



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Wednesday, 29 November 2023

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Questions without notice

Business—economy

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Business and Better Regulation. Minister, the Australian Bureau of Statistics *Counts of Australian Businesses including Entries and Exits* shows, again, that the ACT has the worst business survival rate in the country for businesses that were operating between 2019 and 2023.

The Canberra Business Chamber's quarterly business survey found that 34 per cent of businesses think it is more difficult to do business in the ACT than any other jurisdiction.

In addition, the latest ASIC insolvency data for the financial year to date shows that appointments over companies in the ACT have more than doubled between 2021 and 2023 and are now 66 per cent higher than in Tasmania.

Minister, why is it so much more difficult to operate and grow a business in the ACT since you became minister?

MS CHEYNE: It is not.

MS LEE: Minister, what is your plan to improve these metrics for ACT businesses in the next 12 months?

MS CHEYNE: Madam Speaker, I would suggest that Ms Lee starts by not being so selective with the statistics that she is using. The economy in Canberra is strong. The Chief Minister's responses to questions—

Mr Cocks: You just keep telling people that!

Ms Castley: ASIC has got it wrong!

MS CHEYNE: Do you mind?

MADAM SPEAKER: Just ignore the interjections, Ms Cheyne.

MS CHEYNE: Madam Speaker, it was clear in the response that the Chief Minister gave yesterday that the ACT is outperforming every other jurisdiction in Australia over this past year. Household spending in the ACT increased by 8.2 per cent through the year to September 2023 and in current price calendar adjusted terms, with rises across all categories except furnishings—

Ms Lee: A point of order, Madam Speaker. The question was very straightforward: it was about what the minister intends to do over the next 12 months to improve these metrics; it was not about the broad-brush view of what the ACT economy is like nor household spending.

MADAM SPEAKER: I do not think there is a point of order. She was referring to

another set of data, which goes to the point in question. Ms Cheyne?

MS CHEYNE: Thank you Madam Speaker. As I was saying, the data does show that things are very positive in the ACT, and this is consistent with what we are seeing. There are excellent business conditions in the ACT; but, we do know—and this is replicated right across Australia—that business confidence in the outlook is weaker because they are nervous about the future and they are nervous about rate rises.

Ms Lee: What is your plan? What is your plan?

MS CHEYNE: Our plan is detailed in the Small Business Strategy, which was released back in July—

Ms Lee: So what's in it?

MS CHEYNE: Ms Lee can download it and get acquainted with it.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, do you still think the Canberra Business Chamber's finding that the ACT is one of the most difficult jurisdictions in which to operate a business is, as you stated, "bemusing", or will you be more willing to listen to their recommendations in the future?

MS CHEYNE: Ms Castley is conflating two totally different things. The Business Chamber has recently done a business sentiment survey, as has the ACT government, and I can say that Mr Harford, when he presented me with the business survey recently, said that sentiment at the present time is relatively positive. It is fascinating that the Liberals are saying what they are saying and trying to quote something from a particularly long time ago!

Ms Castley interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Castley, please!

MS CHEYNE: I would note that my comment saying that the Business Chamber's media release was bemusing was about the budget and what was contained in the budget, and if you look at what the Business Chamber said at that time, many of those things that they were calling for were not budget related or were being progressed in other ways. Also, I would note that Mr Harford has said that, while he did note that businesses do say that it can be harder to do business here, he will continue to probe on this, because he really wants to come to me with specifics. When specifics are detailed to me, which they never are by the Liberals, that is when we do something about it, and we have. We have had a consistent record of this over the last three years.

Community councils—government support

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management. Minister, your government has been highly critical of the importance of the role of community councils in the ACT, a role which often touches on planning issues. As the ACT commences a new planning system, community representative bodies are disbanding when they are crucial to holding this new system to account. Minister,

why is the role of community councils in the consultation process on planning being reduced under your government?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Cain for the question. I do not agree with the premise of his question. It has not been reduced at all. In fact, we engage with the community councils on a regular basis on planning matters. We have officers from EPSDD visiting community councils and doing presentations at the community councils. Indeed, you can look at the input from the community councils as we did with the planning system review and reform project but they are not the only contact we have with the Canberra community. I would invite Mr Cain to have a look at the responses I gave to him during annual reports hearings in looking at the community consultation that occurred during the planning system review and reform project. A wide variety of consultations took place across the ACT, including the biggest YourSay consultation that has ever occurred undertaken by this government. We are still involved with the community councils of course and we take on board their comments.

Mr Cain: The combined community council did not think so; they publicly criticised your consultation.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary, rather than a comment Mr Cain?

