



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Thursday, 26 February 2026

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Questions without notice
Government procurement

MR PARTON: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister, in question time on Tuesday you said:

... if you say you are going to spend \$500 million on the project, then you will basically get all the tenders around that mark.

You said that when you were asked about the use of NFP, or not for publication, on the territory's budget papers. This is an approach that you used for the upgrade of the Fitzroy Pavilion at EPIC. Was this figure held from the industry during the procurement process?

MR BARR: I will have to check on that. It is one of a thousand projects from several years ago.

MR PARTON: Why did Major Projects, in issuing a works order for a project manager, disclose the full amount of that project?

MR BARR: Again, I will need to seek some information from the relevant agency. I do note that that was not a \$500 million project though.

MR COCKS: Chief Minister, why are the administration processes in directorates that you are responsible for so sloppy?

MR BARR: I will reject the premise of Mr Cocks's question.

Firstly, government procurement occurs across all agencies, but we do have Infrastructure Canberra as a central focus for the larger projects. So I do not think it is a fair characterisation. I am not sure whether this is going to prompt Mr Cocks to get up and claim a standing order non-answer, but to be clear I do not think the question is fair. The way procurement works, the government has a central agency but individual directorates also have responsibility for the delivery of smaller projects.

Government procurement

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Chief Minister. According to the Declarations of Members' Interests, one of your cabinet ministers remains a member of the CFMEU. Before entering parliament, this cabinet minister worked for the CFMEU and, in his inaugural speech, thanked the CFMEU for helping him get elected. Chief Minister, is it appropriate that a member of your cabinet maintains CFMEU membership, given widely reported corruption concerns around Australia and recently highlighted in Victoria, Queensland and the ACT?

MR BARR: People are free to join organisations. Under the Human Rights Act, that would indeed be a right that we all have. I would be surprised that a member of the Liberal Party who believes in freedom of the individual and freedom of association would suggest that someone could not be a member of a trade union.

MS MORRIS: Chief Minister, can you assure the Assembly that this cabinet member is excluded from cabinet deliberations involving government procurement?

MR BARR: The member is not a member of the Expenditure Review Committee. But, equally, if there is any conflict of interest—and I do not believe there is in relation to the minister’s involvement in government decision-making—those conflicts of interest are declared. The minister is quite clear, as is required in the Declarations of Members’ Interests, on declaring membership of organisations, as, indeed, all ministers and all members do.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, will you direct this cabinet minister to at least suspend his CFMEU membership while investigations into the CFMEU are underway?

MR BARR: I am not sure what you mean by “investigations”, Mr Pardon. The union is under administration, but there are no investigations into the ACT branch of the union. It is under national administration. Being a member of an organisation, as distinct from being on the executive and running an organisation, represents a pretty clear distinction. It would be a bit like asking you to not be a member of the West Coast Eagles if the West Coast Eagles’ executive were under some form of investigation. It is a very tenuous link.

Paediatric electroencephalograms

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Electroencephalograms—or EEGs, as they are more commonly known—are vital for diagnosing seizures and understanding the nature of seizures. Seizures are said to be common in paediatric patients, yet we have been told that Canberra Health Services does not have an EEG available on the paediatric ward. Instead, CHS requires patients to leave the hospital, potentially involving interruption of inpatient care, and pay around \$200 to have an EEG done privately, unless they are a concession card holder. Minister, can you confirm whether CHS has an EEG on the paediatric ward and, if not, why not?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Rattenbury for the question. I am aware of the issue. I am not sure if I have some advice in some briefing that I have not had an opportunity to review yet. So I will take the question on notice and come back to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, can you confirm whether the ACT government has any plans to purchase the piece of equipment for the paediatric ward?

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

MS CLAY: Has CHS received requests from staff or stakeholders to purchase an EEG?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Clay for the question. Certainly this issue has been raised by stakeholders. But, until I have the further information about the existing availability, I obviously cannot answer that question. So I will take that question on notice as well.

Public housing—maintenance

MR EMERSON: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. The Productivity Commission's latest *Report on government services* shows the proportion of public housing in the ACT whose condition is of an acceptable standard has decreased from 76 per cent in 2023 to 71 per cent in 2025. That means almost a third of our public housing dwellings do not have at least four working facilities and no more than two major structural defects, the second-lowest rate in the country. Minister, why is the condition of our public housing stock so poor and why is it worsening?

