



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

**HANSARD**

Edited proof transcript

Thursday, 7 May 2026

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## **Ministerial arrangements**

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (2.00): Minister Orr, is away from question time today as she is en route to the Energy Ministers' meeting. So for question time today, Minister Stephen-Smith will take questions in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, disability, carers and community services portfolios. Minister Cheyne will take questions in climate change, environment, energy and water portfolios and Minister Pettersson in the seniors and veterans portfolios.

## **Questions without notice**

### **Canberra Hospital—Behavioural Assessment Unit—incident**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, you confirmed during question time on Tuesday that you had not spoken to any of the BAU siege victims. Yesterday morning on ABC Radio you stated that you usually like to let some time pass between these events and reaching out. Today, we have learned of another serious staff assault that occurred in April of last year at the Canberra Hospital with a patient being charged with occasioning actual bodily harm after strangling or attempting to strangle a nurse. Minister, given that a year has passed, have you reached out or spoken to the nurse who was assaulted and strangled while at work at a government-run hospital?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** No, I have not spoken individually to that individual about that incident. I do take advice also from the directorate in relation to these matters.

I would note for the benefit of the Assembly that in some cases staff very much value their privacy. They want to deal with these matters on their own terms and they receive support, as is appropriate, through workplace support, through occupational violence leave, through the occupational violence framework, through the employee assistance program and through their managers, including senior leaders in the hospital system.

I would take advice as to whether it is helpful for me to meet with people. I have been contacted by that individual now, subsequent to the media reporting, and that individual has requested a meeting and I have, of course, agreed to that.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, since my question to you on Tuesday, have you personally spoken to or visited any of the eight BAU siege victims?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** No, I have not, and the answer that I gave on radio yesterday stands. I will continue to take advice from the directorate, but the advice that I have received informally has been that those staff want to get on and do their work in this complex and challenging environment. The opposition's insistence on describing this as a siege, on using words like held hostage as if this individual, this very unwell individual, who the team were supporting had a motivation to harm them—the team understands this individual had no motivation to harm them. They were not under siege and they were not being held hostage. They were safe for an extended period of time. I recognise that what occurred was traumatic and difficult, but the advice that I have is that the team want to be able to get on with their job in the very difficult environment

in which they work every day with people who have complex, challenging behaviours. It is called the Behavioural Assessment Unit for a reason.

**MRS MORRIS:** Minister, do you accept responsibility for failing to provide a safe workplace for hospital staff?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I do not agree with the premise of Mrs Morris's question, Mr Speaker. Hospitals can be challenging environments and we know that occupational violence is increasing across our community in many workplaces, from retail to education, to health, to all frontline services. We have strong policies in place, but we know that those can always be improved and we learn lessons every time there is a serious incident like this, and the leadership works closely with staff.

One great example of that is the Towards a Safer Culture strategy, where the Health and Community Services Directorate, then Health Directorate, Canberra Health Services and our nursing union, the ANMF, worked closely together on a series of activities to improve the safety of the workplace for nurses and midwives. That has been a very effective strategy, in combination with consultation and close engagement with staff. The roll out of Safewards, for example, I have heard described as one of the most positive things for culture in our hospital and health service that the union has ever seen. So those are the steps that we take.

Unfortunately, our healthcare workers come into contact with people on some of the worst days of their lives, sometimes people who have little control over their own behaviour, either because of the psychological psychiatric distress that they are experiencing or because they are drug and alcohol affected. They also come into contact with family members and carers who are extremely distressed by what is occurring, and people do get heightened in those situations. There is a lot of work that goes into saying to people that is not acceptable, but that is the world in which we live.

### **Canberra Hospital—staff safety**

**MR PARTON:** Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, we have learnt today through *Canberra Times* reporting that ACT Policing confirmed another occupational violence assault where a nurse at Canberra Hospital was strangled by a patient in April 2025. The recent siege at Canberra Hospital is one edition of 128 staff-reported incidents in the BAU alone, since opening in August 2024. It is undeniable and clearly evident that this government is only interested in the suppression of information, attempts to control the narrative, and that staff safety is not a priority. Minister, why were staff, patients and the broader community not proactively informed that such severe assaults have occurred inside the hospital system?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I completely reject Mr Parton's assertion. As I said earlier, staff deserve privacy when something really distressing has happened to them, when they've been the subject of occupational violence that is really severe and significant.

There are not very many staff who work in the Behavioural Assessment Unit at any particular point in time. They get support. They get cared for. And these incidents are reported to policing appropriately.

In this instance, the alleged perpetrator of the assault was charged. That subsequently did not proceed to court, but the matter was taken very, very seriously.

But I absolutely reject all of Mr Parton's assertions in his question about the way that this government responds to occupational violence. We take these matters incredibly seriously. I meet with unions and staff regularly about their work environment; and with leadership, to discuss what is being done in this space and in the broader space of supporting our incredible healthcare workforce—who work with some with people on some of the most challenging and difficult days of their lives; who work with people who have incredible complexity in their lives, who are often experiencing significant trauma and psychological or even psychiatric distress.

