and what, if any, role the minister or the minister's office played in that.

**MR COCKS:** Chief Minister, are you confident that all members of your cabinet abide by the FMA?

**MR BARR:** I have no reason to think otherwise.

### **Government procurement**

**MS MORRIS:** My question is to the Minister for Finance. Is it accepted practice for the territory to enter into a contract for the supply of goods or services that have not been provisioned for in an appropriation bill?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I will take the detail of that question on notice. The appropriation bill is quite broad in terms of the funding that is provided across agencies, and, within that, it is well understood that there is flexibility to expend funds according to the outcomes that are articulated within agencies' budget papers and annual reports, as they set out their objectives. It would be helpful—rather than making generalised, vague and obvious allegations—if the opposition has specific allegations about wrongdoing, if they raised those with the appropriate authorities.

**MS MORRIS:** Minister, is it common practice for the government to pay invoices on behalf of the territory that have been submitted in relation to the supply of goods and services that have not yet been appropriated for?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** This is a very general question and it is hard to understand the context of what Ms Morris is indicating she believes the appropriation is for. Directorates have a very clear responsibility to manage their budgets in line with their appropriations and outcomes under the Financial Management Act, and those responsibilities sit with directors-general.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, is it common practice for the government to continue to pay invoices on behalf of the territory in excess of the total contract value stipulated in the contract documents without a variation?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I would say no, that is absolutely not common practice.

### **ACT Policing—hate speech laws**

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is to the Attorney-General. I refer to ACT Policing attendance Wednesday evening at Dissent Cafe and Bar, which was closed and designated as a crime scene in light of a complaint about satirical artwork that was clearly anti-fascist. Attorney-General, what are you doing to protect Canberra's artists from the vaguely written national hate speech laws?

**MS CHEYNE:** Ministers are looking at each other because there has been a response among the three of us—and, by three of us, I am referring to Minister Paterson, Minister Pettersson and myself. I understand that this is a matter for the police, and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on something that is a live legal issue.

When it comes to protection of artists' freedom of expression, I would refer Mr Braddock to our existing ACT legislation as opposed to the powers that are in the commonwealth legislation. I am not privy to exactly what powers police were operating under at that time. However, we will have the Standing Council of Attorneys-General on Friday—and I appreciate that Mr Solly has been trying to get the commonwealth Attorney-General rolling on radio—and I intend to at least raise it in passing with her there on the margins.

Equally, I understand that Minister Pettersson has written or is about to write to the federal minister for police and the arts, Tony Burke, about artists' freedom of expression and how important it is to maintain that in the ACT. I do appreciate that what occurred last week may have had a chilling effect among some of our artists and with the now night-time economy. The best thing that I think members can do is get out and support live music in our great local venues.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Attorney-General, why are media organisations allowed to rely on their exemptions under the hate speech laws but artists appear to be subject to enforcement action for comparable forms of expression?

**MR SPEAKER:** Minister for Police, are you going to take this one?

**DR PATERSON:** Yes. As the Attorney-General said, this is an ongoing police investigation. There have been no charges laid as yet. The police are receiving legal advice. I think that, once we have that advice, there will be significantly more community conversation about this issue either one way or another. So I think we just need to wait until that point.

**Mr Cocks:** On a point of order under 118AA, I do not believe the question has been answered. It was a question very clearly about the legal issues.

**MR SPEAKER:** I think it was a reasonably general question about the difference

between the treatment of artists and the media, rather than necessarily about this specific action. Minister, I think it is upheld that you have basically answered a different question. So either directly come to the point of order, which is to answer why, as per Mr Braddock's question, artists and the media are being differently, or I will require that you respond under 118AA.

**DR PATERSON:** To my knowledge, I am not aware that the media has been treated differently—so if there can be some further clarification. ACT Policing received a report last week around the posters and their impact. So that is what the current investigation is exploring. If people have concerns around what has been expressed or reported in the media, they can report those concerns. But I am not sure of what Mr Braddock is actually talking about there.

**MR SPEAKER:** On the point of order, I will get back to the Assembly on that matter and see as to whether you will be required to. I will get back to the Assembly at a later hour this day.

**Ms Cheyne:** On the point of order, Mr Speaker, in undertaking your review, I respectfully ask that you pay heed to continuing resolution 10 as well as the fact that Minister Paterson, or myself, was being asked to express a legal opinion, which I think perhaps could have been ruled out of order as well.

