



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Wednesday, 20 March 2024

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Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Tourism and Minister for Trade, Investment and Economic Development) (2.01): I confirm that the ministerial responsibilities for the absent ministers in question time remain the same today as they were yesterday—and will also be for tomorrow, provided everyone is here.

Questions without notice

Light rail—economic analysis

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister, in media today it was reported that you said it was unfair to characterise the cost of the tram to Commonwealth Park to be \$1.46 billion, saying it includes costs to support the continued delivery of the entire network. However, in Minister Steel's response to the PAC inquiry into the Auditor-General's report on stage 2A economic analysis, he said the project costs include early works; track; structures; depot and roads; light rail vehicles; power systems infrastructure; operating and maintenance costs; salaries and wages; depot and stabling costs; electricity supply; special events costs; operator mobilisation costs; maintenance costs; lifecycle costs; and development costs for road and services connections. Chief Minister, why do you continue to mislead Canberrans about the true cost of stage 2A, when your own minister has confirmed that these costs are included?

MR BARR: The premise of the question is wrong. Mr Parton was called out by the Public Transport Association for seeking to massively inflate costs associated with capital versus recurrent operations and maintenance over the duration of the service concession that is the stage 1 PPP that is augmented by stage 2A. So you are attempting to bring together operations and maintenance costs and a range of factors in an attempt to create the highest possible number to create a scare campaign.

Mr Parton interjecting—

MR BARR: Of course, any capital project that is then operated will have operating costs. A bus rapid transit model would have capital costs and operating costs. I note that you do not seek to do this on any other project. It is just another blatant attempt by the Canberra Liberals to attack light rail—same old, same old.

Mr Pettersson: I rise on a point of order, Madam Speaker. Mr Parton, in his question, accused the Chief Minister of misleading the people of Canberra. I ask that you ask Mr Parton to withdraw.

MADAM SPEAKER: Even though it was unflattering, I think it is not unparliamentary. There have been broader comments about misleading the public. It is about misleading people in the chamber that is the truly offensive matter, Mr Pettersson.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, was Minister Steel trying to create the biggest

possible number when he included in his response to that committee inquiry all of the same things that we included in our cost assessment?

MR BARR: Minister Steel was very clear about the different components. He was not seeking to mislead the committee to suggest that the capital cost of the project—or indeed other elements of the cost of the project—were to the extent that Mr Parton is attempting to scare the community with the figures he is putting out. Mr Steel was also very clear that stage 2A adds on to stage 1. It is not a project in isolation. It is not 1.7 kilometres of light rail connected to nothing else; it is connected to stage 1. The additional light rail vehicles that will operate will operate across the whole length of the network and will allow more people to utilise public transport.

Mr Parton interjecting—

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, who is wrong—you or Minister Steel?

MR BARR: It is always a problem when the second supplementary is so pre-prepared and so blatantly political and so obvious. What a stupid question, Ms Castley!

Ms Lawder: As you would recall, Madam Speaker, the answers to questions should follow the same rules as the questions themselves and not have inferences and imputations about the member asking the question.

MADAM SPEAKER: Do you have anything to add, Mr Barr?

MR BARR: No. I have completed my answer.

Light rail—economic analysis

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, the ACT Auditor-General's report from September 2021 on the economic analysis of light rail stage 2A found that, in relation to the costs of retrofitting the existing light rail to enable wire-free technology—and I quote:

... they were not included in the Light Rail Stage 2a cost estimate. Explicitly identifying these costs would have provided greater accuracy and transparency in the economic appraisal and Cost Benefit Analysis for Light Rail Stage 2a.

Chief Minister, why were these costs not included in the cost-benefit analysis for 2A, given it would have provided greater accuracy and transparency?

MR BARR: If my dates are correct, at the time that was not a requirement. The National Capital Authority later made it a requirement. Of course, the commonwealth has now contributed to more than cover the costs there.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, did you include the cost of retrofitting the existing light rail to enable wire-free technology in your business case to the federal government when seeking a fifty-fifty contribution?

MR BARR: I think those facts would have been publicly known by that point, yes.

The commonwealth, of course, have provided the funding.

Mr Cain: Did you notify them? Did you tell the commonwealth?

MR BARR: It was their decision; we did not need to tell them anything.

DR PATERSON: Chief Minister, is it unfair—the way that the Canberra Liberals characterise light rail costs to scare the Canberra community?