MS BERRY: Well, the ACT has some of the oldest housing stock in the country, which is probably one statistic Mr Emerson did not pay attention to. That is the reason the government has been conducting a growth and renewal program where we have been renewing older, unsustainable homes, so that 20 per cent of our public housing properties are now newer, more sustainable, environmentally friendly, affordable to heat and cool and accessible for people with different ability needs.

MR EMERSON: Minister, will the ACT government commit to reversing this concerning decline in the condition of our public housing stock by the time the next set of RoGS data comes out, which will be based on the 2027 year?

MS BERRY: Well, I have just described what the ACT government is doing to address the issues in our public housing and will continue to do that.

MS CARRICK: Minister, has the government set a goal of at least meeting the national average for the condition of our public housing stock or of having the highest quality public housing in the country?

MS BERRY: We have certainly been running a growth and renewal program, unlike any other any other state or territory. The ACT government is keen to ensure that our public housing stock meets the needs of all our tenants, regardless of their needs or their backgrounds, including the increase to public housing of another thousand homes. It will make a difference to the sustainability and liveability of our homes. We are also, as members know, looking at insourcing our housing maintenance program as well as making sure our homes are electrically efficient, have electrical upgrades and have ceiling upgrades to ensure there is appropriate insulation. So there is a range of different work happening in the ACT, and I am sure that there will be better outcomes as we continue with that work.

Mr Emerson: Mr Speaker, I seek your guidance on the responsiveness of the minister's answer. I appreciate the remarks regarding the work that is underway but I believe Ms Carrick's question was specifically whether a target had been set in relation to the data that I quoted in my first question.

MR SPEAKER: On the point of order, Minister Berry, do you have anything to add or not?

MS BERRY: No.

MR SPEAKER: I will have to review that one, Mr Emerson, on the specifics. I will take that away, have a look and get back to you as to whether there is anything under 118AA, which I presume is where you are at. I will get back to the Assembly on that.

Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Health, and it is about Burrangiri.

Minister, on 24 February, a couple of days ago, you said:

The ACT government is funding Burrangiri until 2027 at the cost of almost \$2 million a year in ACT taxpayer dollars for a service that is a commonwealth responsibility and which is not structured in a way to be cost-effective or commercially viable in any part of the aged care system, and we are doing that in a building that is rapidly running out of time, that was considered to be end of life last year in terms of needing refurbishment.

You also said:

It does not meet modern standards of delivering this kind of care.

Minister, will the ACT government release the full building condition and safety documentation for Burrangiri so the community can understand what the actual concerns for the building are and how those concerns affect future service delivery?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: All of those documents have already been released. I understand that Ms Carrick has a different interpretation of some of those documents to me, to officials and, indeed, to some of the feedback from the service provider over a period of time about the constraints associated with the infrastructure at Burrangiri. But all of that documentation is available. I think probably Ms Carrick and I will continue to take different interpretations of that. Ms Carrick also has available to her all of the briefs that I received, which very clearly include advice from the directorate about the quality of the infrastructure.

I will just repeat what I have said multiple times in relation to this matter. The thing that sat alongside the condition of the infrastructure was that the Salvation Army's contract was coming to an end and, under our procurement rules, there was going to be a requirement to test the market for this service. If we were going to go to market for a new contract for this service, we would have to ensure that the facility was such that our officials could stand by asking someone to deliver this service in a facility that was fit-for-purpose for the activity that they were contracting for, for an extended number of years. On that basis, officials could not in all conscience go to market asking someone to deliver this service in that facility without significant refurbishment, which—yet again—would have required the facility to close to be refurbished. I do not think Ms Carrick and I are ever going to agree on this matter, but all of the documentation is already publicly available.

MS CARRICK: Minister, what financing and sustainability analysis has the ACT government completed? Which providers have you spoken to about what they believe can realistically be delivered with the commonwealth's \$10 million?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am not going to go to individual providers that have been consulted, although I will say that I have had some good conversations when—as I think I mentioned on Tuesday—I visited the Mullangarrie Baptist Care facility that provides the residential portion of the therapy and transition care program, 14-bed facility that is funded through that commonwealth program where the ACT contributes allied health services as our in kind contribution to TTCP. I also had a bit of a chat—as I know Ms Carrick did—with the CEO of Goodwin at the Dementia Australia Memory Walk & Jog on Sunday morning. So I think both of those are kind of on the record, as it were.

