



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Friday, 12 June 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 Berry is away from question time today for personal reasons. For question time, Minister Petterson will take questions in the Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs portfolios; Minister Stephen-Smith will take questions in the Education and Early Childhood Education portfolios; and Minister Cheyne will assist in the Sport and Recreation portfolios.

Questions without notice

City Police Station—condition

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services.

Minister, the government has announced plans for a new City Police Station and ACT Policing Headquarters. However, your own answer to questions on notice identified repeated policy facility failures, including flooding, sewage incursions and water ingress at the City Police Station. Those new facilities may still be years away. Do you believe that the budget announced this week makes sufficient provision for remediation works that will stop a repeat of the long list of problems that you detailed on notice?

DR PATERSON: Yes, I do. There is an ongoing budget that is used to remediate some of the issues that Mr Parton has outlined. And that is why we have been progressing procurement for a new City Police Station and headquarters, because we want to see ACT Policing in new facilities as soon as possible.

MR PARTON: Minister, do you consider City Police Station to be currently fit for purpose for ACT Policing officers, and do those policing officers feel that it is fit for purpose?

DR PATERSON: I feel that it is a station that has been fit for purpose in its time, and at that at this time we recognise that police needs have evolved and changed, and the number of staff at City Police Station has now increased significantly. How we understand best practice of a watch house has changed significantly. So that is why we have budgeted for and are progressing procurement for a new City Police Station and headquarters.

Mr Parton: A point of order on relevance: the question was very specifically whether the minister considers the City Police Station to be currently fit for purpose, and I am not sure that the minister has answered the question.

MR SPEAKER: I do not think she was precise, Mr Parton, but I think she was relevant to the question, so there is no point of order.

MS LEE: Minister, what interim remediation works will be undertaken to ensure police are not left working in a deteriorating facility while the new station and headquarters are developed?

DR PATERSON: There are further works that have been funded for particular stations around Canberra to upgrade, particularly, heating and cooling systems. There is funding

in the budget to upgrade armouries at two of the police stations in Canberra. There are continued works to see that these stations are functioning to the best of their ability. There is funding for those works, and as I said, we are very committed to progressing the procurement process for a new City Police Station and headquarters.

Budget—revenue

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, your budget referred to developments in the Middle East 21 times.

Mr Parton: How many?

MR COCKS: Twenty-one times. Treasurer, you have blamed events in the Middle East for anything from softer investment returns and poorer economic uncertainty to lower payroll tax revenue. You have blamed lower payroll tax revenue on events in the Middle East. Treasurer, how much of the ACT's payroll tax revenue comes from the Middle East?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Of course, the war in the Middle East has had an impact on the ACT economy. Of course, it has, because it has seen a significant increase in fuel prices, and it has seen prices escalate right across other goods in the economy as well. That has had an impact on the territory's budget. It has had an impact on households and businesses. Everyone is alive to that fact.

We are still in a period of uncertainty. Every single state and territory Treasurer, as they hand down their budgets—including Queensland's; I was reading David Janetzki's comments about the war today in the *Financial Review*—is recognising the fact that this has had a big impact. So, yes, it does affect the ACT's budget, and that is outlined in the budget.

Of course, it forms part of the forecasts that Treasury has made, not just in relation to the economic parameters but in relation to budget expenditure. There is direct budget expenditure on things like increased fuel, diesel, particularly in Transport Canberra operations. The cost of other products has gone up as well, and that has affected a range of different government agencies. It has also affected the range of decisions that the government can take during this period of time, including on payroll tax, recognising that there were already changes flowing through that were going to start from 1 July and that were announced in the last budget. We could not take further decisions to implement the recommendations put forward by Mr Eslake in his report, to take additional payroll tax measures. That was a decision not to take a decision in this budget, to support businesses during this uncertain time.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, have you considered that weaker payroll tax revenue might reflect the consequences of your own tax policies, rather than events occurring thousands of kilometres away in the Middle East?

MR STEEL: Of course, the forecasts from Treasury take into account all economic factors. There is a range of different things occurring both locally and globally that affect the ACT's economy. One of the local things that is happening is the insourcing agenda of the federal government. That has impacted on payroll tax receipts, as we see

the kind of work that consultants would otherwise have done being insourced and undertaken within the federal government. We have been doing some of that, too. In fact, we have a measure in the budget to reduce the use of consultants, to achieve savings in the budget—a responsible decision that we have made on the expenditure side of the budget in this year.

Yes, there are a range of factors that contribute to the economic circumstances that we face, and the revenue that the ACT government receives.

