



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Tuesday, 16 September 2025

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Questions without Notice

Economy—credit rating

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. In 2024, S&P Global rated the ACT's budgetary performance as "average". What changed in the last year that has led S&P to downgrade the credit rating and to conclude that the territory's budgetary performance is now "very weak"?

MR BARR: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. This is commentary from Standard and Poor's that was consistent across, pretty well, every state and territory except Western Australia. They have been clear that some elements of cost pressures that the ACT, Tasmania, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Queensland have experienced have put pressure on state and territory budgets. Principally, as the Leader of the Opposition would be aware, that includes health expenditure. But it does also include other areas of expenditure growth, and, frankly, a reality that revenue at a state and territory level—unless you have a significant mining industry to tax royalties from—is challenged at the moment.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, did the Treasurer fail in his stated goal of avoiding a ratings downgrade this year?

MR BARR: No. The objectives of the budget are more than just about a credit rating. The budget has to do many different things. Of course, it is always open to a party seeking to form government to say that their only criteria is the credit rating, but I think we all know that the obligations and responsibilities of government go beyond just that question. And, as we are already one hour into many, many days of debate on the budget, already the tone of that first hour is that more needs to be spent on education. I look forward, I am sure, to hearing from colleagues that more money needs to be spent in every single area of government expenditure—perhaps with a couple of notable areas where we will be debating amendments to spend less money.

MR COCKS: Chief Minister, why should the community have faith in the Treasurer, when the independent ratings agencies do not?

MR BARR: The independent ratings agencies have not expressed a lack of faith in the Treasurer. They have identified that there are challenges for state and territory governments. There will be other ratings downgrades, for other states and territories; that is very clear. There already have been. And there are a number of state and territory budgets that are challenged at the moment. Undoubtedly the vertical fiscal imbalance that is a feature of the Australian federation is only growing as a problem, not shrinking.

Housing—affordability

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Homes and New Suburbs. The latest Domain property report shows that median house prices in the ACT are the second highest in Australia, and median unit prices are the third highest. Minister, is housing affordability a genuine concern for this government?

MS BERRY: Of course, it is important for this government, as it is for governments across the country, including the commonwealth. That is why we are partnering

together to provide more opportunities for people to get into housing. Our own commitment of 30,000 homes after 2030 is an extraordinary commitment, and the federal government's commitment of 100,000 new homes for new home owners is something on which we are all working hard. We know it is a challenging time, but we are all working together. By working together, we will be able to achieve some really good outcomes for people in our community.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, is it the success of your housing policies that is driving so many local families to move to cheaper homes in Googong, Queanbeyan, Yass and Bungendore?

MS BERRY: I do not agree with the premise of Ms Castley's question. I would say that people make choices about where they live for a range of reasons. Price may be one of them; location is another reason why people will live in different areas.

Mr Cocks: Yass is so much more convenient!

MS BERRY: Well, move there; do us a favour! Those kinds of decisions are made, as I said, for a range of reasons, and every community across the country is working hard to meet the needs of all people.

MS BARRY: Minister, when will young people on median incomes have a real chance to own a house here in Canberra?

MS BERRY: I think that question is a bit of a hypothetical, but I will refer Ms Barry to my first answer. We are all working together, across the country—each state and territory, and including the commonwealth—to meet the needs of every community member across the country, with a range of different options, because we are all experiencing a housing crisis. Nobody is denying that. We are all working very hard to make sure that every person gets a chance to have a home of their own that meets their needs, whether that is in home ownership or whether that involves people who are most in need, in public, social or affordable housing.

Legislative Assembly—member conduct

MR RATTENBURY: Chief Minister, last week on 666, ABC Radio Breakfast, host Ross Solly read out an anonymous text message from a sitting Labor member of the Assembly. The text made a series of reflections on another member of this place, including about that member taking personal leave from the Assembly. Chief Minister, do you consider it to be an acceptable standard of conduct for sitting members to send anonymous texts to the media with these sorts of reflections about another member taking personal leave?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Rattenbury for the question. No; I do not. I asked the member concerned to issue a direct apology to Ms Lee. That has occurred and has been accepted.