I know that the ACT Health and Community Services Directorate, the commonwealth Department of Health, Disability and Ageing and I have all had conversations with providers. In fact, we have seen a business case, which would be commercial-in-confidence, from a provider talking to another jurisdiction about a similar kind of service, which indicated that the minimum number of beds that would make a service like this viable was 30 beds, and that a 15-bed service simply was not a cost-effective service nor a service that was viable to operate under current aged care funding arrangements.

Ms Carrick: Point of order The first part of the question was what financing and sustainability analysis has the ACT government completed?

MR SPEAKER: On relevance, Minister, the supplementary did ask if there had been any analysis done. Do you have a response?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The Health and Community Services Directorate is continuing to undertake that analysis and is providing advice to the government, in the context of negotiations with the commonwealth and ACT government budget processes. Obviously, I will not be revealing the content of that advice at this time. *(Time expired.)*

MR EMERSON: Minister, what is the process you are following to ensure that when the Salvation Army's contract ends there is no reduction in respite bed capacity and the level of care that is currently provided?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Emerson for the question. As I indicated on Tuesday, the ACT government is working very closely with the commonwealth. The Health and Community Services Directorate has been engaging with aged care providers and with the commonwealth department to work through what the options are for the use of that \$10 million as well as what opportunities exist in the ACT for respite care. Our intention and the commonwealth's stated intention—recognising, again, that this is a Commonwealth responsibility—is that the number of respite beds available in the ACT will not be reduced from July 2027.

Land sales—Jamison and Kaleen

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. On 13 February, in response to my question, you wrote to tell me that direct sale applications have been received for unleased land at both the Kaleen and Jamison group centres in July 2025. There is community concern that Big Splash closing may have

been related to a desire to redevelop the area, and those feelings will be exacerbated by any sale processes that are not public. Can you tell me the status of the two applications for direct sale at Kaleen and Jamison and what criteria will be applied to determine whether the land should be sold directly instead of through an open, public process?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Yes, the status is that they have been received, and I think they are under assessment in accordance with the Planning Act and regulation. There is a panel that initially assesses those, and then there may be a decision and recommendation to government about whether there should be a different process, rather than just engaging with the one direct sale applicant, or whether it should go to a competitive sale or another process, depending on the outcome, or, indeed, that it should not be considered at all.

I will seek an update from the City and Environment Directorate on the status and come back to the Assembly on notice.

Ms Clay: A point of order on relevance. The question was: what are the criteria? We heard about the panel, but what are the actual criteria that they apply?

MR SPEAKER: I think the minister did respond to what the process is in terms of moving forward, and he said he would get back to you with further detail. I think that he has been relevant.

MS CLAY: How is the community consulted, and transparency given, where land is sold via direct sale?

MR STEEL: The government would have to consider what steps need to be taken in terms of community consultation; that would be on a case-by-case basis. But in virtually all circumstances, any direct sale is usually contingent on there being a development application that is approved for a site, which has a requirement, of course, for consultation to be undertaken. There is an independent assessment by the Territory Planning Authority in those circumstances, but that is really dependent on whether the government is prepared to actually sell the site, which may not be the case, depending on the particular proposal. I will provide an update to Ms Clay. I do not think it has reached the stage of providing a recommendation to government yet. It is still under consideration by the City and Environment Directorate.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, are any of the companies involved in the Big Splash site also involved in applications for direct sale?

MR STEEL: I do not believe so, but I will check and take that on notice to make sure I have that correct.

Tourism

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister, can you provide an update on the government's plan to action phase 2 of the T2030 Tourism Strategy?

MR BARR: Yes, I can provide an update. We are particularly focused on a number of domestic and international markets with a view to increase the tourism expenditure in the city's economy by a billion dollars over the next five years. We have four key priorities and that includes domestic and international markets as well as continuing strong investment in infrastructure, major events and making it cheaper and easier for people to visit Canberra and that includes initiatives to support both land transport, principally through the Canberra-Sydney rail corridor, and aviation access, working in partnership with Canberra Airport.

