



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Thursday, 11 June 2026

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of question time proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* should be lodged with the Hansard office as soon as possible.

Thursday, 11 June 2026

Questions without notice:

North Canberra Hospital—infrastructure—costs.....	1
Domestic and family violence services—men’s crisis accommodation	2
Teachers—certification fees.....	2
Teachers and school staff—enterprise bargaining	4
Clubs ACT—political donations.....	4
Public housing—stock.....	6
Budget—economy.....	6
Stirling oval—facilities	8
Public housing—stock.....	9
Public housing—stock.....	10
Budget—debt	11
Budget—electricity prices.....	12
Kingston Arts Precinct	14
Yerrabi electorate—infrastructure.....	14
Housing affordability—housing supply.....	15

Questions without notice

North Canberra Hospital—infrastructure—costs

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, the government repeatedly points to the ACT size to justify the exaggerated costs of infrastructure builds such as the \$1.5 billion cost of the North Canberra Hospital redevelopment. For a comparable investment, Queensland's Coomera Hospital is being built with a capacity for up to 600 beds, while the North Canberra Hospital redevelopment will deliver just over 200 beds. Based on the government's own figures, this equates to approximately \$7.4 million per bed in the ACT, compared with around \$3.4 million per bed in Queensland.

Minister: on that comparison, can I ask why ACT taxpayers are paying more than double the cost per bed for substantially less hospital capacity?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question, but I will correct him, as I did Ms Vassarotti yesterday. He is only talking about the 200 inpatient ward beds—in fact, it is 210. The media release, released quite some time ago, indicates, more than 300 treatments spaces: so that includes beds in the intensive care unit, beds in the emergency department, and beds in maternity and the special care nursery. I am not familiar with the type of hospital that Mr Parton was referring to in terms of the Queensland hospital, but this is a critical services building that will include an intensive care unit, an emergency department, maternity services, special care nursery and operating theatres—and all of those things are more expensive than building a standard ward bed. So I do not believe that this is an apples-to-apples comparison. I am very disappointed that, having had this announcement out for some time—it did not only come out in the budget yesterday—the Leader of the Opposition, who is also the shadow health minister, has not even understood the scale of this investment on the part of the ACT government, which is the biggest investment in health infrastructure since self-government.

MR PARTON: Minister, before approving this project, did cabinet receive advice comparing the North Canberra Hospital's cost per bed with comparable projects in other Australian jurisdictions? And if so, is it possible for that to be tabled?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I would note that we passed a 213A motion from Mr Parton yesterday that demanded a whole bunch of documents in relation to the north-side hospital. If the information that Mr Parton is after has been provided to the government, it will be included in that very comprehensive list of documents that the Assembly has already sought. I will say to Mr Parton that, to the extent that that information can be provided, it will be provided in response to that order for production of documents.

But I would also say that we have had Multiplex involved as a very early contractor involvement partner in this project. They are an experienced hospital build partner. I would also refute the beginning of Mr Parton's first question, where he said that we have put forward the small size of the ACT as a reason that health infrastructure costs more. I have never said that. I have absolutely no idea where Mr Parton is getting that information. The ACT is a small jurisdiction in terms of economies of scale, and that relates to health service delivery, not health infrastructure delivery. So can I just say that the agreement that we have with Multiplex and the work that we do with Multiplex

does enable us to do a budget comparison to understand constructability.

And I would also point out that comparing a brownfield development like this one that involves early work—that involves the demolition of buildings and relocation of existing services on a challenging site that already has utilities in place that will need to be moved—is very different to a greenfield hospital, and I suspect that is probably the comparison that Mr Parton is trying to draw.

MR COCKS: Minister, why do you expect Canberrans to pay roughly double the cost on your numbers when building something here in Canberra compared with elsewhere in the country?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Obviously, Mr Cocks was unable to adjust his question in response to my first answer, but I will refer him to my first two answers.

Domestic and family violence services—men’s crisis accommodation

MS CASTLEY: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence.

Minister, what local crisis accommodation services are available to men who are escaping domestic and family violence?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. We were really excited to be able to support EveryMan in this year’s budget. EveryMan do fantastic work with vulnerable men in our community, they do work with men who have experienced domestic and family violence as well, and they also work with perpetrators of domestic family violence. They provide a pretty comprehensive counselling service and services for men. They also work with Housing ACT in supporting people in housing.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what evidence has the government relied on in providing this level of crisis accommodation and help for men experiencing domestic violence?