MR RATTENBURY: Chief Minister, will you inform the Assembly who in the Labor Party sent this anonymous text message?

MR BARR: Yes; I can. Ms Cheyne sent the text message.

MR BRADDOCK: Chief Minister, why did you not require the member to make a public apology, or was it your preferred strategy to try to sweep it under the carpet?

MR BARR: I think that is a very pejorative question from Mr Braddock. I received an approach from Ms Lee, asking for the identification of the member and for an apology. I undertook to find out and asked for that apology to be given. It was, within a matter of hours. I subsequently contacted Ms Lee to be assured that the apology was received, and it was.

Early childhood education and care—Early Childhood Strategy

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. One of the actions in the ACT’s Early Childhood Strategy is:

Through cross-government and sector collaboration explore enhancing multi-agency support services through a model built on strong partnerships and relationships, to ensure children and families are supported through their learning, health, safety and wellbeing, when they need it.

This is the only mention of “safety” in the whole document. Minister, given the nationwide concerns about children’s safety in early childhood settings, do you accept that the strategy needs updating with more of a focus on children’s safety?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Emerson for his interest in early childhood education and the safety of young people in those services. That strategy was brought together with strong consultation with the sector, with unions and with the ACT government to make sure that it did cover and was fulsome. It is the first strategy of its kind in the country, and I think it still remains the only one. We are proud of the work that we have done as a government, working with the early childhood education and care sector, to ensure that we can recognise the expertise within the sector and work together towards making changes that support early childhood educators and ensure that our children are safe.

We will continue to update and work on the strategy and work on regular updates as far as things change within the early childhood sector across the country—of course, we will; things change all the time across a range of sectors—and we do that in close collaboration with the early childhood sector.

MR EMERSON: Minister, how many actions from the Early Childhood Strategy have been completed, noting that we are five years in and, as of a month ago, 24 actions from the first phase and 19 actions from the second phase were due to have been completed?

MS BERRY: I will take that on notice.

MS CARRICK: Minister, of the actions from the third phase of the strategy, which were due to commence last month and which, if any, are underway?

MS BERRY: Sorry; I did not catch the last bit.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Carrick, what was the last bit of the question?

MS CARRICK: Of the actions from the third phase of the strategy, which were due to commence last month, which, if any, are underway?

MS BERRY: I will take that on notice.

Economy—credit rating

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Finance. Last week, the estimates committee was told that cash payments to Calvary Health Care would not be funded through new debt but through existing cash reserves. However, S&P Global have noted that the territory's cash reserves is one of the few things holding up the ACT's credit rating. Can the minister confirm if this is a one-off drawdown or if there will be further reductions in liquidity to avoid new borrowings?

MR STEEL: I am happy to take the question, Mr Speaker. In the short term, as S&P has noted, we will be returning to surplus in 2027, based on their metrics. S&P looks not only the general government sector but also at the PTE sector as well. They are focused on that. We show a return to operating surpluses one year earlier than that in our budget papers. Of course, we will be managing the totality of the government's spending, not just through borrowings but through the revenue that we receive from the community, from businesses and from a range of different revenue lines, so it will not just be from borrowings. There is also revenue from across the government that we use to fund the delivery of services and infrastructure.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what policies or rules does the government have about drawing down the territory's liquid assets?

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice.

MR COCKS: What policies or rules does the government have about reducing contributions to the Superannuation Provision Account?

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice. But as we have set out in the fiscal strategy, we are moving to a position of wanting to pay down the outstanding superannuation liability over the next ten years, and so we will be consistent with that strategy in our approach to managing the superannuation liability that was inherited, on self-government, from the commonwealth.

Labor Party—donations

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. It is well known that TikTok has been aggressively lobbying politicians around Australia, including “drinks, canapes, private meetings and tickets to exclusive events”. They are represented by a firm called Anacta Strategies, which has made substantial financial contributions to ACT Labor.

Chief Minister, have you ever been contacted by TikTok or its representatives to meet or discuss any policy or other issues?

