



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Tuesday, 24 March 2026

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Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (2.00): Minister Cheyne will be away from question time today. For question time, Minister Steel will take questions in City and Government Services; Minister Paterson, in the Attorney-General and Human Rights portfolios; and Minister Pettersson in the Night-time Economy portfolio.

Questions without notice

Light rail—stage 2B

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, you suggested in your appearance before the Select Committee on Fiscal Sustainability that territory expenses on capital works would likely taper off around 2030. Are you cancelling plans to get the tram to Woden by 2034? If not, how is it possible that infrastructure spending would taper off in that period given that stage 2B is not likely to come in under \$4 billion?

MR BARR: The answer to the first part of the question is no. In the second part of the question, Mr Parton is making certain assumptions on the procurement methodology and the timing of payments associated with a potential procurement methodology that is consistent with the methodology that the government has used for stage 1 and stage 2A of the project.

MR PARTON: Despite your initial answer, Chief Minister, does the diabolical state of the territory's finances put a question mark over the ACT's capacity to fund the tram to Woden?

MR BARR: Certainly the government is cognisant of both industry capacity to deliver forward infrastructure programming and the mix of that programming. In relation to the forward program there will, of course, be contributions to the delivery of infrastructure, and funding would come from a variety of sources—commonwealth contributions, proceeds from asset sales, the government budget and potentially public-private partnerships.

MS MORRIS: Chief Minister, what is the current forecast cost of stage 2B of the tram—that being from Commonwealth Park to Woden?

MR BARR: The current forecast cost I will take on notice.

ACT Fire & Rescue—hybrid electric fire truck

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. On Thursday 19 March, Region Media reported the hybrid electric fire truck was taken off the road earlier that week with a seatbelt issue. Last week in question time you were asked six questions on the truck. Minister, why did you not take one of those opportunities to inform the Assembly the truck was again out of service?

DR PATERSON: Because that was not the question I was asked.

MS MORRIS: Minister, has the truck returned to service?

DR PATERSON: I will provide advice by the end of question time, but the advice to date is that, no, it is not back in service yet.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, was the truck being shadowed in the brief period from 26 February to when it was again taken off the road?

DR PATERSON: No. As members of the opposition can see on ESA's website, the shadowing process was part of getting the truck on the road for the first time, so that was a very limited period of time. The electric fire truck is able to attend fires on its own and has been able to since it became operational.

Just to provide a bit more information to the previous question, the issue this time is a seatbelt issue. So this is obviously a safety issue for our fire and rescue teams that are using the truck. It is a routine maintenance issue and they are just waiting for the seatbelt approval to be finalised.

ACT Policing—facilities

MS MORRIS: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services.

The government has known for many years that City Police Station and Winchester Police Centre are beyond their useful life, yet police continue to work in buildings plagued by leaks, flooding and sewage.

Minister, can you assure our police officers that construction work will finally start on a new city police station and headquarters by the end of this year?

DR PATERSON: What I can assure ACT Policing members is that the government, the Chief Police Officer and I are very committed to progressing a new city police station and headquarters. So we will continue to do that. This is obviously work that requires significant budget processes. We are going through that process.

As the opposition would be aware, we ran an expression of interest from the market to assess a broad range of solutions to the accommodation issues that we are facing. So it may not be a construction. It may not be a build-from-the-ground type of project; it might be a fit-out project with a partner. So we will continue through this process and continue to work with Infrastructure Canberra and ACT Policing for a solution.

Mr Cocks: Point of order under 118AA. The minister's response does go to the process that the government is looking to, but this question was around timeframes. I do not believe that the minister has actually responded in regard to timeframes.

MR SPEAKER: She was asked whether she could assure that construction work will start by the end of the year. She explained what she can assure. She does not need to give a yes or no. I think she did explain; she was responsive. I accept that it is not the answer that you might have wanted from the opposition, but I think she did respond and provide sufficient detail that it does not merit a 118AA.

MS MORRIS: Minister, how many serious building failures or closures have occurred at ACT Policing facilities this year?

DR PATERSON: There have been no closures of stations. There have been two issues. There was an issue in the gym with an air conditioner in City Police Station. On, I think, 7 March the whole of Canberra experienced severe thunderstorms and flooding. The Winchester Police Centre was one of the buildings impacted by that. So there was significant leaking in parts of that building. So some officers have been moved out of their offices. The gym was affected there. We will continue to work with those teams. I would like to thank ACT Policing for their patience and their resilience in working around these issues and remind them and the opposition that we are really committed to working and progressing a new city police station and headquarters.

MS LEE: Minister, would it be acceptable for you and your own staff to work in a building that is plagued with repeated leaks, flooding and sewage incursion?

DR PATERSON: Well, the Assembly is a very similar era building to the City Police Station, and it does leak regularly.

Again, I would like to put on the record my thanks to ACT Policing members for working around these issues, and I do recognise how they impact them. As I said in the previous answer, we are really committed to working towards a new solution for them.