MR PARTON: Treasurer, why is the government slugging more and smaller businesses with increased payroll tax rates, rather than pursuing reforms that encourage employment growth to expand the tax base?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. As I said, we did not make a decision to implement the recommendations by Saul Eslake in his report, partially because the report came down late, but also because the timing was not right, and we had to be measured and balanced in our decisions in this budget, recognising the constraints on the economy and business. We had already made decisions in the last budget—tough decisions on revenue and expenditure, some of which are still being implemented, including the change that we made to broaden the base of payroll tax for businesses with a payroll of over \$1.75 million. But we also made the decision to cut the rate that they were paying in payroll tax, which is exactly in line with what Mr Eslake had recommended.

Macquarie swimming pool—site lease

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. The first mortgagee is intending to sell the Big Splash site. Access Canberra has imposed conditions on re-opening the pool by 1 November 2026. I presume these conditions would be included with the sales documents. What is the full set of conditions imposed by Access Canberra, and can you table a copy?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I think they have published a statement of the reasons for their decision, and obviously the commitment has been made to open the pool in November. I am not aware of any decision that Access Canberra has taken to step back from that commitment. They are still going to very closely monitor the implementation of that. It is positive to see Purdon, on behalf of the mortgagee, making a statement that they still intend to follow through with the commitment to open the pool in November.

Nothing has changed in terms of the government's position. We want to see the pool open as soon as possible. We want to see the full range of aquatic facilities being provided. It is positive, with today's announcement, that it appears that the slides will not be demolished. In fact, they will be fenced off to allow the sale to proceed and then see the outcomes achieved from the sale.

Again, the government has not ruled out any options in relation to Big Splash. We continue to have conversations outside of and separate to the regulatory process led by Access Canberra—between the mortgagee and officials—to make sure that we understand where they are up to in the process and that they are continuing steps

towards opening the pool. We want to see a good outcome for the community. I hope that the announcement today will see the sale of this site to someone who can operate the full range of aquatic facilities that the community want and have enjoyed over the past few decades.

MS CLAY: Minister, in the event those conditions are not complied with, what compliance action is available to Access Canberra?

MR STEEL: There are a range of penalties available under the current Planning Act and other steps that they can take. We have committed to review the range of enforcement powers available to Access Canberra to make sure that there is compliance with leases. That was a commitment that we made at the election, and we will be undertaking that work over the next year to see what could be improved within the Planning Act to give the community greater confidence that there is a range of powers for Access Canberra to use, and to make sure that they have the flexibility to choose an appropriate mechanism to enforce leases, depending on the circumstances that they face.

Ultimately, we want to see the lessee—whoever that may be in the future—bring this site back to recreational use for the community. The government continues to be clear that we have no intention whatsoever to rezone this site. We want it to remain for restricted recreational use. That will continue on the site. We just need someone who can take it over and provide the long-term commitment that the community wants to see for an aquatic facility delivered on the site. In the meantime, Access Canberra will be holding the lessee to account in relation to opening the pool from November.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, when will the internal review into compliance actions by Access Canberra be completed? And do you commit to releasing a statement on the outcomes of that review?

MR STEEL: It is not a review into their compliance activity; it is a review into the suite of powers under the Planning Act that Access Canberra has, acting as a delegate on behalf of the independent Territory Planning Authority and the Chief Planner. We expect that to be completed over the next year. It may require some legislative change being brought forward to the Legislative Assembly. That will be an opportunity for the community to engage and members of the Assembly to engage with that process as well.

Ms Clay: I believe the minister may have misunderstood the question. The question was about the internal review being conducted by Access Canberra into decisions about Big Splash. We understand that at the moment there is an internal review. We would be happy for the minister to take that on notice.

MR STEEL: I am happy to take that on notice to find out whether there is some more information that I can provide to the Assembly.

Woods Reserve campground—domestic animals

MS CASTLEY: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. I understand the government has decided to exclude family pets from the

Woods Reserve campground when it reopens later this year. Could the minister please confirm if this is accurate and why this decision has been taken?

MS CHEYNE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I believe that this is part of the overall upgrades for Woods Reserve. But I think the best thing that I can do in in this moment is to take the question on notice and to come back with some more detail for Ms Castley. I might be able to do it by the end of question time.

MS CASTLEY: Could the minister also confirm if this exclusion would mean that there is only one remaining pet-friendly campground in the ACT, Blue Range, which has no waterways for swimming or cooling off on summer camping trips?

MS CHEYNE: I will also take that on notice. I would note that a number of our campgrounds are in a National Park and that means that there are limitations on what non-native animals can be present, even if they are under some level of human control. But let me confirm that for Ms Castley, and I will do my best to respond at the end of question time.

MR EMERSON: Minister, will the government commit to delivering more pet-friendly campsites in the ACT?

MS CHEYNE: I think that is asking me to announce policy, Mr Speaker. While I would love to, I will not.