MR BARR: No. I do not use TikTok. I have not been approached. I have no regulatory

function in relation to TikTok. I do not use it personally. In fact, I think I am looking at the most prolific user of TikTok in this place!

I have heeded the advice of Australian security agencies in relation to that application.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, were Anacta's contributions made on behalf of TikTok, and did it facilitate greater access to Labor ministers?

MR BARR: I do not believe so, because we have no regulatory role in relation to social media. It is not within the purview of the ACT Legislative Assembly.

MR HANSON: Chief Minister, have any ministers had private meetings, tickets to exclusive events or other benefits from Anacta or TikTok?

MR BARR: In relation to Anacta, quite possibly. With TikTok, I would be surprised, but I will check the record on that. Any declarations are made through the appropriate ministerial diary declarations or, indeed, through a minister's register of interests or through their gift register. They are provided annually. We believe in that transparency.

We will report who we meet with, unlike some opposite who seem to think that one standard applies to one political party but not to them.

MR SPEAKER: Chief Minister, can I just get a clarification based on the start of your answer? Are you taking that on notice?

MR BARR: In relation to meetings with Anacta, yes, I will take that part on notice—

Ms Castley: And TikTok?

MR BARR: And TikTok. I do not believe there will be any with TikTok.

I am pointing to the fact that they are all published, in time, anyway, under all the reporting requirements that sit on eight members of this chamber. And there is the voluntary contribution that two members are now making to report their diaries.

Drugs—policy

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, a YourSay panel survey has been issued on the ACT government's recent drug law reforms, informing an evaluation by the University of New South Wales. We have been informed that this survey is not publicly available, has only been sent to a select group, and is presented in a way that encourages endorsement of the reforms. Minister, who exactly has been invited to participate in this survey, and why isn't it publicly available?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you to Mr Hanson for the question. This is part of the legislative review of the changes to the Drugs of Dependence Act, and, as Mr Hanson has indicated, that review is being undertaken by a third party—I think Mr Hanson said University of New South Wales. I will take the detail of the question on notice in relation to who has been invited to participate. But the questions that are in this particular survey are not the types of questions that the public would be able to respond

to. They are quite specific questions that require a level of knowledge and engagement with the drug law reform process and the sector. So that is why there has been, for this part of the process, a targeted engagement. But I will take on notice to provide the Assembly with who, specifically, that has gone to.

MR HANSON: Is this survey being used to inform the New South Wales review, or is New South Wales actually conducting the review? Who is the reviewer?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: If Mr Hanson and I are talking about the same thing, this is the review that we are required to have for the drug law reform in the ACT, so it would be an ACT government review. I might have misheard the question that Mr Hanson first asked. I thought he said that it was the University of New South Wales, but I could be wrong about that. I will take the whole question on notice.

Mr Hanson: That is who is doing the survey—are they informing the review, or is New South Wales doing the review?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: They are the University of New South Wales. They are not the New South Wales government. It is a completely different organisation. I think we are now talking about the same thing—that it is an ACT government commissioned review that is part of our responsibilities.

MR COCKS: Minister, will you commit to making the full results of this survey publicly available, including the questions and how they were answered?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yes, we will make information available in relation to the review. I will take on notice Mr Cocks's question as well, in terms of making available how the questions were answered. I have no issue in making the questions publicly available. My recollection is that they were provided to me in a brief, but I did not make any comments or changes to those questions—again, if we are talking about the same thing that I am recalling from my briefing. But individual answers are generally not provided. Generally, there is a summary. The independent consultant who is undertaking the survey summarises what the responses were and provides that summary. I have no problem at all with making that publicly available.

Roads—Molonglo Valley

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is directed to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, can you please provide the Assembly with an update on the construction of the Molonglo River bridge?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. I certainly can. The Molonglo River bridge, a major Labor government investment delivering for a growing Canberra, is progressing on time and on budget. Current works include protection over the interception sewer, concreting and steelworks for the pedestrian underpass, stormwater drainage and utility conduits, and topsoil placement on batters.