MR BARR: It is, but it is standard practice and what we have come to expect from the Canberra Liberals, who, perhaps depending on where they are in their backflipping in relation to light rail—

Mr Parton: I thought we had the same position all the way through?

MR BARR: You're the one contesting that in some elections you oppose it and in some elections you support it. We think you always oppose it and have never supported it.

Mr Hanson: Yes, I did. I did always oppose it; you're right!

MADAM SPEAKER: Members. Mr Barr, no encouragement.

MR BARR: Indeed, sorry. The interjection from the man in exile says it all!

Light rail—economic analysis

MR PARTON: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, a *Canberra Times* article published in June 2018 suggested that the second stage of light rail would cost between \$1.3 billion and \$1.6 billion, according to your government, and that light rail could be running by 2023-24. Your latest estimate of the time line for stage 2B is 2033, almost a decade longer than you initially said, and the cost for stage 2A alone is now revealed to be \$1.46 billion. Chief Minister, how did you get both the costings and the time line so wrong?

MR BARR: Firstly, I reject the premise of the question. The figures that Mr Parton has used are clearly not comparing construction costs with construction costs. Mr Parton's number includes all of the operations and maintenance costs over the duration of the service extension. The other obvious point to make is that the government split the project, reflecting the fact that the approvals process for the second stage was far more complicated than the approvals process for stage 2A. Another factor that has obviously contributed to delay in the construction project was the global pandemic.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, why should Canberrans now trust your time line for construction being complete by 2033 when your previous estimate was so dramatically wrong?

MR BARR: Canberrans can trust that the government will deliver the project, because we have delivered stage 1 and we are getting on with delivering stage 2A.

They can also be certain, it seems, that a Canberra Liberals regime would not do anything.

Mr Parton: Absolutely.

MR BARR: So if you want light rail, if you want the network to extend, re-elect the government.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, can you at least confirm for Canberrans whether your estimates show that the cost of stage 2B will be more than \$5 billion?

MR BARR: That is a hypothetical.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

MR BARR: I reject the premise of the question outright.

Housing—Affordable Home Purchase Scheme

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development.

Ms Berry interjecting—

MR PARTON: Minister, last week in the media it was revealed that there have been significant building delays for Canberrans participating in your government's affordable housing scheme. A year ago, I raised this same issue with you regarding major building delays in Whitlam. In your response to a question on notice, you failed to give a meaningful answer and to provide any certainty to the Canberrans who your government enticed into a scheme with promises of the dream of home ownership, which has ended up being a nightmare for many. Minister, how many of the so-called affordable housing and land packages have actually been completed with buyers moving in, and how many are still hanging in the balance?

MS BERRY: I will take the specifics of the question on notice, with regard to actual numbers. But I will say that Mr Parton is well aware that there have been a number of constraints on the construction industry that have been beyond the control of the ACT government, including a global health pandemic and including a war overseas which is also not our responsibility, affecting where we get supplies in this country to build homes and to do building and construction more generally. We also have a workforce crisis that the ACT government is working towards addressing, which I referred to in developing a pipeline for workers in construction who are women.

I think Mr Parton is well aware of the issues in the industry. I understand the frustration of people who are entering into the affordable home ownership program. Unfortunately the relationship between the Suburban Land Agency, the construction company and the buyer ends once the buyer and the construction company sign up to the development of the land.

As I said, I understand the frustrations, but some of the issues that construction companies are facing are beyond the control of the ACT government. I will always advocate on behalf of individuals who are facing difficulties in that respect. However, with regard to interfering in a contract that has been made between an individual and a contractor, it is very difficult for the ACT government to have any other leverage.

MR PARTON: Minister, how many successful ballot winners have forfeited their deposit and have had to break their contract as a result of these lengthy delays?

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

MR CAIN: Minister, what support has been given to buyers who, after years of waiting, find themselves in financial distress due to this debacle by your government?

MS BERRY: If there are individuals in the community who are experiencing financial hardship, then the ACT government has a number of programs in place, as well as support services across the ACT community, to support those individuals. I suggest that, rather than raising it here as a general question when Mr Cain is contacted by constituents who are facing financial difficulty, he puts them in touch with either me, the Chief Minister or any other MLA in the government to support them to be able to live a happy and fulfilled life.

Economy—performance

DR PATERSON: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, can you please update the Assembly on the latest national accounts data release by the ABS?