These are hard jobs. We thank the staff that do them, and we regularly do that in this place, and we work hard to keep them safe.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, is the level of violence and the frequency of violent incidents at Canberra Hospital acceptable to you? And is the government considering introducing occupational violence leave in the next enterprise agreement?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** No, it is not acceptable. That is why we have a range of strategies in place to seek to reduce occupational violence, like the Safewards program that I spoke about. That, elsewhere, was originally a program for mental health units. Not only has it been rolled out across mental health for Canberra Health Services but in a range of wards, and entirely across University of Canberra Hospital. That to my understanding is the only hospital that is entirely a Safewards hospital.

There are a range of other matters measures that we take as well, including a public campaign about reducing occupational violence and that aggression is not acceptable.

In relation to occupational violence leave, Canberra Health Services has a policy around occupational violence leave. I mentioned it earlier. It is something that is available to people. It is also the case, as I alluded to earlier, that not everybody is going to want to take leave after an experience of occupational violence. So, it is not mandatory. It is part of the suite of responses that are available to support people who have experienced occupational violence in the workplace.

**MRS MORRIS:** Minister, if it is so unacceptable to you, and if you have implemented prevention measures, then why do we continue to see so many healthcare workers face violence on the frontline at Canberra Hospital?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I think I have already answered Mrs Morris's question in terms of the working environment that our healthcare workers work in. I have said, multiple times so far today, that healthcare workers work with people at some of the most difficult days that they will ever experience. They work with consumers who have incredible complexity in their lives. They work with consumers who are in acute psychiatric distress, and they work with consumers who are affected by alcohol or other drugs that impact their capacity for behaviour control. All of these things are unavoidable when you deliver a health service.

What we can do is support our staff with training to de-escalate situations and to keep

themselves safe. On the incident on 22 April, our staff did exactly the right thing. They followed their training and they kept themselves safe. What we can do is ensure that we have appropriate code responses and security in place. What we can do is learn from every example of occupational violence, and understand whether it could have been avoided, and put measures in place to do that. What we can do is have community campaigns and local campaigns within our health facilities making it clear that aggression and violence are not acceptable—and we do that. What we can do is learn from evidence and implement policies like Safewards that reduce the risk of occupational violence; build positive relationships between staff and patients and carers; and reduce the need for restraint or restrictive practises while also reducing the impact of occupational violence on our staff.

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

**MISS NUTTALL:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, earlier today it was announced that the Community and Public Sector Union’s protected action ballot was successful, with over 95 per cent of CPSU members, on the admin and health agreements, voting “yes” to take industrial action in the face of your below-inflation pay offer. In fact, some of them join us in the chamber right now. Chief Minister, is a better offer being considered by cabinet?

**MR BARR:** I thank Miss Nuttall for the question. She has been around this place long enough to know that cabinet deliberations are not discussed in question time. Of course, the government will continue to engage with the CPSU and other unions as we seek to reach an agreement. Bargaining is continuing. The Minister for the Public Service, Minister Stephen-Smith, together with officials, is working towards an outcome. We have a budget next month, and we will continue to engage constructively.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Chief Minister, recognising that NTEU members at the University of Canberra also went on strike this week, will the government look at supporting a revised offer which goes to their concerns of pay and workloads?

**MR BARR:** Again, I think Miss Nuttall is aware that the ACT government does not fund the University of Canberra, and we do not have responsibility for their industrial relations arrangements. They operate, obviously, under federal arrangements, and the university is legally a separate entity from the ACT government. So just to be clear, the ACT government does not fund pay rises for staff at the University of Canberra.

I have spoken with the Vice Chancellor in relation to industrial matters on the campus, as well as governance matters that relate to the University of Canberra, and I know, given his long experience in industrial relations, he intends, again, to approach bargaining in good faith.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Chief Minister, does the ACT government share the position, which you yourself have previously put, that pay rises should at least match CPI?

**MR BARR:** Certainly, we endeavour, through the life of an agreement to achieve those outcomes. We also look to achieve productivity improvements, and we look forward, of course, to extending a range of other benefits to our workforce.

We are in a volatile time at the moment, and there will be a need to make some forecasts about what inflation will look like over the next 12 months and beyond. We certainly know the Reserve Bank is taking quite considerable action to seek to bring inflation back within the two to three per cent band, but we also need to be conscious of the government's own budget and fiscal position, and the reality that any extra money that we need to find will come from ACT taxpayers. There is no magic pot of money sitting out there. If there were, we would access it. There is not. So we need to put forward an offer that addresses, as best we can, the range of claims that are made but that also needs to be affordable for the territory and territory taxpayers.

### **Housing ACT staff—enterprise bargaining**

**MR EMERSON:** My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. The CPSU has just announced that Housing ACT staff, some of whom are in the gallery today, will strike next week. The ACT Ombudsman recently found that Housing ACT is failing its legal obligations as a landlord in relation to repairs and maintenance. One of the tenants who features in the Ombudsman's report has told my office that her repairs are still outstanding. Meanwhile, there are 3½ thousand approved applicants on our public housing waitlist, critical repairs and maintenance are not occurring, thousands of people are waiting for a home, and staff feel undervalued to the point that they are going on strike. Minister, why is Housing ACT so chronically under-resourced?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mr Emerson for his question and his interest in housing in the ACT and services provided by Housing ACT staff, who do an incredible job under some very complex and challenging circumstances, supporting people in the ACT into homes across our city, in every suburb. I understand the pressure that Housing ACT staff are under, and I hope to work with them to continue to support not only their work, but also the work that the ACT government does to make sure that people are getting into homes across the city.