MR CAIN: Minister, how can the remaining community councils be assured that the level of participation will continue, given the Chief Minister has very clearly stated that community councils are a relic of a bygone era?

MR GENTLEMAN: I simply refer Mr Cain to my previous answer. We continue to engage with them, but there are other forms of engagement. Indeed if you look at the volume of engagement that occurred during the review and reform project on YourSay, and other engagements across the ACT—

Mr Cain interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cain, that is enough thank you.

MR GENTLEMAN: it showed that we are well engaged with the ACT community on planning reform, and indeed the community has responded.

MR COCKS: Minister, will you commit to personally attending and engaging with the Molonglo Valley community forum, which represents the ACT's newest rapidly-growing region, and which recently rejected government funding so it can remain unfettered in providing its views to the government?

MR GENTLEMAN: I have engaged with the Molonglo group, particularly during the planning system review and reform project and we will continue to engage with them. They are modern, forthright thinkers in that particular group and I am very pleased with their contribution to ACT government policy.

Social and public housing—funding

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Housing. Minister, I refer to your recent joint media release with the federal housing minister regarding the Social Housing Accelerator fund. I understand that the money will go towards building 65 public housing dwellings. Will this be over and above the additional dwellings as promised and agreed to in the PAGA? If that is not the case, how can you justify directing this substantial additional funding towards a target that you had already committed to deliver long before the HAFF was ever on the table?

MS BERRY: The answer in response to the question is: yes, it is over and above.

MR PARTON: Minister, can you very clearly detail how many extra public housing dwellings, over and above the PAGA commitment, will be delivered through the Social Housing Accelerator and when they will be delivered?

MS BERRY: There will be at least 65 homes, depending on the price. It is our expectation that that will be at least how many we deliver. The time frames will depend on the availability. But I think we have two years to deliver on the expenditure of that funding.

MS LAWDER: Minister, why does your government struggle so much to fulfill your promises with regard to the total number of public housing dwellings?

MS BERRY: I do reject the vibe of the question with regard to the government's commitment to build public housing in the ACT, because we have always committed to continue to grow and improve public housing in the ACT. Unfortunately—as I have brought to the attention of the Assembly—what we have all lived through over the last couple of years is an international health pandemic, some extreme weather conditions, a war that restricted supply of infrastructure and a workforce crisis in the construction meant that there were delays to all infrastructure builds, not just within public housing.

As I have updated the Assembly, those time frames are improving. What was taking us 18 months to two years to build public housing is now returning to more normal time frames of around nine months. So we will be able to continue to build and deliver on our promise and commitment to the Assembly as part of the PAGA and to the broader community.

Municipal services—footpaths

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, the 2021 footpath audit identified almost 9,000 path defects. In the two years since that audit, just over 5,000 of these have been repaired. This is really welcome progress, but it is moving pretty slowly, given that a lot of people rely on this network for their essential travel. What changes have you made, since the defect list was published in May, to progress path repairs in a more timely matter?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I reject the premise of the question that we have been slow. This demonstrates the proactive approach that we have undertaken, by undertaking this audit to identify defects in the footpath network, which is over 3,000 kilometres long across the ACT. It was previously the case that

defects were identified in a reactive manner by the community, through Fix My Street, for example.

The government has taken a new approach to address these defects. We are doing so based on defects that have been classified as the highest risk. That is the priority order that we have addressed them in. We know that the best way to address the issues is by addressing those urgent and high risk repairs from the audit. We have already addressed approximately 5,188 defects, which is the equivalent of nearly 11 defects per business day. It includes repairs to concrete paths, kerbs and gutters, pedestrian crossings, vehicle crossings and driveways. There have been repairs to asphalt paths and pavers, using cold mix to make paths safe where necessary, and also grinding.

In the budget we made a very substantial extra investment of 40 per cent in footpath maintenance, including through insourcing workers to be able to do some of those make-safe repairs on our footpath network, particularly grinding and asphalt repairs. I have already indicated that we are currently looking at the opportunities for undertaking some more insourcing in relation to pavement replacement on our footpath network as well. We will continue to work towards addressing the issues identified, as well as new issues that have come to light, through both proactive and reactive means.

MS CLAY: Minister, how do you make sure that our paths are clear and clean so that people can walk, wheel and ride on them safely?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. It is a good question, because some of the defects that were identified through the 2021 audit were not considered to be actual path defects. They were not structural problems with the path itself but things like debris on a path, dirt on a path or vegetation encroachment, like an overgrown hedge, for example.