MR BARR: I thank Dr Paterson for the question. I can confirm that the Australian national accounts data showed that for the December quarter the ACT had the second-highest state final demand growth in the nation. This builds on having the strongest growth of all states and territories in the fiscal year 2022-23, where the territory's real gross state product increased by 4.3 per cent and state final demand rose by 3.5 per cent.

It is not just one quarter, though, or one year: it is an entire decade of nation-leading economic growth. The ACT has led every other state and territory—and gapped them at sometimes double the rate of growth of some of the other states and territories. It has done so over a decade. In fact, since the June quarter of 2015, the ACT is the only jurisdiction in Australia where annual state final demand has shown continuous growth.

This is not just growth in totality; it is economic growth on a per capita basis as well. Our per capita SFD continues to improve, which, in the context of the nation's fastest-growing population, shows our economy is growing faster than our population, and per capita GSP and SFD is growing year on year, and has done consistently faster than anywhere else in Australia for a decade now.

DR PATERSON: Treasurer, what are the factors that have led to the level of sustained economic growth in the ACT?

MR BARR: There has been a range of factors: national leading growth that I have just mentioned; significant expansion of our service export sector; very strong household consumption; and growth in private and public investment. Public investment will continue to be an important foundation of the ACT economy over coming decades; however, we are pleased to observe increases, as we saw in the national accounts in the December quarter, where private gross fixed capital formation increased by 15.3 per cent in the second quarter, driven by a 56 per cent rise in non-dwelling construction and a 35.1 per cent rise in machinery and equipment investment in the territory.

MR PETTERSSON: Treasurer, can you please outline the role of the ACT government in supporting growth industries into the future?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary. The government has and will continue to support growth industries in the territory, including space, cybersecurity, renewables, advanced technology, international education and tourism. Two of the most significant growth industries over the past decade embody increasing diversification in our service exports, particularly in the education and tourism sectors.

Travel exports in the ACT, which include business and personal travel, grew by 65 per cent over the decade from \$786 million in fiscal year 2012-13 to \$1.3 billion in 2022-23. Most of this growth came from in-bound tourism, which grew from \$736 million to \$1.26 billion—a growth of 71 per cent over the decade.

International students also provided significant impetus to our service export growth and to our population growth. Each year, Canberra’s tertiary education institutions enrol over 60,000 students—in a population of about 475,000, 60,000 students. The majority of these are from interstate or overseas. There are students from more than a hundred countries studying in our city. It is our single biggest international export industry, and, outside of the public sector, one of the fastest-growing areas of employment and economic activity—one of the leaders in private sector economic growth. It is an area of our economy that has great capacity for future growth, and the government intends to support that.

Housing—Affordable Home Purchase Scheme

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, a number of participants in the government’s Affordable Home Purchase Scheme have been left in limbo despite promises from your government that their homes would now be built. The SLA email to buyers at the start of the process states “construction will commence.” It does not say it might commence. It says it will commence; at whatever date it was. In the instance of Casey Westcombe, it was by 2022. It turns out the contract between the builder and the SLA gives the builder a four-year grace period and that is not communicated to buyers. A number of these buyers are stuck in financial distress and limbo for years as they wait for their property to be built. Why is the four-year grace period not communicated clearly to buyers?

MS BERRY: I would suggest that the SLA, in selling affordable land for purchasers, does encourage buyers to get legal advice, and one would assume that legal advice would include advice around the time frames included in the build time on the land that the individual has purchased. I will take some of that question on notice and see if there is more information I can provide, but I would suggest that in the first instance when the Suburban Land Agency does sell that land—purchasing land and building homes can be quite complex—people should get legal advice on what the requirements are and what the timeframes are.

MR PARTON: Minister, why have you not been responding to buyers' emails on this issue? I guess when I say you, I mean you and your office.

MS BERRY: I will respond to people who get in touch with my office. It might not be immediately, on the same day, or even the same week that a person emails my office, because I do need to get advice about their particular circumstances so I can provide a fulsome response, but I do respond to any emails that come to my office with the appropriate advice.

MR CAIN: Minister, will you apologise to those people who are facing financial hardship due to your government's mishandling of this scheme?

MS BERRY: First of all I reject that the ACT government is mishandling the scheme. It is providing opportunities for individual's to get into homes and buy land that is more affordable. I understand the frustration of individual's who have entered into a contract with a contractor and that contractor has not delivered. I can definitely empathise with individuals in those circumstances. I would encourage Mr Parton and Mr Cain, should they have individuals or constituents that have contacted them, to please get in touch with my office so that I can—

Mr Parton: They have, that is why they came to me.

