



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

**HANSARD**

Edited proof transcript

Thursday, 26 March 2026

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Questions without notice:

Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer .....	1
Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer .....	1
Macquarie—swimming pool.....	2
Canberra Stadium.....	3
Roads—procurement.....	4
ACT public service—enterprise bargaining.....	4
Sustainable Household Scheme .....	5
Domestic Violence Crisis Service—funding .....	7
Teachers—enterprise bargaining.....	7
Fuel security—impact on food security .....	8
Nurse-led walk-in centres.....	9
Water—data centres .....	10
Roads—safety and maintenance .....	11
Hospitals—Caesarean sections .....	12
ACT Ambulance Service—staffing .....	13
Magistrates Court—Chief Magistrate vacancy .....	14

## **Questions without notice**

### **Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Skills. Minister, I refer to documents tabled yesterday afternoon in relation to the appointment of the CIT CEO. In the email from your Chief of Staff to the CIT board, dated 19 June 2025, it says:

I have discussed with the Minister who agrees the Public Sector Standards Commissioner is the appropriate entity to consider these matters. While it may have already been included, we ask that the referral ask the Commissioner to consider Dr McNeill's conduct during the recruitment process.

Minister, was this matter referred to the Public Sector Standards Commissioner, as per that email? If so, when?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I will take that one on notice and seek guidance from the CIT board as to the actions undertaken.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, how can you retain confidence in the CIT board if you do not even know in the context of question time when or if the Public Sector Standards Commissioner investigation commenced, is concluded or is in the process?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I will take that one on notice to ensure I provide accurate information. I have, I believe, an understanding of the events that have occurred in that space, but I would like to take it on notice to provide absolute certainty and not mislead the Assembly.

**MRS MORRIS:** Minister, what have you done to satisfy yourself that the CIT board has taken all necessary action on this matter?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I thank Mrs Morris for the question. I have sought to respond appropriately at each stage in this process. In December, upon learning of a substantiation of a finding of misconduct, I sought the establishment of an independent review of the board's processes in this matter. I am awaiting the outcome of that independent review, which will guide any future decisions.

### **Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the minister for skills. Minister, I refer to documents tabled yesterday afternoon in relation to the appointment of the CIT CEO, which included a letter from the ACT Integrity Commission, which was sent to you enclosing a copy of the anonymous complaint. The complaint states:

Initial findings were that out of the multiple complaints and PIDs submitted, there were over 40 categories of wrongdoing that warranted investigation and these included reports of maladministration of salaries budgets, maladministration of temporary and contract staff, chronic and substantial waste of public money (over \$100M), conflicts of interest in recruitment, conflicts of interest in procurement, improper engagement of private contractors ...

Minister, in letters to the CIT chair, you rightly expressed your deep concern about the

possible reputational damage this could cause to CIT. Given your deep concern about this, what action have you taken to find out whether any of these allegations formed part of the finding of misconduct by TAFE NSW?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I would like to thank Mr Parton for the question. As he is well versed in the correspondence, I would direct him to it. It outlines the actions I have undertaken, including in December seeking the establishment of an independent review of these processes to inform any future decisions.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, are you saying that you have never sought information from anybody, be that TAFE NSW or any other relevant body, on what the actual misconduct was?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I thank Mr Parton for the question. I recognise the distinct and separate responsibilities that I hold and that the CIT board holds. Central to consideration of these matters must be the actions of the CIT board who are responsible for her appointment and ongoing employment. As such, I do not conduct my affairs with a mind to a direct relationship to the CIT CEO.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, how can you express deep concern over the potential reputational damage to CIT but not take any direct action to alleviate this concern?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I thank Mr Cocks for the question. I have sought to respond appropriately at each stage of this process and I will continue to do so. I am currently awaiting the results of an independent review which I commissioned in December, which will inform any future decisions.

