



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Tuesday, 21 October 2025

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Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (2:00): Before we commence question time, I need to advise the chamber that, as is evident, Ministers Paterson, Cheyne and Steel are away from question time today, for a variety of personal reasons. So for question time I will assist members in Mr Steel's Treasury; planning and sustainable development; heritage; and transport portfolios. Minister Berry will take questions in the women; and prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence portfolios. Minister Stephen-Smith will assist in the government business; Attorney-General; and human rights portfolios. Minister Pettersson will assist in the night-time economy portfolio. And Minister Orr will take questions in the city and government services; police, fire and emergency services; corrections; and gaming reform portfolios.

Questions without notice Government—performance

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. After a year in which you have delivered the largest budget deficit and the biggest debt in the Territory's history, despite 25 new and increased taxes and underfunding critical services such as health, education and community safety, Chief Minister, why are so many Canberrans losing faith in you and your government?

MR BARR: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question—an anticipated question, with today being the first anniversary since the election. I do not accept the premise of the question. Obviously, government is difficult, as I have indicated in public commentary to mark the first anniversary. Minority government is particularly difficult. The territory does face challenges. So too do other state and territory governments around the nation. We will work through the issues that we face in this period of time, just as we have worked through issues in years past. I accept there are challenges ahead. They include getting the budget back into balance, but there are other challenges that we face as well and we will remain focused on that task. Government is indeed a marathon, even in a four-year marathon. We are at the first-year mark, and we look forward to continuing to implement the program that we took to the people of Canberra at the election a year ago.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, why is your government failing at so many of its core functions?

MR BARR: Again, I do not accept the premise of the question. I acknowledge there are challenges. Challenges are being faced by every government at every level, and part of the role of government is to seek to respond to those challenges. We will do so. In many instances, we will require the support of other members of this place in order to put in place policy and other responses to respond to those challenges. They will come forward for the Assembly to consider in the usual manner, either through legislation or through budgetary and other measures that members are very familiar with. I believe the challenges can be overcome and we can work cooperatively together to make Canberra an even better place.

MR HANSON: Chief Minister, when will we actually see tangible improvements in

core services like hospital EDs, school violence statistics, drug-driving results and the maintenance of our suburbs, to name but a few?

MR BARR: I thank the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for the question. I believe there have been significant improvements across those areas, but there has also been, in some instances, increased demand that we have had to manage. We have made significant investments in health infrastructure, including a new emergency department at Canberra Hospital, and we are progressing work on more health facilities, both at a community level, in terms of community health centres, and by working with the commonwealth to improve access to primary health care, and we are bringing forward reforms to expand the scope of practice for pharmacists, for example. We continue, through machinery of government changes, to focus on our municipal service priorities, and that is a key task of the new City and Environment Directorate. We look forward, through future budgets, to making further investments in these areas.

Housing—construction

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. Minister, last week the ABS reported that dwelling commencements fell by 55 per cent over the last financial year. Why is new housing development collapsing under this government?

MS BERRY: I thank the opposition leader for her question. It is not collapsing, but it is becoming more challenging and complex to build housing across the city as different challenges face the Suburban Land Agency in their delivery of housing across the city. One of those is the discovery of a koala in Jacka, which meant that 189 homes could not be delivered. Those kinds of complexities mean that delivering land for housing is much more complex than it ever has been.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, how does the government expect to accommodate an extra 43,000 Canberrans by 2030 if new build activity remains at this level?

MS BERRY: We will carefully, through the Suburban Land Agency, work through these challenges, similar to the one that I have described, and we will meet the targets. We worked very carefully with the Suburban Land Agency in setting our target for 2030, and it is a target that we expect to meet.

MS MORRIS: Minister, is your failure to deliver new supply the reason housing affordability is so challenging for Canberrans?

MS BERRY: No, and I absolutely disagree with the premise of the question. I have just explained the complexity around delivery of land for housing. We will work through those challenges and complexities, noting that land in Canberra is finite and that we have to carefully navigate our way through a range of different complexities that we had not experienced so much before, like not having as much land to build on and that there are environmental, cultural and heritage issues that we need to overcome.

Lake Ginninderra—water quality

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment,

Energy and Water. I have now heard a number of incidents where family pets have become sick or died as a result of contact with the water of Lake Ginninderra. Minister, can you inform the chamber why Labor's approach to managing water quality is failing Canberrans and their pets?

MS ORR: Noting that I am also the Acting Minister for City and Government Services, which this question actually probably goes to, I will just answer the question with all hats on.

In the first instance, I would like to acknowledge the reports that two dogs have passed away after coming into contact with Lake Ginninderra and the surrounding areas and I think everyone in here who has a pet will completely agree that losing your pet is a very upsetting and traumatic experience and our thoughts are with those pet parents who have lost their animals.

