



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Tuesday, 28 October 2025

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

Tuesday, 28 October 2025

Questions without notice:

Suburban Land Agency—land release	1
Canberra Health Services—staffing	1
Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism	2
Climate change—emissions	3
Climate change—emissions	4
Gambling—gambling harm.....	4
Hybrid electric fire truck—warranty	5
Drugs—decriminalisation	6
Planning—transit-oriented development	6
Parking—Woden.....	8
Climate change—emissions	9
Climate change—emissions	9
Roads—Athllon Drive.....	11

Questions without notice

Suburban Land Agency—land release

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. The minister has previously told the Assembly that the government does not have annual targets for its goal of delivering 30,000 new homes in the ACT by 2030. Could the minister please explain what milestones, targets or goals the government is using to assess its own progress towards the goal?

MS BERRY: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. She is right—I did explain to the Assembly that there is not a yearly target for meeting the land release program. That is because land release is a complicated and complex matter. It requires a range of different infrastructure projects surrounding particularly greenfields areas but also brownfields to make sure that land can be released for housing. We made an election commitment target of 30,000 by 2030. That is the target that we have set, and that is the target we expect to meet.

Of course, when years of the land release program go well that means that we are obviously ahead of our targets and, when we are behind, it means we need to catch up. I have already described the complexity and risk of a range of our land release programs going forward. We will commit to deliver those and update the Assembly as required.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, how do you know if the ACT government is on track to achieve the 2030 goal?

MS BERRY: I get briefed, obviously, by the Suburban Land Agency, which is the ACT government's land release delivery agent, and also through the land release program, knowing where releases of land are expected to be scheduled and understanding the timeframes for those to be delivered.

MR HANSON: Minister, will you commit to annual public reporting that can be used to assess the government's performance against the goal?

MS BERRY: I already do that. So, yes, I commit to keep doing that.

Canberra Health Services—staffing

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, a code yellow is a situation where a staff shortage or infrastructure event impacts healthcare delivery—we have talked about it before—and may force the closure of hospital units, such as an emergency department. Minister, how frequently are code yellow declarations being made?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think I have said to Ms Castley before that code yellows are a regular occurrence. I would say on average I probably get about one code yellow notification every day. Sometimes there are multiples in a day; sometimes there are none for a couple of days. To clarify, Mr Speaker, this can be things like staff shortages in particular areas. So they call a code yellow when there is a staff shortage in the emergency department; in intensive care; in women's, youth and children's; or in other areas of either of the hospitals. What that enables them to do is to bring into effect some

of the emergency provisions of the enterprise agreement so that staff who are called in to respond to those staff shortages can get the additional allowances that are available.

Other code yellows relate to infrastructure issues. They could be major infrastructure issues, but often they are quite small incidents where maybe there has been a leak from a significant storm or amount of rain, or some piece of equipment has broken down. So, as you can imagine, when you are running an operation of 11,000 staff and major hospital and community based health facilities, there are regular occasions where things break and need to be fixed, and sometimes that is a code yellow.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, where do you report the frequency, causes and impacts of code yellow declarations?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I do not think we do publicly report the frequency, duration and impact of code yellow declarations. They are an operational tool to manage facilities and staffing and, as I have indicated, many of them are relatively minor issues. I have to also indicate that many of them are resolved very quickly and some can go on for some days, particularly around staff shortages during winter for example. In addition to code yellows, there will sometimes be notifications in relation to digital and electronic systems that do not necessarily come through as code yellows but will also be a brief interruption to service delivery. But, importantly the vast, vast majority of code yellows and other forms of interruption have no impact on the actual delivery of clinical services or the safety of patients or staff.

MS BARRY: Minister, will you commit to consistent public reporting of code yellows and other declarations that impact the health care of Canberrans?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will commit to considering whether it is valuable to publicly report code yellows and other codes. People would be aware that code red, for example, is an indicator that there has been a fire somewhere. But again, just as in this place, that might be that someone has put something inappropriate in a microwave and that has caused a fire alarm and the attendance of fire emergency services. Other things are called for different reasons.