ACT Policing—professional standards investigations

MR EMERSON: My question is for the minister for police. Minister, after officers wrongfully apprehended an Aboriginal teenager at gunpoint on a bus in November last year, ACT Policing initiated a Professional Standards Command investigation. During annual reports hearings in November, more than six months ago, when asked about the investigation, the Chief Police Officer said:

Certainly, with our Professional Standards Command, we have talked about doing that as quickly as possible.

I understand this investigation was expected to take six to eight weeks. On ABC Radio this week, the Chief Police Officer indicated the investigation is still ongoing and a resolution is expected soon.

Minister, why has the internal investigation into this incident been delayed for so long? Do you accept that this extended delay risks further damaging trust between police and the First Nations community?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. The investigation has not been delayed, it is just a complex investigation. As the member will know, the police have a PRS investigation and the Ombudsman also has an investigation ongoing, and I look forward to the outcomes of both of those investigations.

MR EMERSON: Minister, what support has been offered to the young person who is subject to this wrongful apprehension and to his family and the broader First Nations

community while this investigation is still ongoing?

DR PATERSON: There have been supports made available to the young person and his family by ACT Policing. ACT police have worked as closely as they can with community members and those who are supporting the family as well as with the Elected Body as this process continues.

MS CARRICK: Minister, is change needed to ACT Policing's internal investigations processes given the unacceptable amount of time this investigation has taken?

DR PATERSON: No, I do not believe so. The PRS is a robust process that the Australian Federal Police undertake when they investigate police conduct. It is unfortunate that it has taken a long time but, as I said, it is quite a complex investigation.

Access Canberra—Woden shopfront

MS CARRICK: My question is to the minister for city services. Minister, in the recent budget it was announced that the Access Canberra shopfront in Woden will be relocated to the Woden library, as part of a proposed co-location model. This raises concerns about the impact on library services, accessibility for residents, and the broader rationale and transparency of the decision-making process. Minister, will the co-location of Access Canberra with the Woden library result in any loss of meeting room capacity or any other library service? If so, how will these be replaced? And will there still be an Access Canberra presence in the Cosmopolitan building or will those jobs be lost to Woden?

MS CHEYNE: That is a lot of questions, Mr Speaker. I will do my best to answer.

In terms of the overall footprint makeup of Woden library, I will take that on notice and come back with the detail for Ms Carrick. I think it is in the early stages but let me see what I can get for her.

Secondly, on the Cosmopolitan building, my understanding is that there would not be an Access Canberra presence in there but that does not mean any job loss. They would instead be working in the Woden library, which we understand to be a good outcome because it allows people to be using both services in proximity—very similarly to Belconnen.

MS CARRICK: Minister, what consideration has been given to accessibility for Canberrans with limited mobility, noting that the Woden library is significantly further from the Woden bus interchange and that there are no public transport services on the western side of the town centre?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that on notice.

MR EMERSON: Minister, what analysis informed the decision to co-locate services in Woden? Why was Woden selected over other town or group centres? Will this analysis be made public?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that on notice just to make sure I respond as comprehensively

as possible. I would note that there will be plenty of opportunity in estimates to ask these questions, too. One of the considerations is the overall footprint in the Cosmopolitan building and the lease timing around that. But let me come back to the Assembly with a detailed answer—if not before estimates, by estimates, through estimates, or after.

Budget—frontline services

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, how does the 2026-27 ACT budget invest in more and better services for our growing city?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Tough for her question. The 2026-27 budget has a distinct and important focus on better frontline and community services, and that is why the budget has invested over \$231 million in public health and the community-based health services and workforce. This includes a significant investment to operate a new acute palliative care unit at the Canberra Hospital, which will be complete later this year. And the budget also supports funding to expand the Canberra Hospital paediatric fracture clinic, increase lung cancer specialist services and support, grow and retain our health workforce, with a \$14.1 million investment to continue junior medical officer wellbeing and workforce initiatives.

Mr Speaker, this will be supported by the \$1.3 billion investment that we are making in a new north-side hospital through the budget, a significant piece of health infrastructure that will include a new state-of-the-art emergency department, co-designed birth centre and more than 200 inpatient beds. Labor will always invest in our public hospitals and our public health system to support the health and wellbeing of our community.

MS TOUGH: Treasurer, what other frontline services are supported through investments in this budget?

MR STEEL: The budget also invests in more firefighters and paramedics. Supporting these critical workforces is a priority for our government. More paramedics will respond to growing demand as our city grows and ensure the Ambulance Service remains responsive. The new Molonglo Emergency Services Station will be supported by additional fire crews to support continued responsiveness, and the government will also support the upgrade and replacement of vehicles and equipment across the ESA.

The budget is also making additional investments to strengthen additional prosecution services, with \$18.9 million of investment to fund 24 new and permanent positions, including additional prosecutors and witness assistance officers.