As to Ms Castley's question of failing on lake quality, I do reject the premise of that question. This government is very much committed to improving the quality of our lakes. I am advised that the types of algae that have been present in Lake Ginninderra are naturally occurring but can become toxic if ingested by people or pets. City Services and the EPA work to monitor the lake during the swimming season. I am advised that they do tests which are updated weekly to inform on the quality of the lake and what the status of it is and signs are put up.

I appreciate none of this information takes away from the loss that the two families who have lost their pets will be feeling, and again, extend our condolences and thoughts to them, as we continue to look at how we can better communicate the safe use of the lake area.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, can you guarantee that Canberra's lakes and waterways will be safe and clean for use this summer?

MS ORR: The government has a range of assessments, processes and checks in place to provide the best and most up-to-date information for lake users and we will continue to implement those approaches and that information in a timely manner as best as we can to inform lake users.

Ms Castley: Point of order. I asked whether they would be ready for summer, safe and ready for summer, not on the reporting that the government already does. We want to know if they are ready for summer, December.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Orr, do you have anything else to add?

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, I can point Ms Castley to my previous answer where I did point to the weekly testing and the updating of signs. That takes in the summer period as well as the broader programs that I think Ms Castley was referring to in her point of order.

MS BARRY: Minister, how much money has the government invested in improving water quality and why have you not delivered better outcomes?

MS ORR: I would have to take the substance of that question on notice, given the

timeframe that could take in it could be quite extensive and definitely pre-date my time in the portfolio.

Members interjecting—

MS ORR: Ignoring the interjections and continuing to answer the question Mr Speaker—

MR SPEAKER: Yes, please, please do ignore them.

MS ORR: Certainly, as to the second part, we have seen improvements in water quality. We will continue to work at improving our water quality. As most Canberrans will be aware, our lakes and our river system within the ACT—the lakes that we have are not necessarily natural lakes. They have been designed to be catchments for pollutants and we continue to work through how best we can not only have these as catchments but, due to the fact that they do have a lot of pollutants in them, how we need to manage that.

Housing—Rent Relief Fund

MR RATTENBURY: My question is for the Attorney-General—or the minister covering that portfolio today. Minister, your government axed the Rent Relief Fund four months ago. Since then, based on Care Financial having provided an average of two grants every day over the life of the scheme until it closed on 4 July 2025, by today's date 220 households have not been able to get help to stay in their rental property. Minister, why has Care Financial not heard from the government since it said it would consult with stakeholders in the wake of axing the Rent Relief Fund and announced a new fund would replace it?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the question on notice as to any communication with Care Financial. I note that I recently had a chat with the new CEO of Care Financial just the other day—but not in a formal capacity.

It is important to recognise that the Rent Relief Fund was originally intended as a short-term, cost-of-living relief measure that was introduced during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. It was not introduced or intended to be a long-term measure, and, therefore, did not have recurrent funding. However, recognising the feedback that has been received both from service providers and the community about the impacts of the cessation of the funds, the government is considering re-establishing a slightly different version of the fund to assist people who are struggling to pay their rent.

The Chief Minister, as well as the Attorney-General, has talked about this. Details of a possible program are being carefully considered by government to ensure that a comprehensive approach can be taken to this complex issue that achieves the best outcomes for the community. As the Chief Minister has previously publicly indicated, the Rent Relief Fund was administered in relation to providing a direct grant to help tenants who were experiencing rental stress or severe financial hardship. It went straight to a landlord, which did not necessarily take into account the fact that many people pay their rent on direct debit. It is the first thing that comes out. When they are experiencing financial hardship, it may be other costs that are more urgent or that they need a one-

off payment to help with. That is one of the things that is being taken into consideration.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, what is the process or timeframe for developing a new replacement for the Rent Relief Fund that you just spoke of?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Rattenbury for this supplementary question, and also for his first question. In August 2025, ministers met with community service providers during the round table to hear and understand the views and experiences of frontline organisations who are assisting those who are struggling to pay their rent. The government committed to supporting those who are struggling with cost-of-living pressures. As I said, a possible re-established rent relief fund of some kind is being considered in the short term, with longer-term supportive measure also being considered.

Noting some feedback about the earlier iterations of a rent relief fund being a bandaid solution, a possible new program would need to consider how it can have a more holistic supportive approach for people who are facing financial strain. Again, any future program will need to consider whether eligibility criteria should be amended, or if program parameters should be expanded, such as by being extended to include other cost-of-living pressures that renters may face.