DR PATERSON: I will take the crisis accommodation issue on notice; that sits outside of my portfolio responsibility.

MR EMERSON: Minister, what engagement have you had with the housing minister about homelessness experienced by men who are escaping violent situations but unable to access crisis accommodation?

DR PATERSON: We have had multiple discussions over the last couple of years about men and women who are experiencing crisis and needing accommodation, in a full range of different aspects from people experiencing homelessness, to people escaping domestic violence situations and to how we may support people coming out of the correctional system.

Teachers—certification fees

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Minister, the *Canberra Times* reported that yesterday’s budget includes significant new and

increased fees for teachers. It states that teachers applying for or renewing their certification will face increases of up to 17 per cent, alongside the introduction of new charges for accreditation programs and the assessment of international qualifications. Minister, on the first full day that teachers are on strike in 15 years, can you please confirm for the Assembly if you increased the fees teachers have to pay just to teach?

MS BERRY: Sorry; what was the last bit—can I confirm it?

MS LEE: Yes.

MS BERRY: Yes.

MS LEE: Minister, at a time when teachers across the ACT are raising serious concerns about workloads and pay, why are you slugging them with increased fees, making it more expensive to be a teacher in our government schools?

MS BERRY: The Teacher Quality Institute provides professional development and learning and registers our teachers. It is as much about child safety as it is about a registration process and a professional learning and development organisation. Like every other professional, teachers deserve to be recognised for their craft—

MR SPEAKER: A point of order, Mr Parton?

Mr Parton: A point of order on relevance: the question was specifically about why you are slugging them with increased fees. It was not to explain the course to us.

MR SPEAKER: I think she is explaining the rationale behind the fee increase. She has some time to go, so I will allow the minister to continue.

MS BERRY: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The increase in the number of teachers that need to be registered in the ACT means that there are increased fees to provide the services that the Teacher Quality Institute provides, and it is because there are more issues around addressing complex matters in schools, which is the job of the Teacher Quality Institute, as the regulator. That takes more time and more staff. It is the professional organisation that provides teachers with support and recognition for their craft.

MR PARTON: Minister, why are you forcing teachers and would-be teachers to be further out of pocket during a cost-of-living crisis?

MS BERRY: We refer to those teachers as beginning teachers, not would-be teachers. It is appropriate to refer to beginning teachers in the appropriate way. “Would-be” sounds like wishful thinking.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Members! Just answer the question, Minister.

MS BERRY: The increase in fees is a small amount of money compared to other professional organisations. I understand that the timing probably wasn’t perfect, given the industrial action that the teachers are taking. However, the decision to increase fees

was made a long time before today.

Teachers and school staff—enterprise bargaining

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood.

Minister, my colleague Mr Braddock regrets he cannot be here in person to ask this question because, as a proud parent who supports the school strike, he is absent from the chamber parenting today. Meanwhile, the AEU and their hardworking members would not have filled the whole of Civic Square with red for their strike today if the government was meaningfully coming to the table.

Minister, when will your directorate engage substantively with the AEU's full list of claims across the two enterprise agreements?

MS BERRY: They are.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, will you have an answer for school assistants on their list of claims by the time the School Assistant Classifications Framework Review is complete, and how long will that be?

MS BERRY: The administration part of the core agreement that the ACT government has been negotiating is completed. That will be put to the ACT government public service in due course.

MS CLAY: Minister, will you apologise to the students, educators, LSAs and parents for letting things get to the point that every public school had to close for a full day?

MS BERRY: I already have, but I am happy to do that again. I know that it is frustrating for families and that it disrupts our community. Our schools play such an important role and are integral to every part of our community life. I know that it has been a difficult time for everybody involved, particularly teachers and students but also families, carers and others who are engaged with our school communities.

I am hoping that we can get to a point with the Education Union that this kind of industrial action will not have to happen again. But, of course, unions and their members are able to take industrial action to further their cause. So I respect the right of the union to do that—although I accept that it has been disruptive to everybody. I have already apologised publicly, and I am very happy to apologise again in this place.

Clubs ACT—political donations

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Leader of the Opposition. Mr Parton, I noticed on the gift disclosures published by Elections ACT that Clubs ACT has made multiple cash donations to the Canberra Liberals in recent months for the first time since 2020. Have you personally accepted any donations or gifts in kind from Clubs ACT or any other gambling industry entities during your time as Leader of the Opposition?