Planning and development—urban growth boundary

MS CLAY: My question is to the minister for planning. Today I am honoured to ask a question on behalf of Canberra's animals and their supporters, some of whom are in the gallery with us here today.

It has been almost a year since the ACT government agreed to my motion and promised to set a hard urban growth boundary for the ACT to protect the western edge, ensuring our bush capital remains naturally beautiful as we continue to build homes for our growing population. Yet, Canberrans and our animal friends are still in the dark as to where and when this line will be drawn.

When will the government take the western edge investigation area out of its development plans and resolve this so the western edge is outside the yet-to-be set urban growth boundary?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Clay for her question. The government recognises that as Canberra continues to grow, it is important that the environmental values of the ACT are protected and enhanced. To achieve this the government brought forward a vision at the election of developing a new landscape plan for the ACT, which will be developed by the ACT's Chief Landscape Architect, who is being appointed through a process at the moment.

It is envisaged that as part of that work, which will get underway shortly, large parts of the western edge of the ACT will be protected under that plan. That will be informed by environmental studies which have been underway, as well as other studies to inform

where those areas of environmental value are so that we can then go out and consult with the community on an evidence-based landscape plan for our city and for the ACT.

MS CLAY: As one of the five remaining studies for the western edge, can you provide an update on what the Ecological Values and Constraints Assessment Study is addressing and when it will be completed?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. We will use those studies to inform the development of a landscape plan for the ACT, which Minister Orr is leading. Once those studies have informed the plan and a draft is developed, there will be an opportunity for community consultation on that, and those studies will be published. There is as a list of those studies that are available on the ACT government's website.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, will your government rule out all development on the western edge?

MR STEEL: The government has not made a decision to develop the western edge investigation area, but we are committed to develop a landscape plan for the ACT, which will include proactive protection of areas of environmental value in the western edge.

I appreciate that there are some people and groups that would like us to rule out development prior to those studies being conducted and informing a landscape plan being developed. We believe that the community should be consulted on those studies and the protection of areas that are identified within the plan.

ACT public service—staffing

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for the Public Service. Minister, CPSU representatives recently stated, before an inquiry of the fiscal sustainability committee, that ACT public service hiring decisions are hampered by unclear rules. They further stated that the requirements of the Financial Management Act, the Fair Work Act and the Work Health and Safety Act overlap and even contradict each other. Minister, do you accept that the government's staffing settings are creating that conflict?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Cain for the question. I do not accept the way that he has characterised this matter. We do have regular conversations with our union partners in relation to the responsibilities that exist under the Financial Management Act, the Work Health and Safety Act and the Public Sector Management Act in relation to a wide range of issues, including in relation to safe staffing and ensuring that psychosocial risks are well understood within a workplace. That is why we are committed to taking action on workload reduction. We recognise that there are areas where workload has been identified as a risk and challenge for staff. Every single directorate is working with their staff to consider opportunities for workload reduction, recognising that we have, as everybody in this place is aware, a challenging fiscal situation, which has only become more challenging in the context of the current global environment and a series of crises that we have experienced over the last few years.

We will continue to work with our industrial partners in relation to any concerns that they have on these matters. I am confident that our work health and safety settings, as

well as our recruitment settings, are appropriate, but that there is overlap in consideration of these matters.

MR CAIN: Minister, what action will the government take to ensure ACT public service managers are not forced to choose between budget compliance, workplace rights and workplace safety?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Managers in the ACT public service do have obligations under both the Financial Management Act and work health and safety. It is part of their role to balance those, in consultation with staff. There are also very clear consultation requirements in the enterprise agreement, and every directorate and work area has capacity for staff to escalate concerns about work health and safety. There are health and safety representatives that can represent the staff in relation to these matters, where there are concerns.

There is no getting away from the fact that managers are going to have responsibilities under both the Financial Management Act and the Work Health and Safety Act, and that sometimes they need to be able to manage within their budgets, while taking account of work health and safety. If that means having a conversation with their senior manager or, indeed, their minister about workload reduction, that should be part of the work that they do to manage these responsibilities. If Mr Cain is suggesting that managers should be given the——

Mr Cocks: A point of order.

MR SPEAKER: On a point of order; yes, Mr Cocks?

Mr Cocks: It appears that the minister is moving into debating the question by suggesting an alternative suggestion from Mr Cain.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have finished.

MR SPEAKER: You have finished? Thanks, Minister. A supplementary question?

MR COCKS: Minister, is the ACT public service in this position where they are having to choose between which acts they breach because the government cannot afford permanent contracts?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I disagree with the entirety of that question from Mr Cocks. Part of the financial challenge that we have had in some areas is the lack of permanent recruitment. Canberra Health Services are a really good example of this, where the tendency has been to use agency staff to fill vacancies or to recruit to temporary positions. We are saving money now by permanently recruiting, particularly on nursing and midwifery, and reducing the use of our temporary agency staff, so we are both meeting our work health and safety and our ratios obligations and supporting fiscal sustainability of Canberra Health Services.

