



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Tuesday, 5 May 2026

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Questions without notice

Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations. Minister, I refer to the report to be tabled today, which is publicly available, from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration's inquiry into the CIT CEO recruitment process. The report found:

TAFE NSW would not provide the findings to CIT but authorised Dr McNeill to do so. The Committee is uncertain as to whether the CIT Board has seen a copy of findings of misconduct against Dr McNeill, or whether they have only received Dr McNeill's account of what those findings are.

Minister, have you seen a copy of the TAFE NSW report into the conduct of Dr Margot McNeill which found that that she had breached the TAFE NSW code of conduct?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Parton for the question. No, I have not.

MR PARTON: Minister, what action have you taken, as the minister responsible for the CIT, to gain a copy of the TAFE NSW report, given that the committee found that TAFE NSW had authorised Dr McNeill to reveal it?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Parton for the question. I have not taken any action myself to try and gain access to that information. I understand that the CIT board have communicated numerous times with TAFE NSW to try and gain that information. I understand that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration, in conducting their inquiry, have also sought to gain access to this information. That standing committee has access to the powers of this Assembly to compel witnesses and summon documents. They do not have access to this information. I appreciate the intense community interest in this information. I; the board, I think; all members in this place; and the wider community, share an intense interest in this matter, but no, I have not sought this information.

MS LEE: Minister, do you continue to retain confidence in the CIT CEO given the damning findings in the committee report?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Lee for the question. I do not—

Mr Parton: Do you?

MR PETTERSSON: I have had worse, Mr Parton.

I would like to thank Ms Lee for the question. I do not intend to offer a view of that nature in this place. As members are well aware, my direct relationship is to the independent governing board. They hold the direct employment relationship to the CEO. Based on my relationship with the board and the structure of the act, I do not think it is appropriate to offer a view or opinion of that nature.

Canberra Hospital—Behavioural Assessment Unit—incident

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, Canberra Health Services has confirmed staff and unions have repeatedly raised concerns about the single-exit design of the Behavioural Assessment Unit. Nonetheless, eight staff have now been held under siege at knife-point for hours. Minister, have you personally spoken to or visited any of the eight staff that were held under siege in the BAU?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No, I have not personally visited or spoken to any of the eight staff, but I understand that they are getting—and I have been assured that they are getting—appropriate support.

Again, I want to reiterate my thanks to the staff. And, again, the Assembly's understanding is those staff were physically safe. Those staff work in the Behavioural Assessment Unit as part of their jobs, dealing every day with very challenging consumers.

In relation to the physical infrastructure issue, I think Mr Parton said that there is a single exit. He is aware that there are two exits from the staff station. There are also four exits from the BAU. Staff were consulted on the design throughout the design and construction period; as were unions. I am advised that there is no record of unions raising concerns during the design and construction period. I have spoken with one staff member who indicates that there was a concern raised. But my understanding is that, primarily, concerns have been raised subsequent to the opening of the building. This is not an uncommon experience; that people look at a design, they walk through a space, and it is only once they start using the space that they realise that something could be improved. That is why Canberra Health Services was listening to that feedback from staff and had already engaged an architect to look at whether there could be a change. There are a couple of options on the table and that work will be done.

MR PARTON: Minister, do you not think that being held hostage for three hours warrants at least a call or some sort of direct contact from the health minister?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I take issue with the term “held hostage”. The staff were safe. They were being supported. Policing was making decisions about what the appropriate action was, and I am assured that police were checking in with staff.

“Held hostage” implies a motivation on the part of the individual. I do not believe that the individual had—

Ms Barry: It implies somebody can't leave!

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: “Held hostage” implies a motivation on the part of the individual, and I do not believe that there is any evidence of any kind of motivation on the part of the individual to hold anybody hostage.

Mr Parton: How often do we use grenades?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Mr Parton is well aware that the use of “grenade” is not accurate. This is a flash-bang device. It was an unusual circumstance. It was absolutely an unusual circumstance. This is the first time in— (*Time expired.*)

MS CASTLEY: Minister, how many other known safety risks across Canberra Hospital are currently awaiting action? What assurance can you give staff that they will not have to wait for another serious incident before those risks are addressed or rectified?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the question on notice, but I would reiterate, again, that there was no waiting. When Canberra Health Services became aware of the concerns that had been raised by staff, they had already brought in an architect to look at a solution to this issue.

I repeat, again: there are two exits from the staff station, and there are four exits from the BAU. Egress out of a space is something that I am highly conscious of. It is something I often take note of. I have had a conversation with the chief psychiatrist as well the executive director of mental health, justice health, and the alcohol and drug service. The chief psychiatrist had not raised any concerns previously about the Behavioural Assessment Unit. And the ED of the mental health, justice health and ADS had also said that, when he visited the unit, this was not an immediately apparent risk in terms of his visiting the unit, either. This is something that was raised by staff after the unit started being in use. It was not, as far as we can tell, something that was considered during the design process. And it is something that is now being rectified.