Five-tonne pre-cast bridge deck panels are being craned into place, which is a significant milestone. Road closures are required at the end of this month and the beginning of next month to safely enable the placement of the deck panels on the

northern side. The times for closures have been chosen to coincide with the school holidays as much as possible. Between November and March, crews will complete the concrete deck pours, safety barriers and throw-screens, ensuring a safe crossing for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians.

This is one of the largest infrastructure projects in Canberra's history and it is being funded and delivered by Labor governments. This bridge is on track to open in late 2026, better connecting Molonglo to the rest of Canberra and future-proofing the network.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how will this bridge support the continued growth of the Molonglo Valley?

MS CHEYNE: This bridge has been designed with Molonglo's future firmly in mind. Its raised profile, above the one-in-100-year flood level of the Molonglo River, means flooding will no longer cut access, ending the days of traffic being diverted to Cotter Road and causing incredible, city-wide congestion when that happens, while ensuring long-term resilience and reliability. It provides safe, separated active travel paths so that walking and cycling become real options—something that those opposite rarely prioritise.

Most importantly, Labor has reserved space for a future light rail span between the bridges, because we believe in a connected, sustainable Canberra that moves beyond car dependency. This is what forward planning looks like.

This bridge will keep Molonglo connected, improve network performance across the ACT, and support the government's plan to deliver housing, jobs and infrastructure together for a well-serviced, thriving community.

MS TOUGH: Minister, can you please explain the environmental innovations and sustainability improvements incorporated into the project?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary, and I appreciate Ms Carrick's interest. Labor is committed to delivering infrastructure that is not only functional but sustainable. We have used Envirocrete, a low-carbon concrete with 30 per cent lower embodied carbon, and we have optimised the design to save materials and cut waste. We have shortened the bridge to 200 metres, which has reduced the number of girders and bearings, and eliminated the need for rock anchors, all of which lowered costs, improved constructability and reduced emissions. We have sourced rock protection from the site, balanced earthworks by raising the road alignment, and incorporated safe access features for long-term maintenance.

These are tangible, measurable environmental benefits, and this is the difference that Labor governments make: we build infrastructure that serves today's needs, protects the environment and creates a legacy. Mr Speaker, we are proving that you can deliver major projects while cutting carbon and delivering value for money.

Light rail—federal funding

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Chief Minister. Infrastructure Australia is the

Australian government's adviser on infrastructure. Their role is to evaluate infrastructure proposals that are seeking investment from the Australian government of \$250 million or more. In response to a question taken on notice during the estimates hearing on 28 July 2025, you stated that Infrastructure Canberra has been working with Infrastructure Australia on the format of the light rail stage 2A submission since 2024 and that the final submission was provided to Infrastructure Australia on 30 July 2025, which was two days after the estimates hearing.

Why was the final submission of the light rail stage 2A submission sent to Infrastructure Australia only two days after I asked you about it? And is the submission publicly available?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Carrick for the question. I will seek some advice from Infrastructure Canberra in relation to the timing of their submission. It would then be a matter of Infrastructure Australia publishing that on their website. I note, going back about six or seven years ago, that there was an Infrastructure Australia sponsored assessment of future transport needs for Central Canberra. I think that is available via a Google search, if that helps Ms Carrick.

MS CARRICK: When will the light rail stage 2B business case be submitted to Infrastructure Australia to ensure a significant contribution is received from the Australian government, given the state of the budget?

MR STEEL: I will take the question, Mr Speaker. The answer is: when it has been developed.

Last sitting week, I tabled the indicative timeframe for the development of the stage 2B of light rail from Commonwealth Park to Woden, and that included the timeline for the development of a business case, which of course will take a period of years. That would be the appropriate time, once it has been developed, to go through the appropriate Infrastructure Australia submission process.

MR EMERSON: Minister, will the business case for stage 2B include details of connections to all public transport services across Canberra's South, given these were not addressed in the environmental impact statement?