So I will commit to the Assembly that I will consider, and consult with Canberra Health Services about, the public reporting of these things, but I have to say upfront that I cannot imagine what value this will add to anybody in this place or outside of it, given that these are entirely operational matters and mostly resolved very quickly, and have no impact on the delivery of services or the safety of staff, patients or carers.

Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism

MS BARRY: My question is to Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, what progress have you made on reforms to the ministerial advisory council?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Barry for the question. I have not progressed any reforms to the council in my time as minister.

MS BARRY: What issues would you have been seeking advice on if you had a functioning ministerial advisory council?

MR PETTERSSON: I reject the premise of the question. There are a range of matters that the council is engaged on, and they provide effective and fruitful advice to government.

MS CASTLEY: How can multicultural communities, such as the South Sudanese community, be assured that you are across their concerns, given you have no framework for consultation and you have a poor record of engagement with communities?

MR PETTERSSON: I reject the premise of the question. I engage fruitfully with all multicultural groups that seek to engage with me, noting that not all multicultural groups do proactively seek to engage with government. However, as minister I do attempt to go out and engage widely, and I have, in my time as minister, engaged proactively with the South Sudanese community.

Climate change—emissions

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the minister for climate change. Minister, yesterday when launching the process to develop a new climate strategy, you commented that the ACT will be unlikely to meet its 2025 emissions reduction target. However, the most recent greenhouse gas inventory, released in December 2024, showed ACT emissions were already 50 per cent below the 1990 baseline, which is within the target band for 2025. What information are you basing your comments on to suggest the ACT will not meet its targets?

MS ORR: My comments were made in relation to the next target and the briefing that has been provided to me on the tracking for the target that is upcoming and for which I will be handing out the greenhouse gas inventory for prior to the end of this year, in the final sitting. The advice is that we will not make our target, with the final work to refine the accounting to be done. Once that final work is done, we will make it clear as to how much we have not met the target by.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, can you explain what the key changes are that have led you to make this observation?

MS ORR: Again, this is on the advice that has been provided to me from the tracking that has been done in regard to our greenhouse gas inventory. As we finalise that through, I will be able to provide Mr Rattenbury with more detailed information as to the various different measures within that.

Mr Rattenbury: Point of order, Mr Speaker. I appreciate the minister's comment; I am sure it is true. I am obviously trying to ask what that advice is so that this Assembly might understand why the minister has made that public comment.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Orr, am I to understand from the first part of your answer that you are seeking to take part of that on notice? Is that what you are saying?

MS ORR: Not on notice, Mr Speaker. Mr Rattenbury has asked what has informed my comments. As I have said, it is the briefing that has come to me and the advice I have received that our overall target is unlikely to be met. As to the specifics, I will be tabling

the inventory by the end of this year, in the final sitting, and then I will be able to provide Mr Rattenbury with the detailed information he is looking for.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, are you able to inform us what the advice is that you received on the greenhouse gas emissions?

MS ORR: I refer the members to my previous question. I have said what the advice is. It is that we are not on track to hit our targets, based on where we are tracking.

Climate change—emissions

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Minister, there is no mention of the ACT government's legislated emissions reduction targets for 2030 or 2040 in the discussion paper on the next climate strategy. Why have you not included these interim targets in your discussion paper?

MS ORR: The discussion paper that I released yesterday is to inform an overarching framework in the first stage of the development of our next strategy. That framework is the focus of the discussion paper. It outlines a number of key areas where we wish to progress work. It is not a detailed plan of all the actions that we will be undertaking or a final view on our sole response to this challenge.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, is it the government's position that having interim targets is an important point of accountability and measuring progress on the path to net zero?

MS ORR: Yes.

MS CLAY: Is the government still committed to 2030 and 2040 targets and to legislated targets?