Those issues are dealt with in a slightly different way, through different programs and different parts of Transport Canberra and City Services, such as the sweeping program, mowing and pruning, but also licensing and compliance, engaging with residents to make sure that they are complying with the nature strip guidelines. We are working in a range of different ways to address those issues.

The remaining 1,000 issues identified in the audit were of that non-structural nature. There were also some issues like aesthetic cracks to paths which do not currently show a vertical or horizontal displacement causing a safety risk but may need to be dealt with at a future point in time, or as prevention of a future safety risk becoming present as a result of that crack.

There are a range of different ways that we address those. We are dealing with the highest risk issues first, before we then move to the lowest risk. The insourcing framework work that the ACT government is doing, looking at footpath maintenance, will be much more responsive in how we manage these issues when they arise. Rather than having to wait, often up to a year, for work to be packaged together and put out for open market procurement, we can simply get on and deal with those defects. So it is a different way of doing things.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, when will all 9,000 defects be fixed?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. There will be many more defects in the future, I am sure, as the footpath network ages and as we have weathering on our footpath network. It is not simply the work that has been identified in the audit. We have got on to the highest risk issues first. There may be other high risk defects that become present that were not identified in the audit. They would be a priority to address.

If the member is suggesting that we prioritise low risk defects over any high risk defects, we do not agree with that point. What I have said is that we are changing the approach that we are taking in relation to our footpath maintenance. We are looking at the opportunities for insourcing, to be more responsive. As teams go out and do work on the network to replace panels or to undertake grinding, for example, they may see some of those lower risk defects that we have identified through the audit. Geolocation surveys and so forth may show other low risk defects around the high risk defects. We will try to get on top of those at the same time, to address them.

Public housing—energy efficiency

MR PARTON: My question is to the minister for housing. Minister, you have recently accepted \$7.2 million of funding from the commonwealth to assist with upgrades to minimum standards for ACT public housing dwellings. Your rhetoric around the commonwealth assistance leads me to believe that, without it, you would not have been able to comply with your own minimum standards mandates. What is your message to private landlords who must comply with the new standards without a handout from the Prime Minister and who will likely be forced to pass the cost on to renters?

MR RATTENBURY: Madam Speaker, I will take this question as I have policy responsibility for this area of work. I am very pleased about the partnership with the federal government. The federal government have established a significant fund to work on energy efficiency across Australia. They recognise that the ACT government have an excellent program, and they have contributed to that because we have a clear rollout mechanism and a clear goal as to what we want to get done to improve the lives of our public housing tenants.

In terms of private landlords, there are options available to them, including interest-free loans, as well as their own tax deductibility issues that go with having that kind of property. I think Mr Parton is trying to draw an equivalence that simply does not exist.

MR PARTON: Will the ACT government meet its own deadlines on these minimum standard upgrades, or will this be another target that you miss?

MS BERRY: I can probably respond a little bit on that one. Of course, it is our intention to ensure that we do meet the deadlines that we have set, and we want to make sure that we do that in a safe way. With the organisations that ensure that housing and other properties are insulated appropriately, we want that to be done safely and in a timely manner. In public housing, we do not want to interrupt tenants'

lives unnecessarily. Overall, our goal is to ensure that everybody has a safe and comfortable home to live in. With respect to time frames, we will do that as safely as we can, while keeping tenants' lives at the forefront of the work that we do.

MR CAIN: Minister, how have you arrived at a total cost estimate of \$32 million, given that there is a \$7.2 million contribution from the commonwealth and \$28 million worth of funding from the ACT government? They just do not add up to \$32 million.

MR RATTENBURY: I am afraid that I do not know where Mr Cain got that figure from. I am very clear that the initial contribution of \$28 million is from the ACT government. We received an additional \$7.2 million from the commonwealth government in recognition of the quality of the program, and their desire to assist with that. Also, the commonwealth is very pleased that we are rolling it out and we are actually getting the job done. I must confess that I do not know where Mr Cain got that figure from. We are very clear about what has been allocated to this program.

Pharmacies—provision of medication

DR PATERSON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, a pilot recently commenced in Canberra that will allow people to access the oral contraceptive pill more easily. What will this program look like and what benefits will it have?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Dr Paterson for the question and for her interest in the progress of this important initiative to make health care more accessible. The ACT government recognises the important role of pharmacists in the healthcare system and welcomes the opportunity to see where that role can be safely expanded for the benefit of the community. That is why we joined NSW Health and the University of Newcastle in the pharmacy trial. Under the pharmacy trial, people aged 18 to 35 who require contraception may be able to get their next supply of the pill after consultation with a participating pharmacist, if they have been taking their existing pill for contraceptive purposes and have been continuously prescribed a low-risk oral contraceptive pill in the last two years by a doctor or a nurse practitioner.