There are a range of other areas where permanent recruitment is more cost effective. This government has been working with the unions and directorates through the Secure Work Task Force to ensure that our public servants can have secure work across ACT

government. That includes areas where we have been insourcing work so that lower paid workers have security of employment, particularly in maintenance and cleaning activities—something that those opposite have consistently opposed.

Building—trade licensing

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, the biggest purchase most Canberrans will make in their lifetime is their first home. What is the government doing to lift building quality and protect Canberrans from shoddy builders?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Tough for her question. The government has begun consultation on the expansion of trade licensing in the ACT, and this builds off work that we have already done on developer licensing, which recognises that too often homebuyers are left to foot the bill from builders who have completed work that results in defects. With significant reforms underway to increase the supply of new homes in the territory, particularly through planning reform, the community needs to have confidence that, when these homes are built, they are built well. Licensing is a way that we can lift building quality by ensuring that the practitioners such as waterproofers, carpenters, and brick and block layers meet minimum quality standards, receive appropriate training and can be held accountable for the work that they do. Extending the chain of responsibility for building outcomes from builders to certifiers to developers means homebuyers do not face the financial consequences of the poor work of others.

Peak bodies, including Master Builders ACT, recognise that the expansion of trade licensing is an important step towards strengthening building quality, embedding accountability and building community confidence in the building and construction sector. We will work closely with the construction industry and tradies as well as we consult on these reforms to ensure that we are hitting the mark and delivering the outcomes that matter for Canberrans.

MS TOUGH: Minister, can you please outline how important lifting building quality is as the government works towards its goal of enabling 30,000 homes by 2030?

MR STEEL: The housing agenda is not just about delivering more supply; it is also about ensuring every Canberran has access to well-built, safe and sustainable homes that suit their lifestyle and their budget, and that is why we are so focused on ways to lift building quality as we work towards that goal of enabling 30,000 new homes by 2030. To deliver these homes, we need a skilled and experienced workforce—that is critical—backed by a regulatory framework that delivers the housing mix that our city needs. Whilst our city experiences significant growth over coming years, it is even more crucial that the community has confidence in the development taking place. Extending trade licensing is a key part of this, helping to improve quality and safety on sites and ensuring homes are built right first time.

We recognise that this transition for the workforce must be carefully managed so it supports rather than slows housing delivery. Strong training pathways, clear transitional arrangements and industry readiness will be critical to building capacity in our construction sector. Ultimately, better trained and better licensed trades mean higher

quality homes being built, and that is vital to meeting our 2030 goals.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how will improving building quality boost construction productivity and help reduce the costs to consumers?

MR STEEL: The scheme supports broader ACT government priorities to strengthen regulatory oversight, improve transparency and boost consumer confidence in building quality. It complements initiatives such as property developer licensing, the establishment of publicly funded building certifiers and the expansion of automatic mutual recognition. As part of our construction productivity agenda, we have listened to industry and consumers on ways to simplify and improve building and regulatory systems, reduce costs and boost construction productivity. Recognising how the industry operates in both the ACT and across the border, aligning with the New South Wales licensing scheme is important to reduce red tape for businesses, increase labour mobility and meet demands right across our region. We know that we have trades that work in the ACT and work across the border, and vice versa, and this will provide those pathways.

Whilst the scheme supports productivity, it will also reduce costs for homebuyers. Just recently, a constituent wrote to me sharing that they had received a bill for \$150,000 due to building defects. In no other industry is it acceptable to knowingly pass off defective products to consumers, and homes should be no different. Putting the onus of responsibility back onto the people actually doing the work will see fewer defects holding up the construction of new homes and consumers will be protected, and that will be a win for homebuyers and for builders who are doing the right thing.

***Close to the edge* report—government response**

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for the Environment. As highlighted in the chamber earlier today, the government took 10 months to respond to the *Close to the edge* report from former ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment Dr Sophie Lewis and has not provided a detailed direct response to the specific recommendations the report contains. Minister, why did the government take so long to respond to such a significant report and why have all of the commissioner's recommendations been noted, not accepted?

MS ORR: I refer the member to my comments during the ministerial statement and the discussion this morning and also to the submission itself, because some of the answers to his questions will be in that. I would also add that the government has taken the time to consider this report in the context of a number of pieces of work that are outlined within the response and within my ministerial statement, including new initiatives that we have been working through. Given that there was not a statutory timeframe for responding to the report, we took the view that it would be better to work through those pieces of work and to consider the report against those other considerations and give a more fulsome response.

As outlined in the statement and in the response, the government has taken on board and noted the recommendations. But, given that there is a lot of work in train and given that the report itself focused specifically on land use—and, as we said in the response, there are a lot of other factors that go to impacts on our environment—the government

wants to again take a full view of the impacts and respond in the best way possible and not just through one lens.