It is a significant job. I have not shied away from the fact that we need to build more homes. That is clearly the case. No-one can deny it. But we are seeing increased funding and partnerships across the territory, including partnerships with the federal government, that are providing more opportunities to build more new homes that meet the needs of Canberrans. I commit to continuing to do that work.

**MR EMERSON:** Minister, does the government's pay offer for Housing ACT staff, which has led to a stalemate in negotiations, reflect a broader, ongoing de-prioritisation and devaluation of the work of Housing ACT?

**MS BERRY:** Absolutely not. I absolutely reject the premise of the question that the ACT government thinks that the work of Housing ACT staff is not vital. I value and respect the work that they do every day. I am a regular visitor at Housing ACT and engage very closely with the staff out there about their challenges. I continue to do that.

The government will continue its negotiations through the bargaining process. Of course, it was not something that any of us wanted to see—that action has been taken today, and members of the public service and Housing ACT have decided that they will take action. I am probably the least likely person to object to anybody taking industrial

action. I understand the purpose of that. I will continue to work, in my capacity, in good faith with Housing ACT staff, and any other staff that I am directly responsible for, as well as across the ACT government, as all of us will, to ensure that we get the best possible outcome that we can, particularly under the circumstances that the government has, within the budget arrangements that the Chief Minister has referred to.

We will continue those negotiations. I hope that the members that are here today will know that we are speaking truthfully and seriously, and that we do want to work with the public service to make sure that we can support them and that they know that we respect and value their work.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, why does the government expect Housing ACT staff, who deliver critical services for vulnerable Canberrans, to accept a 1.6 per cent pay cut in real terms during a cost-of-living crisis?

**MS BERRY:** Negotiations are continuing. I ask Miss Nuttall to understand that we are continuing those negotiations with the public service. The Minister for the Public Service is sitting here right now, and she is committed to doing that work, so that we can get the best possible outcome that we can. We understand the cost-of-living crisis that people are experiencing, and the important, and often—unfortunately—unseen and undervalued work that Housing ACT staff do every day. It is done by people who are perhaps in this place today, and across the community. It is certainly not something that I have shied away from. I look forward to continuing those discussions with them. I would be very happy to meet with them, any time after today, following this announcement—

**Mr Parton:** I thought it was a branch meeting in here.

**MS BERRY:** It looks like it. I am very happy to meet with them, and I am sure any of my colleagues would as well.

### **Teachers—enterprise bargaining**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, ACT government school educators have announced industrial action, citing months of delays and a failure by your directorate to meaningfully address key issues in enterprise bargaining. Minister, what action are you taking to resolve this dispute before it escalates further and disrupts staff, students and families?

**MS BERRY:** Thank you, Ms Lee, for your question. I think it is refreshing to have support from the Canberra Liberals and others in this place for the public service and the negotiations around their pay and conditions. It is not the usual course that we on this side of the table would be facing questions and support for unions and their actions by those opposite and others in the chamber. So it is refreshing and we thank you for your support for their work.

I have been meeting with the education union on a regular basis. My most recent meeting was on Friday, and my office has been in communication with them daily this week. I have been meeting with the Education Directorate. I have put my expectations to the Education Directorate that they meet more frequently and that the timelines and

expectations that the AEU wants to see through the negotiations occurs throughout those meetings.

So I am determined to make sure that there is a good outcome and that the Education Union and their members see that I am taking these negotiations seriously. I am not the employer; the Education Directorate is. But we are all working closely to try and resolve the issues that the Education Union has raised.

**MS LEE:** Minister, what assurance can you give educators, parents and students that your government is treating this dispute with the urgency that it requires ahead of the planned stop work action on 22 May?

**MS BERRY:** Well, I already have. I have described the meetings that I have had to date. I have said to the education union officials that I am willing to meet with them at any time for any length of time to go through the issues that they have raised and to get some clarity around a way forward and the timelines that they are expecting so that they can inform their members. I made sure that that information was provided to them so that they could feed that back to their council meeting last night.

I am certainly doing everything I can to progress the negotiations and get them on track. I understand the frustrations of the Education Union and their members and that it has led to industrial action. I would note this is the first time as education minister that education members have taken industrial action. So whilst I am personally disappointed that, unfortunately, we are in this situation, I am absolutely 100 per cent committed to seeing a way through this. I will continue to work with the union to get a positive outcome where I can.

**MS BARRY:** Minister, do you retain confidence in your directorate's handling of the bargaining process?

**MS BERRY:** Yes, I do.

### **Teachers—enterprise bargaining**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Minister, on ABC radio this morning, the President of the ACT Australian Education Union said that your directorate failed to proceed with the next expected bargaining meeting, which had been scheduled as part of the conciliation process, and used this as an example of the ongoing frustration that they are experiencing. Your comments on radio this morning after seemed to contradict this statement when you said, "Look, there was a meeting yesterday with the Education Union and the Education Directorate." However, our understanding is that that meeting was in relation to school assistants, not teachers. Minister, is it acceptable that your directorate did not proceed with the teachers' bargaining meeting that was scheduled following conciliation?

