



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Wednesday, 9 April 2025

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Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (2.01): As members would be aware, the Deputy Chief Minister is absent from the Assembly today, so the same arrangements as yesterday in relation to questions will apply today.

Questions without notice Commissioner for International Engagement

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister.

Prior to the Chief Minister's recent trip to China, any mention of Taiwan was removed from the web pages of the Commissioner for International Engagement. Chief Minister, were you aware that material was scrubbed from government web pages, and were you involved with this decision?

MR BARR: No and no.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, were any representations made to the ACT government from any foreign governments regarding use of the word "Taiwan"?

MR BARR: It is a very broad question; not that I am aware of—

Mr Cain: Take it on notice then!

MR BARR: but I will take it on notice. Yes, I will take it on notice, Mr Cain. Thank you for answering the question for me!

Mr Cain: You're most welcome!

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain, that is enough!

MS MORRIS: Chief Minister, did the Commissioner for International Engagement make any representations to you or the government about references to Taiwan.

MR BARR: None to me. I will check. Because "the government" is quite a large entity, I will need to check with the commissioner as to whether he has discussed any of these matters with anyone else.

Transport Canberra—MyWay+

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Transport. On several occasions, I have sought to know how much revenue is being forgone by the territory as a result of the botched rollout of MyWay+, and the minister has been unwilling to confirm if this is occurring. I have now heard reports that the buses used in peak periods and on the busiest routes are more likely to have functioning validators than vehicles used on less busy routes. Minister, are these reports correct?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I have provided some information on notice, which I believe has gone through the MyWay+ inquiry, regarding a few things. I refer, firstly, to patronage levels, which, of course, are reflected in fare revenue. It shows that patronage levels are coming back to around the same level as they were last year. That is really good to see, and we expect that MyWay+ will continue to encourage more people to use public transport, which will have a positive impact on revenue.

The decision that I made to slightly delay the implementation of MyWay+ in November last year also had an impact on revenue. I have provided some information on notice as well. We have some information showing around \$4 million worth of forgone revenue associated with that transition phase between the old system and the new system. There is some information that I have provided, so I reject the premise of Ms Castley's question.

Of course, there has been hardware installed on buses that are not due to retire. We have been very clear from the very beginning of the rollout last year that we would not be installing that hardware on buses that are going to be retired. Yes, there has been active management of the use of those buses, where possible, on routes that are less busy, so that limits the amount of fare revenue that may be forgone.

Some of those shifts often have multiple different bus routes associated with them, so it will not be possible on all occasions to limit the use of those buses for some of the rapid routes, but there is certainly an intention to do so.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, when will you provide the Assembly with information about forecast and actual fare revenue for this financial year?

MR STEEL: When the financial year has ended. I have been very clear about that. We are still going through this financial year. We will, of course, report on that, as we would usually do, and there will be opportunities for the opposition to ask questions in estimates about the forecast actuals for this financial year and impacts on revenue.

Generally speaking, in cities around the country and around the world, there have been impacts on revenue in recent years associated with changed travel habits during COVID-19, and that is still the case. We are still coming out of that period. That has affected budgeted and forecast revenue over recent years, and that still continues, although there is, of course, a changed environment, with the rollout of MyWay+.

It is worth noting that that has included a changed approach in relation to compliance. We are taking an educative approach during the transition to the new system; so we are not undertaking hard compliance that would particularly be undertaken, for example, on light rail vehicles by Canberra Metro, in handing out warnings and infringements. That is because we are giving the people of Canberra time to adjust to new ways of paying for public transport, and we acknowledge that that will have an impact on revenue. Over time, as people become used to it, we will move back to undertaking further compliance activity, as is appropriate.

MR COCKS: Minister, is it true that fare revenue could underperform forecasts by more than \$10 million this year?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Of course, we will report on that once the year has ended, and I provided feedback on that in the previous answer. I also note that some of the forecasting was around pre-COVID revenue targets. In cities like Canberra, public transport systems are still recovering patronage compared to prior to COVID-19. That has impacted on revenues and budgeted revenues as well.