Canberra Hospital—Behavioural Assessment Unit—incident

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, it has been confirmed through the media—and not through the robust and transparent information-sharing habits of this government!—that the knife-wielding man who held eight staff under siege at the Canberra Hospital was in breach of a psychiatric treatment order and therefore receiving mental health treatment involuntarily.

Minister, do you accept the Minister for Health deflecting the blame to ACT Policing for eight staff being held under siege.

DR PATERSON: I find it really deeply concerning the way Mr Parton just framed his question there. This is an individual in our society who is very unwell, who is requiring hospital support; he is a patient at the hospital. To talk about him like that and to talk about these issues like that in this chamber—just afford that individual some dignity.

Mr Cocks: On a point of order.

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

Mr Cocks: The minister has not actually made any effort to respond to the question.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, on the point of order: you did criticise the question, but you did not actually turn to the answer. If I could ask that you be relevant in terms of actually responding. I appreciate that you do not like the question, but I would ask that you be relevant.

DR PATERSON: I feel quite offended by the question, so I will take it on notice.

MR PARTON: Minister, did ACT Policing officers who escorted the patient to hospital brief the nurse in charge of accepting him into care that they had found a knife during an initial search and that he was subject to a psychiatric treatment order?

DR PATERSON: I will take it on notice.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, do you accept that had ACT Policing had the powers to conduct a more thorough search, or wand the patient, it might have prevented the siege?

DR PATERSON: No, I do not accept that. The Chief Police Officer has been very specific that wand and strip searching mental health patients is not part of their core business.

Canberra Hospital—Behavioural Assessment Unit—incident

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, in your ministerial statement earlier today, you stated that, since the siege at the Canberra Hospital on 22 April, Canberra Health Services has empowered security guards to conduct wand searches at the Behavioural Assessment Unit. Minister, what steps will CHS security take if a wand search uncovers a concealed weapon on admission to the BAU?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the question on notice, to be sure, but I can only assume that they will remove the weapon. I will note that Mr Parton claimed that we did not advise that the individual was under a psychiatric treatment order. I did not want to directly contradict the Chief Police Officer on radio when he indicated that the person had absconded, and was only going to do so if asked, but I did in fact provide the information to the Assembly, and we provided information to the media, that the person had not absconded, as the Chief Police Officer originally claimed. I understand that there has been an explanation that he misspoke, and that is fine. We all misspeak from time to time. But to claim that we were somehow trying to hide the information that this individual was on a psychiatric treatment order is ridiculous.

I will take the rest of Mrs Morris's question on notice.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, is it appropriate to shift more responsibilities onto hardworking frontline health workers, who now have to deal with potentially armed patients?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again, I reject the way that Mrs Morris has characterised this. This individual was brought to the Behavioural Assessment Unit by police in handcuffs, with advice that the individual had been searched. This is one extra step that the Canberra Health Services security staff can take to ensure that they are doing everything they can to support the safety of staff in the Behavioural Assessment Unit, recognising, as Dr Paterson said, that the staff there support some of the most complex and vulnerable people in our community, with heightened behaviour. The clue is in the name. It is called the Behavioural Assessment Unit for a reason. It is there to support people in acute psychiatric distress or whose behaviour is impacted by alcohol or other drug use for assessment, and to understand what the next steps in their care need to be.

It is purpose-designed for that use, it is something that did not previously exist in the same way in the old emergency department, and it was designed specifically for this purpose.

MS BARRY: Minister, is this policy change simply a reactive response that ignores the conditions that led to the siege?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No. There was both a hot debrief of staff immediately after the incident and a cold debrief with police—as I went through in my statement—on Friday, 24 April. This is one of the actions that came out of the cold debrief. There is always a review. In addition to that, as I said in my statement this morning, I have asked the Chief Psychiatrist to work with Canberra Health Services and ACT Policing to consider every element of this incident, how it occurred, how it escalated and the appropriateness of the response to it, recognising that this individual was discharged from the Adult Mental Health Unit earlier in the month.

I have asked the Chief Psychiatrist and Canberra Health Services to go right back to that discharge from the Adult Mental Health Unit, through the support that this individual was receiving in the community, recognising that they were on a psychiatric treatment order, the contact with police to alert them to the fact that the individual was in breach of the psychiatric treatment order, the police response to that information, and what happened after police had identified and brought this person to the hospital.

Economy—population

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, what steps is the government taking to ensure Canberra continues to attract and retain young people as part of its long-term population and economic growth strategy?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Tough for the question. This is a really important priority for the government, and we are taking a coordinated approach to ensure that Canberra continues to attract and retain young people as part of a longer term population and economic growth strategy.