Pharmacists provide a critical service as trusted and accessible health professionals in our community. They are often the first point of contact for consumers and carers and are significant contributors in our healthcare system. Enabling pharmacists to supply certain low-risk medications when it is safe to do so is one way of providing more timely access to medications and treatments for Canberrans and reducing pressures on primary healthcare providers and emergency departments.

Of course, pharmacists are highly trained and, by participating in the trial, they will be able to have a conversation with eligible Canberrans to determine whether they can indeed provide medications or whether the person needs to see a doctor or a nurse practitioner. I was speaking to a pharmacist just the other day who was telling me that someone had come in seeking a new script for contraceptive pills under this particular trial and, in fact, they were told that they were not eligible to receive that new script from the pharmacist, and the pharmacist advised them to see a health practitioner. This is a responsibility pharmacists take very seriously.

DR PATERSON: Minister, have there been any other recent trials to increase the health care that Canberra's pharmacists can provide?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Dr Paterson for the supplementary question. The initiative to make oral contraceptive pills more accessible expands on the trial of pharmacists supplying medications to treat uncomplicated urinary tract infections in women. The trial will evaluate the effectiveness and safety of pharmacists prescribing antibiotics to treat uncomplicated UTIs in women and people with a uterus aged between 18 and 65. UTIs are a common condition in women, and uncomplicated UTIs can be treated with a short course of antibiotics.

This initiative is a good example of community pharmacies partnering with GPs and other health professionals to treat common health conditions, with increased accessibility in a safe and efficient way helping to unclog the health system. By enabling pharmacists to initiate treatment for women with an uncomplicated UTI, we are helping Canberrans to access treatment quickly and are reducing pressure on other primary healthcare providers. With nearly 2,000 people presenting to emergency in the ACT for a urinary tract infection annually, this initiative will help reduce pressure on the hospital system and will make UTI treatments even more accessible for Canberrans across the territory. ACT pharmacies participating in the trial are required to follow strict protocols and diagnostic criteria to ensure the safe use of antibiotics in the treatment of uncomplicated UTIs and ensure patients understand when they may need to seek further care.

In addition, earlier this year, the ACT government also expanded the vaccines that pharmacists can administer in the ACT without a prescription. ACT pharmacists can now administer vaccines to certain age groups for a wide range of conditions, including hepatitis A and B, human papilloma virus, measles, mumps, rubella and meningococcal. This will be expanded further from 1 January 2024.

MS ORR: Minister, how else is the ACT government making women's health care easier to access in Canberra?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary. In addition to the pharmacy trial, our fabulous nurse-led walk-in centres can also treat women for uncomplicated UTIs, and we are continuing to expand their scope of practice as well. Earlier this year, I announced that the ACT government is investing more than \$4.6 million over four years to provide all ACT residents who require an abortion, including those without a Medicare card, access to free abortion services. Medical abortions up to nine weeks gestation are available through a trained GP, telehealth service or MSI Australia, formerly known as Marie Stopes. MSI Australia also offers surgical abortions up to 16 weeks gestation. Long-acting reversible contraceptives are also available at the time of surgical abortion.

Abortion, of course, is a health service, and not being able to access appropriate care in a timely way can have a detrimental impact on a person's mental and physical health, as well as socioeconomic consequences. This initiative is about providing women and people who need an abortion with access to the right supports and services without stigma or financial burden. The ACT government will continue to engage with service providers, including general practices, and our non-government

community partners as we work to expand services in the ACT.

At the November Health Ministers Meeting, I gave in-principle support to implementing the recommendations relevant to jurisdictions of the Senate inquiry into universal access to reproductive health care. As health ministers noted, the ACT has implemented several of the recommendations already, and I look forward to working with the commonwealth labour government to deliver on the recommendations where there are joint responsibilities. I congratulate the commonwealth government on the changes that have been made to make medical abortion more accessible as well. We will continue to work with the commonwealth to improve women's access to health care.

Ginninderry—services

MR CAIN: My question is to the minister for suburban development. Minister, I have received correspondence from residents of the Ginninderry community who feel neglected by you, the SLA and the government. The planned Strathnairn school will be delayed until at least the start of 2026, despite the suburb's population growing quickly. Furthermore, there are still no local shops and the mobile reception out there is not adequate.

Minister, why are you depriving the residents of Ginninderry of essential infrastructure?