Canberra Health Services—fees for service

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. In your ministerial statement yesterday, you said that CHS is working with specialists who undertake fee for service to phase out this way of paying medical professionals. Minister, can you confirm that the CEO of CHS is holding discussions with medical professionals to retain the fee-for-service model?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yes, I can, because the two things are not inconsistent. We are talking about phasing it out over time. There are two things that I have said consistently in relation to this matter. Firstly, we wanted to have productive collaborative conversations with our senior clinicians about how we can deliver a more efficient and effective health system, and the changes to visiting medical officer contracts over time were part of that conversation. Secondly, anyone with an existing contract would retain that contract for the life of the contract, and anyone whose contract was expiring within the next six months would have that contract extended while these conversations were underway. So both things are true. We are, over time, phasing out fee-for-service contracts. But the CEO of Canberra Health Services is also having very productive conversations with a range of specialist groups, which I am really pleased to say now includes orthopaedics, about how to structure those contracts going forward to ensure that we can deliver the most efficient and effective health service for Canberrans.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, why are you on the one hand claiming that you are phasing out the “outdated” fee-for-service model, yet the CEO is negotiating with medical professionals to keep it?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I refer Ms Castley to my previous answer.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, do you really know what is going on in your health portfolio when you are saying one thing and your CEO is saying another?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I also refer Mr Milligan to my answer to the first question. As I said from the very start, existing contracts will be maintained, and I was encouraging our visiting medical officer workforce to engage in productive conversations and collaborative conversions with the leadership of Canberra Health Services. We want to work together to deliver an efficient and effective health system. That is exactly what is now happening. Also, I note for the record, as I have before, that the vast majority of our visiting officers are already on sessional contracts. In fact, a minority are on any kind of fee-for-service contract. If it is going to deliver a more effective and efficient service to retain some of the fee-for-service arrangements—at least for a period and at least for our existing clinicians—we are open to that conversation. We have always been open to conversation.

Margaret Timpson Park

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. On Monday, Labor's MP for Fenner, Andrew Leigh, announced that a re-elected federal Labor government would provide \$1.5 million for upgrades at Margaret Timpson Park at Belconnen. I also note that ACT Labor made the exact same promise during the 2024 election. Chief Minister, who is actually going to pay for the upgrades at Margaret Timpson Park? You, or the federal government?

MR SPEAKER: Ms Cheyne, are you going to take this one?

MS CHEYNE: Yes, I can Mr Speaker, although the question is about a federal Labor Party election commitment. Yes, if the election goes in Labor's favour, then I expect them to deliver on that election commitment and to pay for it.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, if federal Labor are going to pay for the upgrades to the park, does that mean that you will now use the \$1.5 million you have saved to help pay for, say, the continued operation of Burrangiri respite centre?

MS CHEYNE: This is capital funding that is for new projects within the City Services portfolio. It is subject to a budget process, just like any commonwealth funding that we get is further subject to a budget process. I am not going to engage further in hypotheticals.

MR CAIN: Minister, over the next four weeks, which other ACT Labor election policies will be funded by federal Labor, in order to try and save this government money and prevent any further ACT budget blow-outs?

MR SPEAKER: Chief Minister, you look keen.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker—

Mr Cain: Why the change? Could we not have the same minister?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain, have you finished your question?

Mr Cain: Well, no I have not actually!

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain, Mr Cain—enough!

MR BARR: Perhaps for Mr Cain's benefit, the executive can determine who will answer questions. The initial question related to a project both in Ms Cheyne's portfolio and her electorate. In relation to future announcements from federal Labor, that is a matter for them. Once the federal election is concluded and we know who the government of the day is, there will—

Mr Cain: You can tell us what you know surely—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain, Mr Cain.

MR BARR: There will be a process through our budget where we will seek to understand all of the future commonwealth government's commitments and their impact on the territory. Look, I would be very pleased if the federal Liberal party would make any commitment to Canberra other than cutting jobs! It remains to be seen what further commitments will be made during the campaign by either potential party of government.

United Ngunnawal Elders Council

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. The United Ngunnawal Elders Council is a long-established Aboriginal body providing advice to the ACT government in relation to heritage and connection-to-land matters for the Ngunnawal people, comprised of representatives nominated by each of the Ngunnawal family groups. Minister, is there a review of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council underway?

MS ORR: I think I am going to take that on notice. There is a review of the elected body—the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body—but the United Ngunnawal Elders Council is not actually a government function. There is a little bit of autonomy there in the decisions that they make, so I can seek some advice—

MR SPEAKER: Are we clear on the question, Ms Orr? Do we need Mr Rattenbury to repeat it?

MS ORR: Yes.