**MS BERRY:** Again, I am super excited to have the opposition and Ms Lee focused on enterprise bargaining and get good outcomes for public school teachers and staff in the ACT. I understand that there was a meeting with the Education Union and it was with regard to other staff. I have spoken with the Education Directorate, and they are clear on my expectations on the frequency of and improved clarity on the meetings that they

hold with the Education Union. I have committed to that publicly this morning and now and to the union and their members. That is the focus that I will be having over the next little while to get an agreement that leads to a positive outcome for the Education Union and education staff at all our public schools, and I will continue to do that work.

**MS LEE:** Minister, when is the next meeting either between yourself or your directorate and the Education Union, given that you have confirmed that that is to take place?

**MS BERRY:** I do not have a meeting with the Education Union at this time; however, I will meet at any time, on their request. I will request it of them as well. I am happy to meet with them at any time. I understand that the Education Directorate will also be organising meetings for bargaining with the union as well.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, what action are you taking to ensure staff, students and families are not disrupted by further industrial action?

**MS BERRY:** Again, I have said and put my commitments forward about the meetings that I will hold with the Education Union and the expectations I have on the directorate. Unfortunately, there will be some disruptions experienced within our public school system because the Education Union has made the decision and voted to take industrial action. They are looking at staging that action. The first part of the action will include not writing comments on reports and then a stop work meeting later this month. I am hoping that that does not escalate and that we can get to a good place. But, at the end of the day, the purpose for unions to vote and take industrial action is to make sure that their agenda is very clearly understood by their employer—in this case, the Education Directorate. I am not suggesting that they should not do that, but I am doing everything that I can to get the negotiations on track, and I am hopeful that I will be successful in that.

### **Housing developments—administrative appeals**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the minister for housing. Minister, in a recent *City News* article on a public housing development in Yarralumla, you urged people to be more accepting of public housing projects. That article seems to blame delays in construction on the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal, but the development application was submitted in August 2024, approved in November 2024 and was appealed and resolved by ACAT in March 2025. Before that process, the site sat empty for four years before the DA was lodged. After that process, the site has sat vacant for 13 months since ACAT resolved the appeal. Why did that site sit vacant for over five years outside any DA or appeals process?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Ms Clay for the question. I want to note that the comment that she is reflecting on in the article was with reference to a different housing project in Curtin where there is a petition, currently being sponsored by a member in this place, to stop the project for affordable housing in Curtin from going ahead. So it was in reference to that particular project that I was commenting on in that particular article, but it is certainly a message that I have called on our community to share some of their green space to ensure that we can have housing for the people who need it most.

With regard to the site in Yarralumla, the site was still occupied by at least one tenant until June 2022. During that time an architect was engaged—before that time in June 2021—to start design works in preparation for the development. During design there were a number of complex issues that were understood on the site, including the presence of regulated trees and public access easements which run through the site. So there were some complications and complexities with the site that needed to be worked through. This is a \$19 million project. It will completely transform a site that was previously built in the 1950s with 12 homes. It will move to 30 new homes across three buildings—18 one-bedroom units, 10 two-bedroom townhouses and two three-bedroom units.

This project is not merely one home on a site. It is quite a significant project. It is no small feat and I think that Canberrans will expect that the government takes the time to do the work and get the project right. I was happy when I went down to the site for the announcement to see and hear that there were some very large trees that were going to be protected through the build.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, how many public housing DAs has Housing ACT submitted since our December 2025 changes to allow public homes to be Territory Priority Projects?

**MS BERRY:** Well, under the TPP rules, public housing developments undertaken by Housing ACT are automatically considered a TPP, except for dwellings that were delivered through the Growing and Renewing Public Housing program. This was the program that the Greens insisted would be ineligible for the TPP process status. The government has focused on delivering the 230 that are left on the Growing and Renewing Public Housing program by mid-next year. This is why no TPP DAs for public housing have yet been submitted, because we are continuing to complete and finalise the current Growing and Renewing Public Housing program. However, Canberrans can expect to see TPP public housing coming through the pipeline.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, why does your government keep blaming delays on regulators and the community when the lengthiest delays are caused by your own agencies?

**MS BERRY:** Well, that is not true, Mr Speaker.

### **Housing—new homes**

**MS TOUGH:** My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. Minister, a couple of weeks ago you announced a partnership with the commonwealth government that will support the delivery of thousands of new homes around Canberra. What will this program involve?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Ms Tough for her question. The commonwealth and ACT governments have teamed up to deliver another fantastic housing initiative, with \$250 million in support from the commonwealth to deliver 4,900 new homes right across the territory. 1,700 of these homes will be for first home buyers. This carve-out of 1,700 homes is especially for first home buyers and will make a real difference to Canberrans who have been priced out of the market.

The commonwealth funding comprises \$200 million in concessional loans and \$50 million in grant funding. It is the most significant amount of funding that we have seen from a federal government in decades, I believe. Certainly, in my time in this place, I have not seen the level of funding that is being contributed to housing in the ACT. I look forward to making sure it goes to building more homes.