At this stage, I am not able to provide Mr Rattenbury or the Assembly with a firm timeline in relation to future decisions—as Mr Rattenbury would be aware. Those decisions will be subject to a range of government processes. What I can tell Mr Rattenbury and the Assembly is that the work is well underway.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, what temporary support measures is the government considering adopting and in what timeframe, given you told the Assembly: “Should the government receive advice this will take a significant period of time, we will look to temporary support measures and how we can adopt those”?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am not sure if Mr Braddock was quoting me from earlier. I do not think I said “a considerable amount of time”. As I indicated to Mr Rattenbury, work is currently underway. We do, of course, have a range of supports that are already available for people through the emergency, material and financial aid system and the existing supports through Care Financial.

I certainly encourage anyone who is in a situation of financial hardship to contact Care Financial. While this specific measure is not available to people, there are a range of other financial supports and arrangements that can be put in place with providers of utilities and with ACT government offices. There are potentially negotiations that can be had with landlords. Care Financial can support people in managing all of those complex processes and understanding how they can improve their own financial situations.

So it is not as if the Rent Relief Fund was the only thing that previously existed. And, as I said, work is underway. I am sure that announcements will be forthcoming in due course.

Education—languages

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Education. Many students learning languages in our public education system rely on the existence of a specialist, external senior secondary languages provider, which has been offered up to this point by CIT Solutions. Minister, why has a decision not already been made and communicated to families about the future of the delivery of an external senior secondary languages offering in the ACT, given that CIT Solutions is being wound up and almost all 2026 student enrolments in colleges will already have been finalised?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Emerson for his question, and note that CIT Solutions and the Education and Training Directorate are working together to investigate and consider a solution to the issues that Mr Emerson raised around learning languages through CIT Solutions—including whether some of those languages can be offered through our college system. I do not have an update at this point in time. If I have information to provide to the Assembly through these sitting periods then I will.

MR EMERSON: Minister, will the education directorate consider taking over management of the external senior secondary languages school, given the unique need fulfilled by that school and that the program operates on a cost-recovery basis?

MS BERRY: No. That is not a decision that the ACT government or the education directorate are considering at this point in time. That is not a decision that would be made, in any case, during a question from question time. If I can find further advice or an update for the community on the communications between education ACT and CIT Solutions, I will bring that to the Assembly.

MS CARRICK: What, specifically, is the government doing to support language studies for Year 11 and Year 10 students affected by CIT Solutions being wound up?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Carrick for the question and say that, on individuals that have been speaking with the education directorate or colleges regarding their language studies, we have been working with individuals to try to seek an outcome that is suitable for them, so that can continue on with their studies. As I said, if there is another, broader response to this through CIT Solutions and/or the education directorate, I will bring that information back to the Assembly.

Infrastructure—project costs

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Chief Minister, and it is about economic development.

Chief Minister, in your ministerial statement this morning, you stated that your government is delivering a range of transformative projects that will revitalise the way Canberrans will experience and enjoy our city centre. These projects include the extension of the light rail to Commonwealth Park, the raising of London Circuit, development of the Acton waterfront, the new UNSW city campus, construction of a new Lyric Theatre, and the new Canberra aquatic centre and convention centre and its entertainment precinct. Can you provide an indicative cost and timeframe for each project in the city, so that we can understand the impact on the budget and borrowings?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Carrick for the question. The answer to most of those project line items is contained within the budget papers, or will be revealed upon the successful procurement of those projects. A number of them, obviously, attract a 50 per cent commonwealth funding contribution; light rail would be an example. I think the cost of that is very well known, and it has been discussed and debated for some time.

In relation to the other projects, I would refer Ms Carrick to previous public statements. I will not go through the full list for each one, but it is in the budget papers. Where we are yet to procure and have a final contract cost, once we have procured and have a final contract cost, that will be made public.

MS CARRICK: Chief Minister, what percentage of the investment pipeline will be allocated to these projects, and what impact will that have on the delivery of the many projects needed outside the city centre, many of which have been in planning for over a decade?

MR BARR: The bulk of the government's infrastructure expenditure is outside the city centre, as Ms Carrick would be aware. I am looking at the cost, for example, of the Canberra Hospital expansion, the cost of roadworks and major road duplications around the ACT, the cost of new schools in each of our suburbs, and the cost undertaken by the Suburban Land Agency in relation to the development of new suburbs and new estates. They total probably more than \$10 billion, just across all of those things.

To build a new suburb involves billions of dollars of infrastructure that sits under the ground—all the necessary electrical, water and sewerage connections, all the clearing of land, and the construction of roads and schools. All of that public infrastructure across about 15 new suburbs in Gungahlin and Molonglo over the last decade would constitute billions of dollars of expenditure.