MR RATTENBURY: If it is helpful, I am specifically asking about the United Ngunnawal Elders Council, UNEC. It has been put to me that there is a review underway, and I am seeking the minister's advice on that.

MS ORR: I am going to take that on notice.

MR RATTENBURY: As a related question: have United Ngunnawal Elders Council members been consulted on the terms of reference for this review—if it is taking place?

MS ORR: I will take that on notice.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, is it also the case that the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body—the only democratically elected voice to government in Australia—is also under review, and what is the process of consultation for this review?

MS ORR: I refer the member to my first answer, where I said that yes, with the elected body there is a review going on, in consultation with the elected body. I think this is always good to have in any organisation after it has been operating for a period of time, just to make sure that it is still operating with the best of its functions and to its greatest capacity in realising what we want to do.

But I have been somewhat at arm's length from the review, because it has been, very much, steered by the elected body. I am quite looking forward to the recommendations

they bring on how we can continue to realise the potential of what is, essentially, our Voice to government and to the parliament.

Crime—domestic and family violence

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Domestic and Family Violence. The domestic and family violence report, published in 2023, highlighted the increase in deaths from domestic violence since 2016. Your government has clearly known about the increasing prevalence of domestic violence in our community. So why has it taken 12 months since the Assembly passed the Domestic Violence Agencies (Information Sharing) Amendment Act to let the community know that this critically important legislation will be delayed?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. We have been trying to work through the implementation of the information-sharing scheme. Over the past few weeks, it has become very apparent that there is still work to be done on that before I could have confidence that the scheme would be up and running in full effect. Ultimately, a decision was made. I believe that, to proceed with the commencement of this act at this time would put the safety of women and children at risk in the ACT and so it is best to delay the commencement and actually see full implementation when it is ready.

MS MORRIS: Minister, why have you waited until now, just weeks before the legislation is due to commence, to announce an 18-month delay?

DR PATERSON: Because work was underway. It was really an assessment of what work had been completed and where the stages of work were at. Ultimately, it was deemed that the scheme was not ready for implementation, in order to keep the community safe.

MS BARRY: Minister, why do victims of domestic and family violence have to wait another 18 months for greater support?

DR PATERSON: I want to assure the Assembly and the community that I have received assurance regarding the current information-sharing legislation and schemes and the family violence assistance program, which actively shares information between different government agencies and the Domestic Violence Crisis Service. I have also had consultations with the Canberra Rape Crisis Service. All of those services and agencies have confirmed to me that current arrangements are appropriate until the scheme is up and running and the training has been conducted. We are also revising the risk assessment framework, which also requires training. That will include coercive control—which we debated here in the Assembly a few weeks ago—and we know the importance of that being included.

So, rather than notify an instrument that we would then have to come back and notify again in a few months time and have to run all the training again, it is absolutely appropriate that we commence all this work that still needs to be done in order to keep the community safe.

Federal government—infrastructure funding

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, can you please share with the Assembly any recent infrastructure announcements made by the commonwealth and what they mean for the ACT?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Tough for the question. The Albanese Labor government has been delivering real outcomes for Canberra, with major investments in transport infrastructure to support our growing population, reducing congestion and improving our quality of life. It is a long-term commitment to building a more connected, accessible and liveable city, backed by nearly \$60 million in new commonwealth funding for projects in the ACT in the 2025-26 budget alone. This funding will deliver on vital road links within the ACT, including the Monaro Highway and Gundaroo Drive, as well as further funding of \$25 million for the stage 2 upgrades to the Barton Highway, completing duplication across the border into the ACT, providing better and safer connectivity with surrounding regions.

These investments mean safer roads, more reliable travel times and expanded options for active transport. This adds to substantial ongoing federal support for light rail, cycling paths and active transport, ensuring Canberrans have safer, smoother and more connected journeys.

MS TOUGH: Minister, can you provide any further detail on the specific road projects in the ACT supported by these commonwealth announcements?

MS CHEYNE: The recent infrastructure commitments help complete and progress key road upgrades across Canberra. This includes \$30 million to finalise stage 1 of the Monaro Highway upgrade, delivering safer intersections and new lanes, and \$20 million to progress stage 2 planning, covering upgrades at Mugga Lane, Tralee Street and Isabella Drive. The \$3½ million for Gundaroo Drive supports the completion of that road's duplication, following a number of issues which increased time and cost for that project.