We have seen this week a further announcement of a new direct service between Canberra and Launceston, building on the Canberra-Bali services that Virgin announced earlier this year and our priorities will focus on working with the Queensland government on connections between Canberra and the Sunshine Coast and Canberra and Cairns, as well as working with the South Australian government to improve the frequency of services between Canberra and Adelaide and working with the Western Australian government to see if we can get Virgin to fly between Canberra and Perth.

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, what progress have we seen so far in 2026?

MR BARR: We have seen some significant progress in the areas that I have just spoken about and we have been particularly pleased with attendance at major events already this year, with a lot still to come. We are, I think, in peak festival season now for our city, Mr Speaker. We will continue our focus in relation to international aviation, welcoming the return of Qatar Airways service, but maintaining a focus on connections to New Zealand, either—most likely, I think—with Air New Zealand or with Qantas, and then working on that Singapore connection which really does require more traffic from India and from the UK and Europe. So these will be priority areas for Visit Canberra to focus on through this year.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, what recognition are those in our tourism sector receiving nationally?

MR BARR: Some excellent recognition, and I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. We are very strongly represented at next month's Qantas Australian Tourism Awards. A number of significant Canberra region businesses are national finalists. I cannot name them all in two minutes, but I do want to acknowledge Questacon, which has been a regular winner of national tourism awards, but also on the smaller scale, Pop Canberra, Shaw Estate, Hotel Realm and some of our own ACT government venues and events. The National Arboretum is up for a national award and so too is Floriade.

These awards represent the highest level of recognition for tourism excellence in Australia and the territory's nominees reflect the diversity and quality of experiences that our city offers. So I would take this opportunity to wish all of the ACT finalists all the best in the national awards and thank them for the work they do in providing quality tourism offerings and for representing Canberra on the national stage.

Government procurement

MR COCKS: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, between March 2017

and the end of October 2024, the territory entered into three contracts with Relational Data Systems, with a combined value of \$1.221 million, including all published variations. That was for provision of online services for a land title project. Minister, why did the government make over \$2.4 million in payments under these agreements that totalled \$1.2 million?

MS CHEYNE: For clarity, this might be in my role as Minister for City and Government Services. The short answer is that I do not know. Even if this is from responsibilities I had last term—it obviously extends back to the Ninth Assembly—I will need to seek some advice. I will take it on notice.

MR COCKS: Minister, why is the government incapable of properly administering its contractual arrangements?

MS CHEYNE: I reject the premise of that question. I do not think there is any suggestion, especially in relation to the specific project that Mr Cocks is asking about, that it has been incapably managed. I have no evidence to support that, and I am not sure that Mr Cocks does either. If he does, he is certainly welcome to raise that with me here or in any other forum that he wishes. But, to my knowledge, it has not been improperly managed. If that is not the case and I owe the Assembly an apology, I will provide that and correct the record. Otherwise, I will seek to explain what this contract was for and any other relevant information.

MS MORRIS: Minister, will there be any overspends without variations under the current \$1.3 million contract with the same service provider?

MS CHEYNE: I think that borders on hypothetical, but, in the interests of hoping to be useful, the short answer is again that I do not know, because I do not know the full extent of this arrangement. But I would note that variations in contracts are not unusual. In fact, many contracts have variations built into them, including relating to extensions of time or further services that might be available if the circumstances allow.

Mr Cocks: On a point of order regarding relevance: the question was about overspends without variations.

MR SPEAKER: I think the minister is being helpful, to be honest, Mr Cocks. She said that she will take the original question on notice and will provide further information. And I think she is right to say it is verging on hypothetical. She cannot predict the future. I think she is being helpful. There is no point of order.

MS CHEYNE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. If there is anything in the projection that suggests that this might be the case, of course I will try to give as much information as possible. If there is further information, with the imputations that are coming across here, I will be happy to receive it, if that might assist us in providing the information that is actually being sought here.

Government procurement

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Finance. Minister, on Tuesday in question time, you were asked:

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?