MR STEEL: I do not agree with the premise of the member's question, and it is pre-empting debate on the motion that we are about to have. But I have been very consistent in the answers that I have provided to questions on notice through the estimates committee process: one, there will still continue to be direct bus services from the south side to the city once light rail stage 2B commences; and, two, there will be great opportunities for the integration of bus services with new light rail stops that are being built. I particularly highlighted the new light rail stop that is being planned at Kent Street, with the opportunity to potentially connect in with buses—particularly R7 and R10 services coming from Weston Creek and Molonglo—in the future. Of course, these connections are not possible right now. That will enable people coming from those areas to be able to access the employment hubs in Barton and Parkes, which employ 40,000 people and are not accessible under the current bus system, because the infrastructure is not there. That is what light rail will deliver.

Unused land—lease squatting

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Planning. Canberrans are tired of lease squatting and poor enforcement. Schedule 4 of the Planning Act makes it an offence to fail to use land for a continuous period of at least one year for the purpose for which the land is granted, with a penalty up to \$48,600.

Big Splash was last open to the public in March 2024, but Access Canberra has not commenced enforcement action and has no timeframe for when it will. The Hawker Tennis Centre has been closed since 2010, and Access Canberra has not stated a timeframe for redevelopment or enforcement action. The lease for SDN Bluebell requires operation of a childcare centre but, at the moment, it looks like that might shut and the site may have no childcare centre at all. Why hasn't Access Canberra commenced enforcement action against Big Splash?

MR STEEL: It depends on what you call enforcement action. Both I and Access Canberra are very much aware of those provisions in the Planning Act, which commenced with the new planning system. Of course, it is up to Access Canberra, as an independent regulator, to make decisions about the compliance action under either the Planning Act or, indeed, other acts that they have responsibility for enforcing.

In relation to Big Splash, they have been engaging with the owner about safety on the site, particularly around the fencing in the first instance and making sure that they fully fence the property. While a date of completion for the fence is unknown, the matter is being monitored by Access Canberra inspectors. They have options available to them under the Planning Act if they need. That is a decision for them to make as part of their ongoing review.

The same would also apply in relation to, I think it is, 44 College Street in Belconnen, which the member also referred to. Of course, if that matter was drawn to the attention of Access Canberra—which I believe it has been—then they will certainly look into compliance with the lease conditions. I understand that there are a range of uses that are available under the lease for that site. So they would be, of course, looking at whether they are complying with the range of uses that are available.

Ms Clay: I have a point of clarification.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Clay, do you have a point of order here or not?

Ms Clay: I have a point of order on a point of clarification. I believe the minister said Access Canberra were an independent regulator, and I am not sure that they are. We have already raised the matter with the minister, and the minister has said that enforcement action has not taken place.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Clay, what is your point of order? Is your point of order on relevance or is it—

Ms Clay: Relevance, given that we are told that Access Canberra is an independent regulator and given that we are being given different information than we have previously been given.

MR SPEAKER: I do not believe there is a point of order. I think the minister has made every attempt to answer your question, which was specifically: why hasn't Access Canberra commenced enforcement against Big Splash. He has answered that in some detail. Irrespective of whether Access Canberra is independent or not, I am not sure that that really comes into whether he has answered the question relevantly. I reckon you have a supplementary, Ms Clay.

MS CLAY: I do indeed.

Why hasn't Access Canberra commenced enforcement action at the Hawker Tennis Centre?

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice and ask. I do not want to speak for them on that issue without having full advice before me. So I will come back to the Assembly in relation to that particular site.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, has Access Canberra advised the leaseholders for the SDN Bluebell early child learning centre in Belconnen that leaving the site unoccupied for 12 months may be an offence?

MR STEEL: That is the law. It is set out in the Planning Act. So I think everyone should be aware of that—and, of course, ignorance of the law is no excuse. But I am sure that members of the community have brought that to the attention of the lessee. I appreciate what the question is aimed at doing, and I want to express my sympathy with the families and, indeed, the operators of SDN Bluebell in relation to the closure and application for the demolition of that site. That has to be independently assessed by the Planning Authority in relation to any development on the site, and that of course will be assessed in accordance with the lease conditions and the Territory Plan.