MR EMERSON: Minister, will the government increase funding for nature conservation in the forthcoming budget, given the report's finding that the current level of funding indicates it is "hard to take the view that biodiversity protection is a genuine priority for the ACT" and the fact that the ACT was graded with an F for funding sufficiency on the World Wildlife Foundation's most recent Threatened Species Report Card?

MS ORR: Decisions of budget are for the budget subcommittee, the ERC and the cabinet, and I will not be making any announcements today in question time.

MS CARRICK: Does the government support making it a legislated requirement to respond to self-initiated investigations from the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment and to do so within a specific timeframe and, if not, why not?

MS ORR: I believe that would be a change in the current policy and require a change to the legislation, and I am not in a position to make announcements in question time on new policy initiatives.

Teachers—enterprise bargaining

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for the Public Service. Minister, noting that thousands of teachers are taking industrial action in Victoria and Tasmania, can you please share in as much detail as you are able to, how has enterprise bargaining progressed with ACT public school educators and school-based staff since July 2025?

MS BERRY: I will take that question. I am the minister responsible for education in the ACT and it is the Education Directorate that is holding those negotiations with the education union. There has been a range of meetings and consultations with the Australian Education Union and the Education Directorate. The Education Directorate has been meeting in good faith and continues to engage with the education union on a range of different claims that the education union is making on behalf of their members.

The education union has expressed some frustration at the length of time that the process is taking. I understand that frustration. I have been on the other side of those negotiations, and I have some empathy with understanding the negotiation processes of the government. I can commit to the education union—my office has been in touch with them at least three times since last night and following their release today—that we are absolutely committed to our election commitment of ensuring that ACT teachers remain the highest paid in the country and we continue to want to engage in good faith with them.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, all that being the case, why are we hearing that public school educators in Canberra are considering protected industrial action as a result of those negotiations?

MS BERRY: Well, because the Australian Education Union is representing their membership and their membership is asking for the education union to consider taking

industrial action, which is absolutely their right and I am the last person in this place who would stand between a union and taking industrial action on behalf of their members. As I said, I understand their frustrations. My office has been in touch with them at least three times today, and I know the Education Directorate will too. We want to work on the best possible outcome for our public school teachers in this town and will continue those conversations.

MS LEE: Minister, is it acceptable for the Education Directorate to take more than seven months to respond to the claims made by the union, in which only six of those claims have been agreed to in principle?

MS BERRY: Thank you for that question. Look, as I said, I understand the frustration at the length of time these negotiations are taking. However, I can assure the education union and members of this place that our Education Directorate in the ACT is negotiating in good faith and wants to continue those conversations with the education union and we will continue to do that work in good faith. As I said, we responded to their urgent letter last night and we will continue to work with them to get the best outcome for our teachers. I think that is something that the education union, my office and the Education Directorate want to ensure. I am sure the Assembly supports that work as well.

Active travel—Civic-Woden cycleway

MS CARRICK: My question is either to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development or the Minister for City and Government Services. It is about the Woden to Civic cycleway.

I understand that Infrastructure Canberra, the Suburban Land Agency and the City and Environment Directorate are all tasked with delivering different sections of the Woden to Civic cycleway, with the National Capital Authority also involved in the design process. This fragmented approach risks a lack of clarity of purpose. Without a safe direct active travel route between Woden and Civic, we may miss the opportunities for encouraging significant mode shift to active travel presented by the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge works and the escalation in fuel prices.

Minister, which ACT government agency is responsible for coordinating the planning and delivery of the Woden to Civic Cycleway.

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. We recognise that there is a lot of interest in the city to Woden cycleway. As Ms Carrick knows, the government is going out to consult with the community on active travel links in the Woden Valley and inner south as part of the draft Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework. We are expecting that to go out for consultation around the middle of the year. The purpose of that document is to make sure that we have an aligned vision for the corridor, including those active travel links and the opportunities to reimagine the corridor as an active boulevard with much better cycling and pedestrian links. So the purpose of the plan is to get that aligned vision. We will be, of course, then progressing with those plans beyond that. Light rail has been delivered—

Ms Carrick: Point of order. The southern gateway does not go through to the city. The

question was: who is responsible for coordinating all the different sections of the Civic to Woden cycleway?

MR SPEAKER: Minister, if you could explain which agency it is, which is the question being asked.

MR STEEL: Infrastructure Canberra are obviously focused on the infrastructure side of particularly delivering the light rail project, which includes some of the pedestrian links. Then we expect there would be active travel links delivered as an allied project to light rail stage 2B. It has not been determined yet whether that would be delivered by Infrastructure Canberra or the City and Environment Directorate. It is possible that some parts of it may be delivered by one agency and other parts by another. But what is important is that we have a shared vision for those cycle links, and that is what we want to consult with the community about.