MR SPEAKER: Just before you respond, I want to check that it is in order, because the standing orders are pretty clear about what can be asked and to whom about what.

I am not sure this fits in with that Mr Emerson, so I will seek some advice as to whether that question is in order.

The advice is that standing order 116:

Questions may be put to a Member, not being a Minister, relating to any bill, motion, or other public matter connected with the business of the Assembly, of which the Member has charge.

Given that it is a public declaration, the advice I have received is that it is in order, Mr Parton. So over to you.

MR PARTON: Thank you and I thank the member for the question!

Mr Barr: Do you?

MR PARTON: Yes, I do! I would say, Mr Speaker, that the fundraising donation scenario for the Liberal Party is run at arms-length to members and although I am on the management committee and I could seek to have a look at all the donations, I am not specifically aware of donations that have come from Clubs ACT other than pertaining to the bill that is on the notice paper this week. I guess you could say that the sports roundtable we held at the Southern Cross Club at Woden would technically fall in that particular bill as a donation in kind from that club, whether it was to us—well, I guess we were the organisers of the event. So in answer to your question, no. I can stand here and say I am not aware of donations from Clubs ACT that have been made to the party in recent weeks.

MR EMERSON: As Leader of the Opposition, have you been lobbied to slow down or block potential forthcoming gambling harm reduction measures?

MR PARTON: I thank the member for the question. I reject—no, I am not going to reject the premise!

Look, you know, we have held views. I have certainly been the holder of the portfolio of gaming and racing for most of my time here in this place, and in that time my position has not changed one iota. So I would suggest that perhaps we would have to track back and have a look at lobbying that had been done prior to me being elected. So my response to the question is my position in that space has not changed one tiny little bit in the time that I have been elected.

Mr Emerson: Point of order: under standing order 118AA responsiveness to the question. The question was not whether Mr Parton's position had changed, but as Leader of the Opposition—so recently—have you been lobbied to slow down or block potential forthcoming gambling harm reduction measures?

Mr Cocks: On the point of order, given the clarification that we have just heard, I am not convinced that the supplementary question is actually in order in the standing orders.

MR SPEAKER: Well, interestingly, under 118AA, Mr Cocks, of which you are an

expert, I can only direct a minister to respond and Mr Parton is not a minister. So I do not uphold the point of order on a technicality, Mr Emerson.

Public housing—stock

MS CLAY: My question is to the minister for housing. The *ACT Housing Strategy Year 7 Report Card* confirms the government's commitment to an additional 1,100 homes by 2030, which will take the public housing portfolio to 13,200 homes. Last Friday, the government announced a public housing pipeline with \$364 million over four years to deliver 450 new homes. You called it a “generational investment” but, minister, it is not generational investment; there is no funding for the other 650 new public homes that need to be built by 2030. When will you announce the funding for the remaining 650 new public housing dwellings that need to be built by 2030 to meet your commitment?

MS BERRY: That will be a decision for government in future budget processes and, of course, the government does not announce future policy in the Assembly, in question time.

MS CLAY: Now that the territory is \$250 million better off because the commonwealth is funding housing infrastructure works, when will you spend the extra \$250 million you saved, on providing more public housing?

MS BERRY: I refer the member to my previous answer.

MS VASSAROTTI: What is a “government owned HAFF 3 dwelling”? If it is managed and operated by a community housing provider, will it be leased to public housing tenants?

MS BERRY: It will depend. But if it is government owned housing and it is leased to a community housing provider, then it will likely be leased at affordable rates to a community housing tenant.

I am not sure if that is the answer that Ms Vassarotti is after, so I will take some of that on notice and provide more clarification around that.

Budget—economy

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, can you provide us an update on what the 2026-2027 budget says about the ACT economy?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question—the first question about the budget for this question time. Mr Speaker, the ACT economy is strong and resilient, despite global headwinds and the impact of Donald Trump's war in the Middle East.

The ACT economy continues to grow faster than the rest of the country and has now enjoyed 29 consecutive years of economic growth. Strong economic growth is forecast to continue. While growth will soften in the immediate term due to the economic conditions from the war, we do expect that growth will remain strong, with the GSP forecast to grow by 3¼ per cent from 2026-27.

Importantly, the ACT economy is supported by low unemployment, strong wage growth and high workforce participation, and that means more Canberrans staying in the workforce and earning more. While inflation will be higher in the first half of the calendar year 2026, the ACT will continue to have lower inflation than other jurisdictions around the country.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Treasurer, how is the government supporting continued economic activity and growth in the city?