MS ORR: My hesitation is not because we are not committed to these; my hesitation is about why the question is being asked. At no point have I come out and said that we are stepping back from these targets or the legislated targets that are there. If the Greens need me to confirm for the record that the government remains committed to our legislated commitments, I am happy to do that, but I think this is a little bit of a distraction.

Gambling—gambling harm

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Gaming Reform. The ACT Gambling and Racing Commission's annual report indicates that gambling harm reports are surging. Roughly one in every 80 reports of gambling harm prompted a referral to self-exclude or engage with support services. Minister, are the government's policies just concentrating gambling harm rather than reducing it?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. This year, it was really great to see more data included in the Gambling and Racing Commission's annual report. This is information, particularly in relation to the Gambling Incident Register and self-exclusion, that I felt is very important to be transparent with the community about. What we have seen from the ACT prevalence survey is that the level of harm in the ACT has

remained relatively unchanged over the past 10 years. We know that we need to do more to address this harm.

ACT Labor has both a long-term and a medium-to short-term plan to address this harm. The long-term plan is to reduce the supply of gaming machines to the community. We know that the closer you live in proximity to a gambling venue the more likely you are to experience harm. This was evidenced in the ACT gambling prevalence survey. It showed concentrations of harm in the town centres around Canberra, where we have more poker machines. That is why it is critically important that we work with the clubs to see the implementation of account based gaming over the next couple of years. There will be a range of measures related to machines and venues and it will include impacts, and there will be ramifications for self-exclusion. That is why it is really important that we very proactively address measures at machines to address gambling harm.

MR EMERSON: Minister, is the current regulatory system capable of ensuring that existing rules are actually followed given nearly a quarter of poker machines inspected in the past year were found to be in breach of ACT gaming laws and half of all venues inspected were also non-compliant?

DR PATERSON: There is significant opportunity to look at the code of practice, look at the incidents that are recorded and reported, and look at the regulatory activities that occur within venues. There is going to be significant reform in respect of the implementation of account based gaming. Through that process, there will be opportunities to update the language of our laws and regulations but also update them to ensure that they are best practice.

MR HANSON: Minister, how many millions of dollars did the Labor Party reap in the last five years through its clubs and its associated entities that have been funded by pokies?

DR PATERSON: You can go onto the Elections ACT website and see the annual reports of the ACT Labor Club and the 1973 Foundation. That will have all the information Mr Hanson is looking for.

Hybrid electric fire truck—warranty

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. The hybrid electric fire truck has been offline since June awaiting a traction-battery replacement and its warranty expires at the end of this year. Minister, does the government expect the replacement battery to be delivered and installed and the vehicle returned to frontline service before the warranty expires?

DR PATERSON: The warranty is not so much the issue; the issue is getting the battery into Australia, through Customs, and installed into the vehicle. These are all works that are currently under warranty. The ACT government is in constant talks with Rosenbauer in relation to these issues.

MR HANSON: Minister, does the contract provide for an extension of the warranty to account for time out of service due to vehicle failure?

DR PATERSON: These are all matters that the government is currently in discussion with Rosenbauer about.

MS MORRIS: Minister, do you intend to seek a warranty extension once the battery arrives to see if the truck finally works?

DR PATERSON: As I said in answer to the previous question, there are active discussions around the warranty and around getting this truck back on the road. I will be able to update the Assembly with more information in due course.

Drugs—decriminalisation

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. On 21 October, the Australian Federal Police Association welcomed the Canberra Liberals call for the repeal of the government's dangerous drug decriminalisation laws. They say:

The promise that decriminalisation would reduce harm, free up police resources, and disrupt drug dealers has simply not materialised. The data shows the opposite. Drug use is up, supply offences are down, and Canberrans are less safe as a result.

Minister, have you kept your promise to reduce harm in our community?