Miss Nuttall: Mr Speaker, with apologies for interrupting, a point of order on relevance. The question was specifically about whether Access Canberra had advised the proponents of the development, about their obligations—

MR STEEL: I will take it on notice to find out whether they have. But the broader point still applies, which is that it is, of course, an option available to Access Canberra to enforce those provisions under the Planning Act if they are not undertaking those uses within 12 months—noting, as I have already said, that there are a range of uses that are permitted on the site that, I understand, extend beyond just childcare provision on the site. It would be up to Access Canberra as to whether they wish to undertake any activity around potential enforcement in relation to activity there. But, obviously, a development application may also be made by the lessee about what they want to do on the site, and that would have to be assessed according to the Planning Act.

Business—Better Regulation Agenda

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries. The government released its Better Regulation Agenda in 2022. The agenda was meant to help improve regulation in the ACT through a two-year program. However, in March this year a Canberra Business Chamber survey found 47 per cent

of businesses still find red tape and compliance are issues preventing them from reaching their full potential. Minister, has the government implemented all of the changes announced in the Better Regulation Agenda?

MS CHEYNE: I will take this question, Mr Speaker. I appreciate that while it is in the business area it is also about regulation and government services, which is me. The structure of that report, if I recall correctly, is that there were clear areas of focus for this government, as well as longer term areas that we hope to be able to progress. Those major areas of reform have been completed. One of those, of course, was the night-time economy. That work will remain ongoing but the issues that were identified in that report have been undertaken. There has also been the work regarding mutual recognition, which has been a huge undertaking for governments across Australia.

Going forward, there certainly are elements of the report that were anticipated for future consideration that are being worked through as we speak, including some areas where we can streamline some processes, especially when it comes to transactions and transactions with Access Canberra. There have been a whole host of areas that have been identified where I have engaged with my colleagues about some reforms that we can undertake to give effect to those suggested changes. I expect that work to remain ongoing.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, why has this agenda failed to reduce the red tape burden on local businesses?

MS CHEYNE: I do not think it has failed at all. I think it has been about better regulation not no regulation, as we have said repeatedly. I would note that regulation comes in many different forms and from different levels of government as well. What we have really aimed to do, and I think the night-time economy is a terrific example of this, is to find ways to make it easier for businesses to access programs that the ACT government has. We have seen a really sharp uptick already in the night-time economy venues that can receive liquor licence discounts. We have made it easier for musicians to park in loading zones by giving them free permits to be able to do that. These are all things that we have heard from the community and that we have implemented and have been received well.

I appreciate that there are always going to be some areas of business that are feeling like there is some extra hurdles to go through and I would note, in particular, in the public unleased land space and in the Urban Forest Act space, that is what has come through from a good portion of the business sector. We have discussed it a few times in this place. Minister Steel and I have been working closely together on implementing a program of reform, including reviews of both of those acts, so that it is easier for other government objectives, including doing business in the ACT, to be met.

MR COCKS: Minister, when can local businesses expect the government to finally start actively working with them to reduce red tape and get the ACT economy moving again?

MS CHEYNE: I reject any assertion that we have not been working with businesses. We have. We have had multiple ministerial roundtables with a collection of ministers as well as on specific issues that have fallen within our portfolios. Minister Steel meets

regularly with PACICERG—great acronym; always makes me laugh. I have met with the construction sector, the real estate sector and several others, planning what we can do to ensure that conducting business in the ACT and meeting some of those other objectives for us, doing business, more housing, housing that is developed in a way that gives the community confidence, is achieved. Those conversations will continue. In fact, I think Minister Steel and I have a roundtable forthcoming in the coming weeks, I think. So we look forward to continuing those conversations, hearing from businesses, testing the changes that we are looking to make with businesses to make sure that we are not adding to any burden of doing business in the ACT.

Climate change—National Climate Risk Assessment

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Minister, the National Climate Risk Assessment was released yesterday and makes for sobering reading. We can expect extreme heat events and a longer bushfire season in south-eastern Australia.

Has the ACT government done any modelling or assessment on the climate risks to the ACT specifically?