### **Macquarie—swimming pool**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the planning minister. Minister, Access Canberra is in negotiation with the Big Splash leaseholders about the future of Big Splash. There has been very little information issued by Access Canberra about the status of those discussions. Community members tell me they saw construction workers at Big Splash this week from construction company ShevGroup. The community wants to know what these workers were doing there. In fact, I have just had an update from one of those community members, two minutes ago, saying that the site is now being ripped up. Was the construction company ShevGroup maintaining the site for safety and doing engineering checks on the slides? Or were they scoping the site for demolition and redevelopment?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Clay for her question. I have been advised today that the owner of the Big Splash water park has advised the ACT government of their intention to commence work to secure the site with new fencing, as well as work to empty the pools and undertake clean-up of the site. The government was advised that works are to commence this week. So, if you are seeing works on site then our assumption is that they are the works to clean up the site.

Obviously, Access Canberra continues to undertake an investigation in relation to the Big Splash matter. I do not have any further update from Access Canberra to provide to the Assembly.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, are these works consistent with a future use on that site of a pool and a water park?

**MR STEEL:** Nothing has indicated anything to the contrary, Mr Speaker. The works are as advised in the previous answer to the question.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, as the ACT community owns the land, when can we expect an update from the ACT government, Access Canberra or the owners of Big Splash about the next steps for Big Splash?

**MR STEEL:** Once the investigation has progressed, Access Canberra has committed that they would provide an update at an appropriate time about the regulatory action that they are undertaking. But, obviously, if there are matters such as the update which I have just provided in relation to the clean-up of Big Splash that can be provided, I will do so to this Assembly and the public.

### **Canberra Stadium**

**MR PARTON:** My questions to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, concerns are growing by the day about the condition of Canberra Stadium not only in areas used by patrons but also in facilities relied upon by visiting sporting teams, including change rooms and the coaches box.

Given this is the territory's premier sporting venue, and with the Raiders and Brumbies games this weekend, will the government now commission an independent safety audit?

**MR BARR:** That work is already in place. There is a comprehensive asset management plan for the stadium, and the government is actioning that plan.

**MR PARTON:** Chief Minister, do you accept that players, staff, visitors and workers are entitled to safe, functional, hygienic and professionally maintained facilities?

**MR BARR:** Certainly, that is the objective, so yes. What did happen last Thursday was that the stadium was hit with an extraordinary rain event.

**Mr Parton:** Yeah, but come on!

**MR BARR:** No; it was hit with—

*Members interjecting—*

**MR BARR:** The Bureau of Meteorology issued a severe thunderstorm warning at 6.26 pm warning that the thunderstorm was slow-moving, and it would lead to flash flooding. It did, Mr Speaker.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Chief Minister, if the NRL and Super Rugby find Canberra Stadium is no longer fit for purpose, what is plan B?

**MR BARR:** Well, that is a hypothetical question, because neither organisation has

made such a suggestion. But Manuka Oval is of course available for elite sport and has hosted games in the past, and there are other rectangular football venues in the city.

### **Roads—procurement**

**MR EMERSON:** My question is to the Minister for Transport.

As discussed in this chamber on 24 February this year, senior officials in the ACT government signed off on a \$3 million settlement to a contractor for work on the Gundaroo Drive duplication, despite an independent adjudicator rejecting the contractor's initial \$7.5 million claim and finding that the firm was due less than \$830,000 for a progress payment. Minister, has any settlement deed or payment of a similar nature been made by the ACT government to the same contractor for works on the Monaro Highway upgrade? If so, how much was paid?

**MS CHEYNE:** Mr Speaker, this is a question for me. I will have to take it on notice, Mr Emerson, but I might be able to come back by the end of today. I think I can come back quicker than 30 days.

**MR EMERSON:** Minister, has there been any advice given or received within the ACT government not to award the Monaro Highway job to the same contractor? If so, what was that advice and can you please table it?

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

**MS CARRICK:** Minister, do you have confidence that the ACT government is getting value for money on its road projects?

**MS CHEYNE:** Yes.

### **ACT public service—enterprise bargaining**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for the Public Service and pertains to the current impasse between the ACT government and the CPSU on their public service pay deal. Noting that the CPSU is now the single-largest union affiliate to the ALP and by far the largest union of the ALP left faction—the faction to which you belong—

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** True that!