MR STEEL: The ACT government will support continued economic activity and growth through continued economic reform. As we have repeatedly said, this is a budget for housing. On the one hand, we are undertaking micro-economic reforms to enable more homes and more housing choice and reforming the planning system. We are streamlining building processes and delivering on our construction productivity agenda and enabling more homes to be built for Canberrans sooner. This includes more work on tax reform and eliminating stamp duty for first home buyers, for people buying off the plan, for turn-key units and for pensioners as well.

Housing is a fundamental economic enabler, and secure affordable housing provides the economic basis for growth. What we are doing through this budget is supplying a massive pipeline—a massive new pipeline of non-market housing that will support our construction industry. It is the first stage of a massive investment in public, community and affordable housing—450 new homes through the public housing pipeline and over 1,000 new community and affordable homes through community housing providers. And it is off the back of a massive growing and renewing housing program, with construction still underway on new dwellings there.

The budget also supports investments in a range of important parts of the economy through investments in tourism, the arts and sport. We will continue to make sure that Canberra is a fantastic place to visit, to work and in the creative industries and support continued economic diversification.

MS TOUGH: Treasurer, how does the ACT compare to other jurisdictions?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Tough for her supplementary. The budget shows that we will continue to grow faster than all other Australian jurisdictions, reflecting a strong local economy supported by continued public investment. The ACT continues to have lower inflation than other jurisdictions. The ACT has one of the highest workforce participation rates in the country, with low unemployment and low underemployment, and the ACT labour market continues to outperform the national average. The participation rate is one of the key drivers of success in our economy. We are relatively young; we are a well-educated populace, with a large proportion of Canberrans in the workforce, and Canberrans continue to enjoy the highest wage growth in the country.

We see that the ACT continues to track below national inflation. This is not by accident. It is also because of active investment that our government has made in renewable energy—reducing power prices—and in intervention in the housing market, particularly around rent setting, which has reduced the rate of rent growth compared to other jurisdictions.

Stirling oval—facilities

MS CARRICK: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation.

I refer to the ongoing concerns raised by multiple community sporting clubs—including the Molonglo Juggernauts Football Club, Weston Creek Molonglo Cricket Club and Weston Creek Molonglo Wildcats—regarding the condition of the Stirling enclosed oval. Despite paying user fees comparable to modern facilities such as the Gungahlin and Woden enclosed ovals, Stirling continues to face significant safety, maintenance and infrastructure issues. These include hazardous playing surfaces, deteriorating cricket facilities, inadequate amenities, pest infestations and a lack of suitable spectator infrastructure. Clubs pay up to \$12,000 to hire the grounds, and they expect the grounds to be suitable for games. However, in addition to other issues, Stirling enclosed oval has a scoreboard that does not work. These problems have been raised with the ACT government for over a decade without meaningful resolution.

Minister, why are community sporting clubs at Stirling enclosed oval being charged fees comparable to premium facilities when the standard of infrastructure amenities and maintenance is demonstrably inferior.

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Carrick for her question and for her advocacy for the Juggernauts. I have heard very clearly that there are some issues at the Stirling oval, and I have raised this with the Sport and Recreation sports field maintenance team. At the roundtable that Mr Parton held last week, one of the issues they raised specifically was around the disposal of pads and meds in their changerooms—that there was only one disposal unit available. I understand that that issue has already been resolved. So the team, once they found out that it was a concern, has immediately acted on it. I am just following up on the other issues that I am aware of following the meeting, but I will take Ms Carrick's question on notice about the other issues that she has raised in here today and just check that they are being acted on as well.

Most sports clubs know—and I think the Juggernauts know—that there is an on call ranger every weekend that all clubs can contact for any issues that arise, which might be emergency issues that need to be addressed over the weekend. Often those requests go to the ranger. The ranger can usually repair them or address them pretty quickly. If those issues have not been addressed in a reasonable timeframe, then of course that is unacceptable. Depending on the on the actual nature of them, some of them might be more significant and need more work, which will take more time, but I will take that on notice the detail and provide further advice to the Assembly.

MS CARRICK: Minister, will the government fix or provide an appropriate scoreboard for the Stirling enclosed oval?