We welcome the federal government's recognition and support for projects designed to reduce travel times, to support freight movement and to improve safety for local communities and communities in Canberra's north and south.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how will the additional funding from the commonwealth's Active Transport Fund improve walking and cycling infrastructure in Canberra?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary question. The commonwealth's Active Transport Fund is investing \$8½ million in Canberra to extend and improve walking and cycling infrastructure. This includes \$5 million to extend the Garden City Cycleway connecting North Ainslie and Majura primary schools with the new 3.15-kilometre shared path. Stage 1 from Braddon to Ainslie will be completed in May 2025, with the final connection from Torrens Street to the Lonsdale Street intersection to be completed later this year, with work commencing on stage 2 in 2026. Another \$3½ million will deliver the Hall Village Main Route, a 2.3-kilometre community path linking Gold Creek and Hall.

These projects are designed to deliver safer, more accessible infrastructure for cyclists and pedestrians, to reduce traffic pressure and to support the ACT's shift towards cleaner, more active modes of transport.

Transport Canberra—MyWay+

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Transport. The MyWay+ inquiry has heard evidence from two individuals who acted with integrity and came forward stating that they had accessed other Canberrans' personal and payment information in MyWay+. I understand that there is now a third person who is in the process of coming forward. This is contrary to the ACT government's repeated claims that no such access occurred and that no evidence of such access exists within the logs. This is now a question of credibility for the ACT government. Minister, why should Canberrans trust the ACT government's word on the reliability of the accessed records, and why should Canberrans believe that malicious hackers did not exploit the same IT vulnerabilities?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Braddock for his question. The government has provided a quite comprehensive response to those two individuals on the issues that they raised through both Australian government and ACT government agencies. Those responsible disclosures were taken seriously, and the issues that were identified were addressed immediately. Steps were taken within hours to address the issues that were raised. If there has been a third responsible disclosure made, that should be treated responsibly. Mr Braddock should make the ACT government's Chief Information Security Officer aware of that immediately, if that has been brought to his attention, in order for that vulnerability to be assessed and, if required, action taken to address that and close the vulnerability, if it still exists.

We have provided advice—the Director-General of Transport Canberra and City Services has written to the MyWay+ inquiry secretariat, and I believe that submission was published as part of the submissions to the inquiry—outlining the process for responsible disclosure that we follow, and encouraging committee members and members of the Legislative Assembly to comply with that. If Mr Braddock has received information or is aware of a vulnerability, can I ask him to please responsibly disclose that, so that it can be assessed through the appropriate channels, as the other two matters were, and closed down immediately.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, will you correct the record and admit that Canberrans' personal and payment information was in fact accessed in an unauthorised manner?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. We have already put on record an answer to that, and we have addressed that issue. If Mr Braddock has evidence that we are not aware of, he should bring that forward and present it to the government, as part of the responsible disclosure process.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, beyond the "expectations" and "disappointment" with NEC on MyWay+ that we heard from you yesterday, what are you actually doing to hold them to account for shoddy compliance with their contract?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. As I mentioned in question time yesterday, there are a range of terms of the contract which relate to the delivery phase

of the contract, and we are holding NEC to account in making sure that the contracted items are delivered within that phase, and that they continue to improve a range of different things when it comes to disability standards and their compliance and conformity with those at a high level. We have already seen a range of functionality that has rolled out over the last few weeks and months in relation to items which have addressed some of the key issues that have been raised since “go live” in November. We are continuing to work with them and hold them accountable regarding meeting those requirements.

In relation to cybersecurity, which is what I assume Mr Rattenbury’s supplementary question relates to, when those issues have been raised, they have been dealt with immediately. Cybersecurity is an ongoing risk for any IT system. The cybersecurity threat environment is evolving and changing, and we all need to remain vigilant and have continued vigilance around addressing those matters. If there are new issues that have come to light, they need to be raised immediately and responsibly.