**MR PARTON:** Minister, can you explain to this Assembly how it is not a massive conflict of interest that you are, on behalf of ACT taxpayers, negotiating with the union that is primarily responsible for ensuring your preselection as a Labor candidate?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Parton for the question, but it portrays a fundamental misunderstanding of ACT Labor preselection processes. We have a 100 per cent rank-and-file preselection and the majority of Labor Party members in the ACT are actually not faction members. To correct the understanding of the way the Labor Party works, not only are we the most transparent party, in having our conference open to the media, but we also have a full rank-and-file preselection. Everybody knows that I am a member of the Community and Public Sector Union—it is on my declaration

of interests—and everyone here clearly understands that I am also a member of the left faction. There is no conflict, and any interest is very transparent.

**MR PARTON:** Are you a member of the same Labor branch as CPSU Regional Secretary Maddy Northam? Do the two of you discuss these matters either before, during or after branch meetings?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I am a member of the same Labor branch as Ms Northam. We discuss these matters regularly in many fora. That is the way of the world: these discussions take place. But I would note that formal negotiations in relation to enterprise agreements are held by our public servants. They are the ones drafting clauses and bringing them to the government and to cabinet for consideration. And decisions are not made by me alone; they are made by relevant ministers in different portfolios, and they then go through an Expenditure Review Committee and a cabinet process, as is appropriate, before any agreement would go to ballot.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, if the CPSU were to withdraw their support for you at the next preselection, would you have a snowball's chance in hell of getting preselected?

**Mr Pettersson:** Point of order: that question is wildly unacceptable and entertaining hypothetical matters at a minimum.

**MR SPEAKER:** I have to agree, Mr Pettersson. We will move on to new questions.

### **Sustainable Household Scheme**

**MS TOUGH:** My question is to the Minister for Finance. Minister, the ACT government's Sustainable Household Scheme has provided significant benefits to Canberrans and works towards creating a cleaner future. Could you please provide the Assembly with an update on the Sustainable Household Scheme?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Tough for her question. Indeed, the Sustainable Household Scheme continues to deliver real cost-of-living relief while driving our transition to a cleaner energy future. In last year's budget, we committed a further \$75 million to expand the scheme, ensuring more households can access low-interest loans for energy efficiency upgrades. Since commencing in July 2021, the scheme has supported more than 27,000 households to take practical action to reduce their energy use and bills by investing in technologies like rooftop solar, battery storage, and efficient heating and cooling, as well as to purchase electric vehicles. These upgrades are not just good for the environment but also delivering real, tangible cost-of-living relief for around one in eight homes in Canberra.

Collectively, households participating in the scheme have generated more than \$100 million in lifetime bill savings. At the same time, the scheme has driven a substantial increase in renewable energy generation across our city, helping to reduce emissions and support our transition to a net-zero future. This is a policy that is working as intended—cutting emissions, lowering bills and making sustainable choices more accessible for everyday households.

**MS TOUGH:** Minister, can you provide an update to the Assembly on the popularity of different products available on the scheme?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. The data from the Sustainable Household Scheme shows that Canberrans are highly engaged with and responsive to both new technologies and broader policy settings. The Sustainable Household Scheme complements the Albanese Labor government's Cheaper Home Batteries Program, which commenced on 1 July 2025. SHS data shows that additional support has made battery storage even more accessible, and households are clearly recognising the value of storing and using their own solar energy. Battery systems have accounted for more than half of all loan applications this financial year—around 53 per cent; up from only about 10 per cent prior to 1 July 2025. Over the life of the scheme, 63 megawatt hours of battery storage have been delivered, which is enough to fully charge 170 Transport Canberra electric buses, I am told.

At the same time, rooftop solar remains one of the most popular and impactful products under the scheme, and it continues to play a critical role, particularly for low-income households—the only ones eligible for solar under the current rules—because it delivers immediate and ongoing bill reductions. We are also seeing a strong uptake in electrification technologies, like efficient heating and cooling, as households move away from gas and towards all-electric homes. Taken together, these trends show that Canberrans are not just participating in the scheme but are also making smart, forward-looking decisions that reduce their bills and improve energy resilience.