I think the thrust of the question is that somehow the city is getting a disproportionate level of expenditure. That is not reflected in the total spend across both the general government sector and our public trading enterprises. The point I would make about those city infrastructure pieces that she has listed is that they are for the entire Canberra population. Canberra is a city of 500,000 people. We are all Canberrans, and we are all Canberrans first. Ahead of any other allegiance we may have to a suburb or a region, we are Canberrans. If we stop being Canberrans and start to decide that we are from Woden rather than from Canberra, that is a problem for us, because we are too small to break up into little tribes. We are one great community of nearly half a million people, and Canberra will only succeed if we stick together as Canberrans.

MR EMERSON: Chief Minister, can you outline the governance arrangements for these precincts and projects which will ensure that the government achieves the transformation that you are seeking?

MR BARR: In many instances, the governance arrangements involve Infrastructure Canberra and independent project governance boards. The City Renewal Authority has a role in broader precinct planning, and we have an intersection with the National Capital Authority in the commonwealth government in relation to particular precincts.

For example, in Belconnen, in the Bruce sports, education and health precinct, there is

work between the ACT government, multiple ACT government agencies and the commonwealth, through the commonwealth department of infrastructure and territories. We have a National Capital Authority co-partnership in relation to, for example, the Commonwealth Park master plan. In other instances, we have our own independent project governance boards for each of those major infrastructure projects. That information is publicly available through a very simple web search.

Infrastructure—project updates

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Chief Minister. Could you update the Assembly on the progress of the major city infrastructure projects?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. There is no doubt that we are in the midst of a very significant transformation of our city centre. We are putting the finishing touches now on the Raising London Circuit project, which is a major step in reconnecting our city centre. Works approval has been launched for the new Lyric Theatre. Construction is almost ready to begin on the next stage of the Acton Waterfront lakeside public park. Construction has now officially started on the new University of New South Wales Canberra City campus. At the same time, consultation has opened on the Canberra aquatic centre in Commonwealth Park, which of course will help shape the future of the new Canberra Convention and Entertainment Precinct. Additionally, there are upgrades underway to Garema Place, with stage 1 due for completion by the end of this year.

The government understands these works have been disruptive, but they are part of building something that will benefit all Canberrans for decades to come. We are at the peak disruption period now. Things will start to settle down as we move through 2026 and 2027, and most of the projects will, in fact, be finished by 2028.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, why is it important to invest in the city centre? And how does this work position the territory for future growth and opportunity?

MR BARR: The city centre and investment in it is about shaping our city's future to maintain its national and international competitiveness. The city centre is a place where more than 50,000 people come to work every day, and tens of thousands of people live within walking distance of the city centre. It is the biggest conglomerate of economic activity in Canberra. We are now approaching half a million residents for our city. We are projected to keep on growing, so we are planning for that growth. We are working with the commonwealth on forward-looking approaches to adaptively re-use and re-utilise spaces within the CBD to accommodate more residents, more students and more business and commercial activity as our city centre evolves. As these projects take shape, we will see more people living and working in the city centre. This aligns with the vision for a more compact and connected Canberra, where housing is close to jobs, public transport, retail, services and entertainment.

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, how will major projects like the new Lyric Theatre, Acton Waterfront and the new UNSW Canberra City campus reshape our city?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. The major projects position

Canberra to remain one of the world's most liveable cities, to be future-ready and to be an attractive destination for investment that is sourced locally, nationally and internationally. One example: by reconnecting the city to Lake Burley Griffin, we overcome a longstanding physical divide and will create new spaces for people—places where there might be more people than rabbits! We will improve connectivity and enhance amenity between our city centre and the Lake Burley Griffin waterfront.

I was pleased to be able to break ground on the new University of New South Wales Canberra City campus yesterday. It is a significant investment in driving innovation and growth to position Canberra as Australia's knowledge capital. The new aquatic centre will deliver modern and accessible facilities for swimming and fitness for a catchment of more than 100,000 people in the immediate precinct, but with connectivity for every Canberran to be able to use a facility of territory standard. The Lyric Theatre is a significant development for all of Canberra. Every Canberran can enjoy that new facility and the events and shows that it will bring to Canberra that are currently not possible in our 1965 small and outdated theatre. These are big projects for Canberra's future, but they are projects for all Canberrans, regardless of where in the territory they live.

Housing—National Housing Accord

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. The government signed up to deliver 30,000 new homes by 2030. To meet that commitment 5,000 homes are needed to be completed each year. The Chief Minister said today:

This government is continuing to play our part in the nation-wide efforts to increase the supply of housing.

But in 2024-25 only around 4,000 dwellings were completed, and the MBA and the Property Council are pretty concerned. What is the government doing to address this shortfall of 1,000 homes?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Clay for her question. I note that the Indicative Land Release Program is less than two per cent of the ACT's total established housing, which is around 200,000. So I think we need to keep in mind that, while the ACT government plays a very important role, we are not the only organisation that provides housing in the ACT.