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice. On the ownership of the scoreboard, sometimes on sports grounds, the scoreboards are not owned by the government—for example, the Magpie scoreboard at Kippax is owned by the Magpies Club. Whilst the sport and rec team can assist the clubs in resolving the issues that they might have with repairs, sometimes it is not owned by the ACT government. So I will just take that part of the question on notice and check that that can be resolved.

MR EMERSON: Minister, will you commit to taking immediate action to address the current safety, maintenance and pest control issues at Stirling enclosed oval to ensure the oval is fit for community use?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Emerson for his interest, and I have already done that as a matter of priority following the meeting that Mr Parton held last week. I took copious notes and all of them I sent off to—

Mr Parton: Thanks for coming.

MS BERRY: Thanks for inviting me.

I sent all of the notes off to the sport and rec team to be addressed. As I said, some of them have already been addressed as a matter of urgency, and I will get on to the rest of them in due course.

Public housing—stock

MS BARRY: My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. Minister, the ACT Labor government's budget revealed that confidence in Housing ACT has collapsed, with a historical low of one-third of respondents being dissatisfied with public housing. Minister, how will reducing client service visits from 11,000 per annum to 5,800 in the next financial year actually help to achieve the priority of improving the delivery of tenancy-centric public housing services?

MS BERRY: As Ms Chiaka Barry might know, those house visits are done in pairs now due to safety concerns and they are targeted at people who need them most. That does not mean people cannot get in touch with Housing ACT, Programmed or others via phone or via email. That contact can always occur—even going into the shopfront in Belconnen. But it means that we take the safety of Housing ACT staff seriously, so that work needs to be done with two people at a time attending a Housing site. That does not mean that people cannot call and request a visit of their own or get in touch with their housing manager or anyone at Housing ACT. That contact will not stop.

Mr Cocks: Mr Speaker, a point of order under 118AA: the question specifically related to the nexus between a reduction in client services and the priority of improving the delivery of tenant-centric public housing services. I do not believe the minister has actually been relevant to that question.

MR SPEAKER: I tend to agree. Mr Cocks. I think the minister's answer explained why they had reduced the number of visits—to go in pairs—but did not actually explain what effect that would have, which was the nub of the question. So, Minister, I would ask whether, under 118AA, you could provide a response.

MS BARRY: Minister, you talk about providing stable, long-term and affordable housing, so how does investing in only 450 new public housing units and 50 social and affordable housing units over four years meet the demand increase of 500 per annum?

MS BERRY: Sorry—I did not catch the end of that question. Could you repeat it?

MS BARRY: Sure. I will start from the beginning. Minister, you talk about providing stable, long-term and affordable housing. How does investing in only 450 new public housing units and 50 social and affordable units over four years meet the demand increase of 500 per annum?

MS BERRY: I thank the member for the question. The ACT Labor Party has committed to 5,000 affordable social and public housing properties; 1,000 of those will be in public housing. We have made a commitment in this budget to buy and build 450. Our commitment is still for 1,000 by 2030, as well as adding affordable rentals and community housing to that work of an additional 4,000 homes.

MR CAIN: Why is the Housing Crisis Support Fund, which seeks to replace the Rent Relief Fund, only funded for the next two years?

MS BERRY: It is working through a new program. Previously, the fund was for paying rent only. This new fund provides other kinds of supports. It may include rental fees, but it also may include other emergencies or support that a tenant might require at a time. It could include whitegoods replacement, it could include repairs to their home, and it could also include rent arrears. It is about trying and testing that fund to make sure that it is meeting the needs of the people who need that support.

Public housing—stock

MS VASSAROTTI: My question is to the Minister for Housing. Minister, the public housing waitlist is growing faster than this government is building public homes. In a rapidly-growing housing crisis, public housing becomes more important, not less. We have seen in just 16 months—between November 2024 and March of this year—the waitlist surging from 2,975 to a staggering 3,551 applications. Yet the government announced last month that your plan is to increase public housing stock to by only 1,271 homes by the end of 2030. At this rate, the growth of this waitlist will continue to outpace this sluggish delivery timeline. Given this, when will the government deliver a real plan to shrink the public housing waitlist, with a stated objective of bringing that list to zero?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Vassarotti for her question, and I note her interest in housing and her time in the ACT government in supporting people who are experiencing homelessness in the ACT. We already have a plan, and I have already outlined the 5,000 homes by 2030. Not everybody on the public housing waitlist needs public housing. Some of the people who are on the waitlist have also applied for community housing in addition to public housing. So community housing might actually be a better support or a better fit for them.