DR PATERSON: I refute that Canberrans are less safe. I believe that as a result of the drug decriminalisation law change there are people in our community that may seek help now for their drug use that may not have previously. We have all heard stories in this chamber over many years of families who have lost loved ones because they have not sought help because they have been terrified of a criminal justice response to their drug use. As we answered in the chamber a matter of sitting weeks ago, there is a review under way for the legislation so we will be very interested to see that legislation in terms of drug use within the ACT. This is consistent with levels across the rest of Australia.

MS MORRIS: What confidence can Canberrans have in these reforms when police are saying we are less safe as a result of ACT government policy?

DR PATERSON: That is not the message that I am getting from ACT Policing. I believe that the response to drug use in the ACT is now firmly a health one, and that is what it should be. This makes our community a healthier, safer place. The long term benefits potentially of this legislation are significant.

MR HANSON: What police resources have been freed-up to crack down on drug dealers?

DR PATERSON: ACT police have significant operations that they conduct daily to target drug trafficking and organised crime within the ACT. This is a significant priority for ACT police and they will continue to target the supply of drugs into Canberra.

Planning—transit-oriented development

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Planning and

Sustainable Development. Minister, how is the ACT government ensuring that the new planning reforms support transit-oriented development as well as encouraging more housing, jobs and community facilities around major public transport routes and town centres?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. The Labor government is delivering integrated land use and transport planning along light rail and rapid bus corridors. This approach is designed to support transit-oriented development, creating more well-located homes close to transport, services, jobs and community facilities. By focusing housing growth along public transport corridors, we are building a better connected, accessible and sustainable city.

Transit-oriented development brings real advantages over traditional suburban sprawl. It creates vibrant, mixed-use communities and walkable neighbourhoods, and it reduces car dependence—making better use of existing infrastructure. It also supports more frequent and reliable transport services. Importantly, this approach can also support human-scale density developments that are liveable, welcoming and community friendly.

Transit-oriented development is part of our ACT government's planning reforms, which we are all united behind on the Labor side, helping us to enable 30,000 homes by 2030 while shaping the kind of city that we all want to live in—one that is connected, sustainable and thriving.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, could you please provide the Assembly with an understanding of how these reforms affect the different areas of Canberra?

MR STEEL: We are creating a more connected, liveable city by linking housing growth with rapid transport. In 2023, the *Inner north and city district strategy* identified parts of Downer and Watson as key change areas, thanks to their excellent access to rapid transport through light rail stage 1. These areas are well placed to support gentle residential densification, creating more housing close to services, jobs and transport. Consultation on DPA-09 is currently open, and I encourage the community to have their say through the ACT's planning website until 4 November.

This work aligns very well with the ACT's broader planning strategy, which aims for 70 per cent of new homes to be built within existing urban areas. It is about making the most of the land and infrastructure that we already have, while ensuring our city remains compact, connected and environmentally sustainable.

A key part of that vision is the extension of light rail to the southside and to Woden. The development of the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework will guide this project, creating an integrated land use and transport plan that supports: more housing; more local business activity; community facilities; and better connections for walking, cycling and public transport. Stage 2B will deliver 9 stops between Commonwealth Park and Woden, and this route will cross Lake Burley Griffin on a new bridge built between the two existing spans of Commonwealth Avenue Bridge, then travel through the National Triangle and along Adelaide Avenue and Yarra Glen. The light rail to Woden is more than just a transport project: it is about shaping our city's future, supporting sustainable development, improving accessibility and ensuring

that as Canberra grows we do so in a way that remains people focussed and connected.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how will the government's planning reforms that encourage transit-oriented development help deliver more diverse and affordable housing options near key transport corridors and town centres?

MR STEEL: To enable 30,000 new homes by 2030, as both Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development and Minister for Transport my focus is bringing these portfolios together to make sure that new homes are in the right places—close to jobs, services and great public transport. We have been doing that through machinery-of-government changes with the new City and Environment Directorate. I have announced that we are doing that through the new environment and transport forum, bringing transport stakeholders together with planning stakeholders to make sure that we get the most out of these planning reforms in terms of housing and that integration with transport.