We have made a commitment to build 30,000 homes between now and 2030. Yes, we could divvy it up in a simple rounded number like 5,000 a year; however, construction is never linear and so there will be years when we fall behind. Yes, in this budget period, the Suburban Land Agency has fallen behind in its delivery, for a range of reasons, including one that I highlighted earlier around the discovery of a koala, which meant that 189 homes are not being delivered. There are also a range of other complexities in building, particularly in greenfield areas but not confined to those spaces. That includes brownfields development as well.

The commitment still stands. The target is still 30,000, and the government intends to deliver on that target.

MS CLAY: Noting that the Suburban Land Agency fell short of their target, what is the government doing to address the SLA shortfall of 40 public homes and 432 community homes?

MS BERRY: Again, it has not fallen short of its target of 30,000. This year it has under-delivered to the 5,000, if you were going to suggest that construction was going to be linear across each year. It is committed to delivering the 30,000 new homes by 2030 and, in addition to that, affordable community and public housing properties. Those will be made up in future years, as has been the case in other years, in developing homes across the ACT.

Ms Clay: Point of order on relevance. The question was: what is the government doing to address the SLA shortfall of 40 public homes and 432 public homes? It was not about the 30,000; it was about the SLA land release target, which was quite specific: 40 and 432.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Berry, I don't know if you have anything else to add. I certainly formed a view from this chair that Ms Berry did answer the question as regards the non-linear timeline of the wider promise of the 30,000. I know that that does not necessarily suit, but I think she has been quite relevant. You can have a crack with further points of order if you want.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, what was the feedback from Housing ACT and the Suburban Land Agency when you consulted them before setting targets for the release of public, community and affordable homes?

MS BERRY: I might take that on notice, because I am not quite sure I understand the depth of the information that Mr Rattenbury is seeking here. So I will take that on notice and see if I can better understand the question.

MR SPEAKER: I think that goes to your point of order, Ms Clay. I think we ended up talking about two different things, and I am pleased that we are taking that on notice.

Sport and recreation—Stromlo-Cotter mountain bike trail

MISS NUTTALL: My question was to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. It relates to the Stromlo mountain biking trails. Minister, I would like to ask about the Stromlo to Cotter mountain biking trail. Last week, the company Dirt Art, which had been granted the tender to work on the trail, entered administration. What impact on the projected timeline for the trail's completion will this have?

MR BARR: I will need to take that question on notice and seek that information on Minister Steel's behalf.

MISS NUTTALL: How much of the work Dirt Art had been contracted to do has already been completed? Will a new tender process be required to replace them for the remainder?

MR BARR: Again, I will take that on notice for Minister Steel.

MS CLAY: Is the trail on track to be within the expected budget and timeframes?

MR BARR: I certainly hope so Ms Clay, but I will need to take that on notice on behalf of Minister Steel.

Roads—Commonwealth Avenue Bridge works

MR BRADDOCK: My question is for the Chief Minister, in lieu of the Minister for Transport. I note the National Capital Authority's update today on the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge works. It posits one lane for general traffic in each direction across the bridge, plus a northbound lane for buses and emergency vehicles. Is this plan consistent with what the ACT government was advocating for? If not—or not entirely—how does it vary?

MR BARR: Thank you. Following some considerable engagement between the government and the National Capital Authority, that outcome of a three-lane configuration which features two lanes of shared traffic—one in each direction—and then in a priority lane for buses and emergency services vehicles heading north into the city was the preferred option.

None of the options are ideal; they all come with a degree of compromise. If it could put it in these terms: that option is the least-disruptive and the least-worse option available to the NCA when they force six lanes of traffic into three. We did need to maintain a lane north and south, so we only had one lane with flexibility. That lane with flexibility has been dedicated to public transport and emergency service vehicles.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, will northbound buses and emergency vehicles need to merge with all other traffic into one lane near Albert Hall, before moving to the eastern side via the newly constructed crossover lane?

MR BARR: That is a level of detail I do not have in front of me. I know there will need to be a cross-traffic arrangement, but I suspect it will be possible to maintain a continuous lane for that northbound connection. I suspect that will be possible. But it is the National Capital Authority's project; it is not the ACT government's project, so I will need to seek some advice from them. But my understanding is that—as difficult and challenging as it is going to be—they will do their best to maintain three lanes of efficient flow over the bridge, whilst the other bridge is being repaired. Then they will switch it over after the completion of repairs to the first span of the bridge.