Higher education is critical to this strategy, and so we continue to invest in partnerships with our world-class higher education institutions. The centrepiece of this is the new UNSW Canberra City campus, a major expansion in our city's higher education sector. We are also working with the University of Canberra, the Australian National University, the CIT and the Australian Catholic University in our whole Study in Canberra effort.

We are strengthening pathways into employment by backing startups and supporting a strong ACT public service and by growing our innovation ecosystem so that graduates can build careers here in Canberra.

On the housing side, we have a very clear plan to enable 30,000 new homes in our city, unlocking opportunities for first homebuyers. We are structuring land release, the new Built Form Housing and our tax policies to support first homebuyers.

We are positioning ourselves at the forefront of industries of the future, including

artificial intelligence, digital technology, cybersecurity and space industries, creating the sorts of high-skilled jobs that attract and retain young people in our city, whilst of course seeking to shape a highly liveable city with a strong social and cultural life.

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, what are the economic benefits of this approach?

MR BARR: This approach lifts productivity, it drives innovation and it strengthens key sectors like public administration, education and technology, all of which depend on a skilled and dynamic workforce. In turn, it supports a stronger and more diverse territory economy. Steady population growth supported by migration and the retention of young people also gives greater certainty for long-term investment in infrastructure, services and the broader economy.

Importantly, we seek to align with the commonwealth policy settings that are beginning to be outlined ahead of next week's federal budget that will strengthen the ACT economy and address intergenerational equity. Maintaining that strong and constructive partnership will support stronger delivery against our economic and population growth objectives.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, what are the social benefits of this approach?

MR BARR: Beyond the economic benefits, we seek social benefits from this approach to attract and retain young people. Our strong social and cultural foundation includes important factors such as our city's national cultural institutions, our natural surroundings and an award-winning food and hospitality scene across the broader Canberra region. What really builds on the strong economy and the job opportunities is giving people the confidence to invest and to stay here—to build lives here.

For young people and new residents it is about having the basics—like jobs, housing and safety—but also being part of a city with a lively social scene, a city that is inclusive and accepting of people from all different backgrounds, from all different parts of the world, different sexualities and religions. Canberra is one of the great multicultural successes of this nation and of the world. In a time when our national migration policy debate is shrinking to make Australia a smaller and less inclusive space, let Canberra be a beacon for multiculturalism, for inclusion and—importantly—for young people. That is our city's future. That is what we are striving for.

Schools—Meals in Schools program

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, the Meals in Schools program is designed to ensure that children in the program have a meal and to make sure that that meal is a nutritious one. It provides kids in five ACT public schools free breakfasts and lunches three days a week, because evidence shows that kids learn better on a full stomach. A menu recently published by an ACT public school contains K-Time Twist bars as a breakfast option; however, these are classified as junk food by Nutrition Australia. They are actually higher in sugar and more ultra-processed than baklava. Minister, why are children being offered these bars for breakfast under the Meals in Schools Program?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Rattenbury for his question and his interest in the Meals in Schools program, which is there to support children with healthy food options. I am aware of the issue with regard to that particular food item. I will take the question on notice as to whether it is still being provided as an option. Of course, a selection of meals is provided as an option to schools within a range of areas, making sure that they are in line with the traffic light system that our schools use to ensure that their meals and food options are as healthy and nutritious as possible and that options that are not are clearly identified under the “sometimes” food option. But I will take a bit more of that detail on notice, although I do understand that the menus that are provided do meet with the schools’ menu policies and guidelines. However, I have had the issue raised with regard to the K-Time breakfast bars by at least one family. I have taken that inquiry, and I will take the question on notice regarding the issue about other options within our menus for free meals in our schools.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, who is responsible for deciding on the nutritional content of the meals being offered in the Meals in Schools program?

MS BERRY: As I said, it meets with the menu policy and it is assessed by a dietician. So it does have an eye cast over it by people who are experts within this space. I can see if there is any more information to satisfy Mr Rattenbury on his question on whether or not they are being assessed appropriately, but I am advised that the menu is assessed and approved by a dietician.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, you might have to take this on notice: how much is the government currently spending to deliver K-Time bars to kids in the Meals in Schools program?

MS BERRY: I will take that on notice. The detail of the information may not be able to be broken down to the level of detail that Mr Braddock has been asking for today. I am happy to provide more information on the advice provided by the dietician on the menu. If I have that advice that satisfies members, I will bring that back to the Assembly for their information.