MS BERRY: In the first instance, I would encourage Mr Cain to pass on the constituents' concerns that he has received with regard to Ginninderry. I would be very happy to take those up with our joint venture partner at Ginninderry, Riverview, to address the concerns that he says his constituents are raising with him.

As to the second part of the question, I understand that the Ginninderry group have been working very closely with residents of Strathnairn to work through some of the challenges that have more recently been identified with development and growth in that area. That continued consultation and conversation is important to ensure that the community is engaged in all of the fantastic work that the Riverview Group, our joint venture partner as part of Ginninderry, are doing in that wonderful new suburb.

Mr Cain interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cain!

MS BERRY: I do not accept that people in Ginninderry are unhappy. I do accept that living in a new area does come with challenges, and the best way to overcome those is to have those really great open communication channels. I know the Ginninderry group do that through their communications and access to their Link down there—their community space—to encourage people to come and talk with the Riverview Group about how they are overcoming some of the challenges out there.

Mr Cain interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cain!

Mr Cain might want to just understand a little bit better the joint venture partnership and the responsibilities of each the joint venturers and their partner. The ACT government is the funding partner; the Ginninderry Riverview Group is the delivery partner, so they are really, primarily, responsible for communications with residents.

MR CAIN: Minister, when can Ginninderry residents expect to see the construction of a local or group centre in their area?

MS BERRY: I think the Riverview Group in Ginninderry are updating the community about time frames for a group centre, but I might take that on notice to be sure that I can have the most up-to-date time frames to provide the Assembly and, more broadly, the community.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, what collaboration or correspondence with the commonwealth have you undertaken to urgently upgrade telecommunication reception in outer west Belconnen?

MS BERRY: I understand that the Ginninderry group have been discussing some of the issues that have been raised with the community with regard to Telstra, who recently installed a telecommunications pole and, however, have identified some issues with the connections of mobile phone coverage with that area. I understand that some of those concerns have been communicated with the Ginninderry community. I completely understand the frustrations some of the individuals out there would be experiencing. I know that west Belconnen does have significant gaps in coverage for both wi-fi, broadband and phones, not just out at Ginninderry—

Mrs Kikkert: A point of order, Madam Speaker. The question specifically asked the minister about what collaboration or correspondence she has had with the commonwealth rather than what Ginninderry has been doing with their residents.

MADAM SPEAKER: I do not think there is a point of order. I will given the minister the time she has left.

MS BERRY: I just wanted to continue to say that the joint venturer, obviously, briefs me regularly on issues that affect that community and the Ginninderry project more broadly, and these are the issues that the joint venture is working through with the telecommunication provider, as well as with the commonwealth government.

Obviously, I understand, as I said, the frustration that community, and, more broadly, that some of the other parts of west Belconnen are experiencing. I know myself and my colleague Tara Cheyne have written regularly to telecommunication providers and others to try to have these issues addressed, and we will continue to make sure that we advocate on behalf of those residents.

Public housing—Lowanna Street

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Housing. It is that time of question time, Minister—

Ms Berry: It is my turn!

MR PARTON: where we have a question about the public housing complex on Lowanna Street in Braddon. We are exasperated too! This complex, which sits vacant, has the opportunity to house many of those on the waiting list, in a fantastic location. In recent sittings you have assured us that things are moving forward in this decade-long saga of neglect and mismanagement. Can you detail exactly what has changed since we last spoke in this place regarding this complex and provide the chamber with an estimated date for the commencement of new tenancies?

MS BERRY: Thank you Mr Parton for that question. I will provide an update. I am just going to get some absolute dates to make sure I have the time frames correct, if I can provide them. I am not sure if I mentioned during the last time that I was asked questions about Lowanna that there were ACAT processes that were occurring. I understand that those have been resolved, which is good. So we are another step in the direction of developing that site for future public housing, but I will come back to the chamber with some more detail on the time frames.

MR PARTON: What is the total estimated rebuild or renovation cost to have Lowanna Street brought up to standard and tenanted? What has the decade-long vacancy of this property cost the taxpayer in total?

MS BERRY: I will take the question on notice. The building is not being upgraded, it will be demolished and a new building built. The future price might not be available at the moment, but if there is detail on the actual cost, I will make sure that I bring that information back to the Assembly.

MR CAIN: Minister, why is the ACT government not able to properly manage their housing properties at a time when housing is so unaffordable?

MS BERRY: I completely reject the premise of that question. The question asked by Mr Parton was specifically about Lowanna, which had some particular complex challenges which do not exist with any other public housing properties. The ACT government has significantly invested millions of dollars—record investment—into maintaining, upgrading and building public housing properties.