It is going to be two challenging years. People will, no doubt, make adjustments to their use of Commonwealth Avenue Bridge over that time. It was necessary to maintain one lane of traffic in either direction, and I think it was a sensible decision to prioritise public transport and emergency service vehicles with the remaining lane.

Mr Braddock: I have a point of order, Mr Speaker. Can I just clarify that the Chief Minister took that question on notice?

MR SPEAKER: I cannot even remember!

MR BARR: I provided a level of detail. If what I said is incorrect or there is further information that I can provide from the National Capital Authority, I will take that on notice. It may be that what I have said is absolutely all the information that there is. Of course, there is a website for the National Capital Authority, and Mr Braddock could have a look at that as well.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, when can Canberrans expect to see a 2026 public transport network design that reflects these changes?

MR BARR: I am advised that it will be in coming weeks.

Schools—safety

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, violent incidents in ACT public schools have reached record highs. According to the 2024-25 education directorate annual report, 9,627 occupational violence incidents were reported; an approximate 31 per cent increase from last year. Minister, why have violent incidents in ACT public schools reached record highs?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Hanson for his question. Unfortunately, these violent incidents and bullying behaviour are a challenge for all schools across the country, which is why the federal minister has announced—with education ministers, last Friday—a specific campaign to target bullying in our schools, which includes these violence incidents to which Mr Hanson is referring. That included \$5 million into programs, and \$5 million into an awareness campaign. Note that schools can only do what they can within school hours; outside of school hours needs to be addressed as well. We are also seeing the consequences of that behaviour in occupational violence issues with our staff and other students, and one of the reasons why schools have been spending more funding on their—

Mr Hanson: Mr Speaker, on a matter of relevance—

MR SPEAKER: Stop the clock, please.

Mr Hanson: The question was why those incidents have increased. The minister is talking about the federal government's response and the effects of those incidents on staff. But what I am trying to get to with this question is, "Why has it increased?"

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, I think that the minister, in her answer, referred to a national trend of bullying and violence in schools, and referred to that federal funding as a reflection of that national increase. So, I do not believe there is a point of order. Ms Berry, have you got more?

MS BERRY: I can expand a little on the reasons. Whilst I am not sure that there is specific data, there are a number of circumstances that can be pointed to that could be causing behaviour in our schools around bullying and violence. Some of it goes towards the long tail of COVID, and some of those students who were at school during the COVID years not having the social experiences that other children would have been having. So, coming into school without those experiences means that they might communicate in different ways—which is unacceptable. We have already talked about

internet use and the federal government's change to the ability for children under the age of 16—(*Time expired.*)

MR HANSON: Minister, are the ACT government's current programs on addressing school violence working? If not, why not?

MS BERRY: A program at a point in time might resolve an issue in response to a situation that might occur, however, a cultural shift is what is needed in our schools. This is what the ACT government and the education directorate are doing with regard to their implementation of the Positive Behaviours for Learning program. There are a range of different approaches in our schools, which takes around five years for the full program to be implemented. But it is more than just a point-in-time response; it is about a shift in culture where students and teachers understand the expectations of each other and behaviour in schools. I could not tell you whether that is working right now. It is something that we have to test. But the research for other countries—and for other states and territories who have implemented it—show that it does work, and it is successful. It just takes some time to deliver. In the meantime, we will work with the federal government on the programs that they have put out around the bullying funding—the \$10 million—as well as the coming change to social media access for 16-year-olds.

MS MORRIS: Minister, how are staff being supported to manage the surge in violent incidents?

MS BERRY: One of the things that is delivered through the Positive Behaviours for Learning program is about supporting teachers to understand and work with complex behaviours, and de-escalation of student misbehaviour—and understand students' complex lives and families' complex lives. It is not an easy, black-and-white answer. There is no silver bullet. However, the education directorate is working with school staff and their unions, to better understand how we can support staff to manage this escalating behaviour which we are seeing in our schools, no doubt. I am also hoping that the school funding review will provide some more answers for us on how we can respond better to these circumstances.

Schools—safety

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Minister, the 2024-25 Education Directorate annual report shows an additional 958 reports that detailed impacts on staff wellbeing, as a direct result of student or parent behaviour. Minister, what are the parent behaviours that are impacting on staff wellbeing?

MS BERRY: A range of different behaviours might be experienced by teachers and staff in our schools. A parent's behaviour might be escalated, and they might speak inappropriately. They might email constantly, outside work hours. They might speak to a teacher or a staff member disrespectfully or in an inappropriate way. A staff member may feel threatened. It is all of those and a range of others that schoolteachers and school staff are experiencing from some parents.