Your answer was: “I would say no, that is absolutely not common practice.” Minister, in August 2022, the ACT Insurance Agency, ACTIA, entered into an agreement with Marsh Pty Ltd, contract No GS2593938. Schedule 1 item 3 of the contract, labelled “Contract Price” states, “The maximum amount payable is \$2,340,000.00 (GST inclusive)”. Minister, what is the maximum amount payable under this contract without variation?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think the answer to the question was in the question—it was two million and something. But I will take the question on notice, review the *Hansard* and talk to ACTIA about this contract and whether Mr Cocks has the right end of the stick, given how regularly he is actually unable to read budget papers and contract arrangements.

MR COCKS: Minister, why has the government paid over \$40 million in invoices to this service provider without a contract variation since the commencement of this agreement?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again, while I thank Mr Cocks for the question and drawing this matter to the attention of the Assembly, the frequency with which Mr Cocks misunderstands these issues—

Mr Cocks: Point of order: the minister is debating.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, I would ask you to turn to the question. If you do not have the detail, take it on notice. But a dissertation on Mr Cocks is not relevant.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Okay; let me put that in a different way. I do not accept the premise of the question on face value, and I will take the question on notice.

MR CAIN: Minister, why are you and this government so reckless with taxpayers’ money?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I do not agree with the premise of the question. This government is not reckless with ACT taxpayers’ dollars.

Budget—rollover of appropriations

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer.

Treasurer, on 10 April 2025, you signed an authorisation under section 16B of the Financial Management Act to move an additional \$12.599 million to the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate from the previous year. On what date did you, or the Treasury, become aware of the need to move the additional funding?

MR STEEL: Mr Cocks’s question relates to the rollover of an undisbursed

appropriation. I will seek some advice in relation to that and check records around that date and come back to the Assembly on notice.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, when did you, or the Treasury, become aware of the need to move an additional \$7.9 million into Canberra Health Services for the 2024-25 financial year?

MR STEEL: Again, I will take that on notice.

MS BARRY: Treasurer, when did you or the Treasury become aware of the need to move an additional \$7.15 million into CIT for the 2024-25 financial year?

MR STEEL: Again, I will check and come back on notice to the Assembly.

Budget—rollover of appropriations

MR COCKS: Treasurer, are you aware of your rollover reporting obligations outlined under section 16B of the Financial Management Act, and if so, what are they?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question and refer the member to section 16B of the act that he has been referring to and if the Treasurer authorises an amount to be dispersed under this section, the Treasurer must attach a copy of the authorisation for the next financial statement presented to the Assembly. I will check whether those have all been attached and come back on notice, thank you.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, if you were aware of your reporting obligations, why were you negligent in fulfilling these obligations when tabling the consolidated financial statements for the quarter ending March 2025?

MR STEEL: I will check that and come back on notice. I cannot verify that in the Assembly right at the moment, but I will come back on notice when I can.

MR MILLIGAN: Treasurer, will you apologise to ratepayers for your gross negligence if it is proven that you did not report according to the Financial Management Act?

MR STEEL: That is a hypothetical, and I will be coming back on the other questions, so I will address it through that and then come back to the Assembly about any further actions that need to be taken.

Budget—rollover of appropriations

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, on 10 April 2025, you signed multiple authorisations under section 16B of the Financial Management Act. Your responsibilities as Treasurer under FMA require you to table these authorisations with the presentation of the next financial statement to the Assembly. Treasurer, why did you fail to comply with your responsibilities under the FMA and, in doing so, fail to disclose the need for an additional \$100 million in funding for the 2024-25 financial year?

MR STEEL: Again, I will check that and come back on notice.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, why didn't you choose to disclose the need for an additional \$100 million in funding as part of the second Appropriation Bill for 2024-25?

MR STEEL: I will come back in relation to the first question, and that may also answer the second question.

MR PARTON: Treasurer, did you hide the need for this additional funding because S&P were undertaking a review of the territory's credit rating at that time?

MR STEEL: No.

Treasurer—conduct

MR COCKS: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Treasurer.

Treasurer, you have explicit reporting obligations as outlined by the Financial Management Act. If you were the Chief Financial Officer of a private company, breaching reporting obligations could result in up to 15 years of jail time or potential fines exceeding \$1 million. Since you failed in your reporting obligations, will you resign as Treasurer?

MR STEEL: No, because that has not been verified. I will certainly come back to the Assembly with some information about those particular reporting obligations and present that to the Assembly.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, why should you be held to a different standard to a private company director?