Mr Speaker, the budget also provides further investments to support frontline services in mowing, horticultural services, street sweeping and more funding to support bushfire risk reduction in our nature reserves and parks. This budget continues our government's record of supporting the frontline services that Canberrans rely on.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Treasurer, how will the government partner with the community sector to support essential community services?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his supplementary. The community

sector is a vital and invaluable partner for government in delivering frontline community services, and I am pleased that the 2026-27 budget provides ongoing support for our community sector across a range of different priority areas. The budget provides over \$44 million to strengthen funding for frontline domestic, family and sexual violence, and I am very proud that the budget provides ongoing and uplifted funding to a range of critical providers and supports, including those provided by DVCS, the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre and EveryMan.

The budget also has a strong focus on frontline homelessness services, with an investment of at least \$16 million, recognising the importance of these frontline services and recognising the demand that they are facing—services funded like Samaritan House, Roadhouse, Blue Door, and Our Place Braddon. Supporting our community sector is a priority for the government, and the budget provides funding for a permanent uplift in funding to the community sector organisations to ensure that they can plan for the future, retain staff, provide high quality services and respond to demand in key areas. These investments are part of a responsible and responsive budget that delivers for Canberrans.

Thriving Kids—federal government funding

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services.

Minister, funding for Thriving Kids has been promised to be funded 50 per cent by the commonwealth and 50 per cent by the states and territories. Given our bilateral agreement states that we have agreed to spend \$37.3 million on Thriving Kids over the forward estimates, while the commonwealth is only contributing \$26.1 million, is the fifty-fifty split actually true?

MS ORR: The short answer is yes, it is a fifty-fifty split. The difference in the two figures that Miss Nuttall has referenced is that the commonwealth has provided a portion of its fifty-fifty split to states and territories, so the higher amount in the ACT is reflected in that. The easiest way to explain it is that, yes, our 50 per cent is reflected there. The commonwealth will be spending part of their 50 per cent on services that they deliver, that are nationally consistent, and the remainder has come to us, which is the other amount that Miss Nuttall has quoted.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, where in the budget papers is the \$5 million in federal funding that is anticipated this year, and can the minister confirm that we will be receiving it?

MS ORR: I will take the detail of the question, about where it is in the budget papers, on notice, because I do not have the budget papers in front of me, so I cannot point Miss Nuttall to that.

MS CLAY: Minister, when will you release the ACT's Thriving Kids implementation plan?

MS ORR: The implementation plan is an agreement between the federal and state and territory governments as to how it will be implemented. As I have said previously in

this place, I will need to take on notice whether that will be publicly released or not. I do not believe that has been confirmed at this time, or since the last time it came up for discussion. We have provided publicly information around what the components of Thriving Kids will be, how we will look to progressively roll that out and how we will be consulting on the finer details of the scheme. That information is still there, and it is consistent with everything that you would expect within the implementation plan.

Mr Speaker, with your indulgence, Miss Nuttall had a second part to her question, which was about the \$5 million becoming available this year. My understanding and the advice to me is that once all the agreements have been signed and everyone is content that they are being complied with, the funding will be made available.

Levies and taxation—rates

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer.

Treasurer, before the budget, your government announced that the \$100 health levy was going to be scrapped, but, despite this, the budget figures show that, while removing the levy will reduce revenue by \$21.4 million, rates revenue will actually increase by \$28 million. That means that residents will be worse off overall. Was the abolition of the levy a genuine tax cut or just rebranding how the government collects additional revenue?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. No, what it is is a recognition of the extra funding coming from the commonwealth as part of a new five-year National Health Reform Agreement. Because of the advocacy of the Minister for Health and the Chief Minister, we are receiving additional moneys that were not forecast in last year's budget. We have now reached agreement and we have extra funding of \$75 million in 2026-27, recognising the extra cost of delivering healthcare services in a small jurisdiction like the ACT. We have been able to remove the health levy because we are receiving a fairer share of funding from the commonwealth. That means that average rates bills will only go up by an average of five per cent. This is a reasonable increase, particularly at a time when we know that households are under pressure.

As a result of the health levy being removed from household rates bills, 27,000 households will receive a rates bill cut. At the same time as we are making cuts to stamp duty and we are making cuts to the additional indexation that was otherwise going to come in for motor vehicle registration from 1 July, we are also cutting the health levy, benefiting thousands of households across the territory. But we are also making sure that our rates system continues to provide a sustainable level of revenue to fund the community services that we are funding in the budget, the frontline services that we are funding in the budget, and the new housing that we are funding in the budget as well.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, do you deny that Canberrans are collectively paying more under this budget than they were paying under the health levy?

MR STEEL: I just said that 27,000 households will receive a rates bill cut as a result of abolishing the health levy. The way that our rates system is formulated means it is progressive—very highly progressive. The households that have more valuable land—land that has gone up higher in value relative to other blocks in Canberra—will pay

more in rates compared to those who own blocks that are worth relatively less, on average, over five years. That is a fair system. It is a system that still allows us to provide a contribution to the cost of delivering healthcare services and education to children across the ACT as well as an investment in this budget in frontline services, for new paramedics and new firefighters, and community services that support the most vulnerable people.