MS BERRY: Well, if there are others, I would suggest you put them in touch with my office as well and I will make appropriate investigations into their individual circumstances. But if I have more than one—there is only one I am aware of—if there is more than that, can you please put them in touch so I can investigate.

Government—land release

MS CLAY: My question is to Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, as part of the 2023-24 budget you announced that there would be a total of 16,935 dwellings released over five financial years. Last month you announced that \$50 million was being injected into the Suburban Land Agency to help accelerate the supply of land and deliver more land. How will the SLA use this money to accelerate the supply of land?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Clay for the question. The funding injection which was provided in the mid-year budget is part of the government's plan to enable the SLA to do what they do best, and that is to develop land for release for new homes. The one-off capital injection is part of a bigger project to improve the SLA's capital structure. This project has been in the works for the last 18 months and is designed to

put the SLA in a better position to respond to the risks and opportunities as they arrive, whilst maintaining prudent liquidity arrangements.

MS CLAY: How many public housing homes and community homes have been delivered through the land release program over the last five years?

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice.

MISS NUTTALL: When will this accelerated land be made available for sale to the public?

MS BERRY: When the Suburban Land Agency has the land developed for sale.

Housing ACT—maintenance

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. The minister for housing and homelessness, your Greens colleague Rebecca Vassarotti, said recently, on 26 February, that “maintenance work on public housing should be completed by government workers because contracting the work out has wasted taxpayers’ money and eroded working conditions”. Minister, do you agree with your cabinet colleague?

MS BERRY: I am pleased to hear of the interest of the Canberra Liberals, and particularly Mark Parton, in the Total Facilities Management contract and maintenance of our public housing properties. I am also pleased that I have the support of our Greens colleagues in the ACT government to consider what we can do to insource the Total Facilities Management contract. However, those are investigations that the government will continue to make. It is the ACT government’s policy—

Mr Parton: A point of order, Madam Speaker, on relevance. I asked the minister whether she agreed with her cabinet colleague, and I would ask her to be relevant.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Parton, you know that I cannot direct the minister to give you that type of answer. Minister, you have more time left.

Ms Berry: I think I have answered.

MR PARTON: Minister, why has it taken so long for a comprehensive review of the maintenance management to occur?

MS BERRY: The Total Facilities Management contract is continually reviewed to ensure that the contract actually applies and complies with the KPIs that the ACT government has set in the contract. Obviously, this is the largest contract that the ACT government has. The ACT government and the ACT Labor Party have a policy that we will insource where we can, where jobs can be done by the ACT government. I am pleased that the ACT government is implementing Labor Party policy, that the Greens political party supports Labor policy, and that perhaps the Liberal Party does as well.

MR CAIN: Minister, why is the ACT government consistently the worst landlord in

the ACT?

MS BERRY: I completely reject that question.

Economy—employment

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, can you please update the Assembly on the current state of the employment market, following the latest labour force figures?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. I can advise the Assembly that the latest job vacancies data shows that there are 8,600 vacant jobs in the territory. That is data from towards the end of last year. That is about 30 per cent more job vacancies than there were in February 2020, pre pandemic. The labour market of the territory is one of the strongest in the country. Over the last decade, employment has grown by about 25.5 per cent, or around 54,000 additional jobs. That is an average growth rate of around 2.3 per cent per annum over the period 2014-24.

The latest labour force figures show that the territory has a significantly high participation rate, at 72.1 per cent, as compared to the national participation rate in the labour force, which is at 66.8 per cent. This is a very high level of participation. It reflects the fact that Canberra is indeed a skilled and working city, with a level of participation in the workforce significantly higher than the rest of Australia. To put some perspective on that five percentage point difference, it has taken 36 years for the national participation rate to rise by five percentage points. It used to sit at 61.8 per cent back in July 1988. To rise to 66.8 per cent nationally took 36 years. Here in the ACT, we sit a further five percentage points above that national average, reflecting a highly skilled workforce. *(Time expired.)*

MR PETTERSSON: Treasurer, how has the composition of our labour force changed over this period?

MR BARR: Back in December 2011, nearly 31 per cent of the workforce was employed by the Australian public service. By December 2021, ten years on from that, that share reduced to 24.2 per cent. Private sector jobs grew by nearly 33 per cent between November 2014 and November 2023. Public sector jobs also grew during that period but by 17.5 per cent. The workforce in our city participates more than elsewhere in Australia. It is dynamic and it is growing. Some of the growth industries that I touched on in my answers to earlier supplementary questions indicate where that employment growth is occurring.