MR STEEL: I am not. I will come back to the Assembly with information transparently, as I always have and as our Treasury officials always intend to do in supporting me with the reporting obligations under the Financial Management Act.

MR PARTON: Treasurer, was this malice or simply gross incompetence?

MR STEEL: I reject the premise of the question, Mr Speaker.

Ms Cheyne: On a point of order directly relevant to that question set: standing order 55 is quite clear that all imputations of improper motives and all personal reflections on members shall be considered highly disorderly. If it is not absolutely within that definition, I think it is bordering quite close.

MR SPEAKER: I tend to agree with you on that.

Mr Parton, I think accusations of malice are unparliamentary and I would ask you to withdraw.

Mr Parton: Happy to withdraw. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Vocational education and training—enrolments

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations. Minister, this month marks the commencement of the VET academic year for 2026. What kinds of initiatives and activities does 2026 hold for our VET sector?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. I am pleased to say that 2026 is shaping up to be a great year for VET learning here in the ACT. The CIT has hit the ground running in 2026, following a particularly strong turnout at twilight enrolment sessions earlier in the month, I can happily advise that the CIT now has over 7,900 learners enrolled in semester 1 in 2026. This is around three per cent higher than last year. 2026 will see more fee-free TAFE places offered at the CIT, driving enrolment in courses across critical skill areas, including early childhood education, mental health, cybersecurity and education, to list just a few.

On top of this, 2026 will see the first full academic year where our 90 per cent subsidy of fees for critical construction apprentices is in place. As an initiative introduced part way last year, this subsidy is helping lower the costs for an apprentice across trades. This initiative removes barriers to education and ensures that we are supporting people into a career they know will have a positive impact on our community.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how will the ACT government support VET learners with their studies in 2026?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his supplementary question. The ACT government recognises that, to meet the skills needs of our city, we need to support our VET learners. Earlier this week, I provided an update about the important work we are doing in partnership with the Albanese Labor government through the National Skills Agreement and how this agreement is central to our efforts to support VET learners.

2026 will mark the commencement of work on an ACT careers hub, which is an initiative of the National Skills Agreement. This hub will provide guidance to learners, both new and already studying, about pathways and qualifications open to them in VET. This hub has been established because we heard, through consultation, that current and prospective students would benefit from a simpler, clearer and central point of information on vocational pathways. Through the careers hub, we will be able to provide greater support and guidance to help learners find a career through their VET studies. It will complement the skills and knowledge of our employers and RTOs and will help our learners find the career path they want to be on.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how can we as a community support our VET students with their studies this year?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary question. If there is one thing that helps the students succeed in their vet studies, it is practice. CIT has talented students sharpening their skills across a wide range of disciplines. At CIT Woden, the return of students for 2026 marks the return of the CIT Restaurant and CIT Hair and Beauty Bar. These wonderful facilities are open to the community and, if you have not visited yet, you are frankly missing out. At the CIT Restaurant, the cafe is open

Thursdays and Fridays, pouring wonderful coffee and selling bread, pre-made meals and delicious desserts. In the evening on Thursdays, the apprentices offer Canberra's cheapest five-course tasting menu, with wine pairing, for just \$85 a head. Mr Speaker, I know this one is close to your heart! If you are looking to make a day of it, the CIT Hair and Beauty Bar offers haircuts, colour, waxes, tinting of lashes, manicures, pedicures and massage, as well as a whole host of other treatments and pampering.

These services provide students with real experience for real success in the workplace, but they only work if people in our community show their support and encouragement by taking part. Further information on how you can get involved and make bookings is available on the CIT website.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you for the information, Minister.

Playing fields—artificial grass

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, the Gungahlin Bulls Rugby League Club, the primary user of the Taylor playing fields, has written to the government about their concerns with the government's announcement of installing artificial grass. They write that installation of the surface would make the facility unsuitable for rugby league due to concerns about injury risk, increased abrasion and altered playing characteristics and, hence, have asked that the ACT government reconsider its proposal to install synthetic surfaces at Taylor. Will the government reconsider its position on this project?

MS BERRY: I am aware of the Bulls' concerns with regard synthetic grass and sports fields at Taylor. This was part of an election commitment that the ACT Labor Party made and was made aware to the community at the time that those fields would be synthetic. I will have to check on the timeframes around requests for tender and things like that to see if it is able to be reconsidered and whether it is appropriate to be reconsidered, because there is a need in the ACT for more synthetic field ovals for a range of different sports.