Macquarie—swimming pool

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. On 24 April, Access Canberra announced that it was not taking any further regulatory action against the owners of Big Splash and that it would not terminate the lease. The community are devastated and may have lost confidence that the government have done all they can to ensure compliance. What were the reasons that Access Canberra had for not terminating the lease?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Certainly, I acknowledge that Access Canberra, as the independent regulator, did make an announcement in relation to their decision in relation to the notice of intention to terminate the lease of Block 1, Section 53, Macquarie. They issued a media release to the community and to the media announcing their decision. They noted that following engagement with the operators and multiple site inspections conducted in April, Access Canberra considered the substantive actions taken by the owners, including the site clean-up and repair of the pool infrastructure, to reopen the site as an aquatic facility by 1 November 2026. They

noted that progress on the site to date supports that intention. They noted that it was important for the community that the operators have expressed their intention to continue operating the site as an aquatic facility, retaining the existing 50 metre pool and associated food amenities. They have also said that inspectors will remain actively engaged over coming months and intend to conduct regular site visits to ensure this progress continues. So that is the rationale they have put forward.

I understand that they have met with the Save the Big Splash group to talk through some of the reasons for their decisions and they have also committed to publish a longer version of the rationale for their decision in relation to this matter, which was not to terminate the Crown lease and to set aside the notice associated with potential lease termination. However, they also briefed me very soon after their decision that they still believe that this is a controlled activity, that they will continue to monitor compliance on the site and that they retain the right to take regulatory action if necessary.

MS CLAY: What is the timeframe for Access Canberra to publish those reasons for their decisions?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I am happy to come back on notice with some information about when they intend to publish that information. That is a commitment they gave to the Save the Big Splash group, to provide more information about that reasoning.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, has the ACT government considered a buyback of the site?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Now that Access Canberra has made their decision in relation to their regulatory action on the site, the government certainly has not ruled out any broader options available to us. But the government's view has always been that we want to see this aquatic facility open to the public as soon as possible and noting the decision by the independent regulator in relation to the lease and the commitment that the lessee has made to opening the 50 metre pool in November, we believe this is the quickest possible way to get the pool open.

I am also of the view that we should not be rewarding or encouraging bad behaviour by lessees, and as the government undertakes a review of regulatory powers available to Access Canberra under the Planning Act to be able to enforce lease conditions, we will certainly have that objective in mind.

Hospitals—staff uniforms

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health.

Minister, there has been much angst among Canberra's health workers in the last week or so, following communications that North Canberra Hospital and the Canberra Hospital were apparently embarking on a push to stop staff from wearing fun scrubs. CHS has in recent days attempted to retreat from that position, suggesting that this is confusion caused simply by the wording of several emails. Multiple individuals, including supervising staff from with CHS, have contacted my office to assure me that the very clear intent from management was to limit the wearing of fun scrubs across the

workforce.

Minister, do you accept that this is a bad call?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: We all love fun scrubs. I certainly accept that there was some unfortunate language in an email. I do not accept the way that Mr Parton has characterised this, however.

I have a copy of the email that went out to staff. The primary purpose of that email was in relation to the appropriate use of surgical scrubs—or theatre scrubs—reminding nurses and midwives that those scrubs are not to be worn outside the perioperative and procedural areas, and not across the general campus, for infection prevention and control.

The email did attach the existing *Nurses, Midwives and Assistants in Nursing – Dress, Uniform and Personal Appearance Policy*, which was finalised in 2022, I understand, in consultation with staff.

As part of the email it did say, “Fun scrubs are not part of the CHS uniform and as such are only permitted to be worn if there is an approved local agreement in place where you work.” That is a direct quote from the email. Many areas do have an approved local agreement in place for nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing to wear fun scrubs, and that should not have been an indication that those local approvals were going to change.

MR PARTON: Minister, can you confirm if CHS management emails to staff last week state, “Approved uniforms are provided at no cost and must be worn”?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am just looking through the email. I will have a look at that and come back, and take on that on notice at this point.

I think there was probably some confusion between the theatre scrubs issue and the general scrubs issue. Clearly, the email was not worded as well as it should have been, and there probably was no reason to include in the email a reference to fun scrubs in the first place.

We all make mistakes. I think this has been a fun issue to escalate through Reddit and Canberra Notice Board and their communities, but I also understand that for staff it was serious and people do take seriously when they think that changes are being made without any consultation. So, I do want to assure staff that is not the case.

The existing policy that was consulted on in 2022 does continue to be the policy. Canberra Health Services will review the policy. The current policy is due to expire in 2026 and be reviewed anyway, so it will be timely to do that.

MR CAIN: Minister, is it any wonder to you that Canberra Health Services is struggling to attract and retain staff?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I absolutely reject the premise of the question. Canberra Health Services is not struggling to attract and retain staff. Canberra Health Services

has recruited significant numbers of staff, and we are actually seeing a good level of retention as well. After the experience post-COVID which Canberra Health Services shared with other health services, there was a significant amount of movement where people went home to where they came from, in large part. So, I think that is a response to Mr Cain's question. *(Time expired.)*

Active travel—Garden City Cycleway

MR EMERSON: My question is for the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, on 7 April, the government issued a media release stating:

Construction of Stage 1D of the Garden City Cycleway has commenced on Cooyong Street in Braddon ...