Housing affordability—Rent Relief Fund

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Attorney-General. The government’s Rent Relief Fund provides emergency assistance for renters and low-income earners who are experiencing financial hardship to catch up on rent arrears, relieve some pressure and prevent eviction. It is administered by Care ACT, who were recently informed that the program’s funding would be discontinued in the upcoming budget. They were told the decision had already been made and not to bother including the Rent Relief Fund in their budget submission. Was any modelling undertaken to determine the impacts of this decision on our already unacceptably long social housing waitlists, and, if so, could you please explain to renters under financial pressure how that modelling justifies this decision during a cost-of-living crisis?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Emerson for the question. I think most people in this place understand that the Rent Relief Fund was established in April 2023 as a short-term program to address cost-of-living pressures that had arisen during and after the COVID-19 lockdown periods. The ACT government then extended funding twice, with a total allocation of more than \$3 million provided towards grants and \$640,000 towards Care’s administration costs. Care has done an absolutely fantastic job and, in respect of that, I indicated to them that the program was unlikely to continue past its current end date, noting that this was subject to budget processes, of course, and again stressing that this was a short-term program.

We know that, thanks to several progressive, compounding and effective legislative reforms to rent in the ACT, we are now one of the most, if not the most, affordable jurisdictions. Equally, a large number of programs remain available for support and through which renters can seek assistance. In particular, I reference the Tenancy Assistance Program that is run out of Woden Community Service. It provides tailored wraparound support that stabilises tenancies and mortgages and focuses on early intervention and prevention.

MR EMERSON: Will the government reconsider its decision to scrap the Rent Relief Fund, given the potentially disastrous impact on some members of our community who most need our support and on our social housing waitlists?

MS CHEYNE: As I have said, there are already a considerable number of programs available. The Rent Relief Fund was considered to be an extraordinary, short-term, discrete and time limited program at the time, but there are other programs and supports available and clear on the ACT government's cost-of-living assistance page. I refer anyone who believes that they are under financial stress or in any sort of housing instability to, before it escalates, approach the Tenancy Assistance Program to get wraparound support and intervention.

MR RATTENBURY: Is the decision to scrap the Rent Relief Fund a sign of things to come for vulnerable Canberrans in the upcoming budget?

MS CHEYNE: No.

Roads—regional roads

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for City Services. Minister, I refer to your colleague, Minister Steel's, motion back in 2022 calling on the commonwealth government to reclassify regional roads which are not in Canberra's urban footprint as regional in order to qualify for the commonwealth government's 80:20 funding split. I have had correspondence from Smiths Road residents who have advised me that the current condition of this road is dangerous, and it has been dangerous for awhile. They would prefer the road fixed, irrespective of which government pays for it. Minister, have you had any luck getting the commonwealth Labor government to reclassify these roads as regional?

MS CHEYNE: These conversations are ongoing. I have received, I expect, the same representations that Miss Nuttall has. Of course Smiths Road and its interaction with the border does mean that we do need to engage several different levels and areas of government across several jurisdictions. I will take the direct question itself on notice because I want to make entirely sure that I have the latest detail of where those conversations are up to.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, if we do not secure 80:20 funding, how long will the residents of Smiths Road have to wait before they receive the necessary safety upgrades?

MS CHEYNE: I think that is couched as a hypothetical, Mr Speaker.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, in the meantime, how do you ensure the accessibility of Smiths Road to emergency vehicles?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Braddock. My understanding is that there has been some investment in Smiths Road by Roads ACT relatively recently, but again, my memory might be dicey on this, so I am going to take it on notice and look to come back to the chamber quickly.

Lanyon Marketplace—works

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. As

part of the government's upgrades to Lanyon Marketplace, a bench—which has been fondly referred to as “Benchie McBenchface” by yours truly—was installed directly across a walkway, blocking shoppers from accessing a popular shortcut into the shops. Roughly two weeks later, the bench was removed after community uproar, which included a running competition to name the infamous bench and a public event to collectively step over the bench. RIP, Benchie McBenchface!

Minister, how much did it cost to erect and then remove the bench?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that specific question, Mr Speaker, on notice. I appreciate you are very interested in that answer, too, Mr Speaker.

MS MORRIS: Minister, now that the bench has been removed, does the government consider that the upgrades to the Lanyon Marketplace are now complete?

MS CHEYNE: It has not just been about the bench, Mr Speaker. As you know, we have undertaken some further changes, particularly as a result of Ms Tough's representations to the ACT government and a workaround that was conducted with her.

What I would say is that with this process for the Lanyon Marketplace upgrades the communication was not at the standard that I expect, and it was certainly not at the standard that this chamber—or, indeed, the community—expects, particularly when there was a variation applied to the design that was not shared with me, my office or the community, but it was shared with Lanyon Marketplace owners. That really did not meet expectations.