**MR SPEAKER:** Sure.

**Mr Braddock:** On the point of order, I am not asking for a legal opinion; I am asking why one part of the community is subject to legal action and the other is not. That is not asking for a legal opinion; that is just asking why there is different treatment for one part of the community.

**MR SPEAKER:** As I said, I will take it on notice and come back to the Assembly with an answer on 118AA.

**Mr Barr:** Mr Speaker, on the point of order, just for perhaps clarity for the chamber, Mr Braddon was asking about a commonwealth law, I understand.

**MR SPEAKER:** He was asking about the difference in the application, in how it is applied, is my understanding. As I said, we will have a look at it and I will get back to the chamber.

**MR RATTENBURY:** My supplementary question is to the Minister for Policing, just for clarity. Why haven't ACT Policing taken action against the media publishing the original images?

**DR PATERSON:** I will take that on notice.

### **ACT Policing—hate speech laws**

**MR EMERSON:** New question, same subject. When the venue was temporarily closed last Wednesday night, Dissent cafe and bar, by ACT police—

*Members interjecting—*

**MR EMERSON:** My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. On Wednesday night, Dissent café and bar in Civic was temporarily closed by ACT police—we are now told under commonwealth laws—for the five satirical anti-fascist posters, but the venue owner was told by the first three officers that the action was occurring under section 753 of the ACT Criminal Code. What is the government's position on the provision of this contradictory advice and was the deployment of five officers to the venue for this purpose an appropriate use of ACT Policing resources?

**DR PATERSON:** I will take part of that question on notice. To my understanding, and what I have been briefed on consistently, is that this has been investigated under the commonwealth legislation. That is what has been potentially breached but I will provide any further information on notice.

Ultimately, as has been discussed by ACT Policing, they received a report of offensive material. They addressed that complaint. Now this is currently an investigation undergoing, it is an absolute priority for police to try and receive this legal advice and make a decision on whether charges will be laid or not. I recognise, and they recognise, that this is a really concerning matter, particularly for the bar owner. So we would like to see this resolved one way or another as soon as possible.

**MR EMERSON:** Given the use of ACT policing resources, five officers for five posters, why did the ACT government not communicate the views of Canberrans who are not supportive of the commonwealth government's recent anti-vilification laws by both publicly and privately expressing concerns when the Albanese government announced these laws?

**DR PATERSON:** I do not really understand what the question is asking, but what I will answer is that this isn't a popularity contest or a debate which ACT police are engaging in. They received a report about what was described as illegal behaviour and they went and investigated it. This is under commonwealth legislation. These are new laws, so their interpretation is obviously under significant scrutiny at the moment. But this is an active and ongoing investigation. And as I said, as soon as possible, we will be able to come to the community with the outcomes of that investigation.

**Mr Emerson:** Point of order on relevance. The question is specifically regarding advocacy to the commonwealth government prior to the introduction of the laws, given its impact on the use of ACT policing resources, as evidenced in last Wednesday's event; five officers attending for five posters. Did any advocacy occur?

**MR SPEAKER:** I think the minister has concluded her answer, so unless you have something further to add Minister?

**DR PATERSON:** ACT police apply both commonwealth and ACT laws, so they are applying the laws.

**MS CARRICK:** Will the ACT government's review of anti-vilification laws consider law reform similar to the recently enacted commonwealth laws?

**MR BARR:** I will answer this question. The short answer is that the ACT process, which was an election commitment of this government in 2024, is not intending to follow the same process or indeed seek the same outcomes as the federal parliament determined. And let's not forget that the final legislation that was passed through the House of Representatives and the Senate was a bipartisan position. It was not just that of the federal government, it required support in the Senate as well. Now, of course, it did lead to the implosion of the coalition at that time, but to be clear on the facts, the federal parliament passed those laws and it required more than one party in order to see those laws passed.

**Ms Carrick:** Point of order. The question was about the ACT government's review of anti-vilification laws and whether they will consider the recently enacted commonwealth laws. So it is about our review.

**MR SPEAKER:** I think the Chief Minister answered that before he went on a bit of a rant, to be honest.

**MR BARR:** Forgive me, Mr Speaker, but if it was not entirely clear in the first part of my answer to Ms Carrick, our process is different and we are not seeking the same outcome. Our commitment to review those laws was announced as part of the 2024 election campaign, well before any of the tragic events in Bondi. They bear no resemblance to the process that the federal parliament undertook. It was an entirely different process with entirely different intended outcomes. I hope that is clear.