Freeing up and providing more affordable rentals across the city will also have a huge impact on the waitlist. I spend a lot of time worrying about the time on the waitlist. That is why the ACT government has made the significant contribution to investing in and increasing the amount of public housing here in the ACT—more than ever before. I note that there is more work to be done. The partnerships that we have with the federal government, community housing providers as well as private developers and others in building homes for people who need them have been an important part of this program

of works.

What we have committed to is ambitious but it is also reasonable, responsible and achievable—and I think that is the main thing. We do not want to create a mythical pipeline that cannot be delivered. This pipeline can be delivered.

MS VASSAROTTI: What, if any, modelling is this government doing to determine how many public homes will be needed to bring the waitlist to zero as demand increases?

MS BERRY: We work very closely with ACTCOSS and other housing organisations to understand the data and waitlists and the information that they hold as experts in this area as well as census data that we will all be participating in over the next 12 months or so to understand the situation going forward. Of course, we are not the only place that is experiencing a housing crisis; the whole country is experiencing this. It is being exacerbated by the long tail of COVID and conflict overseas. That is a challenge for everybody. We are seeing that play out in our housing list, which is why we have made an ambitious announcement—an announcement, as I said, that we can achieve—that is reasonable and is a responsible commitment to make.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, how can you justify your conservative housing target when families are facing homelessness and crushing housing pressure right now?

MS BERRY: I do not agree that it is conservative. It is ambitious. If anybody has paid any attention to the housing space over the last five years, they would know that it has been incredibly challenging. Working with industry, with organisations like the Property Council, and understanding where our construction industry is and what they can deliver, is where we come to this pipeline of works. It is not as simple as just pulling a figure out of the air and saying 10,000 homes by 2030; they do have to be delivered and they have to be delivered in a way that meets the needs of our tenants—and that is what the government's commitment is about.

Budget—debt

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, last year's budget said that the territory would take out \$1.64 billion in new borrowings in 2025-26. This year's budget now says that the estimated outcome is \$3.1 billion. That is an increase of \$1.46 billion in new borrowings in a single year. Why did the government need to borrow almost one and a half billion dollars more than it told the Assembly last year, and who approved that decision?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. We continue to undertake borrowing where necessary to support the needs of the ACT budget and the infrastructure program. We would act, going to market for borrowing, based on the advice of Treasury about the best time to enter the market and whether there are any other semi-governments in the market. Obviously there has been an uncertain period at this particular point in time with the war in the Middle East, so advice has been crucial to make sure we go out at the right time to make sure that we get the best possible bond rates for the Australian Capital Territory.

We have been very clear that we believe that borrowing is a responsible decision for our government to take to invest in generational infrastructure. But what we have also set out in the budget is a return to a cash operating surplus, consistent with the fiscal strategy that we set out last year, and what that means is that over time we will see more of the infrastructure program funded through a greater proportion of cash in addition to borrowing.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, was any part of this additional borrowing brought forward because Treasury was concerned about higher future borrowing costs, refinancing risk, investor appetite or the risk of a further credit rating downgrade?

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice and see whether I can come back with some further information about the specific advice that they provided at the time. But we do act on that expert advice about the best time to go out to the market and it obviously depends on a range of different factors that are affecting the bond market at a particular point in time. The objective is to make sure we get the best possible bond rates for the territory so that we can reduce the amount of interest we are paying. As bonds mature, we may then need to issue new bonds to be able to provide the debt finance required to fund the ongoing infrastructure needs of the territory and other costs.

Mr Cocks: Point of order on relevance, Mr Speaker. The question was in relation to new borrowings, which is a separate line item entirely to refinancing of existing borrowings.

MR SPEAKER: I think that the minister said he is taking it on notice and then was just providing additional information. That is my understanding, so I do not think there is a point of order.

MR PARTON: Treasurer, what was the net cost to ACT taxpayers of carrying these additional borrowings early, after offsetting any interest earned on cash balances, and could you table the advice explaining whether this was routine debt management or a response to a worsening budget and credit risk?

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice.