**Mr Werner-Gibbings:** A supplementary?

**Mr Braddock:** A supplementary?

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Werner-Gibbings, a supplementary?

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Minister, which areas of Canberra have benefited most from the Sustainable Household Scheme?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary and Mr Braddock for his efforts. Honestly, I was expecting it to be Ms Clay.

The benefits of the Sustainable Household Scheme are being felt right across Canberra. It is particularly encouraging to see strong uptake in some of our outer suburbs. Belconnen has seen the highest participation, accounting for more than 7,000 loans—around 28 per cent of the scheme uptake. Mr Werner-Gibbings and Ms Tough will both be pleased to know that the figure is closely followed by Tuggeranong at more than 6,800 loans, reflecting 27 per cent of uptake, and Gungahlin at 21 per cent for more than 5,300 loans. This distribution reflects where the scheme can actually have the greatest impact: areas with a high proportion of detached homes, where upgrades like rooftop solar and batteries can be more easily installed. It also shows that the scheme is reaching a diverse cross-section of the community, including families, who stand to benefit the most from reduced energy bills. The strong participation in Tuggeranong demonstrates that this is not an inner city-only initiative.

The scheme is delivering meaningful cost-of-living relief in parts of Canberra where

households can really significantly benefit from lower energy bills. This is a demonstration of ACT Labor's commitment to taking practical and progressive measures to support households and reduce emissions through a scheme that is equitable, accessible and delivering for the whole community. At this particular point in time, I would note that there was some recent media in relation to the increased interest in purchasing electric vehicles, which are also eligible for a loan under the scheme for eligible households.

### **Domestic Violence Crisis Service—funding**

**MR RATTENBURY:** My question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. Minister, in recent public comments about funding for the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, you indicated that the territory would not leave DVCS high and dry and that interim cost pressures would be addressed. This is very welcome. You also said, "DVCS is not the only organisation that is facing a funding cliff." How many organisations are you aware of that are facing a funding cliff?

**DR PATERSON:** That was in reference to DVCS and CRCC, who were both facing a funding cliff mid-year.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, can you outline to the Assembly what level of funding will be provided to DVCS for the 2026-27 financial year, and whether you have committed to ongoing funding or just a one-off at this point for next year?

**DR PATERSON:** As Mr Rattenbury would be aware, we are currently undertaking a budget process at the moment. So these are matters that are for the consideration of the ERC and cabinet over the coming months. In reference to that particular funding cliff, we have made DVCS and CRCC aware that there is a guarantee that particular funding will extend until next year to try to alleviate some of the pressure and the concern around that funding in particular ending, but these are ongoing conversations we will have through the budget process.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, when will the other organisations facing a funding cliff be given clarity about their funding for future years so that they can plan their services and give their staff some certainty over their jobs?

**DR PATERSON:** Yes, so we are working through a budget process at the moment. As soon as that process is finalised, I will look forward to communicating with other services and programs that may be ending mid-year.

### **Teachers—enterprise bargaining**

**MR MILLIGAN:** Mr Speaker, my question is to minister for education. Minister, in question time yesterday, you said you maintained confidence in your directorate's ability to negotiate with the teachers in good faith. Minister, how can you retain that confidence when the education union clearly does not share this confidence?

**MS BERRY:** Thank you for the question. I am confident that the Education Directorate will negotiate in good faith with the education union. We have gotten to a stage of the negotiations where the AEU has expressed frustrations. They have expressed those

frustrations with me and with the education directorate. We are communicating with them, and we are still on track to continue those negotiations in good faith. Of course, at the end of the day, if the education union is not happy with those negotiations, then they can take action—which they have alluded to in their communications to me. But in the conversations that I have also had with the education union, I have indicated that I do take these negotiations seriously and that I am keen to continue our negotiations, and so is the Education Directorate.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, what have you instructed your directorate to do, to demonstrate they are willing to genuinely engage in the bargaining process?