### **Government procurement—capital works**

**MR COCKS:** My question is to the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister, during your tenure as Chief Minister, and formerly as Treasurer, it has been a common practice in budget statements relating to capital works initiatives to withhold the dollar value budgeted for the works and instead use the acronym NFP—not for publication. What was the reason that your government began taking this approach?

**MR BARR:** This is an approach that is consistently used across states and territories and, indeed, at the commonwealth level when projects are going through a procurement phase, in particular. The rationale for this is to not condition the market in a competitive tender process to the value that the government is prepared to pay for a particular project. There has been a long history in Australian government procurement of, if you say you are going to spend \$500 million on the project, then you will basically get all the tenders around that mark. So that has been the lived experience of government agencies involved in procurement.

Of course, the values of contracts are subsequently published. But before and during a competitive tender process, the collective view across the federation has been—particularly for high-value and competitive projects—that it is best not to publish until after the procurement has concluded.

**MR COCKS:** Chief Minister, what is the legal basis for this approach? Will you table any advice or briefing that you or your ministers have been provided to substantiate it?

**MR BARR:** I addressed the main thrust of that question in my first answer, but I will take on notice any further information that I can provide Mr Cocks.

**Mr Cocks:** Point of order on relevance. The question was about the legal basis for adopting the principle, not the general governance approach.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Barr said he would take any further information on notice, Mr Cocks. I presume that would be any advice that he can provide relating to legal advice, noting that government does not necessarily always provide legal advice.

**MR PARTON:** Chief Minister, are you completely satisfied that withholding this information in this way is not in contempt of the Assembly or its committees?

**MR BARR:** As I mentioned in my answer to the first question, it is certainly an established practice, particularly in relation to high-value procurement where a competitive process is required. Governments have given indicative ranges, but, again, there are risks associated with that.

I would accept it would be contempt of the Assembly if no contract value were ever published. But I think there has been a broad understanding—and, up to this point, an understanding that has been shared across the chamber and by Liberal governments in other states and territories—that for the purpose of procurement an NFP is appropriate, but that once the procurement has concluded, contracts are published with dollar values.

### **Government procurement—Gundaroo Drive duplication**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, I refer to an article published on 7 February in the *Canberra Times* referring to a \$3 million settlement payment made to the contractor engaged to undertake the Gundaroo Drive duplication works.

Minister, was a payment of this nature made, and, if so, exactly how much was paid?

**MS CHEYNE:** Yes, a payment was made. I will take on notice the exact dollar amount.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, under what authorisation or delegation was the settlement payment made?

**MS CHEYNE:** I do not have that immediately in front of me, but I think I can get that before question time ends, if you allow me.

**MR SPEAKER:** Are you taking it on notice?

**MS CHEYNE:** I will take it on notice.

**MS BARRY:** Minister, what was the basis for this payment, given that it is inconsistent with the determination made through arbitration? Will you table the copy of the deed of settlement?

**MS CHEYNE:** I think I can get the answer to the first question, which I will take on notice. I do not think tabling a deed of settlement is possible due to it being commercial-in-confidence, but I will also take advice on that and come back either way.

### **Alexander Maconochie Centre—security**

**MS MORRIS:** My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Reports in *The Canberra Times* include serious allegations from former ACT Corrective Services staff that staff and professional visitors are allowed to enter the AMC with minimal scrutiny. Minister, can you assure the Assembly that staff and professional visitors entering the AMC are submitted to the same security and screening processes as a general visitor?

**DR PATERSON:** Yes, I can. We have had a lot of discussion, and a lot of work has been conducted by ACT Corrective Services in respect of visitors entering the AMC, as well as staff. This is largely in respect of contraband that enters the prison. We know that all prisons around Australia and the world experience the issue of contraband being brought in, and it is particularly problematic when it is drugs. We have seen the consequences of that play out in coronial inquiries.

ACT Corrective Services have a range of different methods that they use to screen people. They screen their irises; there is an X-ray machine; there are body scanner machines that have been implemented over the last couple of years; there are canine units which search individuals who are coming into the prison. There are also regular searches of cells, and detainees are body-scanned or strip searched if required. There is clear signage around issues regarding bringing contraband into the prison.

We recently had a media event in the prison, where all the media had to go through a similar screening process. That has raised some further questions. I want to assure the community that there is a very vigorous screening assessment as people enter the AMC.

**MS MORRIS:** Minister, have any staff or professional visitors been investigated for contraband-related misconduct this financial year?

**DR PATERSON:** I will take that on notice.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, does the government have any evidence of staff smuggling contraband into the jail?