We have over 50,000 students in our public schools, so there are probably twice that number of parents. Most parents are very well behaved and respect schools as

environments that are safe for them and their children. For those that do not, however, it does mean that schoolteachers and staff are put at risk. In those circumstances, there is a range of actions that can be taken by schools, including reporting an incident to police, if it meets the threshold, to get protection orders. That has occurred in a small number of cases; nonetheless there have been a few. Schools then work on safety plans for their staff, ensuring that teachers, staff and parents have good working relationships going forward.

It is not an easy matter to overcome. However, the directorate is making sure that we engage with school staff and their unions in ways that can overcome these kinds of challenges, and working with ACT parents as well, to understand how we can better support parents who may have a range of challenges and conflict issues in their lives.

MR HANSON: Minister, beyond reporting to police, what measures are in place for principals and teachers to deal with problematic behaviour from parents?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Hanson for the supplementary. There are a range of policies in place. Some of those are available, I believe, on the education directorate website. If there is something that is of more assistance, I can bring that back to the Assembly, around policies, processes and procedures for managing those kinds of circumstances.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, what resources do staff have when they are subjected to repeated behaviours from parents?

MS BERRY: Thank you for the supplementary. As I said, I put the caveat around it that it is a smallish number of parents. It is not that every parent is creating an unsafe work environment. There are some parents, however, for a range of different reasons, that do. If school staff are union members, of course, they can go to their unions for support. They can go through their school leadership for support. They can also go to the Education Directorate for support in managing those circumstances.

Social housing—maintenance

MS BARRY: My question is to the Minister for Homes and New Suburbs. Minister, can you please confirm reports that the government has already spent its public housing maintenance budget, and that there will be no further works this financial year?

MS BERRY: I do not believe that is so, but I will take that question on notice. There would be information in the budget papers, but I will take that question on notice and will come back to the Assembly.

MS BARRY: Minister, can you explain how a full year's budget has been spent in less than four months?

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what guarantees can you give to the builders, carpenters, plumbers, sparkies and other tradies that they will continue to have work in repairing and maintaining social housing properties in the ACT?

MS BERRY: I do not think I believe that what Ms Chiaka Barry has said regarding the funding to housing repairs and maintenance is true, so, in answer to the question from the Leader of the Opposition, I believe the work will be continuing, so they will be employed.

ACT Ambulance Service—staffing

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. In question time on 24 September Minister Paterson confirmed that ambulance staffing shortages have not affected response times and have had no impact on patient care. Minister, what impact is the staffing shortfall having on ambulance officer morale and wellbeing?

MS ORR: I will take that question on notice and come back to Ms Morris with an answer.

MS MORRIS: Minister, have any ACT Ambulance stations faced reduced operating hours since 14 August 2025?

MS ORR: Again, I will take that question on notice.

MS CASTLEY: Would the minister be able to provide a comment to the self-described burnt-out and extremely concerned ACT paramedic who was disappointed with the previous response on 24 September?

MS ORR: Again, I will have to take that on notice. Acknowledging that Ms Castley is referring to a particular individual, my response in taking it on notice might be disappointing to that individual. But I do ask for understanding given that I am filling in for this portfolio and will need to seek advice.

Skilled training and apprenticeships—support

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations. A recent report by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research found that in the ACT commencements for apprenticeships and trainees were down by 13.7 per cent for the last 12-month period ending 31 March. Minister, why has the ACT government failed to increase apprenticeship and traineeship commencements?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Mr Milligan for the question. As Mr Milligan would know, in the most recent budget the ACT government has increased subsidies to 90 per cent for training for six key construction related trades. This is an investment by the ACT government in supporting the skills needs that our growing city needs. However, I do acknowledge some of the figures that Mr Milligan has cited. There are challenges in commencements and in enrolments across higher education. I attribute that to a range of reasons. Most notably, we are in a very tight labour market. So my observation would be that many people are not undertaking training to get into the jobs that they have previously needed training for, because of the very tight labour market.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, you mentioned that there are challenges facing putting on

traineeships and apprenticeships. Can you identify what those challenges are?

MR PETTERSSON: There are a range of challenges that are identified by employers when they are making the decision to put on an apprentice. Research done at the national level goes to the costs borne by the individual employer, which is why the decision by the ACT government to raise subsidies to 90 per cent for six key construction trades is so important.

MS CASTLEY: How does the minister expect the government to deliver their promised infrastructure pipeline with fewer trainees and apprentices?

MR PETTERSSON: Ms Castley's question is a good one. It will be challenging to build the houses that our growing city needs without the workforce that can build them, which is why we are committed to building our workforce. That may not be a straight up and down linear path. The government, working in conjunction with the commonwealth government through the National Skills Agreement, is committed to developing the skills needs that our growing city needs. Part of that is increasing subsidies for training. It is also in the provision of free TAFE in which we are very proud to partner with the commonwealth government. A key focus of the expansion of free TAFE has been in the construction industry. This will remain an area of focus for the ACT and all jurisdictions in Australia.