MS CARRICK: Minister, does the ACT government have the agreement of the National Capital Authority for the use of State Circle, Flynn Drive and the widened paths across Commonwealth Avenue Bridge for the C4 arterial cycleway?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. What the NCA want to see is a strategic vision put forward to them to inform any future works approvals. They have made that very clear in relation to future development in the north Curtin residential area, and I think they would have the same approach as well in relation to any cycleway improvements, particularly those that are directly on that major approach route into the national capital. So we want to set that out in that strategic planning document through the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework, which will show a new vision for a multimodal corridor, including safe protected active travel cycle links.

We want to consult with the community about that design, and then we can progress with the next stages of delivering on those links that are identified in the plan. That would include, of course, engagement with the NCA through works approval processes, which probably would be necessary in the area.

I note the NCA are also undertaking some very welcome augmentation of the cycling link over Commonwealth Avenue. Through the Commonwealth Avenue bridge project, they are widening the wings to provide more room for cyclists and pedestrians alike. That is an important part of the project—that overall link from Woden to the city that they are delivering—but the ACT government of course would be responsible for other parts of the project as well. So we are looking forward to having that consultation with the community and I encourage members to provide their feedback once it is available for that feedback to be provided.

Mr Emerson: Point of order. Mr Speaker, I seek your guidance on the responsiveness of Mr Steel's answer to the question. He has spoken around the question, which was whether the ACT government has the agreement of the NCA to do these things.

MR SPEAKER: I think he was responsive. He did not give a yes or no on if they have they agreed. He outlined the fact that they in in order to get agreement, there are certain actions that the ACT government needs to take, and he outlined what those actions were that were being taken. I accept he did not give a yes or no, but I do think he went as far

as to be responsive. So I do not take a point of order.

MR EMERSON: Minister, when will the design for the route of the Woden-Civic cycleway be finalised? Will it be constructed before light rail stage 2B?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Of course, there already are cycle links on the city to Woden corridor, but we understand that there is a need, particularly on Adelaide Avenue, to provide more direct links that are on street but have that protection. In terms of those sections where some augmentation is required and further design work, we will be consulting with the community around the middle of the year on the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework, and we expect then we will be able to finalise that piece of work in the following year.

The government has not made any decisions around timing for the allied works for the light rail stage 2B project. I note that some of the pedestrian works and cycle works are part of the scope of light rail stage 2B, particularly as they relate to getting cyclists and pedestrians to the light rail stops, through the creation of new pedestrian bridges near the light rail stops on Yarra Glen drive and Adelaide Avenue. So there will potentially be different delivery timeframes for that. There may be a different delivery partner for those different components of the project. The government will consider what those opportunities are to get the best procurement outcome, once we have been able to secure funding for that and once we have considered, of course, a business case for the projects.

Exhibition Park—Fitzroy Pavilion

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister in February of 2024, Mr Cain asked you a question on notice in relation to the Fitzroy Pavilion upgrades. Question 2 reads:

What are the total costs pertaining to upgrades at EPIC as part of the 2024-25 budget review.

You responded with:

Through the 2023-24 budget review, there is an allocation of \$1.9 million to progress planning for Exhibition Park in Canberra, a new Convention Centre Precinct and the Bruce Sport, Health and Education Precinct.

Chief Minister, can I ask, what is the total value of the work undertaken in relation to the Fitzroy Pavilion upgrades that were funded out of the \$1.9 million planning allocation?

MR BARR: I do not have that detail in front of me. I will take it on notice.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, what process was used to select contractors or service providers and award contracts in relation to the upgrade of the Fitzroy Pavilion?

MR BARR: As I understand, the usual process, but I do recall that the company that won the tender subsequently went into liquidation, and a new company had to be appointed to complete the work. I think that is on the public record, but I will come back with any further information on notice in the same way as I answer the first.

MR CAIN: Chief Minister, who was contracted to undertake the works and on what date were agreements entered into?

MR BARR: Just to seek some clarity from Mr Cain, the original works or once the—

MR CAIN: Both will do, thank you. All will do.

MR BARR: All will do. Okay, I will take them all on notice then.

Public Housing—debt to commonwealth

MR COCKS: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, the *Canberra Times* has reported that the commonwealth has refused to waive the territory's public housing debt. This revelation came a week after the Auditor-General's report into ACT public housing was released. Is the commonwealth government's refusal to waive the public housing debt evidence of a poor relationship with the federal Labor Party?

MR BARR: No.

MR COCKS: Chief Minister, why can't you negotiate a waiver of the historic \$66 million debt, while the feds rip us off on GST?

MR BARR: We remain engaged with the commonwealth on this and other matters.

MR MILLIGAN: Was the money requested in response to the Auditor-General's report?

MR BARR: Could you repeat the question, Mr Milligan?

MR MILLIGAN: Was the money requested in response to the Auditor-General's report?

MR BARR: I am not sure that I follow the line of questioning there, so I will take it on notice, to get some clarity in relation to the line of questions.