Budget—electricity prices

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, your budget claims to address cost-of-living pressures but it includes a 6.2 per cent increase in utility prices. According to the government's own household modelling, a pensioner in Belconnen will pay \$322 more per year in utility costs, and a single parent in Banks will pay an additional \$385. How can you claim to be helping with the cost of living while increasing the costs of essential services and utilities?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. What is shown by those cameos that we transparently published in the budget is the impact of electricity price setting. Obviously, that is informed by the work of the independent regulator, the ICRC. And, yes, electricity prices will increase in the new financial year. That is the case, but what we have also seen in previous years is our government's astute commitment around renewable energy in the territory, and that our commitment to 100 per cent renewable

energy has shielded Canberrans from elevated electricity prices in the past.

There is some additional cost being passed on to Canberrans for electricity prices; the cost of running the electricity network. That is independently assessed by the ICRC and they make their determination about that.

But in the budget, we have continued to provide targeted cost-of-living relief for those who need it most. That has included continued investment in supporting households with energy costs through the Home Energy Support Program and a range of other measures. We will continue to provide support to those who are doing it tough. The budget also provides new supports which did not exist before, including a new \$250 payment for those experiencing housing crisis, and a range of other supports. Those can be found in the *Cost of Living Statement* in the budget, on page 151.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, is it your progressive policy approaches which mean these increases will disproportionately affect pensioners, single parents and low-income households?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Of course, our government has, in recent budgets, made the decision to specifically provide support for utilities through the electricity, gas and water rebate. We have increased the amount of the rebate and we have applied it to more people around the territory. 40,000 people receive that rebate, in recognition that they need a little bit of extra support when paying for energy and water bills.

There is no doubt that the cost of electricity is going up. That was independently set by the ICRC, but we have provided a range of cost-of-living relief in this budget. That includes helping people to provide support for bringing down energy costs. We also continue to support renters to bring down their home energy costs through energy efficiency measures.

MR CAIN: Treasurer, why are everyday Canberrans bearing the cost of your uncontrolled spending and debt?

MR STEEL: I reject the premise of the question, Mr Speaker. I point the opposition to the budget, where we have continued the difficult decisions that we made in the last budget and which they did not support—responsible measures to constrain the growth of the public service; to focus on government priorities; to re-set the infrastructure program to save the budget over \$700 million, to make sure it is deliverable and sustainable.

We have taken a huge range of decisions through multiple budgets, now, to make sure that expenditure growth is sustainable. We have also made decisions on the revenue side of the budget.

We have been measured in this budget, given the uncertain economic conditions that are affecting both businesses and households. The decisions we have made are measured, recognising the cost-of-living pressure that households are under but also the extra costs that are being borne by government during this time. This has meant that we have also been measured in what we can provide, in terms of additional cost-of-living

relief. But we have provided relief. It is extensive and it is targeted, to make sure that it is sustainable.

Kingston Arts Precinct

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Chief Minister. The government has announced that the Kingston Arts Precinct art building will now be staged over the coming years. The site was first identified as a potential site for an arts precinct back in 2003. ACT Labor has promised to deliver it at every election since.

Chief Minister is the Kingston Arts Precinct the longest running broken election promise in the history of self-government?

MR BARR: No.

MR MILLIGAN: Can the Chief Minister confirm that this 23-year-old project will suffer no more delays, and can the Chief Minister confirm what is the longest broken election promise?

MR BARR: That is actually two questions, Mr Speaker! In relation to the Kingston Arts Precinct, a land release is imminent that will support both the first stage of the precinct being car parking and housing for artists, and future stages will be announced in future budgets.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, what consultations have your government undertaken with the local arts community before the decision took place, and what was the feedback?

MR BARR: Yes, the relevant agencies have been engaging both with arts stakeholders and the broader community around that area, noting that the decision to undertake the structured car parking build first was to ensure that all of the businesses in the entire Kingston Foreshore precinct who rely upon that car parking are not disrupted by a significant loss of car parking supply. So that is why the project is being staged in the way it is. New car parking will be built and operational before the existing surface car parking that is the balance of that site is developed.

Yerrabi electorate—infrastructure

MR MILLIGAN: Mr Speaker, my question is for the Treasurer.

The government budget will delay infrastructure projects for health, emergency services and sports in my electorate of Yerrabi. This includes the longstanding commitment to build indoor courts in Casey and playing fields in Throsby. I also refer the Treasurer to the Chief Minister's comments about focusing on maintaining and replacing the infrastructure in the parts of Canberra built during the city's rapid 50-year expansion between 1930 and 1980.

Is it now the government's policy to abandon local infrastructure and new suburbs altogether?