**MS BERRY:** I have discussed the matter with the Director-General of the Education Directorate. I have discussed it with the education union. And I have expressed my willingness to continue to have good faith negotiations with the education directorate, and with the education union.

**MS BARRY:** Minister, what was the date of the last meeting held between the Director-General of the Education Directorate and the leadership of the AEU, on the bargaining process?

**MS BERRY:** Yesterday, 25 March, I believe there was a meeting with the director-general and the education union about a range of different issues including the negotiation process.

### **Fuel security—impact on food security**

**MS CARRICK:** My question is to the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister, Many Canberrans are increasingly anxious about the effects of the war in the Middle East on fuel and food prices. These concerns are compounded by existing cost-of-living pressures, with high housing costs and rising interest rates leading to many of Canberra's adults now being considered vulnerable to financial shocks.

Recent ACTCOSS data shows a sharp rise in poverty and disadvantage, with escalating demand on community organisations providing food and other essential support.

Chief Minister, have you called a cabinet meeting to discuss contingency plans to prepare for potential impacts on food security and cost-of-living pressures for vulnerable households?

**MR BARR:** Yes, the cabinet Security and Emergency Management Committee has met this week.

**MS CARRICK:** Chief Minister, has the government consulted with food relief providers and the community sector, which are already experiencing a sharp increase in demand, and what immediate support is being considered to ensure these organisations can continue to meet basic food needs?

**MR BARR:** Yes, certainly the government through both the community services directorate and, indeed, in the more coordinated mechanism across whole-of-

government, and working with our commonwealth counterparts as well as part of a national approach here, are engaging with all different sectors of the community and the economy to seek to understand impacts to date and to plan for future contingencies. There will be a national cabinet meeting next week.

**MR EMERSON:** Chief Minister, what other levers is the government prepared to use to minimise cost pressures on households and charities, and what is being done now to ensure access to affordable food is retained?

**MR BARR:** I am not announcing government policy in question time, Mr Speaker. But, certainly, we are aware of the issues. We are getting information across all sectors in all states and territories. There is a very strong desire for a nationally coordinated approach here.

As we are an island within New South Wales most of our distribution is part of a broader New South Wales-ACT footprint, so we are working closely with the New South Wales government and the commonwealth government. Question time is not the forum to announce government policy, but I will repeat that there is a national cabinet meeting next week, and this will be a national approach.

### **Nurse-led walk-in centres**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, the federal member for Fenner recently circulated a newsletter to residents in Gungahlin in which he states he has been “working hard” to deliver a network of Medicare urgent-care clinics in Canberra. The member for Fenner further states that there are already five urgent-care clinics in the ACT, with a sixth on the way. Minister, can you please confirm whether there are plans to move from the current nurse-led operating model to the urgent-care clinic model which includes the addition of general practitioners in these centres?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Castley for the question, but I am surprised that she is unaware that the walk-in centres have been part of the Medicare urgent-care clinic network for some years now. There is now, of course, another urgent-care clinic that has recently been opened in Phillip, so that is the sixth that the member for Fenner was referring to. But walk-in centres with a nurse-led model have been part of the urgent-care clinic network for some time.

**Mr Cocks:** A point of order **under 118AA**. I acknowledge that the minister has attempted to respond to a question about what networks these clinics belong to, but the question was clear and very specific about the model of the centres.

**MR SPEAKER:** I do not think there is a point of order under 118AA, because she did respond to it. There was a question about whether doctors would be incorporated. She did not go to that, so even though she responded, there was a bit of a relevance issue, I would accept. But she has concluded her answer, unless she is going to respond to the point of order. Minister?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** No, it is all good.

**MR SPEAKER:** It is on the boundary, Mr Cocks, but I am going to let this one go

through to the keeper. A supplementary question?