Budget—superannuation

MS LEE: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, during the fiscal sustainability committee inquiry, the Chief Minister claimed that the ACT government was paying half a billion dollars towards the superannuation liability every year, yet the budget papers show the total defined benefit superannuation liability is still increasing while the unfunded portion continues to fall. How can the government claim that it is paying down the liability by half a billion dollars a year when the gross liability is actually rising and the annual appropriation is largely meeting current benefit payments?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question and point her towards the budget papers, which show that this is going to be an ongoing liability for the territory until it is paid down. At this stage, that is in 2033-34. I think it was Pegasus Economics who looked into this on behalf of the Select Committee on Estimates last year, and they

determined it would be paid down at that point and it will free up a significant amount of room in the budget because we do not have to continue to fund the unfunded liability from that point. That is some way in the future. In the meantime, the government will continue to focus on making sure that the budget is in a sustainable position.

MS LEE: Will the Treasurer confirm that what is falling is not the total superannuation liability but only the unfunded gap between the liability and the assets set aside against it?

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, is the government counting investment returns as if they were a budget saving or an appropriation and then claiming credit for paying down a liability that is actually increasing? If you do not understand, it is okay.

MR STEEL: No. What we are recognising is that we have to fund the commonwealth for the superannuation liability that was inherited by the ACT government at self-government and we are trying to present the ACT budget to account for that fact so that we can make decisions based on the true state of the ACT budget now. Other states and territories in the commonwealth account for the investments that they make in the superannuation of their employees in a way that the ACT cannot, so we have made an adjustment that makes sure that we transparently account for that so that we can inform proper decision-making based on the true state of the ACT's finances. This is a transparency measure in the budget. I encourage members to read the 2007-08 budget papers, where Treasury clearly sets out the reasons this superannuation adjustment is made in the ACT budget which has been adopted since then as the primary—

Mr Cocks: Mr Speaker, on a point of order going to relevance: perhaps the Treasurer has become a bit confused. The question was not about the superannuation adjustment but, indeed, about the superannuation liability and the appropriation that goes to paying benefits. I know it is a technical one.

MR SPEAKER: On relevance, your question was about whether the government was presenting something in a certain way, and the very first word from the Treasurer was no, so he has answered your question very directly in a yes or no fashion. He then provided further information, but he answered the question in basically his first response by answering your question with a no. So I think he has been relevant. He has provided further information. I do not think there is a point of order, Mr Cocks.

ACT public service—enterprise bargaining

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for the Public Service. Minister, I note that the illegal war in Iran has resulted in a predictable increase in fuel prices that is expected to significantly add to inflation. The RBA's forecasts of underlying inflation were previously expected to peak at 3.7 per cent in 2026, before accounting for this new development, and they have, as of Tuesday last week, raised the official cash rate, which will further push up the cost of living. Against this backdrop, you have made pay offers to the ACT public service which appear to be well below these new expectations for inflation. What are you doing to ensure that ACT public servants' wages keep up with

the cost of living?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Braddock for the question. Obviously this is something that we are very cognisant of. I would also note that the increase in inflation and the increase in fuel costs also create additional pressure on the ACT budget. ACT government services, like households, are not immune to these pressures, and we have to balance what we can offer for our workforce to ensure that they are fairly and appropriately paid with what the budget can actually afford. That is what we believe we have done in making an offer of a three per cent pay rise each year over the life of the agreement and an additional half a per cent superannuation to be achieved before the end of the three-year agreement, bringing the ACT to the highest rate of employer superannuation contribution across states and territories. We recognise that the commonwealth is of course higher, and closing that gap in one go would be a very expensive exercise.

This is a challenging situation for everyone. The ACT government, as an employer, makes a range of other opportunities for people in terms of flexible work—not just working from home but also working from the hubs that exist across our town centre ACT government offices, so that people can work closer to home and reduce their travel costs by assessing those through public transport and reducing their parking costs. I know there will be a debate later today in relation to public transport. We will continue to work with our unions. We have also made a very significant offer around parental leave, which has been welcomed by the union, and also agreed language around safe staffing, which has also been welcomed.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, do you agree that the pay offer will not keep up with inflation and that, therefore, the living standards of ACT public servants will go backwards?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The impact of fuel on inflation will hit different people differently. For example, those people who have electric vehicles will not feel the impact of fuel prices directly but may feel that impact indirectly through the cost of other goods and services if they increase accordingly. We also have no idea how long or short-lived the impact of these fuel price increases will be. We do not know what is going to happen in the Middle East over the next little while. So our inflation estimates are going to be quite challenging over the next little period of time.

I would just go back to what I said to Mr Braddock in response to the first question. We recognise that this is a challenging situation. We are, of course, in the context of the budget overall, thinking about what we can do to support Canberrans broadly, including ACT public servants, in relation to the challenges that we face. But those challenges are also faced by the ACT government in terms of increasing the challenges right across the budget and the cost of delivering the services that Canberrans rely on.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, will you be further revising your pay offer to the ACT public service, so that it at least matches inflation forecasts?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Miss Nuttall for the supplementary. The offer that we have on the table is the current core offer. We have not indicated any intention to change that offer. This offer is the best that we think we can do at this point in time, given the

significant constraints that we have on our fiscal flexibility and recognising that there are a range of other measures that can be taken that relate to the cost of living. So, no, we do not have an intention of making another offer at this point in time. But, as the Deputy Chief Minister said, we continue to bargain in good faith with the unions; we continue to listen to their feedback; and we continue to consider what we can do across other measures.