On the same day, the Chief Minister posted on social media stating:

Works have started on stage 1D of the Garden City Cycleway on Cooyong Street in Braddon.

The *Our CBR* newsletter, published in April, stated:

Construction begins this month on the final section of Stage 1 of the Garden City Cycleway ...

I use the route multiple times per week and have been keeping my eyes peeled for the new works, but nothing appears to be happening. Minister, when will construction of stage 1D of the cycleway actually commence?

MS CHEYNE: Mr Emerson is right to ask this question, and I hope that my explanation will be sufficient. At the time the media release was approved, it was in early April or late March. When it was approved, we expected that construction would begin soon after Easter, so the media release was then scheduled to go out after Easter, accordingly. However, there were then some delays to construction commencing because of the impacts of fuel prices, and there needed to be some further engagement with the contractor. Ultimately, that information was still published while that further engagement was underway. So ultimately it was not correct, and I do take full responsibility for that, and I apologise for any confusion that that has generated within the community. Certainly, we should have picked up on that and adjusted our comms accordingly in the preceding period.

However, what I can say is that the construction contract is in place, and a start-up meeting was actually held today with the contractor, so works will commence as soon as the site approvals and the temporary transport traffic management plans are approved. So I do expect it to be imminent, and we will publish a clarification to that effect.

MR EMERSON: Minister, what processes are gone through on the day of a post to ensure that it is factually accurate?

MS CHEYNE: That extends beyond my direct responsibilities. So I am very happy to engage with our comms areas and to work through the timing of what is published

when, to make sure that something like this does not happen again and to make sure that, at the very least, we have got procedures in place so that by the time something is about to be published, or issued, it is as accurate and as up-to-date as possible.

Phillip—stormwater infrastructure

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. On 7 February this year, more than 500 residents of the Ivy apartments in Phillip were severely impacted when the stormwater drains flooded, inundating two basement levels and lift wells, disabling critical building systems and leaving many residents, including elderly and mobility-impaired people, effectively confined to their homes for up to four days. This flooding is expected to lead to higher insurance premiums and excesses for residents. The flooding occurred where Yarralumla Creek and Long Gully Creek join, and it was the site of the tragic loss of seven lives in 1971. I note this is also where the light rail stage 2B alignment is. Minister, will the government commit to installing an 80-metre wall along the western edge of government land to protect the building from floods?

MS CHEYNE: I am not sure that I can use question time to commit to anything, but I would note that Ms Carrick has a long interest in this area and, indeed, moved a motion in this place, which the government is required to report back on, regarding the re-naturalisation of the waterway, if that is possible, and any other stormwater upgrades. That is due later this year. I suspect that that will have, at least, an answer to that. But I cannot predict what that will say.

MS CARRICK: Minister, will the government agree to have the ACT Insurance Authority fully cover the building insurance claim under insurance subrogation provisions, so that residents are not financially penalised for flooding linked to government stormwater infrastructure?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that question on notice, noting that I do not have responsibility for ACTIA.

MR EMERSON: Minister, what actions has the government taken to ensure this building does not flood again?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that on notice.

ACT Ambulance Service—staffing

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. A brief to the Chief Officer of the ACT Ambulance Service in October states that staffing shortages have negatively impacted response times. Minister, when were you first advised that staffing shortages were impacting ACTAS response times?

DR PATERSON: I have not been advised of that.

MS MORRIS: Minister, why weren't the additional staff required to support the new roster fully funded in last year's budget?

DR PATERSON: In 2024, when the roster changed to the new roster position, the ACT government committed \$18 million over four years to invest in staffing for that roster. It was always known—because of the different shift profile moving from the previous roster to this one—that we would require further staffing. That investment was made over four years, a couple of years ago. In the last budget review process, there were eight full-time equivalent positions for clinical and enabling support for the Ambulance Service. We are currently going through a budgeting process, so this is a matter for cabinet consideration.

MR MILLIGAN: Is funding frontline responders a first order of business for government?

DR PATERSON: Absolutely. Funding our frontline emergency services, our schools and our health services are—absolutely—a priority for the ACT government.

Hybrid electric fire truck

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, in question time on 19 March you noted the work health and safety benefits of the hybrid electric fire truck. In the *Canberra Times* of 30 March, a firefighter and a United Firefighters Union spokesperson noted safety concerns about the EV fire truck, including unsafe seating arrangements, lack of airbags and excessive cabin noise interfering with communication between officers. Minister, have these concerns been resolved?

DR PATERSON: When that *Canberra Times* article came out, that was the first time that I or the ESA executive had heard those concerns, and we definitely encourage staff to report concerns that they might have. We are currently waiting to address the seatbelt concerns and are engaging with Rosenbauer on their electric fire truck in terms of getting this repaired as soon as possible. That has been the primary focus on where the negotiation has been and where the discussion has been in getting this truck back on the road.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, what are your legal obligations with regard to the work, health and safety of Canberra's firefighters?