When we plan for mixed-use areas near transport, more people choose to use public transport. That increased ridership supports more frequent, reliable and accessible services. When public transport improves, it encourages even more people to want to live, work and spend time in those connected, vibrant places. This creates a very positive cycle, one that we want to continue to support in Canberra: better public transport drives better development, and better development supports better transport.

Through the National Housing Accord, the ACT government has agreed, with all states and territories, to prioritise planning changes that support diverse, affordable housing close to transport, amenities and employment. That is exactly what we doing. It is a plan that supports sustainable growth, reduces congestion and helps Canberra transition towards a zero-emissions future.

Parking—Woden

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries.

Minister, business owners in Woden are reporting that public carpark are being closed to make way for ACT government construction projects. This is limiting access for both staff and customers. How many general public, short-term or all-day car parking spaces have been closed specifically for the Woden bus depot project?

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you. I will have to take that one on notice, as Mr Milligan is no doubt aware. Carparks do not fit neatly within my portfolio responsibility, but we will have endeavour to find that information for him.

MR MILLIGAN: How many all-day-parking spaces remain within a reasonable walking distance to all the affected Woden businesses? Approximately how many businesses do those spaces service?

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you. I will take that on notice.

MR COCKS: What is the government doing to support local Woden businesses,

workers and customers impacted by the construction of the bus depot?

MR PETTERSSON: I appreciate the work that the ACT government has undertaken throughout the construction of both CIT and the Woden bus interchange, engaging constructively with local businesses to ensure that they are informed how those construction projects are progressing. I understand that a lot of that work has taken the form of promotion of local businesses to workers who are engaged on those sites. But I am happy to take on notice any further activities that have been undertaken for both those projects.

Climate change—emissions

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Minister, the discussion paper for the next climate strategy has a “vision for 2035” for our transport system. As members of the Assembly will be aware, transport accounts for around 65 per cent of the ACT’s emissions. Minister, why does the “vision for 2035” make no mention of the ACT Zero Emissions Vehicles Strategy, which points to a phase-out of the sale of new combustion engine vehicles in the ACT by 2035?

MS ORR: Again, I would point Mr Braddock and the Greens to my previous answer. This is about the framework in key areas. It is one component of what will be our next strategy, with more work to be done as to the actions and aligning those with the work that is already in place.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, is the ACT government walking away from its commitment to phase out the sale of internal combustion engine vehicles?

MS ORR: Again, it is similar to asking me to recommit to commitments that are policy. I am happy to put on the record that we have not removed our policy commitments, noting that if I were suddenly to make a policy direction, this would mean I was being asked to announce policy in question time.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, how can the community and industry prepare appropriately for a zero emissions vehicle rollout if the government is being vague in its policy documents and not continuing to remind them of the impending change?

MS ORR: The government is not being vague. The government has a discussion paper on a framework for key areas to inform and embed our climate change action across government and the community. Unlike Mr Rattenbury, I think it is clear that we are here to have a discussion about the framework. The individual actions and other commitments will follow.

Climate change—emissions

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Government funding for climate and the environment has dropped from what the *State of the environment* report labelled as “demonstrably inadequate” at 2.8 per cent of the budget to 2.7 per cent of the budget. Meanwhile, in the first year of the Labor government, you have just announced the ACT is off track, for the first time,

on meeting its climate targets. Is government performance linked with government funding?

MS ORR: Ms Clay has put the proposition that government funding has decreased as a percentage many times in various forums within this place, including annual reports and estimates hearings and whatnot. In addressing that, I have made it very clear that government spending as a total has actually gone up on the environment year on year. The percentage total that Ms Clay refers to is of one particular measure that focuses on one stream of environment funding. It does not look at the budget as a totality. There is a lot of work, particularly in responding to our climate action, that that particular percentage does not cover. So I reject Ms Clay's premise that spending and funding has gone backwards.