I reiterate our focus on jobs. We had a 250,000 jobs target for our total employment in the territory. We smashed through that several years ago. We are now on our way towards 300,000 in our territory economy. Those jobs are going to come in areas like cyber security, renewables, advanced technology, education, tourism, the space industry and quantum—a range of really exciting and engaging job opportunities right across our private and public sectors as our economy continues to produce more jobs and we continue to have higher levels of pay in our city than anywhere else in Australia.

MS ORR: Treasurer, what does the high participation rate mean for the ACT?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary question. It reflects that we are a relatively young and highly skilled population, but it also reflects that people vote with their feet and move here. They choose to study and build careers in Canberra. A testament to and a very clear factor in our economic strength has been our very strong rate of population growth. People can choose to live in any number of cities or towns in Australia, and indeed around the world, but people are choosing to live in Canberra. It is an important indicator of success for a city, and particularly in a nation like Australia, where there are very low barriers to internal movement. The ACT had the highest population growth rate across the Australian jurisdictions—all of them—over the decade to June 2023, growing at around two per cent per annum, compared to the national growth rate of 1.4 per cent. In its simplest form, population growth is people voting with their feet, and they are choosing Canberra.

Strathnairn—schools

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister, on 22 September 2020, you shared a post on your Facebook page committing that “a re-elected Labor government will build a new primary school in Strathnairn” and that “construction will begin in the first half of the next term if Labor is elected.” May I remind you that we are now in the final few months of this term and no construction has commenced in Strathnairn, no school has been built there, and there is nowhere for Strathnairn kids to learn in that area. Minister, why did you break this election promise to the people of West Belconnen?

MS BERRY: I am pleased to see that Mr Cain has caught up on the news! There has been a delay, which has been communicated to individuals in the Strathnairn community. It is unfortunate that we have this delay. However, there is room for students and young people in Strathnairn in other schools nearby in West Belconnen. A free bus can get them there. We look forward to working with the Strathnairn community to continue to work towards a new primary school in Strathnairn in 2026.

MR CAIN: Given that your promise was made leading up to the last election, why should the residents of Strathnairn believe that you are going to guarantee them a school, as you are now promising?

MS BERRY: We are delivering on a school in Strathnairn.

MS LAWDER: Minister, how many other election promises have you failed to keep?

MS BERRY: That is a question that is really—

Mr Hanson: Come up with a number. Come on.

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

MS BERRY: How many election promises will the Canberra Liberals never deliver because they will never be elected to be able to deliver them?

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members! Ms Berry, to the question.

MS BERRY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am happy to take the Canberra Liberals through every single election commitment that the ACT government has made. I would point them specifically to the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement, which identifies all the election commitments that were made by the ACT government. That is well on track to be delivered.

Trees—urban canopy

MR BRADDOCK: My question is for the Minister for City Services. Minister, the ACT Auditor-General's performance audit report on urban tree management identified that the TCCS tree unit resourcing was not sufficient to meet the targets in the Urban Forest Strategy. Did the ACT government evaluate what resourcing would be required in order to achieve the target?

MS CHEYNE: There has been a significant increase in the number of resources that we have had in our tree planting team, as well as in our tree assessment team, under the Urban Forest Act. For example, since 2019-20, we have increased the resourcing of tree-related teams and city presentation through several initiatives. That has included the hiring of 65 new temporary and permanent staff across a number of teams. There are also 16 officers covering both inspections and application assessment under the classification of tree protection officers.

In terms of the modelling that is required for the planting of the trees and for the caring of the trees, we have been through a period, over these last few years, of intense planting. I expect in the short term that we will now be moving into a position of consolidation of caring for those juvenile trees. We are in the process, through the budget process, of looking at what resources are needed for this next stage of consolidation.

MR BRADDOCK: What mathematical proportion of the 30 per cent tree canopy cover target will the urban tree activities contribute toward?

MS CHEYNE: I do not have the maths in front of me. I will take it on notice.

MS CLAY: Minister, do queries to Fix My Street that are about trees get automatically referred to the tree unit? If not, could they be?

MS CHEYNE: Fix My Street is an interesting—

Mr Parton: Beast?