**MS TOUGH:** Minister, where will these new homes be located?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. The 4,900 homes, which includes the 1,700 for the first home buyers, will be spread all across the city.

The funding will be used to support infrastructure work such as water, sewerage, storm water and road infrastructure to unlock land for new residential development. A lot of these projects will be on the south side, which includes areas like Kingston, Weston Creek and the Molonglo valley. There are also some really exciting projects in Belconnen.

The ACT government is continuing to work with the community housing sector's ability to deliver these homes, and we do not want to put that at risk. There are some challenges that we are facing, like the petition that I referred to earlier which is championing a protest against Marymead CatholicCare's 54-dwelling affordable housing development in Curtin.

Now, all of us know that we are in a housing crisis all across the spectrum, but particularly for those people who need support in housing. In social housing, and affordable and community housing, we simply must build more homes. These homes are for people who really need it; people who need somewhere stable and affordable to live; people who just do not have the same kinds of chances or opportunities as the rest of us. And I implore Canberrans, as Ms Clay has referred to in the article, and I say it again today, to think about the kind of world that they want to live in before jumping on these kinds of bandwagons which can delay building more homes in our suburbs.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Minister when can Canberrans expect the new homes for first-time buyers to hit the market?

**MS BERRY:** 1700 homes for first home buyers will be delivered by 2034.

Of course, we would love to see some of those delivered earlier but, as the Assembly knows, the ACT government has a lot of housing projects in the pipeline for coming years. That includes 324 social housing homes through the Growing and Renewing program; the Social Housing Accelerator; the Housing Australia Future Fund Round 2; and 800 affordable housing homes through the \$100 million Affordable Housing Project Fund. Mr Speaker, we are building homes.

### **Health services—insourcing**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, I ask: what specific public health services and contracts have been assessed for insourcing under the ACT Insourcing Framework to date, and will the ACT government publish a forward

schedule of contracts to be assessed for insourcing?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** We have a public commitment to insourcing our cleaning workforce, so there is work currently underway that was funded in the last budget to undertake that work to prepare for insourcing the cleaning workforce.

Other decisions about insourcing around, for example, some elective surgery that can now be undertaken at Canberra Hospital would not be the subject of the type of process that Mr Parton refers to. Other things have been insourced through an agreement with the provider—for example, some dialysis services that were previously provided by a third party in our community health centres are now provided by CHS.

I will take the detail of the question on notice, but we are very proud of our record in providing secure jobs for public servants where it is the most appropriate way to deliver those services.

**MR PARTON:** You may want to take this on notice as well. In regard to services within the ACT Health Directorate and Canberra Health Services that are currently under consideration for insourcing, can you provide me with some indicative timeframes for those?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** In relation to cleaning services at Canberra Hospital, which is the only one that comes to mind in terms of clear timeframes, we indicated in the 2025-26 budget, when we allocated that funding, that we were aiming to insource cleaning services for Canberra Hospital and the rest of CHS, other than North Canberra Hospital and Clare Holland House, as of, I think, August this year, and to progress to North Canberra Hospital and Clare Holland House in the second half of 2027.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, what involvement have third-party stakeholders had in the assessment and review of contracts and services identified for insourcing

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** There is an insourcing taskforce, which does not sit in my portfolio; that is a whole of government mechanism. The United Workers Union, as the representative of the cleaners and food services staff across Canberra Health Services has been involved in conversations about how that process is managed, and, of course, Canberra Health Services has also been discussing that with the contractors.

### **Buses—late-night services**

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, on Saturday, 25 April, regular bus services concluded in the early evening, despite the abundance of night-life and activity in Civic, with the last buses departing Civic at around 9.30 pm. Was this early stopping of services because it was gazetted as a public holiday?

**MR STEEL:** I understand that that is the case. I am happy to take that on notice and come back with some further information.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, did no-one in your office or Transport Canberra consider that, in spite of it being a public holiday, this was a Saturday, with considerable night-life; hence late-night bus services might be suitable?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. Certainly, what was taken into consideration was that it was a public holiday for employees of Transport Canberra, just as it would have been for every other person in Canberra. That had to be taken into account, in terms of running a public holiday bus network, which is what we do on public holidays during each stage of the year.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, what is the damage done to the night-time economy when bus services stop at 9.30 pm?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question. It means that people in Canberra who are looking to go out at night beyond that period of time need to arrange for alternative modes of travel that may be available to them, whether it is rideshare, taxis or active travel, or whether they are looking to car pool or use a designated driver, or not drink themselves. There are a range of different options for people who want to access our city. Of course, I also welcome the recent announcement about the e-mobility shared scheme which has been established in the ACT. It provides another option for people to get around Canberra.

### **Phillip—swimming pool**

**MS CARRICK:** My question is to the minister for planning and it is about the approval of the development application for the Geocon towers on the Phillip pool and ice skating rink site. The decision that approved the first two of five towers includes a recommendation that careful consideration be given to the advisory notes prior to commencing work.