**DR PATERSON:** I will take that on notice in respect of the answer to Ms Morris's question. We have a very dedicated intelligence team at the AMC which works on intelligence-led gathering of information. This determines any potential charges, cell searches or any progression to police investigations around contraband coming into the AMC. I would strongly encourage people, and I strongly encourage those individuals who spoke to the *Canberra Times* in that article, if they have information regarding any visitors or any staff at the AMC, there are multiple reporting processes through the ACT Corrective Services website. They can report to ACT police, and they can report to the Integrity Commission. We strongly encourage anyone, if they have intelligence or information, to do that, rather than making accusations that impact the integrity of the staff at the centre, who are doing everything right and who are working in a very difficult job. I encourage people to report, if they have information.

**Mr Cocks:** A point of order.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, Mr Cocks?

**Mr Cocks:** It is under 118AA. The minister started off by saying that she would take the previous question on notice, rather than the current question on notice. She then did not answer the question about evidence within the answer that she provided.

**MR SPEAKER:** My understanding is that she took that on notice, as part of the question about that information. It related to question 1, supplementary 2 and supplementary 3, and she will be providing that information. I took it that the question was taken on notice, Mr Cocks. She then provided further information, so I do not uphold the point of order.

### **Natural disasters—Disaster Ready Fund**

**MR RATTENBURY:** My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, the Disaster Ready Fund is an Australian government initiative providing up to \$200 million per year to states and territories to improve Australia's disaster resilience and risk reduction. Under the fund, the ACT is entitled to allocated baseline funding of \$7.5 million per round. However, over the past three years, our understanding is that the ACT government has forfeited approximately \$7 million of commonwealth funding by not submitting enough applications to reach that allocated baseline funding. Minister, why has the ACT failed to take full advantage of these commonwealth funding rounds?

**DR PATERSON:** I will speak to the Disaster Ready Fund, round 3. We have received the outcomes from that fund, and we did provide an adequate number of proposals for that. The commonwealth did not accept a number of our proposals for projects, so we did not receive the full allocation of funding in the last round. I have written to Minister McBain to understand why we were not successful in those applications. I have a meeting with her in the next couple of weeks to understand and receive some feedback on those applications.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the minister said she was only going to speak to round 3 and said we were successful, and then she said we missed out. I am uncertain.

**DR PATERSON:** We were successful with, I think, \$3.8 million in round 3, not the full \$7 million allocation, so I have asked the federal minister for some feedback and clarification as to why we were not successful for the full amount.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, is the ACT government guaranteeing that we will submit enough applications on time in round 4 to fully access the ACT's \$7.5 million potential allocation?

**DR PATERSON:** Yes; it is the full intention of the government to submit applications for funding, as it was in round 3, and apply for this federal funding to improve our disaster response in the ACT.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, are you working with the community sector on ways to maximise available commonwealth funding through the fund, given that the ACT cannot access funding as a local government entity?

**DR PATERSON:** Yes; absolutely. The majority of projects that were successful in the last round are partnerships with community sector organisations. We are seeing some great projects coming off the ground and we will continue to work with community sector partners. I recently had representations from ACTCOSS on this exact issue, and we will continue to work with them to ensure that we have applications that are competitive for federal funding.

### **Economy—economic development data**

**MS TOUGH:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, what does the latest economic development data highlight for the territory economy?

**MR BARR:** I thank Ms Tough for the question. The data highlights that the territory economy remains one of the strongest in the nation. Indeed, our gross state product increased by 3.5 per cent in fiscal 2024-25. This represents three consecutive decades now of economic growth for the territory, which is a record of growth above the other states and territories and above the national economy, supported by strong public demand, growth in real wages and very high labour force participation. The outlook for the economy remains very positive, with forecasts for economic growth to continue through 2025-26.

One of the factors that is driving our strong economic performance is service exports, such as education, tourism and professional, scientific and technical services—which again grew over the reporting period. Future growth for the territory is expected to be broad based, supported by ongoing strength in public demand and services, a resilient and growing construction sector and pick-up in private investment.

**MS TOUGH:** Chief Minister, how else is the territory's strong services export sector contributing to economic growth?

**MR BARR:** There is one section of our service export sector that I think deserves special mention, and that is international education. Between fiscal 2015-16 and fiscal 2023-24, export income from international education in the territory more than doubled, from \$633 million to \$1.53 billion, highlighting the higher education sector's growing contribution to our territory economy.