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, so that I can confirm that I understand you correctly, there are no plans to move from the current nurse-led operating model to urgent-care clinics; they are one and the same?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Yes, I can confirm that Ms Castley's understanding is correct. There is no plan to introduce doctors into our nurse-led walk-in centres. I think I described them, in response to the first question, as nurse-led walk-in centres. They are also part of the urgent-care clinic network, and co-funded by the commonwealth as urgent-care clinics. This has been the case for some years. It was announced years ago that the commonwealth would start to co-fund walk-in centres and expand the scope of services available in walk-in centres, and provide funding for additional equipment like slit lamps, that enable our fantastic advanced practice nurses, nurse practitioners, with the training to use a slit lamp to look in people's eyes and identify if there is a minor injury to the eye that they can then treat. There are a range of other expansions of scope for our nurse-led walk-in centres, as part of the urgent-care clinic network and as urgent-care clinics.

### **Water—data centres**

**MISS NUTTALL:** My question is to the Chief Minister. It is with regard to the regional water supply and economic development. Chief Minister, you were quoted in a *Region* article last week in reference to the development of data centres in the ACT and water use. The quote was:

... the ACT's current water supply could cope for another 10 to 15 years, but the government faced a decision after that ...

Chief Minister, what modelling has been done to underpin this assertion? And what is the decision that you are referring to?

**MR BARR:** Thank you. In relation to the ACT's water storages that work occurs in partnership with Icon Water. In relation to data centre water use, the data centres that principally operate in the ACT have closed circuit water recycling, so they are not big users of water.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Chief Minister, do the 10 to 15 years account for additional uses such as data centres or do they only account for expected ACT population growth?

**MR BARR:** There are a number of factors that impact future water demand and supply projections. Population is definitely a factor. Climate change would be another.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, has the government taken into account future demands on the ACT water supply by surrounding New South Wales regions that also plan to grow in population? And have any New South Wales local governments sought access to the supply of ACT water?

**MR BARR:** Yes, we have. And, yes, the Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council, who we already supply water to through a longstanding agreement that predates

self-government, have sought access to extra water, and there is an in-principle agreement. New South Wales would then have to replace that water for the ACT.

### **Roads—safety and maintenance**

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, can you update the Assembly on how the government is delivering safer, more reliable roads for Canberrans through targeted upgrades, maintenance and investment across the territory?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. This financial year, the ACT government has made strong progress on the road resurfacing and rehabilitation program, and we have been welcoming some dry weather—at least until recently. To date, approximately 85 per cent of the planned resealing program, around 820,000 square metres, has been completed along with 40 per cent of the asphalt resurfacing program, which is around 60,000 square metres of the planned 150,000 square metres. Micro-surfacing works were completed in early March, and we expect the remaining resurfacing works to be completed by mid-May, weather permitting.

The government is also delivering targeted rehabilitation projects through the commonwealth Roads to Recovery program. Projects delivered this year include on Kuringa Drive in Spence, Sulwood Drive in Kambah and Sawmill Circuit in Hume. Rehabilitation works on Wiluna and Lithgow streets in Fyshwick will commence in April and further projects including Pialligo Avenue—and I know Minister Stephen-Smith will be excited to hear this—Barrier Street in Fyshwick, Gungahlin Drive in Mitchell and Overall Avenue in Casey are currently in design and investigation. We are also continuing to roll out targeted road safety improvements across the territory, including intersection upgrades, pedestrian crossings, school safety upgrades, traffic calming and road safety barriers at a range of locations across Canberra.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Minister, how are these investments improving everyday travel and safety outcomes for Canberrans?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary. These are investments that make a real difference to everyday travel for Canberrans. Road resurfacing and rehabilitation works improve skid resistance, reduce potholes and extend the life of our roads, which makes journeys safer and more comfortable for drivers, cyclists and bus passengers. Targeted safety upgrades are also improving safety where it matters most. For example, pedestrian crossing improvements have been completed in Deakin, Gowrie and Barton and new raised crossings, refuge islands and traffic-calming measures will soon be under construction at Watson and Kambah.