The advisory notes include a statement from the Climate Change and Energy division of the ACT government which states that the proposed location of the central plaza and design of surrounding buildings, including those in the DA that was approved, are likely to have significant detrimental impact on solar access and microclimate conditions and hence usability of the central plaza.

It also states that deep basements will limit the degree to which the central plaza's deep soil zone will enhance living infrastructure and support healthy tree growth. Minister, why was the DA approved with a design that is likely to have significant detrimental impacts on solar access and microclimate conditions and hence usability of the central plaza?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question. As she is aware, we have an independent planning assessment system here in the ACT. I understand that development application was assessed under the old Planning and Land Development Act 2007. I will seek some further information from the Territory Planning Authority in relation to that matter and come back to the Assembly.

**MS CARRICK:** Minister, why was the DA approved with a design that is not likely to support deep soil zones to support healthy tree growth?

**MR STEEL:** Again, I will come back to the Assembly on that matter.

**MR EMERSON:** You may need to take this on notice too. Minister, how can this lack of solar access and deep soil zones be considered a good outcome for the community? Given that, how can we trust the assessment of DAs?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. Noting that the development application was made under the old system, I will take that on notice. But I also will note that we have implemented a new planning system in the ACT. That has included a range of different new features which are aimed at building a more sustainable city. The *Housing Design Guide*, the *Urban Design Guide*, and hopefully a new missing middle design guide will provide greater guidance, particularly around the implementation of sustainable measures that can be undertaken in projects throughout the ACT, including providing more canopy cover and greater guidance around deep soil zones and planting.

We have also introduced the Urban Forest Act 2023 which also, of course, encourages the protection and planting of trees in the ACT, particularly the protection of trees in areas where there are not huge numbers of them, like Woden town centre, for example, where we do want to see more canopy and where the government has been making very significant investments in increasing canopy cover through the CIT Woden campus, particularly the establishment of the western plaza and the northern plaza which is currently under construction to completely finalise that project.

In an area that was a sea of surface car parks that had hardly any trees and was an urban heat island, there is the opportunity to see more trees planted as part of future development on those urban heat island car parks. And that is certainly the intention of the new planning system and that will be assessed under the new planning system with responses made against those design guides in the future.

### **Planning—Tharwa Village**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the minister for planning. Minister, back in 2018, your government released its Tharwa Village Plan to define what is important about Tharwa Village and provide a framework to guide future development. This plan sets out how the ACT government will continue to support the village, and surrounds through things like capital works programs and associated government service delivery. Minister, how many actions, including capital works programs, were outlined in that plan and how many have been delivered?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question in relation to the 2018 Tharwa Village Plan, which forms part of the ACT's broader planning framework. Key elements of the plan were implemented through changes to the Territory Plan, including updates to the Tharwa precinct map and code and removal of the public land overlay through plan variation 359, approved in February 2019 following public consultation. These changes embed the strategic planning outcomes of the plan and continue to guide future development and land use in Tharwa.

Since then, work has progressed across a range of areas identified in or consistent with the plan, including ongoing maintenance of public spaces, such as the Tharwa bridge, recreation area and surrounding corridor, targeted weed management alongside broader river corridor programs, and regular servicing of public amenities. A number of matters

raised by the community, particularly water supply for drinking and firefighting and some local infrastructure upgrades, are still ongoing. Upgrades like those are complex, longstanding issues involving multiple different ACT government agencies and require further coordinated whole-of-government responses.

The ACT government will continue to engage with the Tharwa community as work progresses. Implementation of individual projects and infrastructure are, of course, subject to budget consideration and processes.

**MR PARTON:** How much money did the government make from the sale of the five vacant RZ1 blocks—the only thing that actually has been genuinely fulfilled from the Tharwa Village Plan?

**MR STEEL:** I reject the premise of the question, given the comprehensive answer that I just provided, which says quite a lot to the contrary. I am happy to come back on notice in relation to those sales. But I do note that I also regularly report on direct land sales.

**MRS MORRIS:** Minister, how can the people of Tharwa or, indeed, any part of Canberra believe any of the promises you make, given your government's appalling track record?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question and reject the premise of the question. When we undertake planning frameworks, those are typically updated through our planning system, and that is what we have done through changes to the Territory Plan in Tharwa and the range of actions that I outlined in the answer to the first question. So we have undertaken those planning actions out of what was a planning framework.

### **Yarralumla Primary School—language programs**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Minister, in correspondence from the Education Directorate to Yarralumla Primary School parents earlier this month, it states that 90 minutes of English and 60 minutes of maths education must be delivered daily in English. The correspondence goes on to say that these requirements apply across ACT public schools. Minister, given this advice from your directorate, will the bilingual programs at Telopea Park Primary School and Mawson Primary School also be affected?

**MS BERRY:** I am not aware that they run a similar program or the same way that the Yarralumla Primary School does; however, I will take that part of the question on notice. However, as members in the Assembly will know, in 2026, the Education Directorate's new learning and teaching policy now requires schools to deliver 90 minutes of English curriculum and 60 minutes of mathematics curriculum, and all students now receive daily English literacy instruction—Mr Hanson, one of your legacy projects. They will continue to participate in the Italian language learning in other areas of the curriculum.