We expect that positive trajectory to continue while also appreciating, of course, that international students are not just an export market; they are enriching our community by supporting local jobs, enhancing our city's global networks and driving tourism activity. Our labour market is strengthened by attracting skilled graduates who remain in the territory and education tourism is generating significant flow-on benefits to our city's accommodation providers, hospitality venues and retain and transport services across Canberra. In this respect, I was very pleased to see the rebound in short-term visitor arrivals in January and seeing them up through the years.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Chief Minister, what does the data tell us about the progress of the government's housing agenda?

**MR BARR:** We have seen stronger building activity having a direct impact on housing support and affordability in the territory. Total trend building approvals grew by 113 per cent in the December quarter—well above any other state or territory—aligning with the rise in dwelling commencements of 37 per cent or just under 1,300 dwellings in real terms in that quarter, signalling strong momentum in the construction pipeline. I am sure it is agreed across this chamber that increased housing supply helps improve affordability, ensures students and workers can access accommodation and supports broader economic participation. At the same time, of course, construction activity contributes significantly to jobs and local investment.

These outcomes reflect deliberate government action to accelerate land release, streamline planning and support economic development. By aligning housing supply with economic growth, the government is continuing to deliver on its plan for Canberra's future, creating local jobs and strengthening our economy as we aim to ensure that Canberra remains one of the most liveable places in the world.

### **Macquarie swimming pool**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Access Canberra has provided another five days for the owners or liquidators of Big Splash to respond to the notice saying they were considering terminating the lease. Was Access Canberra asked for this extension, and if so, who by?

**MR STEEL:** Thank you for the question. I will take that on notice.

**MS CLAY:** With the deadline now extended to 27 February, is there the ability to grant a further extension?

**MR STEEL:** Access Canberra is following the process set up under the Planning Act 2023. I will seek some advice from Access Canberra, who are obviously acting on behalf of the independent Territory Planning Authority, and find out whether there is that ability. Obviously that is sort of a legal question under the act as well. I am sure you are not asking for a legal opinion, but I will see what I can provide.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, what response has there been from the lessees of the other six sites that the Territory Planning Authority is taking regulatory action against?

**MR STEEL:** I am not sure I can provide an update on those at this time but I will check with Access Canberra. What I can inform the Assembly is that in relation to the Hawker tennis site, Access Canberra informed me earlier in the week that they have issued a show cause notice in relation to that site.

### **Canberra Health Services—communicable disease management**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, I understand that the confirmed measles case in the ACT spent approximately 2½ hours in the Gungahlin Walk-In Centre and then a further 2½ hours in the emergency department waiting room

at the Canberra Hospital on Wednesday, 18 February this year, while infectious. Why was the patient not isolated on arrival? What specific clinical or triage protocols were followed to minimise exposure to other patients, visitors and staff in that waiting area?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** It is a good question from the Leader of the Opposition. I will take the detail of the question on notice and come back to the chamber in relation to that. I would note, however, that both in walk-in centres and in emergency departments people do attend sometimes with diseases that are contagious. Measles, of course, is a vaccine-preventable illness. The vast majority of people in Australia are vaccinated against measles, but of course it is also something that we take very seriously. This is why the Chief Health Officer makes public information about occurrences of measles and makes available information about where people may have come into contact with it.

**MR PARTON:** Why was the patient reportedly left in a general waiting room for an extended period before isolation? Did that response comply with the ACT communicable disease management protocols?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I will take that question on notice.

**MS CASTLEY:** What formal communication took place between Canberra Hospital and the Gungahlin Walk-In Centre regarding the suspected and later confirmed measles case? Can the minister confirm whether the infectious risk was clearly and promptly escalated between the facilities to protect staff and the public?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Again, I will take that question on notice. Thank you.

### **Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre**

**MS CARRICK:** My question is to the Minister for Health, and it is about Burrangiri. The Aged Care Act 2024, particularly through the new Support at Home program, is designed to support our 58,000 carers to help older Australians remain living at home for as long as possible. In April 2025, the commonwealth committed \$10 million to new capital infrastructure to deliver more aged-care respite beds in the ACT. Burrangiri's 15 beds provide half of Canberra's overnight respite needs; however, the new Support at Home packages that began on 1 November 2025 cannot be used at Burrangiri.