Mr Cocks: Mr Speaker, on a point of order, under 118AA: the question was actually about the collective amount of payments from Canberrans for rates, not the structure of the rate system and whether rates were higher than when the health levy was in place.

MR SPEAKER: Basically you asked him to deny—

MR STEEL: I already said it was going up by five per cent, on average, so, yes, that would be higher. It would be higher by about five per cent.

MR SPEAKER: You asked him to deny something, Mr Cocks, and he is not going to give you a yes or no answer. He was comprehensive in his answer and responsive. There is no point of order. A supplementary, Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: Treasurer, why did the government spin this change as tax relief when Canberrans will be paying record amounts in rates and rental taxes?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. We have been very transparent that we have abolished the health levy, but rates go up every year. At every single budget, rates go up. What we have seen in the first half of this calendar year is because of the war in the Middle East. Inflation has gone up substantially, and that is reflected in the budget, in the economic parameters for this financial year. We have seen the CPI go up to 4¾ per cent, and that has impacted the cost of delivering services by government, just as much as it has impacted households and business. We need a sustainable revenue source to continue to fund the additional cost of delivering the services that Canberrans expect. What would not be responsible is to slash and burn services and massively increase revenue. We are doing neither in this budget, but that is always what is posited by the opposition.

Parking—car parking costs

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, government is once again increasing the cost of parking fees. The cost of parking in the City Centre will rise by 4.57 per cent, and parking in Yarralumla by 5.88 per cent. Why, when the government has previously proposed general fee increases that were wage price indexed, plus a small amount, did parking increases far exceed this?

MS CHEYNE: I do not have that information in front of me, Mr Speaker, but again, I think I might be able to get it by the end of question time, so I am taking it on notice.

MR COCKS: Minister, how can the government claim to be addressing the cost of living for Canberrans whilst simultaneously increasing parking fees far beyond wage price index?

MS CHEYNE: Well, parking. Ultimately, Mr Speaker, the use of land has a cost and the government seeks to recover that cost and that is the frame through which decisions are made.

MR CAIN: Minister, is this excessive fee hike another way this government is trying to push Canberrans off the roads?

MS CHEYNE: No.

Bulk-billing—general practice clinics

MS VASSAROTTI: My question is to the Minister for Health.

As we in the Greens have been pushing for the government to deliver more bulk-billed GP appointments, we are really pleased to see that three new bulk-billing GP clinics are set to open soon. We understand they will be funded for three years, in the hope that the triple bulk-billing incentive and the 12.5 per cent admin fee will enable them to be self-sustaining in a few years. However, the triple bulk-billing is less of an incentive in urban areas because rebates do not cover the cost of the medical bill. Given all that, what is the government's long-term plan for fiscal sustainability of the three new bulk-billing clinics after the three years of government funding runs out?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Vassarotti for the question. As she would be well aware, general practice and primary care is not the responsibility of the ACT government and the funding mechanism that she is talking about in relation to the three new bulk-billing clinics is a commonwealth funding program. Of course, we very much welcome that commonwealth funding towards their responsibility for primary care and general practice in the ACT, and we are pleased to see more bulk-billing GP clinics opening here.

The ACT government is backing this in with significant investment to support more bulk-billing in the ACT. That was delivered in the 2025-26 budget. That includes ensuring payroll tax changes for medical practices from 1 July 2025, exempted income received from bulk-billing GP services from the calculation of payroll tax and \$2.36 million over four years to grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce, and that does include supporting general practice to recruit and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers. But really importantly, \$7.3 million was committed over four years to support GPs through bulk-billing incentives for children and young people—the second stage of that process is currently being assessed by officials—and to support the wellbeing and professional development of GPs. So all of that represents two Labor governments working together to further strengthen Medicare, a great Labor achievement.

MS VASSAROTTI: After these new bulk-billing clinics are delivered, what is the role of the ACT in terms of tracking the target of 160,000 new bulk-billed GP appointments a year?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: We do not gather that data, but we will continue to track that data in relation to bulk-billed GP appointments. We recognise that is part of our parliamentary agreement with the Greens, to aim for that. Part of our focus is supporting