I am not going to enter into a discussion on whether funding and performance are linked, given that I do not agree with Ms Clay's premise on the funding. But what I would say is that where we find ourselves in our transition to a net zero future is something that will require a much more mature, considered and open conversation, and it will have to be a collective effort. A lot of work will be done. We have done a lot of the easier things—although saying that what we have done is easy is a bit uncomfortable, because it has not been easy at all. A lot of work has been done, but we really need to get stuck into the actual task at hand, which is decarbonising our economy and our community.

MS CLAY: What new climate policies and programs have you developed or implemented in your first year in the job?

MS ORR: Without knowing exactly where Ms Clay wants to go—and I feel a follow-up question is coming that might be something along the lines of, “How is this going to reduce our emissions?”—a lot of work is already in place and we will continue to build on that.

The work I have been focused on is how we take the next phase of our response to decarbonise our economy—our net zero future—and how we do that in a way that is considered, sensible and achievable, and builds on what we have, continues to contextualise our response within the broader national response and international response, and makes sure that we fully understand and incorporate the increased knowledge, technology and benefits that are there, in order to respond to the challenges that we have. I will continue to have a watching brief in this portfolio because it is not static; it will continue to develop and change as we have greater understanding of the impacts we will face and as we have greater understanding of the responses that we have available to us. So Ms Clay can continue to ask me as much as she wants—what have you done between X time and X time—and my answer will always be: we have kept our eye on the task and we have done what we can within that period of time, noting that this is not a one-plus-one-equals-two problem.

Ms Clay: Point of order on relevance, Mr Speaker. The question was: what new policies or programs have you developed or implemented? I do not think I heard anything about new policies or programs.

MR SPEAKER: I believe that the minister has been responsive to the question. I was

going to say, “Minister, you have six seconds if you want to add anything else,” but I believe that she has been responsive to the question.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, what will you do differently in next year’s budget to turn our emissions trajectory around?

MS ORR: I am not going to speculate on the outcomes of budget processes that have not been undertaken yet.

Roads—Athllon Drive

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Transport, I think—though I am happy for anyone to jump up. The project business case that went to cabinet for the Athllon Drive duplication in the last financial year had a total project cost of \$82.2 million. The Built for CBR website now estimates a total cost of \$98.6 million. Minister, how has the project managed to blow out by 20 per cent in less than a year?

MS CHEYNE: This is my area. I thank Ms Castley for the question. I am going to have to double-check, because I think, similar to when we were discussing the new recycling facility, that these figures of what was presented to budget cabinet may have been a previous business case compared to the one that actually went through. I wish to be as accurate as possible, so I will take it on notice.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what would the duplication have cost if it had been delivered when it was first promised?

MS CHEYNE: I am going to have to go back. I am sure we put some figure on it at the time. But I think everybody in this place understands that there has been an enormous change in material usage and material costs in terms of the transport of them and in terms of labour. But, to the actual question, let me see if I can get something accurate.

MS MORRIS: Minister, who is responsible for the project cost tripling from around \$30 million in 2016 to almost \$100 million today and delivery being delayed from 2024 to 2030?

MS CHEYNE: I feel like someone from my office is trying to give me the answer, but I cannot pull it off in time, so we might have to wait until after question time and matters arising. In terms of who is responsible, I think the short answer is that this is a project that we had been hopeful that we would be able to get underway much sooner than we have been able to. That has not been case, but we have remained committed to it. Now that we are in a position to progress with it, we are.

As the Chief Minister has made clear in multiple comments as we recognise one year of government in this term, the longer we wait, the more the costs go up. That is true for every project. The Athllon Drive duplication is an unfortunate example of that but is certainly illustrative. I would suggest the opposition take that into account when they ask us to delay other projects.

Mr Barr: If no-one is rising, all further questions can be placed on the notice paper, Mr Speaker.