DR PATERSON: We absolutely have an obligation to the work, health and safety of our firefighters and emergency services, and that is something that we take very seriously. That is why we would encourage the workforce, if they see problems, to report them, and report them immediately, so that they can be addressed.

MR MILLIGAN: Is the EV fire truck operating today?

DR PATERSON: No, it is not. It is in training.

National Disability Insurance Scheme—changes

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services. Minister, in the discussion following members' responses to your ministerial statement this morning, you said that you have made your position on the

announced changes to the NDIS, including the substantial cuts to the scheme, clear to the federal government. Minister, could you please advise us of the position you made to the federal government?

MS ORR: For clarification, the statement I made earlier was around the form of communicating the proposed changes on behalf of the commonwealth. That was a discussion following the National Press Club address, where I made it known that I did not think the approach the commonwealth was taking, in putting a lot of information without detail out, was helpful in answering the many questions of the community nor in allaying the anxiety of the community. That is what I was referring to earlier today.

MISS NUTTALL: Can you please advise us what supports are currently being made available to Canberrans affected by the government's cuts to the NDIS so that they are not left to fall through the gaps which are emerging from these changes?

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, I reject the premise of Miss Nuttall's question. The announced reforms, which have not commenced, would require supports to be in place right now. However, Mr Speaker, if you will indulge me to talk through some of the supports that are available to people with disability, just so they are on the record, there are a range of services across the ACT that people can link up to. These will go through a number of—usually not-for-profit—groups, advocacy groups and the like, and it will go to information, it will go to capacity building, it will go to initial supports for people and it will be looking at case management as well as advocacy.

In particular, going to the point of Miss Nuttall's question, if people have concerns around their current plans and changes that might be reflected through plan reassessments, I would recommend that they get in touch with the advocacy groups that the ACT government funds in order to provide individual advocacy on NDIS matters. Advocacy for Inclusion is a good place, and ADACAS is the other one that they can look to connect with, to have any supports and advocacy that they need around their current plan. That is separate to the changes that were announced by Minister Butler.

MS CLAY: Minister, have you asked the federal government to not cut 160,000 people from the NDIS?

MS ORR: The growth of the NDIS has been an ongoing discussion between all first ministers—the federal government, states and territories—and have been decisions of national cabinet.

Ms Clay: A point of order on relevance: the question was, "Have you asked?" I am not sure that was answered.

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, if you will indulge me, I am happy to add that I have not asked, as those decisions have been made by the first ministers. They have been made around the growth of the scheme and making sure that the scheme is sustainable into the future without the rapid growth that we are seeing here putting pressures on it now.

Illicit tobacco and vaping products—Operation Tempest

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services and

relates to the ministerial statement on Operation Tempest. The Canberra Liberals have been calling for action on illicit tobacco in the ACT for some time, and we welcome last month's operation. Could the minister explain if this operation was the initiative of the ACT government?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Castley for the question. Operation Tempest was a joint national operation initiated through the National Disruption Group. That group is led by the Australian Border Force, and the ACT was invited to join that group late last year. The National Disruption Group is effectively the coordinator of that week of disruption, and the ACT, since it joined the group, has been working with the commonwealth and New South Wales agencies to prepare for this activity.

Think of it as: there is a national framework, but then the ACT government led and delivered the local enforcement response through Access Canberra and supported by ACT Policing and the TGA, using ACT powers under ACT law.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, why has it taken the government this long to take real steps towards controlling the distribution and sale of illicit tobacco in the ACT?

MS CHEYNE: I reject the premise of that question. Work on this operation has been underway since late last year. Operations involving the commonwealth, New South Wales and ACT require some pretty detailed planning and collaboration. So, there has been a need for some proper intelligence development and information-sharing and collaboration. This becomes quite apparent because illicit tobacco enters at the border, which the Border Force is responsible for; it is a commonwealth government responsibility. Then when it enters the border, it is entering New South Wales. Then, almost certainly it is travelling through New South Wales before it arrives in the ACT. So you can see why there does need to be that joined-up approach.

At the same time, the ACT government has been clearly signalling enforcement and enforcement escalation. It was, I think, late last year that the Commissioner for Fair Trading wrote to all licensees and put them on notice that tobacco compliance was a priority for him for the 2025-26 financial year. Then there was further engagement this year with major commercial operators. So I do not agree that it has taken so long. I think that it reflects that this is a complex operation, and one that has proven successful. We will support ongoing enforcement.

MS BARRY: Is the minister aware of an increased organised crime presence in the ACT as a result of the delays in taking action on illicit tobacco?

DR PATERSON: I will take this one. I reject the premise of the question.

Ms Barry: There is no increase? In organised crime?