MS ORR: I thank Mr Braddock for his question. Yes, the Commonwealth government did release their risk assessment yesterday. It is quite a significant read and—as many people have commented—quite a sobering read as well. It outlines quite a lot of the impacts we could see from a warming climate, particularly if we do not take mitigation action and do not respond to the adaptation needs that are already baked in due to our lack of action to date globally.

In regard to Mr Braddock's specific question about how this may apply to the ACT, or whether the ACT has done any modelling on the risks, a 2022 ACT whole-of-government climate change risk assessment process was undertaken. A lot of the risks identified in that, from my preliminary reading of the very large risk assessment from the commonwealth government, do actually align. But, certainly, there will be a little bit of work to go through and identify where the work we have done to date aligns with the commonwealth's: what gaps there may be or what new learnings there may be that we need to look further into.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, will the government develop a specific ACT climate adaptation plan, similar to the national one?

MS ORR: I certainly would not want to be announcing policy decisions in question time! To answer what I can of Mr Braddock's question, I believe there is an ongoing discussion between the commonwealth and the states and territories around the adaptation plan and how that will work: who will have responsibility for what and what kinds of plans or strategies might have to come out of that.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, what work is the government doing in adaptation policy to ensure Canberran lives and livelihoods are protected from climate risks over the coming years?

MS ORR: There has been ongoing work on adaptation. We continue to look at the ways

that we need to adapt. Obviously, there was the hope for and the focus on mitigation globally, so that we would not have to do as much adaptation. We have not seen the mitigation impacts that we would have liked to see, so we will have to address a certain amount of warming in our climate.

The things the ACT government has been specifically looking at to date include: living infrastructure; the way we can cool our city; restoration and adaptability of landscapes; and where we can build opportunities into our buildings to make them more flexible to climate change, such as improving air circulation, heating, cooling and so forth. I could go on. I dare say Mr Rattenbury probably knows quite a few of these programs, so I will leave it there.

ACT public service—staff health and safety

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for the Public Service. There were 114 work health and safety incidents of sexual harassment and assault as of April 2025, across the ACT public service, for last financial year. Minister, how many of those complaints were arising from internal workplace conduct versus those occurring in customer-facing interactions?

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

MR COCKS: Minister, how many of these 114 incidents have been referred to police, and how many resulted in other disciplinary action?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Obviously, I will have to take the detail of that question on notice. But I would say that any incident of sexual harassment, sexual assault or abuse is completely unacceptable in the ACT public service, as it is in any other workplace or any other part of our community. And, of course, under work health and safety legislation, it is a mandatorily reportable incident—a sexual assault or sexual harassment—if I have got the terminology correct. That is through our own RiskMan reporting, and there are regular reminders to staff across the ACT public service that these are matters that also need to be reported to WorkSafe.

MR HANSON: Minister, will you provide—either on notice or table it—a directorate-level breakdown with trend data of these incidents for the past five years, please?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Obviously, I will take that question on notice, Mr Speaker. I think this has been a complete waste of the opposition's questions-without-notice time. I was clearly never going to be able to provide this level of detail and, particularly, to table trend data over five years that I had no idea I was going to be asked for.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: So if the opposition want to waste their time in this way, that is open to them, and I will take the questions on notice!

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

Out-of-home care—foster and kinship carers

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Children, Youth and Families. Minister, this week marks the nationally recognised foster carers week. What is the government doing to acknowledge and support the important role of the ACT's foster and kinship carers?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Tough for the question and for the opportunity to mark national foster carers week. This week is a chance to raise awareness of the incredible work of foster and kinship carers. These carers love, care for and support children who are in out-of-home care. In short, we would not have a care system without them. They are truly the unsung heroes of our community.

I have had the immense pleasure, in my time as Minister for Children, Youth and Families, to meet with many carers, and I am always struck by how dedicated they are to supporting children through some of their hardest times and offering them safety and security when they need it most.

I met with several carers just last week for a carers appreciation event, and was again grateful for the commitment they make to the lives of children. I want to acknowledge to my fellow Assembly members that this is not easy work. It is tireless and demanding. I want to take this opportunity to express, on behalf of the government, that we are extremely appreciative of what they do each and every day.