In more rural and high-risk areas, new road safety barriers have been installed in locations including Gibraltar Falls, Long Gully Road, Erindale Drive and Brindabella Road, with new line marking also completed on Long Gully Road earlier this year. The ACT government has also adjusted speed limits, to reduce the risk of severe collisions on Tharwa Drive, Corin Road, Apollo Road, Boboyan Road and Orroral Road. These are practical, on-the-ground improvements that reduce speeds, improve pedestrian access and make our roads safer for everyone who uses them, whether they are driving,

walking, cycling or catching the bus.

**MS TOUGH:** Minister, how is the government preparing for the potential impacts on road construction and maintenance in the ACT as a result of fuel pricing and supply issues?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Ms Tough for her question. We are actively monitoring the potential impact of rising fuel and bitumen costs. In the short-term, the impact on this financial year's resurfacing program is expected to be minimal as most of this financial year's program is already close to completion and it is expected to be finalised by mid-May. However, in the long term, if there are significantly higher bitumen prices and if those higher prices are sustained, particularly by around 50 per cent or more, this would have a substantial impact on resurfacing and pavement works in the next financial year as well as increasing costs for contractors through higher diesel and operating costs. Our directorate is working closely with Infrastructure Canberra and Treasury to develop a consistent, whole-of-government approach to managing these cost pressures.

We are actively collaborating with industry groups and delivery partners to review cost implications, associated timing and appropriate management strategies for current and future major infrastructure programs. This includes looking at current stocks of materials for projects. Contractors have already provided early warning that rising fuel costs are impacting delivery costs, and the government is considering how best to respond. If those cost pressures continue, the government will prioritise resurfacing works on our most critical roads and consider a range of measures similar to those used during COVID, including scope adjustments, value management, program reprioritisation and, where necessary, seek additional funding. In this situation, our focus will of course be on ensuring that critical safety works are prioritised.

Of course, this is a situation that is still evolving, but we will continue to monitor these costs closely and respond in a responsible and measured way. I am happy to provide any further detail that we might have in our update to members that the government is providing next week.

### **Hospitals—Caesarean sections**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the Minister for Health. I recently asked for the monthly data on c-sections in our hospitals. I was alarmed to see the average caesarean section rate at the Centenary Hospital has gone from 30 per cent in 2019-20 to almost 48 per cent in December 2025, and spiked to 50 per cent in several months of 2025. That is a very steep increase in a very short amount of time and it is well above the 10-15 per cent rate that the World Health Organization says is medically necessary.

I want to ask about comparing the Centenary Hospital to other hospitals in Australasia that would be considered peer services, comparing like for like, those with similar size and capability. Minister, is the Centenary Hospital's c-section rate higher or lower than other peer hospitals in Australasia and why is that?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Clay for the question. My understanding is that it is higher and indeed, the new Chief Operating Officer at Canberra Health Services is looking into better understanding the reasons for this. It is unsurprising that the

caesarean section rate at Canberra Hospital is higher than, for example, at North Canberra Hospital, given that it is a tertiary referral hospital for the surrounding region and that those who are birthing at Canberra Hospital from the surrounding region are more likely to have complex high-risk births. But we do recognise, and I have recognised before in conversation, and I think in this place, that the caesarean section rate is higher than we would necessarily expect for this type of setting. So the Chief Operating Officer is doing some work to better understand that with the team in the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children.

**MS CLAY:** Given that the Maternity in Focus strategy states intervention rates are lower when women and pregnant people are provided continuity of care, how is the government tracking on its target to give 50 per cent of women and pregnant people access to continuity of care by 2028?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I will take the question on notice in terms of the actual data, Mr Speaker, but certainly one of the challenges we have had in relation to expanding access to continuity is recruitment of midwives, which everybody, I think, in this place now understands is an ongoing challenge. But I am pleased that there are more midwives training at the University of Canberra than there previously have been and I hope that they will come and work for us at Canberra Health Services.