access to GPs for children. That is a one and a half million dollar initiative available to support general practice community health centres and Aboriginal Community Controlled health organisations that commit to bulk-billing children under 16 in the ACT. Applications, as I said, were open. They closed on 23 March for the first round. There were providers that were encouraged to engage in a more detailed process around that. We expect that innovative proposals will be supported through this to ensure as many children and young people in the ACT as possible can be bulk-billed because we know that supporting the health of children and young people, particularly in the early years and then as they go through adolescence, is something that sets them up well for a healthy life, and is very much in line with the prevention approach that the Greens keep going on about and saying that the ACT Labor government is not investing in. One of the areas of prevention that we are strongly investing in is the wellbeing of children and young people in our community, setting them up for a healthy future.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, pre-existing GP clinics may well ask where their seed funding is, so where is the incentive for them to go fully bulk-billed?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Miss Nuttall for the question. Ms Vassarotti in her first question actually talked about the triple bulk-billing incentive, which was expanded from being available for bulk-billed appointments for children and young people and older people to being applicable to all bulk-billed GP appointments and then the 12.5 per cent practice incentive for practices that choose to be fully bulk-billing. That has seen 11 practices—before we even get to the specific three new practices being established under the new program—the current program has seen 11 existing practices choose to become, or remain, fully bulk-billing in the ACT.

The majority of those practices are in Canberra's north, but of course we worked very closely with the commonwealth government to ensure that the Interchange down in Tuggeranong, I think it is called something like Tuggeranong family practice now, was going to remain a fully bulk-billing GP practice as well. I understand that another one of the practices to be established will also be in Tuggeranong. Of course, we are going to work closely with the Capital Health Network with the opening of our new South Tuggeranong Health Centre and ensure that we have really strong integration between bulk-billed general practice in the Tuggeranong region and our new South Tuggeranong Health Centre, as well as, of course, the existing community health centre and Walk-in Centre in Tuggeranong.

Sports grounds—facilities

MR MILLIGAN: My question is for the Minister for Sport and Recreation—or Ms Cheyne in this instance.

I would like to thank the minister for attending our sportsground roundtable but, as she is not here today, you can pass that on for me, Ms Cheyne. A key message from sporting clubs on the night was that they pay their sportsground fees to help cover maintenance but are left playing on dangerous fields.

One individual followed up with my office after the meeting to say, "We are increasingly frustrated by the disparity between the fees charged for use of the facility, and the standard of infrastructure maintenance provided." Can Ms Cheyne please

confirm that the ACT government is meeting all of its obligations under the sportsgrounds charter?

MS CHEYNE: A reasonable question. I do not know. I will certainly make sure that I pass on your lovely comments, Mr Milligan, but I do not know so I will take it on notice. I would reflect, I think, more broadly, that one of the challenges is that our sportsgrounds are being used in ways that are not for sport. And, when our sportsgrounds need constant remediation, then that is going to put pressure on the workforce and the funding that is available to us for the general maintenance of sportsgrounds. So, I suspect that this probably has something to do with it, but, to be sure, I will take it on notice.

MR MILLIGAN: Can the minister clarify with the sports minister: is the justification to increase sportsground fees during a cost-of-living crisis warranted, considering that the conditions of the ovals are not meeting the community's expectations?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that on notice.

MR PARTON: Will the government consider reviewing the sportsground fees charged to users of fields which have received little or no maintenance?

MS CHEYNE: I will take it on notice.

Infrastructure—government infrastructure projects

MR MILLIGAN: My question is for the Chief Minister. In question time yesterday, you stated, in a response to my question about delays to local infrastructure in my electorate, that the ACT has reached peak capacity to build infrastructure. However, the CEO of the Master Builders Association said on radio earlier this week that the ACT construction sector is hungry to build. She also said there is capacity there to deliver significant public work.

Chief Minister, isn't the true reason that the infrastructure is being delayed due to your budget mismanagement and not the capacity of the construction sector?

MR BARR: No, and I would note those same organisations have been very clear, both locally and nationally, about the extreme workforce shortages that are being experienced across nearly every element of the Australian infrastructure market, from the specific trades through to some of the project management and engineering, and other qualifications. The workforce shortage estimated across the Australian infrastructure industry is in the order of 300,000 people. Our construction sector locally is around 19,000 people. There are currently more than 400 job vacancies advertised in that sector, so they are having difficulty finding people to undertake the work.

When we go out to the market to seek tenders for particular projects, sometimes we will only get one or sometimes no compliant responses, because there is not the capacity in the sector to continue to do more. The scale of the infrastructure program is the largest in the history of the territory, and it has not been able to be delivered in the last few years, and so money has rolled over from one year to the next. So it is logical to conclude, given all of those factors, that there just simply is not the capacity to

undertake more new projects.

Now, I would point out also that we are expecting a significant increase in the workforce shifting into the housing sector to meet the pipeline that has been funded in this budget. We are also very wary of the reality that Queensland, ahead of the Brisbane Olympics, will certainly be drawing a significant workforce, because there are certain projects that absolutely must be built ahead of the 2032 Brisbane Olympics, and there is no way that either the Australian or Queensland governments would allow Brisbane to be in the position to not host those Olympics and not have the stadiums, the transport and other infrastructure—that would be a national embarrassment for Queensland.