We find that, in inclement weather, in the ACT our grass fields get damaged quite a bit when there is a lot of rain and so a lot of sports look to use synthetic fields. We have only a few synthetic fields and we were hoping to add to our stock by including the Taylor fields. But I am happy to continue to work with the Bulls, as I always have been, on a positive outcome for them and all other sports in the ACT.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, do you acknowledge that some community sports organisations do not welcome artificial grass due to increased injury risk and abrasion?

MS BERRY: Yes, of course, I do. I am aware of the challenges with some sports, particularly with rugby league with more time on the ground perhaps than other sports might. However, as I said, these sports facilities are often for a range of different sports. Making sure that we have some equality there around the kinds of facilities that we provide and having a variety of stock available for a range of different sports is important to the ACT Sport and Rec team. But I do understand the issues that the Bulls club have raised, and I will continue to work with them.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, do you make decisions on sports ovals based on Labor election commitments or on community sentiment?

MS BERRY: Of course, when the government make a commitment they follow through on that commitment and deliver on their promises. Often that is as a result of conversations. As I explained in my first answers to these questions, there is a need and a call from a range of different sports for access to more synthetic fields. I know Mr Braddock has a feeling about synthetic fields—I get that—but there are a range of sports that do benefit from synthetic fields. The technology for synthetic fields has improved over the last decade or so, and there is a very big difference in the quality of the fields and the sustainability of those fields both environmentally but also for user groups. I always consider the needs of sports across the ACT. That is why the Taylor fields are being considered to include synthetic fields.

Public housing—maintenance

MS BARRY: My question is to the minister for housing. Earlier in the month I asked you a question in this place about the insourcing of maintenance for public housing. You indicated that you would not consider doing an efficiency review of this pilot insourcing program by saying “I think we are kind of past that work,” but you went on to clearly indicate that there would be an increase in the cost of maintenance because of your fixation with insourcing. Minister, given the parlous state of the budget, why are you choosing to pursue a much more expensive maintenance method? Will this result in even fewer maintenance jobs being completed?

MS BERRY: Well, I get the feeling that the opposition wants to have a housing maintenance program that is the cheapest, at any cost. The cheapest does not always mean the best quality outcomes, particularly for people who are the most vulnerable in the ACT. My focus is on ensuring the best possible outcomes in repairs and maintenance for Housing ACT properties and tenants who do not have the same kinds of choices as the rest of us. So my work in insourcing the housing repairs and maintenance program is very much focused on the best outcomes for tenants.

MS BARRY: With that in mind, Minister, how much more will it cost to provide even the current level of maintenance once this pilot is rolled out across the territory?

MS BERRY: Well, thank you. That is a hypothetical question. Work is still occurring in that space. As I have said in this place a number of times, we have been piloting a part of the program to test the viability and the ability of the government’s insource teams to deliver that work and whether it is achieving the best possible outcomes for tenants. The feedback that I am getting is that tenants are benefiting from that pilot.

MR PARTON: Which other services will you be cutting to pay for the union-demanded insourcing of the public housing maintenance, or will you simply accept that even less maintenance jobs will be completed?

MS BERRY: No, there will be no cuts to other services.

Mr Parton: So where is the money coming from? It is going to cost more. You told us it is going to cost more.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Parton. Minister, continue.

MS BERRY: I am very much trying hard to answer the question, but the constant interruptions by the Leader of the Opposition are making it difficult. My focus has always been on ensuring the best outcome for tenants and that is it. I have always been focused on making sure that low paid people in our community get some kind of security in their work, and in the case of public housing tenants—tenants who do not have the same kinds of choices as the rest of us—get the best kind of support through their repairs and maintenance program and some respect from people in this place who are leaders in this community, showing that respect, by insourcing a program which will deliver better outcomes for tenants. That is my goal.

Mr Cocks: Point of order under 118AA. The question that the Leader of the Opposition asked was which other services will be you be cutting to pay for the union-demanded insourcing of public housing maintenance or will you simply accept that even less maintenance jobs will be completed? The question was very clearly about how the government intends to pay for higher costs that the minister has already spoken to. The response that the minister provided instead went only to questions of her priorities in what she would like to see delivered, rather than how to offset the costs.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, do you want to—on the point of order?