MS TOUGH: Minister, can you provide specific examples of the way the ACT government is supporting carers to do the important role that you have referenced?

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you, Ms Tough, for the supplementary. We have several ways in which we support, listen to and care for our carers. You will see tangible evidence of how we listened to carers as part of the development of the Next Steps for Our Kids strategy, and sought to value their voice as people with lived experience. Next Steps helps to place carers at the centre of decision-making and to ensure that their expertise in the lives of the children and young people in their care is always respected and their needs are prioritised.

Next Steps has also given more control to carers around the type of service they want to receive, and more choice around providers through the establishment of the preferred provider panel. We are also working closely with the Our Booris, Our Way committee to see how best we can support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship carers, including those in more informal arrangements, so that no-one misses out.

I look forward to continuing to see the outcomes from Next Steps and how it makes a difference in the lives of children and their carers. I want to thank the passionate carers who stand up and advocate for the needs of carers, to help shape the government's policy and decision-making.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, what are the ways carers can access advocacy?

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you, Mr Werner-Gibbings, for the supplementary. There

are several ways carers can access advocacy support, either on an individual level or to raise more systemic concerns. The ACT government funds Carers ACT to offer a range of advocacy services to carers. In July this year, in partnership with government, they launched a new foster and kinship carers resource hub. This is an online resource whereby carers can access information about the system that will help them to advocate for themselves and others by understanding how things work and what they can expect from Children, Youth and Families. It includes information about caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and trauma-informed responses for children who might display very challenging behaviour.

We also have the Carer Wellbeing Joint Committee, which is a group of committed carers that meet with Children, Youth and Families and providers to share their experiences and provide their advice on areas for improvement. I am looking forward to seeing how we can continue to use their insights to make a difference in this very important space.

Public transport—Floriade shuttle bus

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Transport. I have been contacted by an older constituent who is really concerned that the free shuttle busses to Floriade on weekdays are quite inaccessible. If people are living on the south side, from the website it looks like they are encouraged to catch a bus to Albert Hall, walk seven minutes to the National Library and then catch the free shuttle bus to Floriade. So, if they are not living on a rapid bus route in Tuggeranong or Woden, that is three buses one way, plus a fair walk. I am sure you can appreciate that it is a huge challenge for older Canberrans and people with a disability. My constituent genuinely does not believe that she can comfortably make that trip. Was thought given to having the free shuttle bus running past Albert Hall?

MR BARR: I will take this question as Floriade sits within my portfolios. There was extensive work undertaken in partnership with the event organisers and with Transport Canberra. I have also received correspondence to the same effect as Miss Nuttall. We will look to see whether there are possibilities. Obviously, construction activity is impacting the previous bus stop, with its immediate proximity to that entrance to Floriade. There are, of course, other entrances to Floriade that are accessible. We will look at where the shuttle bus stops at a number of locations.

MISS NUTTALL: Was any thought given to extending the free Floriade weekend express—which goes directly from Tuggeranong, through Woden, to Floriade—to a couple of times a day on weekdays?

MR BARR: The event organisers needed to manage within an available budget, of course. I will have to check with them as to whether they considered weekdays. Obviously, the bulk of demand locally for access to Floriade occurs on weekends and public holidays.

MR BRADDOCK: Chief Minister, would you agree that current arrangements are creating inconvenience for those approaching Floriade by bus from South Canberra?

MR BARR: That is seeking an expression of opinion, but, yes, there are challenges

whilst construction is underway. I would point out to Mr Braddock that ultimately, within a few years, there will a light rail stop at the entrance to Floriade, at the entrance to the new Canberra aquatic centre, the access point to the new Acton waterfront development, and a public park—

Mr Hanson: When is it coming?

MR BARR: Construction is expected to be complete on light rail stage 2A in late 2027, if my memory serves me correct—

Mr Hanson: Eight years late.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

MR BARR: We all may as well sit down and let Mr Hanson continue to amplify his voice in this place, because he so desperately wants to be heard!

I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.