Justice—youth justice

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Children, Youth and Families. Minister, what is this government doing to support and celebrate the ACT's youth justice workers?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Tough for the question. On Tuesday last week I had the immense privilege of celebrating Australasian Youth Justice Acknowledgement Day. This was an opportunity for me to spend some time with youth justice workers and celebrate the valuable work these professionals do in our community.

I was particularly pleased to celebrate the winners at the ACT Youth Justice Awards ceremony. The ceremony was an opportunity to hear about the incredible work occurring in the sector. Congratulations, again, to Belinda Garcia, who won the individual award for Exceptional Practice due to her unwavering commitment to preventing young people from coming into or returning to the youth justice system.

The team award for Exceptional Practice went to the Recidivist Offender Multi-Agency Round Table or ROMART. It is a multi-agency case management body made up of representatives from ACT Policing; Children, Youth and Families; and the therapeutic support team. ROMART is a true collaboration across government to help identify causation and offending behaviour and intervention opportunities for young people engaged in youth justice.

The award ceremony is one example of how we amplify the work of youth justice workers to show our support and celebrate their work. Other activities include a comprehensive recruitment and training process to support first-time youth workers to be job ready, and doing what we can to ensure there is a full complement of staff—as

well as listening to staff wherever possible when they identify changes that need to be made in the system.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how is the government maintaining a strong youth justice workforce?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary question. Bimberi holds two to three recruitment rounds each year, in recognition that we need to ensure we have adequate staffing numbers to meet the fluctuating numbers of young people in the facility. These recruitment rounds are followed by a seven-week induction program, where Bimberi draws on specialist expertise from external sources for the training. This includes input from Canberra Health Services, the Australian Childhood Foundation and the Human Rights Commission.

Following the induction, staff participate in two weeks of buddy shifts so that they are supported to implement what they learnt in their training. This is followed by ongoing refresher training provided to all operational staff, to ensure fundamental skills are maintained and that best practice standards are applied.

At the Bimberi event last week I was able to meet with some of the 13 new youth workers who will be part of the operational team by mid-November. It is wonderful to see how enthusiastic they all are to make a real difference in our community.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how is the ACT government ensuring we continue to focus on youth justice in the longer term?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary question. As members would be aware, I recently announced the development of a youth justice strategic plan in response to the ACT Inspector of Custodial Services' *Healthy centre review of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre 2024*.

The strategic plan will be pivotal in providing a long-term roadmap to strengthen the youth justice system and deliver on the government's commitments to improving outcomes for young people. The plan will consider recommendations from previous reports, including the Jumbunna Institute's final report on its independent *Review into over-representation of First Nations people in the ACT justice system*. It will also aim to drive real change in our Closing the Gap agreement—specifically, targeting our commitment to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Islander young people in detention by at least 30 per cent by 2031.

I look forward to working in close partnership with our sector to develop the strategic plan and complementary frameworks to take us forward.

Multicultural affairs—peak bodies

MS BARRY: My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, what process do you use to identify which community organisations you deal with as peak bodies?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Barry for the question. I do not necessarily think there

is a process or framework for that. I engage with all multicultural groups that come to my door. I have an open-door policy, Mr Speaker. I speak frequently with community groups and community leaders across the entire spectrum—from large, well-organised organisations to very small, beginning organisations.

MS BARRY: Minister, how do you decide which organisations you will deal with where there are multiple representative organisations?

MR PETTERSSON: I do my very best to meet with all organisations.

MR HANSON: Minister, are you aware of any concerns from community groups that you have been picking winners and sidelining other communities?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Hanson for the supplementary question. That is a surprising question to me, Mr Speaker, as I speak with the vast, vast majority of groups that seek to have a meeting with me. The few times that meeting requests are not accepted are largely when it is from an individual and we cannot identify an association with an organisation, or if there are potentially scheduling issues. I do my very best to make it to as many multicultural events as I can.

If the member is aware of a particular group that does not feel like they have had an opportunity to engage with me directly—acknowledging that I am not the only source of interaction with the ACT government, either as responsibility for multicultural affairs—I would direct members' attention to the ministerial advisory council. I also acknowledge that many members in this place hold many responsibilities, either to their portfolios or to their electorates, and I encourage lots of engagement—not necessarily just through me. However, I do always enjoy interacting with multicultural community groups, organisations and leaders so I am looking forward to receiving information from the opposition as to who they think I have not had opportunity to meet with, and I will see what we can do to rectify the situation.

Mr Barr: On that cheery note, Mr Speaker, I will ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.