Minister, will you request the commonwealth add Burrangiri's respite services to the approved aged-care service list, enabling Support at Home packages and other commonwealth supports to be used at Burrangiri to resolve ongoing funding issues?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Carrick for the question. I have already been in communication with the commonwealth about these concerns. For the information of other members of the Assembly who may not follow this matter as closely as Ms Carrick does, prior to 1 November 2025, Home Care Package funding could be used for overnight respite for services like Burrangiri. That is, unfortunately, no longer the case under the new Support at Home program, but respite services do continue to be available at Burrangiri, and, of course, the very significant ACT government subsidy for that respite does continue, despite this being a commonwealth responsibility—so

we will continue. I am also aware that our ACT Labor members and Senator Gallagher are also aware of this issue and have been advocating in relation to ensuring that commonwealth funding is available to support people to access Burrangiri.

I would, again, dispute the assertion that Burrangiri has 50 per cent of the respite beds in the ACT. I do not believe that that is an accurate representation. As I have indicated before, the majority of respite for older people is provided through aged-care facilities, but in different ways. Respite comes in all different forms as well. We also have, which I think is not included in the respite figures, a specific, step-down transition care facility for the transition and therapeutic care program, which is 14 beds run by BaptistCare, which is never included in these figures, despite the fact that advocates then claim that Burrangiri is used for hospital step-down.

**MS CARRICK:** Minister, will you test the market and then undertake an expression-of-interest process to identify a not-for-profit registered aged-care provider who is willing to manage Burrangiri's operations and infrastructure, including an expansion and refurb with the \$10 million?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** The \$10 million would not be enough to refurbish and expand Burrangiri. It is not an ACT government responsibility to fund aged care, and we also know, having spoken to multiple aged-care providers—as I am sure Ms Carrick is aware—that the kind of model for respite that is delivered by Burrangiri is not a financially viable model under aged-care funding arrangements.

I know and I appreciate the advocacy of the Save Burrangiri Action Group. I have met with a couple of those very passionate representatives recently and had a long conversation with them about it.

To get back to the original point of how this all started—if we were going to refurbish Burrangiri, we would have to close it down in order to do that, which is how this whole thing started. There is not an obvious, clean answer here. There is not an easy answer, and there is certainly not an easy answer that just involves the commonwealth government funding taking over a facility that we know is not cost effective and viable under the current aged-care funding arrangements. I understand that Ms Carrick believes that this is some kind of simple solution. She is wrong about that. I have agreed to meet with Ms Carrick to talk through where we are up to in relation to this matter. We are taking it very seriously. We welcome the \$10 million from the commonwealth. We are in ongoing conversations with them about how best we use that. I certainly appreciate the passion that people bring to this issue and the degree to which they appreciate the service delivered at Burrangiri, but there is a reason it is a unique service.

**MR EMERSON:** Minister, what options have you pursued with the commonwealth's \$10 million to increase the number of respite beds and maintain the same level of service provided by Burrangiri?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Unfortunately, I am not going to make a policy announcement for Mr Emerson here in question time! We are in conversation with the commonwealth about the best use of that funding, but it is their money, and those conversations are ongoing.

## **Government procurement—kerbside waste collection**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, in 2024, the ACT government entered into a \$444 million contract with JJ Richards & Sons for the provision of kerbside waste collection in Canberra. This was reportedly \$100 million higher than the tender from the incumbent provider, Veolia. In relation to that kerbside waste contract, how many tenders were received as part of that procurement process?

**MS CHEYNE:** I believe we have been asked that question before, and I do not believe that we are at liberty to say how many tenders were received because, under a competitive tender process, that is commercial-in-confidence. I am happy to answer any other question.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, what assessment were tenders put under to ensure value for money on a contract with such a high dollar value?

**MS CHEYNE:** First of all, this was not a like-for-like tender or contract, compared to the previous waste collection services. This was about combining four separate contracts and consolidating them into one contract with the preferred tenderer. That was the collection of red and yellow bins, the collection and processing of green bins, the supply of household bins, and the collection of bulky waste items. Already, it was a very different contract from what was held by the previous contractor, which was Veolia.

In terms of the value-for-money process, the tender evaluation followed our procurement principles. Again, the core objective was to achieve value for money. The responses were assessed in the following stages. There was the compliance assessment, then mandatory criteria assessment, including a Secure Local Jobs Code certificate, a fair and safe employment criteria response schedule, labour relations training, a workplace equity plan, and attendance at a mandatory industry briefing in the office of employment.

It was then assessed against weighted criteria, covering capability, safety environment, workforce transition, innovation and local participation. It was then assessed against non-weighted criteria, including price assessment and risk assessment. All of that combined gave a value-for-money assessment and, ultimately, JJ Richards was determined as providing the highest value for money.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, what weighting was the cost of service delivery given, as part of the tender assessment process?