DR PATERSON: That there has been an increase. Yes. The briefing that I have last received on this states that there has been no increase, as has been seen in other jurisdictions, of organised crime and criminal activity. We have incredibly dedicated organised crime teams in ACT Policing, and our Criminal Asset Confiscation Team, which do fantastic work. Illicit tobacco falls under their remit. As of the last briefing that I have received, there has not been an increase in this activity in the ACT.

Fuel security

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, Canberra households continue to feel the impacts associated with the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, including through rising fuel prices and other everyday costs. Can you update the Assembly on how the ACT government is supporting Canberrans to travel across the city and limit the impact on their household budgets?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. The ACT government understands that many Canberra households are continuing to feel pressure from rising fuel prices and broader cost-of-living challenges, and that is why we have acted to provide practical relief. We have assisted the commonwealth to reduce the fuel excise through a contribution from the GST, reducing the fuel excise by 5.7 cents per litre, on top of the commonwealth reducing the excise by 26.3 cents a litre.

We have also provided targeted relief by halving monthly public transport fare caps until 30 June this year. This initiative delivers real cost-of-living support now, while also helping Canberrans to reduce reliance on higher cost, private vehicle travel during a period of global fuel pressures. For people who may use public transport less regularly, it provides an incentive to use public transport more often. More importantly, it provides certainty: no Canberrans will pay more than \$68.20 per month to use public transport, no matter how often or when they take buses or light rail.

Cheaper fares are only part of the picture. We are also improving public transport services across Canberra. From early April there was a new timetable that has been applied to services, particularly services crossing Commonwealth Avenue Bridge, and that has helped to address early-running buses, and congestion and reliability issues raised by the community. Further improvements will be made to the bus network and timetable from term 3 to ensure that capacity meets demand on some of our busiest corridors.

Together, these changes will boost capacity, improve reliability and reduce costs for frequent users—a balanced approach that supports households now and encourages more people to choose public transport amid ongoing global fuel pressures. The government's response is striking the right balance between cost relief today and remaining prepared to respond to the rapidly developing and uncertain situation that we face.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how much could regular commuters, students and families save each month under these reduced fare caps?

MR STEEL: All MyWay+ users will now reach the monthly cap after just 20 paid trips, and students will benefit even further, with school and tertiary students reaching free travel after only 15 paid trips. Once the cap is reached, all further bus and light rail travel for the remainder of the month is free, and that gives commuters and families certainty that their travel costs are contained to a clear monthly maximum, helping households budget with confidence while encouraging greater use of affordable public transport.

Regular commuters who use public transport to get to work each day could save up to \$68.20 a month in fares under these changes. And for full time university or TAFE students, by reducing the monthly cap down even further—so more than halved—to 15 trips, this will bring the maximum cost of public transport for the month down to \$25.65. For school students, the change will bring costs down to less than \$5 a week for each student, with a maximum of \$19.35 per month.

Passengers who are eligible for other MyWay+ concession fares will have the monthly cap reduced from 40 to 20 paid trips. A number of other cohorts may also be eligible for benefits, such as all-day free travel, or free travel during off-peak periods, with further information available on the Transport Canberra website.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how is the ACT government monitoring the impacts on Canberra households of the conflict, including through the consideration of further measures in our public transport system?

MR STEEL: Thank you, Ms Tough, for your supplementary. The government will continue to closely monitor global fuel markets, local supply conditions and the impact of cost-of-living pressures on Canberra households. And I note in recent minutes the decision by the RBA to increase the cash rate by 25 basis points, which will, of course, provide no satisfaction to any Canberra household, particularly those with a mortgage.

We have made clear that we are assessing the situation every week. Our focus is on making public transport more accessible, reliable and convenient, not making promises that could weaken the system over time. A reduced fare cap keeps public transport costs affordable and predictable while allowing us to keep investing in the things that actually drive mode shift onto public transport over the long term, which include more buses, improved services, more frequent services and new public transport infrastructure.

Earlier today I spoke on the ACT government's work in confirming the State Circle east alignment for light rail stage 2B. Introducing mass transit options is a clear part of our strategy to invest in public transport and drive that mode shift, which we have seen, of course, most successfully in stage 1 of light rail, whilst also supporting our ambitions to support a zero-emissions transport system, with cleaner, quieter and more comfortable bus and light rail services.

We are also strengthening Canberra's bus network, of course, with 106 electric buses already in daily service cutting emissions, and that has been an important part of the resilience of Canberra's public transport system during this time of increased diesel costs. We are already backing the transition by buying 30 more electric buses powered by 100 per cent, Australian-produced renewable electricity, making our transport system much more resilient over time as we continue the transition to 2040.