Now, that is not to say that the school is completely cutting off families from engaging about future opportunities, and I know the principal has been engaging with the families and is welcoming those ongoing consultation opportunities. I know that the consultation

that is happening throughout 2026 will continue to consider access to high-quality teaching and learning both in English and in Italian. But I will take on notice the first part of that question, about the other schools and whether they would be impacted the same, and bring that back to the Assembly.

**MS LEE:** Minister, given that you have just talked about continuing consultation with the families, why was it not undertaken before these changes came into place at Yarralumla Primary School?

**MS BERRY:** Well, it was. There was consultation.

*Ms Lee interjecting—*

**MS BERRY:** There was consultation, and I have described the new program and curriculum work that is happening across our system to ensure a consistent approach across all our schools, which is what our community has been calling for. Part of that is about making sure that when our curriculum on English literacy and mathematics is implemented, it is implemented in a way that is consistent and understood by families across all of our school system. So there has been consultation specifically on that, and I know that the Yarralumla Primary School has also communicated with their school community.

I know that the consultations began in 2025, in conversations with the board at the Yarralumla Primary School, and I know that they will continue. I understand that there are some families who are disappointed with the outcome so far, but I encourage them to continue to work with the school principal on the program going forward and to continue to engage about how Italian language and partnerships can continue to occur at Yarralumla Primary School.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, can you guarantee parents that Yarralumla Primary School will remain a bilingual school?

**MS BERRY:** Well, as I said, that is the intention. I know that the Yarralumla Primary School principal will continue to engage with staff, the school board and community to ensure that the bilingual model remains. It might change from what families have been used to, but to make sure it is fit for purpose and responsive to the needs of all children, including making sure we deliver on the programs we have committed to with regard to English literacy instruction.

### **Emissions—low-carbon concrete**

**MR SPEAKER:** Your last question, Mr Rattenbury?

**MR RATTENBURY:** My question is to Minister Steel as the minister for sustainable development. Minister, the ACT government's *Low carbon concrete policy* aims to reduce embodied carbon in construction by mandating the use of low-carbon concrete in government projects. Implementation began in January 2025. We have now also seen Austroads release a detailed study on the barriers and opportunities for adopting low-carbon concrete in municipal road infrastructure. Can you provide an update to the Assembly about the progress on the use of low-carbon concrete in the ACT?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Mr Rattenbury for his question, and I want to acknowledge his work and advocacy, particularly in relation to sustainability. The ACT government's *Low carbon concrete policy* encourages the use of low-carbon concrete where fit for purpose, and low-carbon concrete is currently being utilised in a variety of different applications across the ACT. As reported by the other minister, in 2024-2025 in their report under the Climate Change Act, low-carbon concrete was successfully used in a range of projects at different scales, including the Molonglo River Bridge, North Wright Sustainable Precinct, public housing and the raising of London Circuit. Roads ACT has now used low-carbon concrete in the delivery of concrete footpath maintenance works across the ACT.

During the current phase of the *Low carbon concrete policy*, as more information and understanding is developed, the use of low-carbon concrete is not required. However, the policy requires documentation and data collection to help understand where low-carbon concrete is used or not used. Data from the first phase will be evaluated later this year to inform the evolution of the policy.

Phase 2 of this policy will consider the introduction of embodied carbon limits on concrete. The infrastructure planning teams of the City and Environment Directorate undertook a series of consultation workshops with industry on new sustainable concrete specifications. This work was undertaken in collaboration with Austroads, other jurisdictions and with subject matter experts that were involved the Austroads study referenced in the question.

The ACT's sustainable concrete specifications were published in August 2025 and align with the recommendations of the Austroads study. This work aims to transition the industry to the use of low-carbon concrete and the incorporation of recycled materials in concrete as business-as-usual practice in the ACT.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, what barriers to the adoption of low-carbon concrete are most significant for ACT government construction projects, and by extension its demonstration as a viable construction material to the broader industry and sector?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Mr Rattenbury for another question cementing his legacy in sustainability and sustainable building! Thank you, Minister Cheyne, for that one!

Low-carbon concrete has proven to be a viable construction material within the ACT and is readily available from many suppliers. In many applications it is cost competitive, and it also comes standard, particularly through Ordinary Portland Cement concrete.

Some barriers remain to the wider use of low-carbon concrete. Industry understanding and experience in managing the supply, delivery and pouring of low-carbon concrete in a cold climate is one of those. So is experience and understanding of low-carbon concrete specifications and data, including the provision of environmental product declarations. Higher costs can also be an issue in lower embodied carbon concrete specifications.

The ACT government's leadership in this area is addressing these barriers and helping

to build industry capacity, maturity and competitiveness in the market.

**MS CLAY:** Is the government mandating the use of low-carbon concrete in current construction projects including light rail stage 2A, the Monaro Highway upgrade, and the Molonglo River Bridge?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Clay for her question. The ACT government has taken steps to use low-carbon concrete on projects such as raising London Circuit and light rail stage 2A including, for the latter, mandating targets to achieve a reduction in use of Portland Cement in concrete.

Low-carbon concrete requirements are being progressively embedded into procurement processes, including forthcoming projects such as the new FOGO facility. These requirements are supporting industry transition by supporting clear signals to the market whilst maintaining a strong focus on performance, durability and value for money.