In terms of completion, I need to double-check if there is anything further that we have planned. Again, I want to be accurate, so I will come back to the chamber.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, if the government cannot install a park bench in the right location, how can Canberrans trust that the government will get the budget on track?

MS CHEYNE: Mr Speaker, the government did believe that it was installing the bench in an appropriate location. You would know that it was near an area that has a tree—and the thing that allows the tree to grow! Effectively, the government had been seeing that if people were using that as a walkway it was not ideal for the tree. It was relatively narrow. I believe that the bench was put there with good intent as this was not the most appropriate route for people to be taking—not realising that this is a very popular route, as it turns out. Thus, the bench has been moved. I would note to Mr Milligan that there are good intentions behind these decisions. It was not nefarious.

Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Health. Burrangiri provides 4,500 bed nights per year and is fully subscribed, with wait times up to six months for respite in aged-care facilities. What have you done to address the shortfall in respite capacity that will result from the closure of Burrangiri? Where have you secured the same amount of bed nights to ensure that the community is not left on long waiting lists for respite?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will not go through the background to all of this again in terms of the reason that the decision was taken and when it was taken with regard to Burrangiri, which relates to both the physical condition and the requirement for maintenance of the facilities and also the ending of the contract with the Salvation Army coming together. I have been clear previously that we had considered alternatives to ACT government funding of respite care, which is clearly a commonwealth responsibility.

Yesterday I pointed Ms Carrick and other members to the fact that CarersACT runs a carer gateway specifically to work with carers to identify both emergency and planned respite care. We are also working with CarersACT—and committed through the election to work with CarersACT—to find land for them to build a new purpose-built respite facility, which they have clearly indicated would not require ongoing operational funding from the ACT government, clearly indicating that funding for this service is available through aged-care and National Disability Insurance Scheme programs.

What I can say to Ms Carrick is that, as a result of the Albanese Labor government's investment in aged care and its reform of aged care, after a decade of neglect of aged care, there are new aged-care facilities scheduled to open in the ACT in the next 12 to 18 months, including the new aged-care facility due to open in Aranda in the middle of this year and a new aged-care facility due to open in Wright before the end of this year. Those brand new aged-care facilities can be expected to increase the availability of respite care through residential aged care in the ACT.

MS CARRICK: What analysis have you done to determine how much it will cost the government to provide beds in aged-care facilities and in the hospital, when people cannot move through to respite due to the long waiting lists?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I do need to clarify in relation to my last answer that I am not putting words in Arcare's mouth that they will specifically provide respite care, but that the pool of residential aged care in the ACT is expanding as a result of the Albanese government's reform of and investment in aged care. After a decade of neglect, we are seeing the first significant investment and expansion of aged-care facilities in the ACT and around the country, under this government, and some of them are due to open very soon.

In relation to people who are in hospital waiting for discharge or who are potentially going to be in hospital, as I have also indicated, Canberra Health Services already runs a step-down service for people who are ready for discharge from hospital but are not able to go straight home. One of the options that we considered in terms of the use of this more than \$1.8 million of funding a year was to transfer some of that funding to Canberra Health Services to enable them to expand that service availability.

Members interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again, that service availability is something that I detailed in my response during the previous debate on Ms Carrick and Ms Castley's motion. If we were going to fund additional respite capability or step-down from hospital capability, that would be the mechanism that we would do it through. But this is very clearly not only a responsibility of the commonwealth government but also an activity that is

funded under My Aged Care and the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

MR EMERSON: Minister, are you planning to move Arcadia House's services to Burrangiri?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I do not know if the freedom of information request has come out yet, but that is one of the options that we are considering for Arcadia House and for the Burrangiri facility. But no decision on that has been made, and I could not tell you whether the Burrangiri facility will be an appropriate site for what is currently the alcohol and drug service at Arcadia House on the North Canberra Hospital campus. That is potentially one future option for the site.

But what I can assure both Mr Emerson and this Assembly is that the decision in relation to Burrangiri was taken after I received advice that the facility was going to have to shut down for a period of time anyway to undertake significant maintenance and refurbishment work in relation to things like electrics, heating, ventilation and air conditioning.

So, yes, Mr Emerson, Burrangiri is one of the potential identified sites for the relocation of the Arcadia House service, but it is not the only site. I await further work being done in relation to where the most appropriate relocation of that service is. I also note that any relocation of that service is likely to be a short-term, temporary solution while further work is done in relation to a long-term solution for Arcadia House. It is very unlikely that the Burrangiri facility would be an appropriate long-term solution for that. But, again, I will not be able to receive further advice about that until that site is vacant and someone can get in and do the work on understanding the options for future use of that site.