I think it is also really important to recognise the very significant offers that have been made in relation to leave, in relation to safe staffing and in relation to a number of other matters. The ACT public service has very good conditions and, for many areas of the public service, is among the best paid, if not the best paid, in the country compared to the same roles in other states and territories. I think it is really important to recognise that.

Crime—organised crime

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, can you provide an update to the Assembly on how the ACT Labor government is combatting organised crime?

DR PATERSON: I would like to thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. The ACT government is strongly committed to supporting ACT police to address organised crime.

On Saturday, 21 March, the Comancheros attempted to conduct a run from Mitchell to Tharwa homestead. ACT police enacted significant disruption activities with their partners across the border in New South Wales, NSW Police taskforce Raptor. ACT Policing established a vehicle checkpoint in Mitchell and issued defect notices to over half the bikes involved in the run for non-roadworthy bikes, as well as a couple of vehicles. Two arrests were made and there was one seizure of a prohibited item. This disruption activity resulted in the majority of the members being without transportation for their proposed ride, which resulted in it being cancelled.

I would like to acknowledge and thank members of ACT Policing's Taskforce Invidia and supporting teams, including NSW Police's taskforce Raptor, for their planning and professional management over the weekend.

Last week I, alongside the Chief Police Officer, announced that the ACT government will draft legislation to ban the public display of OMCG insignia. It is our intention to introduce the legislation before the end of the year. OMCG insignia includes patches, logos and other insignia where they are used to identify membership, intimidate the community and recruit new members. This is a clear statement of intent by the government that it takes organised crime seriously and that organised crime has no place in the territory.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, what impact do you expect a ban on OMCG insignia to have on their criminal activity?

DR PATERSON: Disruption of criminal networks is central to this policy. The banning of OMCG insignia supports disruption efforts currently undertaken by ACT

Policing. A restriction on the public display of insignia reduces the ability of members to display their affiliations, weakening gang cohesion and disrupting recruitment activities. These reforms will also reduce public intimidation. OMCG members often wear insignia in public to assert their control of public spaces. The display of such symbols deters the public from reporting criminal behaviour and creates an atmosphere of fear. I would like to thank the Australian Federal Police Association for the work they have done in the research leading up an advocacy for this particular legislation.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how can Firearm Prohibition Orders be used to respond to organised crime?

DR PATERSON: I thank Ms Tough for the question. On 24 February, earlier this year, I introduced a bill to create the Firearm Prohibition Order scheme in the ACT. The intent of this reform is to disrupt illegal firearm activity and reduce the risk of firearm related violence.

An FBO is a court order that gives police officers an additional mechanism to ensure high-risk individuals do not acquire, possess or use firearms or firearm-related items. These laws are designed to keep firearms out of the hands of people who pose a serious risk to our community, such as those involved in organised crime and terrorism and high-risk domestic and family violence perpetrators.

There are key differences between this legislation and the FPO schemes in other jurisdictions. This includes that orders can only be issued by a magistrate and are open to additional review, appeal and independent oversight mechanisms.

Key features built into the bill include safeguarding rights, where courts must consider human rights, culture, social needs and the impact on family life before issuing an order. Search powers allow police to search a person subject to an FPO, their vehicle, residence or storage facility, without a warrant to ensure compliance with an order. Accountability and transparency requirements are through annual reporting by the Chief Police Officer on the use of the FPO scheme and associated reporting requirements to the minister and the ACT Ombudsman.

The government is also committed through this legislation to conduct a formal review of the scheme and a review of the scheme's ongoing compatibility with human rights three years after it commences. I look forward to working with members of the Assembly and the committee as they inquire into this bill along with other firearms reforms.

Public transport—patronage

MR BRADDOCK: My question is for the Minister for Transport.

Minister, I draw your attention to a 2015 ACT government cabinet discussion paper titled *Transport for Canberra - Mode Share Targets*, which was released this week as an accessible executive record. The 2015 paper describes how the ACT's mode share results are well under target and that, in order to achieve a 2026 mode share target of 16 per cent of public transport, Treasury estimated that the bus fleet would need to increase to 858 buses by 2026, or 2.3 times the size of the fleet in 2015. This is before

accounting for light rail.

Minister, what is the current size of the ACT government's bus fleet?

MR STEEL: Last time I checked it was around 450 buses, but I will come back to the Assembly on notice with the specific number. I will address the other part of the lead in to the question. The ACT transport strategy does not set a mode shift target. The reason for that is that at the time that it was established, in 2020, we were in the midst of a global pandemic and people's lives were being transformed and particularly in the way that they moved around our city. More flexible working arrangements were coming in, such as working from home. People were changing their habits.