Major construction contracts for both the Molonglo River Bridge and Monaro Highway upgrade package 1B were executed in 2023, prior to the implementation of the *Low carbon concrete policy* in 2025. Accordingly, its use has not been mandated on those already-executed contracts. Notwithstanding that, the Molonglo River Bridge has actually now utilised low-carbon concrete mixes for some applications, where it is fit for purpose and meets specification requirements. That has also included the use of 2,400 cubic metres of low-carbon concrete in bridge structural elements on the project, including piers, slabs, bridge decks and walls.

### **Emergency Services Agency—Volunteer Charter**

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, can you update the Assembly on the new ESA Volunteer Charter that you recently signed and implemented?

**DR PATERSON:** I would like to thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for this excellent question. I was delighted, on 31 March, to sign the ESA Volunteer Charter at our Mitchell facility, alongside the ESA Commissioner, the ACT Volunteer Brigades Association, the ACT State Emergency Service Volunteers Association, the ACT Mapping and Planning Support Group, the ACT Community Fire Unit Consultative Committee and the ACT Fire Brigade Historical Society representatives.

The updated Volunteer Charter, which will run through to 2029, recognises volunteer contribution, provides a clear framework for how we work together and reinforces expectations around safety, respect, communication, training and support. It will continue to be reviewed every three years to ensure it stays relevant.

The ESA Volunteer Charter reflects a strong commitment to ensuring our volunteers are meaningfully engaged through consultation processes. Their perspectives are valued, and the ESA is committed to actively listening and responding to their input. We are genuinely proud of the extensive consultation process undertaken to inform and shape this Volunteer Charter. ESA embraced co-design principles to ensure the charter is not only relevant and practical but truly meaningful to our volunteers.

Through the ESA Volunteer Charter, the ESA is committed to upholding guiding principles of the Volunteering Strategy. Central to these principles is a recognition that the experiences and insights of volunteers must remain at the forefront of decision-making. The charter formalises this commitment by ensuring volunteers' perspectives actively inform decisions and their lived experience continues to shape the work that we do.

I would like to thank all volunteers who participated in developing the new charter and I look forward to working with them in the future.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Minister, a large number of our Emergency Services personnel are volunteers, so why is the Volunteer Charter so important to them?

**DR PATERSON:** Thank you for the question. Volunteers are integral to ESA, representing more than 60 per cent of the Emergency Services workforce. The charter establishes a clear framework for collaboration between staff and volunteers, reinforcing principles of respect, inclusion and shared responsibility.

The charter reinforces the importance of the ESA in recognising and including all volunteers and valuing the diverse contributions they make across a range of roles and settings. It represents a clear commitment to remain agile and responsive by continually adapting our approaches, support and strategies to meet the evolving needs of our emergency management volunteers.

**MS TOUGH:** Minister, what is the ACT government doing to support volunteers in our emergency services?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank Ms Tough for the question. Importantly, this charter also represents a clear and enduring commitment from ESA to support our volunteers. We are dedicated to creating an environment where volunteers feel respected, empowered and equipped to contribute safely and meaningfully.

Through ongoing engagement, capability development and continuous improvement, the ACT government will continue to invest in our volunteers and ensure they are all supported to thrive, recognising that their contribution is essential to delivering the ESA's shared mission.

The ESA does not regard the development of this document as complete. It remains committed to accountability and is currently progressing in implementation phase to embed the charter in practice. This includes building capability among staff and volunteers through targeted education and integrating the charter into existing systems and processes to ensure it is applied effectively.

At every stage, ESA actively listened with respect to the voices of volunteers and deeply valued their insights, experiences and perspectives they so generously shared. Their contributions have been fundamental in shaping the final document.

In responding thoughtfully to the feedback, ESA have developed a robust, co-designed charter that reflects what matters most to the volunteers in our community. I am grateful to reaffirm the government's commitment to the volunteers and thank them for their

service in keeping our community safe.

### **Public schools—School Youth Health Nurse Program**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. In the 2025-26 budget, the government committed to having a school youth health nurse available in every ACT government high school on three days a week from January 2026. Minister, does every ACT government high school have access to a school youth health nurse on three days a week? If not, why not?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Parton for the question. The school youth health nurses are part of the Health workforce. Certainly, we funded in the last budget an expansion of school youth health nurses. I will take the detail of the question on notice in relation to recruitment and availability across schools for the time that Mr Parton has identified.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, why has the government not published any implementation updates, service coverage data or performance metrics for the expanded School Youth Health Nurse Program?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I will take that question on notice. I have been the health minister for quite some years now, and regular updates on the School Youth Health Nurse Program are not something that I have been asked about before, and they are not something that is generally part of our health data dashboard. I am happy to take the question on notice and ask about reporting, and I will come back to the Assembly with some further information.

**MS LEE:** Minister, will you commit to publicly reporting, by school, the actual number of nurse service days delivered each week?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I am sure that I can pull that information together. I will take the question on notice—not me personally, but Canberra Health Services should be able to pull that information together, and we will treat it like a question on notice.

**Mr Barr:** I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.