MR MILLIGAN: Chief Minister, when did you become aware of the ACT allegedly reaching the peak of our capacity to build infrastructure?

MR BARR: That has become apparent over the last two fiscal years as a result of the program increasing in the size of the rollover increasing; hence, we took the decisions that we did in this year's budget to stage and delay some projects, making sure we focused on the projects that are currently under construction. The works in progress component of the infrastructure program this year and next is very significant and they will be the two largest years of infrastructure spend in the territory's history.

MR CAIN: Chief Minister, is it convenient that the government discovered this peak capacity, as you have said, over the last two years after the 2024 election?

MR BARR: No, because I had been pointing to the fact that it was going to be a very big infrastructure program in the budget that was delivered in 2024.

Roads—Athllon Drive duplication

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, yesterday's budget was yet another kick in the teeth for the people of Tuggeranong.

The duplication of Athllon Drive between Drakeford Drive and Sulwood Drive—something that has been promised for longer than most of us have been in this place—has been delayed yet again. We now learn that the project, which the Treasurer's first budget promised would be completed by the end of 2028, has been delayed until the end of 2029. This project is slated to be delivered over eight years later than the completion date promised when it first appeared in the budget papers back in 2021, and some 17 years after the duplication idea was first floated. Minister, why has this project consistently been delayed year after year, and when do you expect that this project will actually be delivered?

MS CHEYNE: In terms of actually being delivered, let me take that on notice. In terms of why it is being delayed, history will show that planning has been complicated. There have been some decisions that we have had to take in the past where other duplications or investments have had to be prioritised over others. It has depended on whether or not we have been able to get commonwealth funding to support us. As the Treasurer and the Chief Minister have explained at length, there are pressures on overall delivery that can be achieved in this city at the moment, and we need to be realistic about those

timeframes.

MR PARTON: When it comes to the reasons for the delay, would we blame the lack of tradies more than the war in the Middle East?

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

Mr Parton: It is not a hypothetical. It is not a hypothetical at all.

Mr Cain interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Are you taking a point of order or are you just interjecting?

Mr Parton: I do not believe it is a hypothetical. The question is: when it comes to the delay, would we blame the lack of tradies more than we blame the war in the Middle East? That is not a hypothetical at all.

MR SPEAKER: On the point of order?

MS CHEYNE: Mr Parton said “would we”. He can ask himself.

MR SPEAKER: I think we will move on to a supplementary.

MR COCKS: Minister, can the duplication of Athllon Drive be put next to the undelivered ice sports facility on the shelf of broken and hollow promises for the forgotten people and communities south of the lake?

MS CHEYNE: I think the complications with the ice sports facility are well known in this place. Minister Berry has been steadfast in her commitment to delivering it, but when there are external factors, and in this case external parties involved, that does get a lot more complicated, unfortunately. I know that this has been a source of great frustration not only for her but also for the people of Tuggeranong and, indeed, the entire Canberra community. We do wish the Canberra Brave all the best.

In terms of whether Athllon Drive is a broken promise, we have been clear that we are committed to delivering these projects, but we also need to be realistic about the capacity of the sector, and with prices having gone up, for all sorts of reasons.

Opposition members interjecting—

Housing affordability—first home buyers

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, can you please outline to the Assembly how the 2026-27 ACT budget supports more Canberrans to get their first home?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings. This is a big budget for housing. Through the budget, the government is abolishing stamp duty for all first home buyers in the ACT if they want to buy a home to live in. It makes us the first jurisdiction in Australia to do so. From 1 July, no first home buyer in the ACT will have to pay stamp duty. Our

\$770 million investment in housing is not just about enabling more housing; it is also about more Canberrans being able to call these houses their homes. We are doing this by removing one of the biggest up-front costs and barriers to home ownership, opening the door for more Canberrans to have their own home sooner. It complements the tax reforms that were undertaken by the commonwealth government in their budget in May which level the playing field and support first home buyers in the market. ACT Labor took our commitment to the last election and, through this budget, we are delivering on that commitment in full.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Treasurer, what does this budget do to support the government's missing middle housing reforms?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his supplementary. Not only does this budget support more Canberrans to have their own home; it also provides Canberrans with more housing choice, through a package of tax cuts to support our missing middle housing reforms. As part of that, we are developing a Canberra House Pattern Book, to provide a collection of pre-approved, architect-designed plans for missing middle homes, providing more certainty and efficiency through the approvals pathway for these homes. I anticipate that regulatory change will be required to support that, and I look forward to briefing members of the Assembly on that as we progress that work, as well as the competition that we will run to come up with well-designed homes that fit in well with Canberra streets and climate.