MR BARR: I will take that question, as it relates to infrastructure, Mr Speaker. The

government is intending to complete the projects already underway in the member's electorate before commencing new ones. We remain committed to delivering the projects that we took to the election in our Gungahlin plan, and we will be doing so in this parliamentary term.

MR MILLIGAN: Chief Minister, why has your government chosen to delay local infrastructure in the electorate of Yerrabi?

MR BARR: I answered that in my answer to the first question. There is no capacity to complete the projects at this point until the existing project pipelines across the entire infrastructure program are complete. It is quite simple. We need to pause to complete all of the works in progress, which are the largest ever in the history of the territory. We are at peak infrastructure this year and next—the two biggest programs ever. We are not in a position to start major new projects until those works are complete. The projects in the member's electorate are priorities for the government and will be considered for funding in next year's budget and the budget the year after.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, why is your government expecting people in Yerrabi to pay higher taxes and charges but receive less infrastructure?

MR BARR: We are not.

Housing affordability—housing supply

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, how is the ACT government supporting its commitment to enable 30,000 more homes by 2030 through the 2026-27 ACT budget?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Tough for her question. Our ACT Labor government is delivering \$770 million of investment in new and expanded housing initiatives in the 2026-27 budget. We are releasing land to support around 4,300 dwellings over the next financial year. We are improving project feasibility by introducing a time-limited 50 per cent reduction in the codified lease variation charge for eligible missing middle developments in low-density zones. We are also investing in the planning and enabling work needed to unlock supply, and this includes the residential uplift program which focuses on increasing housing around local centres and along major transport corridors.

We are focused on continued planning reform through transit-oriented development, with work on the Southern Gateway underway as well as work to implement the existing City and Gateway Urban Design Framework and support uplift around key high-frequency light rail and bus stops. At the same time, we are also enabling more mid-rise and diverse housing in well-located areas, supported by improved planning tools and a stronger evidence base. We are also bringing in a new integrated planning and transport strategy together to ensure that housing growth is aligned with the infrastructure and transport needed to build a compact, connected and efficient city. Together, these measures will help bring more homes online in the right locations and at the right time for Canberrans, with support from the government.

MS TOUGH: Treasurer, what steps has the government taken to progress its commitment to support 5,000 more community, public and affordable homes by 2030?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. Our government is committed to ensuring that every Canberran has access to secure and affordable housing, including the most vulnerable in our community. This budget is putting Labor values into action by significantly increasing our investment in community, public and affordable housing. There is \$360 million in the budget to deliver an additional 450 housing dwellings, which contributes to our commitment to deliver an additional 5,000 public, community and affordable homes by the end of 2030. We are also investing \$90 million in capital funding to meet our target of 1,000 property renewals and portfolio growth of 400 public houses under the old Growing and Renewing program by June 2027, supporting better housing stock for existing tenants, as well as growing the housing portfolio overall, supported by commonwealth funding. After 10 years of a policy vacuum under the federal Liberals, we are using programs like the Social Housing Accelerator program and the HAFF to make sure we can deliver those homes.

We are investing more than \$180 million to uplift our public housing repairs and maintenance program, which will prioritise essential repairs and upgrades to vacant properties so that we can return them to being available for Canberrans that need them. I thank Minister Berry for her advocacy throughout the budget process in securing this additional funding for public housing, new homes and repairing the homes that we have in our stock. We are also investing in supporting the delivery of crisis and transitional housing for vulnerable cohorts facing homelessness, under the commonwealth's national Housing Australia Future Fund. And we are backing our community housing sector by providing the finance guarantees required for projects under the HAFF, in the order of \$650 million.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Treasurer, why is investing in the supply of more homes to Canberrans so important?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his supplementary. Investing in housing supply is essential because it goes directly to affordability and it goes directly to the cost of living. This is the largest cost faced by households, and we are making a massive investment in housing to support households with that major cost. It is also important for the future of our city as it continues to grow to 700,000 people by 2050. When supply does not keep pace with demand, we see increased pressure on house prices and rents, making it harder for Canberrans—particularly young people, families and key workers—to find homes close to jobs and services in the community. That is why our target of enabling 30,000 homes by 2030 is so important. And, by investing in enabling more housing choice through planning reform and investing in more well-located homes, we can improve affordability over time, reduce pressure on households, make better use of existing infrastructure, and also make sure that people can live where and how they want to live, in more suitable accommodation. Ultimately, increasing housing supply is critical to keeping Canberra livable, inclusive and sustainable as our city grows.

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