**MS CHEYNE:** In the weighted criteria element, it was given 25 per cent. That relates to capability, capacity and methodology to deliver services. For context, for all other criteria that were weighted, environmental management was 10 per cent, work health and safety was 20 per cent, workforce and industrial relations management plan was 10 per cent, transition management was 15 per cent, innovation was 10 per cent, and local industry participation plan through secure local jobs was 10 per cent.

Again, I would refer Mr Cain to my previous answer, noting that the value-for-money

assessment considers the whole-of-life costs being pricing, weighted criteria—which I have just read out—as well as non-weighted criteria.

### **Government procurement—kerbside waste collection**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services, and it relates to the JJ Richards contract worth \$444 million for the provision of kerbside waste collection in the ACT. It has come to the opposition’s attention that, after the tender was awarded, JJ Richards’ drivers received pay increases in excess of 25 per cent. Minister, is that correct?

**MS CHEYNE:** I will have to check the exact number, but I would note that, under Fair Work obligations, the workers under the previous contract had already been involved in negotiations regarding their EBA. The transition to JJs occurred in April 2025, and it was in April 2024 that the contract was awarded to JJs. I believe that the negotiations between the TWU, the workforce and Veolia occurred in early 2024 but had been underway for some time.

**MS LEE:** Minister, were the pay increases for drivers part of the requirements under the request for tender or a requirement of the contract conditions?

**MS CHEYNE:** There were certainly criteria that required the continuity of employment and transition management. I believe I noted that before as one of the weighting criteria. That was deliberate in terms of that workforce being no worse off.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, how much was the required pay increase?

**MS CHEYNE:** I will take the question on notice.

### **Public schools—infrastructure**

**MISS NUTTALL:** My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, we have heard about classrooms being so hot that students have needed to leave school early due to a lack of cooling facilities in their classrooms. Last year, we heard that some high school students reported feeling faint from the heat, which reportedly got up to 31.3 degrees and we have had three heatwaves since. I understand the Public School Resourcing Review is underway, but what is being made available for students and staff who are sweltering in the meantime so learning is not disrupted?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Miss Nuttall for the question. There are a range of different appliances that are put in place at schools to manage through some of the hot weather that we have been experiencing. We also have a \$15 million fund to increase cooling across a range of different schools that have been listed at priorities. For example, Latham Primary School has been listed as a priority school for a new HVAC system. In the meantime, temporary measures are put in place, like portable fans and air conditioners. We are also allowing windows to be opened for natural air ventilation and also installing more natural shade structures and planting trees in a range of other schools.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, are you aware that a lot of the HVAC machines and fans

that you have mentioned cannot actually be used at the same time as teaching because they are extremely noisy and disruptive?

**MS BERRY:** I have been aware that some of the appliances that schools were using were being described as loud. The directorate has gone down to those schools to check the working order of those machines. I understand that those machines are in working order and within appropriate noise limits, although I understand that that would be a disruption for classes and particularly for teachers. So we are working as quickly as we can to resolve the HVAC system. That will take some time. It is an old school and it is a significant upgrade.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, after the students of Canberra High last year organised a petition begging the government for air con in their classrooms, how many classrooms at Canberra High now have air con and how many still do not?

**MS BERRY:** I will take that question on notice.

### **Government procurement—kerbside waste collection**

**MS BARRY:** My question is to the minister for city services. Minister, I understand that we are now nearly two years into the delivery of a \$444 million contract with JJ Richards for kerbside and bulk waste collection. Minister, what was the average monthly cost of providing kerbside and bulk waste collection as part of the previous contract with Veolia?

**MS CHEYNE:** Would you mind just repeating the question, sorry Ms Barry, just the end bit.

**MS BARRY:** What was the average monthly cost of providing kerbside and bulk waste collection as part of the previous contract with Veolia?

**MS CHEYNE:** I will have to take the specific question on notice, but I would again stress to all opposition members who have an interest in this that value for money is not just cost for cost or the lift cost for lift costs, so a lift for lift comparison. It is not a valid comparative point when there are a range of considerations that need to be undertaken in determining value for money such as risk and who is responsible when a problem does occur. I have detailed the weighted criteria. I have also detailed that there were non-weighted criteria, including price assessment and risk assessment, and all of these, together with the mandatory criteria, formed the value for money assessment.

**MS BARRY:** Minister, what is the average monthly cost of the new agreement with JJ Richards?

**MS CHEYNE:** I will take that on notice.

**MR MILLIGAN:** How does the government justify that such an increase potentially in fee-for-service results in value for money for ACT ratepayers?