We will provide a time limited 50 per cent reduction in the codified lease variation charge for eligible missing middle housing developments in RZ1 and RZ2 areas, which will lower overall development costs for these homes and incentivise their development, aligned with our target of enabling 30,000 homes by 2030. And we will abolish stamp duty for owner-occupiers of newly titled missing middle homes, removing one of the biggest up-front costs for Canberrans wanting to live in these homes. Through the budget, we are investing in housing supply, we are investing in housing choice and we are investing in housing success.

MS TOUGH: Treasurer, how do the changes that we make in this budget complement the Australian government's reforms to support more first home buyers?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Tough for her question. Housing is a national issue, and it is great to see the investment in housing supply and housing ownership by the federal Labor government. New national partnership payments are provided by the commonwealth to the states and territories through Federation Funding Agreements, including \$50 million under the 10,000 homes for first home buyers initiative to support the delivery of up to 100,000 new homes reserved for sale to first home buyers across the country, and \$50 million from the Housing Support Program's Local Infrastructure Fund for the ACT to build the enabling infrastructure, including utilities and other infrastructure needed to unlock new housing developments. The ACT government's Help to Buy intergovernmental agreement, which commenced in December last year, will provide shared equity opportunities for low- and middle-income households to purchase or build a home. Also, the ACT is one of only three jurisdictions invited to participate in the New Homes Bonus, which is a payment for us being on track to meet our share of the national housing target.

We are seeing a very significant level of investment to help Australians and Canberrans have a home to call their own, and that is because we have two levels of government—a federal Labor government and an ACT Labor government—who believe it is a cause worth investing in.

Light rail—stage 2B

MR BRADDOCK: My question is for the Minister for Transport.

Minister, I note the budget initiative titled Delivering Light Rail to Woden. This initiative shows capital provisions between 2027-28 and 2029-30 offset by equivalent capital reductions in the preceding years. Minister, does this represent a now-official delay to light rail stage 2B of one additional year?

MR STEEL: No. I will continue to update the Assembly on the timeline for stage 2B. That initiative goes to the delivery of light rail stage 2A, which is of course under construction—and it did cause a little bit of disruption on our road network today, I admit, Mr Speaker—which is actually ahead of schedule in terms of the construction work underway. That initiative also takes into account the ongoing planning work that is underway on stage 2B of light rail and I will continue to provide updates to the timeline for that project. But we have said all along that, of course, it is subject to third-party decisions by the federal government through the NCA, through the federal parliament in relation to the project. But we are going to progress through each milestone. We are going to do that in a systematic way to make sure we can progress the project. And we continue to fund it in the budget, together with the commonwealth, who also made a contribution of 50 per cent for the planning and design of that project.

So no, there is not a new timeline that has been announced in the budget. But as we progress through the next stage, which is trying to get approval for the EIS and through the Environment Biodiversity Conservation Act process, then I will continue to provide updates to the Assembly through that and as we move into the next stage.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, can you promise—and cross your heart—that the light rail stage 2B will actually be built, and that people will be able to ride on it to the Woden Valley in time for the 2032 election?

MR STEEL: Well, just to reiterate the process that we are in, we have got to go through the planning and design process. We have gone through a significant milestone now of finalising an EIS and submitting it to the commonwealth—a substantial milestone. So we are showing progress on the project. We are going to continue to work through each of those stages to make sure that we can deliver light rail to Woden. and then we will develop the business case. Government will have an opportunity to consider that, make an investment decision. We have to go through the procurement process as well.

So we are working through, and that is what you do with infrastructure projects, including the most complex and large infrastructure projects that the territory has ever had to deliver. You work through each stage systemically. Part of that process will also be engaging with the commonwealth not just on the planning approvals, but with Infrastructure Australia through their processes and with the federal minister for infrastructure and transport to secure funding for the project because the project cannot be delivered without a federal contribution of 50 per cent, and so that will be a critical

decision-making point in the process and it is contingent on that funding being provided to be able to get a project of that size underway in the ACT.

We will also be looking at the financing options. There are decisions that are yet to be made about that. Obviously we have used a PPP process for stage 1 of light rail and the augmentation of stage 2A, and what that has meant is that it has spread the cost out over a longer period of time so that the cash impact on the budget is not as significant as it would otherwise be if it was paid upfront. So we have to work through all of those decisions but we are continuing to progress it through the 26-27 budget.

MS VASSAROTTI: Minister, I think you might have partly answered this question in your first answer. But in that same initiative, does the additional capital expenditure for 26-27 and 27-28 represent the full extent of all remaining costs for light rail stage 2A?

MR STEEL: Well, the project has not finished yet, so we will see what costs come out in the end. But it is on track; that is good news. And I will update the Assembly on that through the budget process and decisions that are made in relation to the project as it is completed. But yes, it is fully funded through the budget. I will take on notice any further information that I can provide to the Assembly.

Mr Barr: With that, we're on track to finish at 3.01. I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.