MS CHEYNE: beast that I now know more about than I certainly ever did! There are issues with Fix My Street, in some cases, depending on what the work request is and whether the front end of the system easily speaks to the back end of the system. We do have a triage team that has been established to work through Fix My Street requests, and the answer to Ms Clay's question really does depend on exactly what the

nature of the ask is regarding trees—is it tree planting, new trees, removal of trees, responding to the storm damage? Whether it is automatic or not depends, but, largely, the time frame in which it is assigned to a team remains consistent.

Education—School Improvement Framework

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister, the directorate recently launched the new School Improvement Framework, anchored around a data dashboard. What new data points or insights does this dashboard show, which were not previously available?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Nuttall for her interest in the School Improvement Framework. The School Improvement Framework was developed to continue to develop strategic improvement planning and to look at what is going well in our schools and what can be done ever better. Schools will deliver a range of different data and bring it together for use for school communities to deliver on strategic plans within their schools and make sure we can provide even better learning outcomes for our students but importantly for our teachers and school principals to be supported. Initially only school principals will be provided the data, but it is the intention to provide that data to the broader community as the program continues to be developed.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, what measures has the ACT government taken to ensure the implementation of this new system does not create additional administrative work, or place that burden on teachers or school leaders?

MS BERRY: Each school already does school improvement activities, so this framework will be about maximising the impact of that work and ensuring our schools work smarter, not harder for their student outcomes. Under this new framework, everything comes back to whether the data and the evidence shows that a positive impact is being made on student outcomes and wellbeing. School leaders will receive support through 2024 with professional learning on the use of data and the new School Improvement Framework. Around 60 school leaders attended the first suite of information and training sessions on 8 February 2024. Schools also have access to a suite of new data dashboards as part of the new framework.

Ms Lawder: “I happen to have at my fingertips”!

Madam Speaker, I heard Ms Lawder interjecting about a question, that it might have been a Dorothy Dixier. If Ms Lawder would like answers to her questions that provide this level of detail, I would be very happy for her to provide that to me in the first instance.

Ms Lawder: It’s called questions without notice for a reason.

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, members.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, is there a rough timeframe as to when this data will be made publicly available?

MS BERRY: This is for school communities to identify ways that they can do things

better within their schools, not so much for the general public. However, we will work with the school communities to ensure these data sets are appropriate for public consumption for individual schools to ensure continued learning and growth.

Economy—tourism

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Tourism. Chief Minister, the T2030 Tourism Strategy set a target that the ACT's visitor economy will be worth \$4 billion in annual expenditure by 2030. Are we on track to achieve this target?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Orr for the question. The short answer is yes. In fact, we are tracking well ahead of that target. We set an interim target of \$3.1 billion by the end of 2025 and we achieved that nearly two years early, with the latest data for the year ending September 2023 showing that the territory welcomed 5.68 million visitors and that they spent \$3.66 billion in our economy. This is another record high, exceeding our previous best result by \$230 million. In short, the tourism industry is booming. It is currently the fastest-growing in the nation. This is both in terms of visitor numbers, which rose 21 per cent through the year, and those visitors' expenditure in our economy, which rose by 34 per cent.

MS ORR: Chief Minister, what are the reasons for this strong performance?

MR BARR: Simply, Canberra is Australia's most improved city. We have a diverse program of major events. It is easier to get here than ever before. There are now direct flights from 12 cities domestically, and internationally we have connections to Fiji and, starting in the not-too-distant future, to Bali. We will continue our work with the international airlines on connections to New Zealand, Singapore and the Middle East. We saw a 17 per cent increase in friends and relatives visiting their friends and relatives here in Canberra. Many of these, obviously, would be family and friends of the 60,000 students I referred to who are studying in our city. Business travel and business events travel saw the strongest growth across all of the categories—up by 39 per cent in the year to September 2023.

DR PATERSON: Chief Minister, what further opportunities are there for growth in our tourism sector?

MR BARR: Domestically, we will be targeting the rail and drive market as well as making it easier for people from further afield to come to Canberra by further improving aviation connections. Internationally, the greatest untapped potential right now is in India and the United States. India has risen to be our second-largest international market, up 21 per cent from pre-COVID levels, and there is great potential for this to grow rapidly over the coming five years. Using Canberra as an initial stop on an Australian itinerary is also a very appealing option to the US market, and we are continuing to work with Fiji Airways on that connectivity over Nandi to ensure that there is a smooth and different gateway into Australia for North American visitors. We will continue to pursue opportunities in our 10 key markets that are outlined in our international engagement strategy. The future for the tourism sector is incredibly bright, off a decade of nation-leading growth.

With that, I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.