Also the employment arrangements for continuity midwives in the enterprise agreement have presented somewhat of a challenge in terms of midwives getting into that service at early stages of their career. I was very pleased last year we had the first intake of graduates who were able to participate as a continuity midwife. That work is still underway in terms of working with the midwives at Canberra Health Services around models of care and how continuity is going to work into the future.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, is the standalone birth centre being planned at the North Canberra Hospital an additional facility, or is it a replacement of birthing beds that are there now?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Miss Nuttall for the supplementary. As Ms Clay is aware, having been briefed on this matter in quite some detail, the current design for North Canberra Hospital includes two birth suites as part of the birth centre. There are currently two birth suites in the birth centre at North Canberra Hospital and six birth suites. It is currently the plan to be replicate that at the new northside hospital, but we do continue to interrogate that data and there is potential opportunity for expansion of those numbers both in the short term, in the first build at the North Canberra Hospital, and also potentially in subsequent stages. As members would be aware, it is a large campus and there will be ongoing growth at that campus into the future. I have had some pretty detailed conversations with Ms Clay about those matters, but any other members who might be interested are welcome to approach me and my office.

### **ACT Ambulance Service—staffing**

**MRS MORRIS:** Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. In a ministerial statement today, you listed the number of new graduate and lateral recruits joining ACT Ambulance Service but did not mention how many staff have left. Minister, since the Assembly resolution on 2 December 2025, how

many additional frontline ambulance officers have entered the service, and how many have left?

**DR PATERSON:** Again, I would speak to the fact that Mrs Morris continues to pull out these abstract dates and measures and markers in time. I will provide the exact data. I will take that on notice. But, it was confirmed with me the other day by the chief officer that ACTAS was at full capacity with their full-time-equivalent positions. They are all filled. So, we have a fully functioning, incredibly impressive ambulance service that does incredible work for our community. And, I think, if Mrs Morris could focus on the work that she has asked the public service to do, and the documents that we have released, and the FOIs that we have released—

**Mr Cocks:** Point of order. I seek your guidance on this one; I am not sure whether the member is being directly relevant to the question by asking an opposition member to do something.

**MR SPEAKER:** She was relevant in answering the question, but I accept that she is now meandering off into a dissertation about Mrs Morris's performance, and that is not relevant. So, I uphold the point of order—and I presume you have finished your answer?

**MRS MORRIS:** Minister, how many overtime hours does ACTAS currently require each week to keep the roster standing?

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

**MR CAIN:** Minister, have there been any ambulance station closures in the last fortnight?

**DR PATERSON:** Yes.

### **Magistrates Court—Chief Magistrate vacancy**

**MS BARRY:** My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney-General, tomorrow would be Chief Magistrate Lorraine Walker's last sitting day before Her Honour retires, and there has been no news about a new appointment

Attorney-General, why has it taken the government so long to announce the appointment of a new magistrate, when courts are already under immense pressure?

**MS CHEYNE:** I would note how Ms Barry has framed the question—as taking time to announce a new magistrate. What I would say is that why an announcement has not yet been made about the next Chief Magistrate is that a decision has not been made.

**Ms Barry:** She has answered the question!

**Ms Cheyne:** I did.

**MS BARRY:** Yes, you did. Minister, who has the government consulted throughout the process of appointing a new magistrate, and when will the appointment be made?

**MS CHEYNE:** Well, the appointment will be made when the decision is made, which I look forward to happening as soon as we can. In terms of consultation, consultation has been occurring, including with the ACT Bar Association, with the ACT Law Society, with the Chief Magistrate herself and with the Chief Justice. I think that is it.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, why is the government failing to respond to the chronic under-resourcing of ACT courts by streamlining the process of appointments?

**MS CHEYNE:** Could that question be asked again?

**MR SPEAKER:** I think it could. Mr Cain, are you happy to ask that again?

**MR CAIN:** Why is the government failing to respond to the chronic under-resourcing of ACT courts—as an example of a suggestion—by streamlining the process of appointments?

**MR SPEAKER:** Attorney-General?

**Mr Cain:** Which you could do!

**MS CHEYNE:** Appointments are set out for government under the legislation in the Magistrates Court Act, and the government can make its appointment processes through that primary legislation. I would refer the member to those notifiable instruments which are publicly available, and that is the process as it stands.

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