**MS CHEYNE:** I feel like I am really not being heard here. So, I need to stress again, that value for money is not just about the dollar amount and that is not a valid

comparator. Look, it is certainly part of it, absolutely, but value for money is determined through a number of different criteria, which I have repeated over and over. And funnily enough, all of these questions were asked of me by Mr Cocks at the end of last year. So it does go to show that if you do questions on notice—I will take questions on notice—people do not necessarily read them. So if members of the opposition would like to avail themselves of all the facts related to this, they can certainly go read that or reflect on the *Hansard*.

## **Health—disability inclusion**

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** My question is to the Minister for Health.

Minister, how are you building a more inclusive health system in the ACT through improving access to care for people living with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and recent changes to the Digital Health Record?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. The ACT government does continue to listen to our community and build an inclusive health system that meets people's needs.

Two measures announced this month recognise that some consumers can feel excluded or face barriers to care as a result of disability or neurodiversity, making them less likely to access the care they need.

As Mr Werner-Gibbings has identified, we have introduced a new consistent way for people with disability to identify their access needs in the Digital Health Record by building a questionnaire into the DHR and MyDHR platform. Through the questionnaire, consumers can choose to identify as a person with disability and can record and update their access needs. This will support Canberra Health Services staff to make reasonable adjustments when providing care. This could be any change to the usual processes or environment, such as adjusting appointments to ensure carers can attend, or communication methods such as Auslan, something specifically welcomed by DeafACT, who joined me for the announcement. Asking whether a person identifies as having a disability and understanding their access needs is essential to delivering person centred healthcare.

We are also making it easier for people with ADHD to access appropriate treatment by simplifying prescribing processes for ADHD medicines. From 11 February, general practitioners who have completed approved training will no longer need repeated patient reviews from a psychiatrist, paediatrician or neurologist, or approval from the Chief Health Officer to allow ongoing prescribing of ADHD medication. Eligible patients for this initiative are those who are stable on their ADHD medication, are aged six years and older and have an existing diagnosis from a relevant specialist.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Minister, what are the benefits to the community of simplifying access to ADHD prescriptions?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary.

These changes will improve access to timely care and help ease pressure on the health

system while ensuring that prescribing remains safe and supported by appropriate monitoring. This reform reflects both clinical realities and the calls from patients and families for better access to timely assessment and treatment, benefiting both patients and health professionals by reducing delays. This will help to ease demand for referrals and appointments with specialists, opening up more appointments for new patients; and remove unnecessary administrative burdens for psychiatrists, paediatricians and neurologists, who will be able to prescribe ADHD medicines for patients aged four and over, within specified dose limits, without needing to apply for a CHO approval for each patient. Importantly, the changes maintain appropriate safeguards and recognise the role of GPs as central providers of care.

These changes around prescribing ADHD medications are the first stage of our approach to better supporting ADHD care in the ACT. Further reforms will come into effect later this year to allow GPs with additional training to diagnose ADHD and initiate medication for eligible patients. This reform is part of the ACT government's broader commitment to enable health professionals to work at their full scope of practice and improve access to high-quality, safe care.

GPs who choose not to expand their ADHD scope of practice or for more complex presentations can continue prescribing ADHD medications in a shared care arrangement with paediatricians, psychiatrists and neurologists. We have worked with GPs and other medical practitioners and stakeholders to implement this measure, and I want to thank all stakeholders for their participation and support in this process.

**MS TOUGH:** Minister, how does the ACT compare with other jurisdictions in simplifying access to health care for people living with ADHD?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary.

The ACT is working collaboratively with other jurisdictions in relation to the role of GPs in ADHD diagnosis and prescribing. In the ACT, we have had continuation of prescribing arrangements with GPs supported by non-GP specialists for a number of years. We were one of the first jurisdictions to announce plans to extend prescribing and diagnosing for GPs. Along with New South Wales, we have already commenced our expanded prescribing arrangements. As I noted earlier, the ACT arrangements have been in place from 11 February. I understand we will also be one of the first jurisdictions to introduce GP diagnosing of ADHD later this year.

But the ACT is, of course, committed to harmonisation across jurisdictions and that work is also continuing. In particular, we continue to work closely with the Australian and New South Wales governments towards a nationally consistent approach to expanding GP scope of practice for ADHD diagnosis and medication management, as well as for a range of other areas where GPs are seeking to expand their scope of practice. Thank you.

**Mr Barr:** Further questions can be placed on the notice paper; thank you.