Light rail—stage 2B

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, this morning you described a number of light rail 2B updates—firstly, moving the Melbourne Avenue stop to the inner verge. Did the ACT government consider the pedestrian impacts of this change, notably, the need for pedestrians to walk further and cross more road pavement to reach that particular light rail stop? How was this considered against

the benefits to short-term construction impacts and the adjacent car parking, by contrast?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Of course, that would impact pedestrians on one side of the road, and not the other. Of course, people on the other side of the road will have much easier access to a light rail stop that is in the verge. Infrastructure Canberra has balanced feedback from the community, including nearby residents, in relation to the stop. There are a range of other factors that were taken into account, which I mentioned in my ministerial statement this morning, which go to constructability and deliverability of the project.

Importantly, what this inner running means is that, because we will have light rail just south of Sydney Avenue in the verge, light rail needs to go onto that side of the road, anyway, in order to cross Capital Circle, then move into the median strip of Adelaide Avenue. That transition has to be made, and it was, of course, included as one of the options within the draft EIS. The further technical work has now confirmed that that is the best solution to support the delivery of light rail and the transition of the light rail line into the median strip of Adelaide Avenue, to make sure it can then travel down to Woden.

Yes, pedestrian matters were considered, as well as a range of other factors, including constructability and delivery issues.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, did the ACT government receive any feedback about the proposed stop locations and their ability to serve the suburb of Curtin?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Certainly, one of the nine stops proposed is in Curtin, on Carruthers Street. It also serves the suburb of Hughes, and part of Deakin as well. Yes, that was a big part of the consultation on the draft EIS. In terms of the north Curtin residential area proposal, yes, we have received feedback from the community in relation to the opportunity for a future light rail stop there. That has also come up through the National Capital Authority's consultation in relation to the National Capital Plan amendment associated with the north Curtin residential area, which is currently out for consultation.

Infrastructure Canberra has been working closely with both the Suburban Land Agency and the City and Environment Directorate on future land use planning in the corridor, and we will be consulting, in a very short period of time, on the draft southern gateway planning and design framework, which will also be looking at the future opportunities to connect the north Curtin residential area with existing bus routes, particularly the rapid bus routes running on the Cotter Road currently, and the potential opportunity for a light rail stop there in future. I note that in that section of Yarra Glen Drive there is not currently any crossing infrastructure in place, as there is at some of the other stops that have been proposed as part of the EIS for stage 2B of light rail. That would need to be considered, and there will be the opportunity for further engagement with the community in relation to those matters.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, does the ACT government commit to the business case considering the final stop being in Mawson and not in the Woden town centre?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. The EIS has been developed for the route down to Woden. That decision was made, noting that the environmental matters in the other section down to Mawson are not as complex. It is one of the reasons why we split stage 2 into two parts, with 2A being completed first, because of that section not being as complex, from an environmental and heritage point of view.

We will consider that potential extension as part of a business case, down to Mawson. But for the purposes of the environmental approvals, that is the section between Commonwealth Park and the Woden town centre that is being sought at this point in time.

MyWay+—retail outlets

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, recent *Canberra Times* reporting has once again brought the illegal tobacco epidemic into the public arena and into some ministerial statements and questions this morning.

Despite numerous stores being raided and nearly 200 kilograms of illicit tobacco seized, dozens of stores allegedly selling illegal tobacco—well, quite clearly selling illegal tobacco!—remain open across Canberra.

Minister, my office has uncovered that there are at least half a dozen retailers suspected of trading illegal tobacco products that the government has entrusted with the sale of MyWay+ cards and recharges. What due diligence, if any, does the government do before a retailer can become a MyWay+ outlet?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I will take the question on notice, but I note that there are a range of different outlets that can sign up to sell MyWay+ cards to the community.

Mr Parton interjecting—

MR STEEL: Certainly, in the past, with the old MyWay system, it would not be unheard of to have a tobacconist selling a range of things including tobacco but also MyWay and transport cards.

There are a range of those retailers around. Of course, retailers need to comply with the law. I am sure that would be considered, but I will come back with some information to the Assembly.

MR PARTON: Minister, would the government reconsider its agreement with individual MyWay+ outlets if they were found to be selling illegal products?

MR STEEL: I will come back with some more information to the Assembly in relation to the current policy and guidelines, but I note that there are range of options that are now available that were never available before. With MyWay+ you do not have to go in to get a travel card; you can now pay with a debit or credit card or the other options available through MyWay+, rather than using a regular travel card. Those regular travel cards are still available, but that is not the only option available. So people do not have to go into one of the outlets that Mr Parton is asking about.

MR CAIN: Minister, given that these MyWay+ outlets suspected of selling illegal tobacco have operated for quite some time, is the government simply not interested in acting?

MR STEEL: No. The government is acting, but we are acting using a different regulatory framework to address the problem. That has been clearly reported on to the Assembly in the ministerial statement on Operation Tempest today.

Mr Barr: It has been a journey, Mr Speaker, but all further questions can now be placed on the notice paper.

MR SPEAKER: It is good to be back!