Economy—economic indicators

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, what were the changes in the key economic indicators for the ACT in the federal budget?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. The federal budget handed down by the Albanese Labor government highlighted the strong fundamentals of the Australian economy and reflects the strong local ACT economy as well. Australia's economic outlook, like ours, remains resilient, despite global and local challenges.

The federal budget outlined that nominal GDP is expected to grow by 4¼ per cent this year and nominal GDP growth is then expected to slow to 3¼ per cent in 2025-26. This pick-up in economic growth is offset by moderation in domestic inflation and a sharper fall in the terms of trade.

All Canberrans will welcome the updates in the federal budget, which expects headline inflation returning to the RBA's target band, and it is now expected to be 2½ per cent through the year to the June quarter 2025, a quarter of a percentage point lower than forecast in December.

Unlike the experience of other advanced economies, under a Labor government Australia has been able to achieve a substantial moderation in inflation whilst

maintaining a low unemployment rate, and Canberrans are experiencing significantly low unemployment at 3 per cent and a continued and sustained wage growth as well, with some of the best results in the nation. But, of course, this is directly under threat at the election with the potential return of a coalition government that slashes public sector jobs, which will have flow-on effects to the private sector and employment.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Treasurer, how is a reduction in inflation likely to benefit Canberrans?

MR STEEL: The budget handed down prior to President Trump's tariff frenzy shows a reduction in inflation, with the market now likely to experience further interest rate cuts based on the market expectations. Despite the uncertainty, this is good news for Canberrans with a mortgage, who can expect to see rate relief helping with cost of living.

This will be supported with direct cost-of-living measures that the federal Labor government has announced, like boosting Medicare and energy bill relief. Lower inflation will support lower household prices and reduction in input costs for construction, a major focus of both of our governments in addressing the housing crisis. It will also provide more certainty for business and confidence in the economy overall.

Across the Australian economy, business investment remains at decade high levels, supported by resilient business balance sheets and strong capacity utilisation. And while growth is expected to moderate, the level of investment will remain elevated. In the ACT, we continue to see strong growth in our own Gross State Product and State Final Demand as well. This growth does face risks and may be seriously jeopardised by challenges in the global economy, particularly those from populist policymakers overseas, but it is also at risk from the election of a coalition government.

MS TOUGH: Treasurer, what were the major risks identified to the economic indicators?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Tough for her supplementary. The escalation of global trade tensions has contributed to significant market volatility and made the international outlook more uncertain. Tariffs and other trade barriers predicted in the federal budget, and implemented since the budget, weigh on global growth and also adversely affect demand for key Australian exports, domestic business confidence and investment.

At a local scale, these risks are compounded by Peter Dutton's consistent but incoherent attacks on Canberra and the public service. Mr Dutton has retained his central promise to cut 41,000 Canberra based public servants. And let's not forget he started the year promising only 36,000 cuts, and then it got even higher. He is now promising to cut around 15 per cent of all jobs in the Canberra economy. Now that he has finally had his pollsters convince him that directly attacking workers' rights and targeting women in the workforce might be bad for his political chances, he has pivoted to telling voters his cuts will be "just like Howard"; a time when Canberra home values dropped dramatically, as thousands of Canberrans lost their jobs and the local economy crashed.

Planning and development—Belconnen

MS CLAY: My question is to the minister for planning. Two apartment towers with 297 units are proposed for 44 College Street in Belconnen. How many public homes will be required to be built in this development?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I am not aware of any public homes as part of that development. As I have previously discussed with the member, and in question time as well, the ACT government, through our housing supply and land release program, will identify around 15 per cent for affordable and social homes, as part of the program each year. That is the way that we support the supply of more affordable homes. We have a commitment that we took to the election to support 5,000 affordable, community and social homes, including public housing, of which 1,000 will be public homes to 2030. We are looking forward to getting on with delivering that commitment.

MS CLAY: How many community homes will be required to be built in this development?

MR STEEL: I am not aware of any, as part of that particular development.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, what types of affordable housing will be built in this development?

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice and confirm whether any affordable dwellings are being provided as part of that development.

Taxation—stamp duty

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Finance.