Environment—lakes and waterways

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction. Minister, going into an El Niño summer, I am increasingly concerned about the rapid growth of blue-green algae within my electorate. The blooms are prominent not just in Lake Tuggeranong but also in other bodies of water around Brindabella. While the Healthy Waterways Program is currently giving some love and TLC to Lake Tuggeranong, a particular concern I have is the filamentous algal blooms in Fadden Pond.

Minister, what is the problem in Fadden Pond and what is the government doing to reduce the occurrence of blue-green algal blooms in the ACT?

MR RATTENBURY: I welcome Miss Nuttall to question time. I am pleased to see

that she is continuing a fine tradition of members for Brindabella taking an interest in the water quality in the electorate.

The filamentous algae in Fadden Pond is growing because the pond water is enriched with nutrients. The high level of nutrients are the result of both high inputs to the urban stormwater system that flows into Fadden Pond and the low levels of filtering in the system above the pond. Two major sources of nutrients in the stormwater flowing into Fadden Pond are from leaves and grass sitting in the drains and gutters in the suburb and also fertilisers leaching from gardens that then travel in the stormwater down through the system.

The ACT government is continuing to deliver the Healthy Waterways Program to improve water quality across Canberra, with a focus on the Lake Tuggeranong catchment, as I have outlined to the Assembly on previous occasions. The Healthy Waterways Program is building water quality assets such as wetlands to filter nutrients from stormwater and slow the movement of water in the landscape so that it can be filtered by soil and plants. We are also conducting research and monitoring and delivering water quality education programs. I recently had the chance to examine a new piece of infrastructure in Kambah, where there have been gaps put in guttering so the water can flow across the nature reserve area and actually be filtered that way. That is one example. Some of the projects are quite complex and some are relatively more simple.

The ACT government is also delivering the Leaf Collective project in Tuggeranong, including in Fadden, which encourages residents to remove the leaves and grass from their blocks so that they do not enter the drains in the first place. The government is also planning a program to find ways to reduce fertiliser use in the Tuggeranong catchment and of course elsewhere in Canberra. But, again, because of particular problems in Tuggeranong, that is where most of the effort is being focused at this point in time.

MISS NUTTALL: Will Fadden Pond be considered for inclusion in the Healthy Waterways Program?

MR RATTENBURY: While the Healthy Waterways Program is focused on building assets in Tuggeranong, there are none that are currently specifically planned for the Fadden Pond catchment. However, this location will be considered for future work, particularly in light of the issues that have been identified. The projects that are happening in Tuggeranong are taking place in other areas at the moment. For example, members of that area may have seen the work that is being done on the Tuggeranong Creek drain, behind the Calwell Playing Fields.

In addition, a catchment plan for managing water quality in the Lake Tuggeranong catchment as a whole, including the Fadden Pond catchment, is currently being prepared and will be made available for community consultation in 2024. That is designed to look at the whole catchment and will take into account the scientific research that has been taking place in the catchment. The work done by the University of Canberra, in particular, has given us a much clearer understanding of the dynamics of the catchment and particularly the source of many of the pollutants and where they are flowing to. I think that will give us a much better understanding of how to manage

these issues in the Tuggeranong catchment.

MS CLAY: Minister, what can local residents do to improve the water quality in their local lakes and ponds?

MR RATTENBURY: There is actually a lot that local residents can do to improve the quality of the stormwater that enters into the lakes and ponds. One of those key things is removing leaves so that they do not wash into the drains. The point of the Leaf Collective program is to, I guess, unleash that community energy that is out there and invite residents to be part of the solution.

We can also reduce fertiliser use on gardens and on sports fields, which is a particular responsibility of the government. That is something that the government is working on as a project at the moment. Using less fertiliser and applying it at the right time—which is, ideally, not before a big rain event like we are currently experiencing—can certainly help to keep some of that nutrient load out of our waterways. We can also, of course, make sure that it is only water that is flowing down the stormwater drains and not other things. We do not want to see people disposing of paints, oil or other liquids inappropriately down the drain.

They are some small but practical things that residents can do to contribute that will complement the work being done by government to seek to improve the water quality in these catchments.

Public housing—maintenance

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, over the last few years we have received countless complaints from tenants in multiple Housing ACT complexes that have broken garage doors. This results in compromised safety for tenants, and these doors have, on occasion, taken years to be repaired, if at all. What is the repair policy for garage doors in Housing ACT complexes and, more broadly, why is the current maintenance arrangement failing so many tenants?