We outlined in that strategy ways to encourage people to use public transport. That included continued investment in things like right rail that do build capacity in our transport network to move more passengers with more frequent services. And we continue to outline our plans to improve frequency as a key driver of mode shift through, for example, ACT Labor's transport plan that we brought to the election. Those commitments, together with the Greens' commitments, are of course outlined in the supply and confidence agreement. We are committed to delivering on those.

To get those additional rapid services and to improve frequency of existing services does require more buses—and more drivers, by the way. That is why we committed to purchasing 110 buses this term in addition to the buses in our fleet. That will provide the opportunity for growth of the transport network to meet the growing needs of our population and to encourage even more people to get onto buses, in addition to light rail and the work that we are doing to extend light rail down to the south side.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, when do you realistically expect ACT's mode share for public transport to reach 16 per cent?

MR STEEL: The government does not have any mode share targets. But, of course, we have committed to a refresh of the planning strategy and the transport strategy. We are looking at how we can integrate land use planning and transport planning. As part of that, we will be focusing on transport oriented development, which is an opportunity to have more people living directly next to public transport connections, rapid buses and future light rail services and the existing light rail line, to provide opportunities for them to use public transport and then to have that positive feedback loop where, as more people use public transport, we can then increase the level of service to the residents in our city. I know that Minister Orr is also thinking about this in the context of developing the next climate strategy for the ACT and the action plans. Transport is a major source of emissions. And so the actions in that climate strategy and action plan will be focused on transport, including public transport. We are already working very closely together in the development of that plan and the actions that we need to take to support even more people to use public transport in our city.

MS CLAY: Minister, given government set mode share targets 12 years ago, why can't we have real mode share targets now instead of an aspirational target that we have no intention of reaching?

MR STEEL: I will just reiterate that there is no mode share target in the ACT Transport

Strategy 2020, but we are of course focused on practical ways of supporting people to move onto public transport and take up sustainable transport options. Those are outlined in the strategy; they are outlined in the active travel plan, as a sub strategy; and of course they are outlined in the existing planning strategy and will be in the updated planning strategy.

We will look at the opportunities to encourage more people to public transport with the proven means that we know have worked in other cities around the world. Frequency is part of that, and that is why my focus is on improving services to Canberrans to make sure that they had that opportunity to use public transport.

We are starting from a pretty good place. We have the best coverage in the country out of any major city in terms of people living within 400 metres of a bus stop. But frequency is freedom. We know that and that is why we have had a big focus on frequency in the 2019 reforms to the bus network. When we introduced all of the new Rapids that was about improving the frequency of services to more Canberrans. With the introduction of light rail, the service is incredibly frequent—every five minutes during the morning peak. We want to extend that benefit down to the south side so that more people can benefit from mass transit options. But importantly it also needs to be combined with land use planning so more people can live near these transport options and those mass transit routes, both rapid buses and light rail.

Domestic and family violence programs—commonwealth funding

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. Last week, the minister told the Assembly that the ACT government received funding for 7.6 new frontline workers and so provided funding for eight workers to local service providers.

Can the minister confirm that this funding was used to engage new workers, consistent with the commitments made to the commonwealth?

DR PATERSON: I will take that on notice and provide some more information, but I did meet two of the workers at the YWCA who were directly employed from that funding. That money is contracted with our domestic, family and sexual violence services. I will come back to the chamber with some more detail.

MS CASTLEY: Could the minister confirm if any of the funding was used to extend or replace expiring programs?

DR PATERSON: No; the money was for workers for programs.

MS BARRY: Could the minister please provide the Assembly with the annual dollar amounts of federal and territory funding for each organisation?

DR PATERSON: Yes, I will. I provided the overall amount last sitting, as well as the number of workers that were allocated to each organisation. Just to provide feedback and context for the Assembly, the government has to report back to the federal government on these figures as well. So there is a reporting back to the federal government to account for this money.

Exhibition Park—Fitzroy Pavilion—Procurement

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, on 26 February, in question time in this fine chamber, you were asked a question about the Fitzroy Pavilion project management agreement, work order 62154. Directly following question time, this contract disappeared from the online contracts register. Chief Minister, did you or your office contact anyone in the ACT public service regarding the contract?

MR BARR: I certainly did not, because I was sitting in the chamber. I will check that. I would be very surprised if anyone did. To put any conspiracy to bed, I will confirm that and find out why said contract was not on the website.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, did any minister or their staff direct or request the removal of that contract from the register?

MR BARR: I do not believe so. Again, for clarity, I will take that on notice and confirm it. That is a lot of people that we will need to confirm with, but we will do that for the Assembly.

MR COCKS: Chief Minister, did you or any of your ministers receive a briefing or information on why this contract was removed from the contracts register?

MR BARR: I have not. I would need to check with others, but I would presume not. I am not sure what the conspiracy theory is here, but in taking that on notice, I will respond to the other questions as well.

All further questions can be placed on the notice paper.