I have been advocating for constituents slugged with retrospective reassessments of stamp duty exemptions and tens of thousands of dollars in bills by your government. This includes domestic violence victims who are experiencing significant distress as a result of the process, the long wait times and your lack of response. This includes people for whom I requested your urgent response because I held serious concerns for their welfare. These constituents have still had no response after months and I still hold serious concerns for their wellbeing. Minister, why have you left vulnerable people, who are already traumatised as a result of domestic violence, hanging in limbo with no response for months?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Cocks for the question. The decisions and work of the Commissioner for ACT Revenue are independent from that of the minister. I can assure Mr Cocks that my office has been working very closely with the revenue commissioner. If there are individuals who have not heard back from the Revenue Office or my office, I would encourage Mr Cocks to please draw those individual matters to my attention. We have been trying to make sure that people have received information, but the decisions that are made in relation to these matters are not decisions for the minister, and some of these matters are quite complex. Changes are being made in the broad that would mean that individual decision-making in relation to waivers and the like would not be required, and the revenue commissioner has been keeping me and the Treasurer informed of that process.

It was my understanding that we had informed Mr Cocks of that process. I am very happy to offer him a briefing in relation to the work that the revenue commissioner is doing. I can assure Mr Cocks that my office has been working closely with the ACT Revenue Office to understand the individual matters, but the actual decision-making is not a responsibility of the minister. Like Mr Cocks, I would like these matters to be resolved as quickly as possible, but I am not a decision-maker on these matters.

MR COCKS: Minister, when was the last time you were personally briefed by the directorate on the individual situations?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take that question on notice. As I indicated, one of my staff has been very closely engaged with the Revenue Office in relation to some of these matters. I generally get a written briefing when it comes up in relation to correspondence. I have not been personally briefed by the revenue commissioner in relation to individual matters, because my office has been working through that with the Revenue Office. I have received a number of policy briefings and, of course, in relation to correspondence, I sometimes receive information in relation to individual matters as well. I also regularly request such information. I will take the question on notice to advise Mr Cocks on when I was last briefed on one of those individual matters.

MS BARRY: Minister, will you immediately pause the government's retrospective stamp duty reassessments and interest program to ensure the wellbeing of all those impacted?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have no legal authority to do such a thing, so no. I also note, in relation to the questions on notice that have been provided, that a very small proportion of Home Buyer Concession Scheme recipients have received a notice of reassessment. This process of integrity in the tax and concession regime is really important. Were assessments to pause and then be recommenced and, subsequently, people were found to have incorrectly claimed a concession, their interest bill would actually be larger after the pause and recommencement of those considerations. Firstly, I do not have the authority to do it, and, secondly, it may in fact be harmful to some individuals.

I completely understand and I sympathise with the point that Mr Cocks is making. I have actually previously raised these issues on behalf of my own constituents as well, both in the last term of government and since becoming minister, and my office is working very diligently with the Revenue Office to try to resolve these issues as quickly as possible. Some of them have a level of complexity, and, again, I am not a decision-maker in these matters.

Taxation—land tax and conveyance duty

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Finance. In your recent responses to ministerial representations regarding land tax and conveyance duty reassessments and objections, and again today, you have stated that you lack the authority to intervene in decisions made by the revenue commissioner. Minister, what formal advice have you received regarding your capacity to intervene—or not intervene—in revenue matters?

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

MR COCKS: Minister, have you advocated on behalf of any of the constituents facing reassessments totalling tens of thousands of dollars, including those whose welfare I have specifically raised with you?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Certainly, my office, at my direction, has advocated on behalf of some of these individuals and, as I have indicated in response to previous questions, there is a systemic change I expect to flow through the system and it will address specifically some of the issues that Mr Cocks has raised on behalf of constituents. Mr Braddock, I acknowledge, raised one of these matters with me directly the other day as well, in relation specifically to people who have separated but not formally divorced, and prior to purchasing a home they have claimed the home buyer concession on the basis that they have separated but they have not actually formally divorced, and that is considered differently. There is some work underway in relation to those matters. I will take on notice to provide an update to the Assembly in relation to that work as well, because that has been a result of advocacy both from other members of this place, but also from me and my office to address that issue.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, will you table the advice you have received concerning your powers, or limitations, in relation to the revenue commissioner's decisions?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I suspect that the advice is largely verbal advice in discussion with the revenue commissioner but I will take on notice the extent to which I have received written advice in relation to that matter.

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