MS BERRY: I am concerned to hear about the issues that Mr Parton has raised on behalf of public housing tenants with regard to the repair of garage doors. I cannot recall receiving correspondence with regard to delays, but I will check with my office—

Mr Parton: You have. You definitely have.

MS BERRY: I will check with my office about that correspondence and whether it is a more widespread issue, to understand whether there are delays and the reasons for those delays. If I have not already, I will respond directly to Mr Parton, if he has provided that correspondence to my office.

MR PARTON: Minister, what message do you have for the thousands of tenants who cannot get urgent repairs and maintenance dealt with in their Housing ACT property?

MS BERRY: As I said, I am always concerned when I hear about public housing

tenants and repairs that they have identified in their properties. Sometimes there are a number of reasons that are out of Housing ACT's and Programmed's control. That includes the availability of the tenant at the home, for the trades to get in. Sometimes it is the material. To be fair, sometimes the tenant's work is not delivered in a timely manner—and I accept that that is unacceptable—or the improvement works are not of the standard that either Housing ACT or the ACT government would expect to be delivered.

Housing ACT and I are constantly reviewing the work that Programmed does, and the engagement that we have with our tenants, to ensure that they are being responded to appropriately, in a timely manner, that the repairs that they are receiving are as appropriate, as any of us would expect got ourselves, and that the tenants are being treated respectfully. I am concerned when I hear about these concerns. When Mr Parton brings them to my attention, I always ask Housing ACT to investigate and to ensure that prompt action is taken.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, why are so many urgent and necessary maintenance issues not being dealt with by the ACT government, as the self-proclaimed “model landlord”?

MS BERRY: Sorry; what was the last bit of that question?

MADAM SPEAKER: Can you repeat the question.

MS BERRY: It was just the last three words. I couldn't hear.

MS CASTLEY: The ACT government, as the self-proclaimed “model landlord”.

MS BERRY: Right. I think I will just refer Ms Castley to the previous answer.

Australian Institute of Sport—federal review

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, how has the ACT government been engaging with the federal government's review, “A fit for purpose Australian Institute of Sport”?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Orr for her interest in the Australian Institute of Sport. As members of the Assembly know, the federal government has commissioned a review of the Australian Institute of Sport, its infrastructure and campus location. Members of the government and I recognise the long-held connection that the AIS has with Canberra and the surrounding region. As such, it was important for me to ensure that the views of the local community, sporting groups and other stakeholders be listened to, taken into account and fed into the ACT government's submission to this federal government review.

Once the review was announced, I organised a roundtable of sporting bodies and other stakeholders to discuss their views on the AIS, and any change to the AIS, including the location and their vision for the potential future of the AIS campus in Bruce. The roundtable was held at the University of Canberra in Bruce on Tuesday, 14 November and it was well attended. The discussion that we had was positive and productive,

with lots of examination of the issues that currently impact the AIS, how local sporting bodies and others use the facility and how important it is, the background and history of the campus, as well as ideas for its future use.

MS ORR: Minister, what did sporting bodies tell you about their current use of AIS facilities?

MS BERRY: Different sports and clubs make use of the AIS campus in a varied way. Some use the facilities for training only; some use the precinct for matches. Many of the sports regularly have athletes who are trained for elite careers by centres of excellence. The Canberra Capitals have had several Canberrans move from their local clubs via the centre of excellence and into professional basketball. What is more, up to 120 local athletes make use of the ACT Academy of Sport, ACTAS, on a daily to weekly basis. This facility is run and funded by the ACT government and provides Canberra athletes with specific programs and training facilities to help their development. ACTAS is located on the AIS campus and there is a large level of collaboration between the two organisations, which benefits local athletes.

The closure of the AIS arena due to underfunding and neglect by the previous commonwealth government was quite a blow to teams, particularly the Canberra Capitals, who had, as everybody in this space knows, used that facility of the AIS extensively. I hope that the necessary maintenance needs of the facility can be completed well before the 2024-25 season, so that we can get the Caps back at the arena.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what were some of the views from sporting bodies about the potential for the AIS?

MS BERRY: There was broad consensus from stakeholders that the AIS should remain in Canberra and that investment should be put into the current campus for a number of improvements, maintenance activities and upgrades. The vision of stakeholders was broad, with lots of enthusiasm for the potential of the campus. This vision included an expansion of short, medium and long-term accommodation options for athletes, coaches, officials and spectators. Many sports talked about the opportunity to improve spectator participation on the site through additional events, activities and connections with athletes. There are also opportunities for research, medicine, learning and innovation going hand in hand with training and match facilities on the campus.