MS BERRY: I answered it in the very first question. I said no other services would be cut.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, I do not see a point of order, Mr Cocks.

Community sector organisations—funding

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services. Minister, I have been really grateful for your engagement on community sector sustainability and funding. ACTCOSS's latest *State of the ACT community sector* reports a community sector that is on the brink. In 2024, 83 per cent of the organisations surveyed reported an increase in demand, driven by increased cost-of-living pressures, housing insecurity, a lack of mental health support and a growing complexity of need in our community.

In their response to ACTCOSS's *Counting the costs* report on sector sustainability, government agreed to a sector sustainability program. In the executive summary, they say that "commissioning of the SSP will include development of an evaluation framework for the program to enable evidence of impact to be gathered and a final evaluation report developed in 2027". That is at the bottom of page 3. Minister, when will that evaluation framework be made publicly available?

MS ORR: I thank Miss Nuttall for her question. I am trying to figure out the sequence here, because Miss Nuttall has asked about an evaluation framework and when it will be made public, and it is for something that is meant to happen in 2027. I will need maybe to seek some advice on timeframes, so that the sequencing is better. I will come back, if there is anything to update.

I would point Miss Nuttall to the Sector Sustainability Program, which is at the core of the question, and it is the program that the evaluation framework refers to. It has been ongoing since 2023. My understanding is that, towards the end of the last term, the progression of that program was not the easiest; it was a very big, complex project, and it continues to be worked through. The delivery was a little bit off, and the timeframes have been pushed out.

With respect to informing ACT Labor's election commitments, coming into government, we have acknowledged that there needs to be more work done on the Sector Sustainability Program, and we had an election commitment to finalise that work, amongst a range of other commitments that are sequential and go to a lot of things, including reviewing commissioning, standing up a unit within the public service, refreshing the social compact, and considering matters of funding. We have been working through those.

I note that the Greens also had quite a lot of election commitments, and part of those go to investing further in the Sector Sustainability Program. That is reflected in our Supply and Confidence Agreement with the Greens. As I said, we have been progressively working through that, and we have been working quite closely as well with the sector and the peak organisations within the sector. I must admit that none of them have asked me about the evaluation framework that Miss Nuttall has raised. I would say that there has been—(*Time expired.*)

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, are we on track to evaluate the program in 2027, and what would be the barriers to that timeline?

MS ORR: In answering the question as to whether we are on track, I think it was generally regarded, before I took on the portfolio, that this project was not necessarily on track. Part of the work that we have committed to do, and that I have been very open about doing, has been working with the sector on progressing a wide range of reforms and getting that work completed. I think that the initial timeframes in 2023 were put forward with the best intentions by all partners to the project. The complexity of the matters to be considered means that perhaps it was ambitious, and not quite as realistic as one might like.

We will continue to work through that. We will continue to see how we can get those commitments and that project back on track. Again, it is part of a sequential reform agenda that is there; it is very clearly stepped out. I have spoken many times in this chamber around looking at how we progress these reforms. Certainly, the ACT for Community campaign brought forward a number of priorities around funding to which they wanted immediate attention to be given. That has been our focus in the first instance.

We will continue to look at things such as the social compact, the commissioning framework, establishing a unit within the public service to focus more on this work, and the sector sustainability. As I said, in all the conversations I have had with sector representatives, they have not raised with me that they would like any particular piece of work changed, with respect to that prioritisation.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, what are you hearing from community sector organisations about the sufficiency of the boost of \$5 million a year split among around 150 community organisations while the Sector Sustainability Program progresses?

MS ORR: The feedback that I have had from community sector organisations is that the boost has been appreciated and that most organisations are putting it to good use. I have certainly had other feedback from people and organisations that, in taking a one-size-fits-all approach, they feel that there are some areas where there might have been a bit more need or a little bit less need, and they would like to see that balance.

They also appreciate that the boost was put in place to alleviate the immediate pressures that the sector was saying they were experiencing, in order to have the time to work through this bigger reform program. It was in direct response to the feedback that we have heard from the sector. There was definitely an appreciation and understanding that, as a temporary measure, it was best to get that in place, so that we can get on with the bigger work of looking at that more detailed reform agenda.

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