Overall, the vision of stakeholders was a positive one—a vision that focused on investing properly in our national institution to bring it back to its heyday and place it firmly on the map as an international sporting centre of excellence here in the nation's capital, Canberra.

North Canberra Hospital—workplace culture

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. The most recent workplace culture survey reveals that only 26 per cent of nurses and midwives from North Canberra Hospital participated in CHS's recently closed culture survey, November notwithstanding. Can you provide an update on how many staff have left

the North Canberra Hospital, and from what units, since the takeover of Calvary?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think Ms Castley has conflated a couple of things in asking the question, so I will take on notice how many. I think the question she actually asked is: how many staff have left North Canberra Hospital since 3 July. I will take that question on notice.

MS CASTLEY: Have you inquired as to why North Canberra Hospital had a low participation rate in the recent workplace culture survey? If so, what information did you receive?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: My understanding is that BPA, which is the provider of the culture survey, is yet to provide a full report back to Canberra Health Services, and I have not been briefed on the full outcomes of that. I would say to Ms Castley that there was a culture survey undertaken in 2022, I believe, by Calvary when it was Calvary Public Hospital Bruce, and that had a low response rate, so there may be some longstanding issues around participation in culture surveys at that hospital. I also do not have the data that she is referring to, so I will need to also confirm that her data is, in fact, accurate. I will check that and come back to the Assembly if I have anything further to add.

MRS KIKKERT: Isn't the fact that so many nurses and midwives at North Canberra Hospital chose not to participate in this survey indicative of their disengagement under your administration?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No. Again, I refer Mrs Kikkert to my earlier responses to Ms Castley's questions.

Trees—urban canopy

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, how is the ACT government tracking in achieving its tree planting target?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Pettersson for his question. Canberra's trees are part of what makes our city one of the liveable in the world and in Australia. They make our streets and neighbourhoods more resilient to climate change. They promote biodiversity, improve air quality and reduce the urban heat island effect. That is why I am really pleased to advise the Assembly that we are on track to plant more than 64,000 trees by mid next year, far exceeding the 54,000 trees we promised to plant at the election. This is the fifth largest tree planting that has occurred in our city's history, with new stock set to grow canopy cover right across our city, especially in new and emerging suburbs that were built after 1990. We have already planted around 50,000 trees and at the moment they are enjoying a good soak!

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what other measures has the ACT government been taking to protect and grow Canberra's urban forest?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Pettersson for his question. Planting more trees is just one of the many strategies that we need to grow and protect Canberra's urban forest, which will help us to reach our ambitious target of 30 per cent canopy cover by 2045. To

help achieve this target that the ACT government committed to under the living infrastructure plan and the Urban Forest Strategy, we have developed actions under that strategy which set out the ACT government's vision for a resilient and sustainable urban forest. The strategy includes a full list of our objectives and actions in achieving the target, and the ACT government recognises the importance of having robust legislation to make sure that we protect and enhance our urban forest. We have got a large existing urban forest. We want to prolong the life of those mature trees as much as possible by better protecting them. I am really delighted that the implementation is well under way on the urban forest, and the actual engagement is occurring with the community and with industry ahead of the start of that piece of legislation from 1 January, which will protect Canberra's trees for a generation.

DR PATERSON: Minister, how does the ACT government's tree canopy coverage target compare with other Australian cities?

MR STEEL: I thank the Dr Paterson for her supplementary question. Canberra's city-wide canopy cover, which was last measured in 2020, estimated that Canberra has a canopy cover of 22.5 per cent. LiDAR data is updated every five years to determine the success of the tree planting program and urban forestry policies. The existing canopy coverage is higher than a number of Australian cities, including greater Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. Over 20 per cent of Canberra's suburbs already have a tree canopy coverage higher than the 30 per cent target, and an additional 50 per cent of Canberra suburbs have a canopy cover above 20 per cent and 30 per cent. The majority of suburbs with a tree canopy coverage of less than 15 per cent have been developed within the last 15 years, so canopy cover in these suburbs is expected to increase as trees are planted and when they reach maturity.

The ACT government has also set the target of achieving 30 per cent canopy cover, or equivalent, across Canberra's urban footprint by 2045. Canberra's urban footprint as a local government area is much larger than many other LGAs across cities in Australia, so this actually does represent a very ambitious target given the size and scale of the ACT. The extra trees that we are now protecting under the Urban Forest Act will also make a difference to us reaching that target and being able to appropriately manage the administrative burden that is required in supporting that management, making sure we are continuing to invest in more tree planting.

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