



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Thursday, 4 December 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.

Thursday, 4 December 2025

Ministerial arrangements	1
Questions without notice:	
Roads—St Clare of Assisi school	1
Outlaw motorcycle gangs.....	2
Murrumbidgee electorate—roads.....	3
Community sector—pay and conditions	4
Sport and recreation—aquatic facilities	5
Transport Canberra—bus services	5
Budget—federal government funding.....	6
Housing—Housing Supply and Land Release program	8
City and Government Services—Christmas lights	10
Parking—Theatre Lane car park closure.....	10
Government—freedom of information	12
Planning—rural leaseholds	12
Public schools—Tharwa Preschool.....	14
Gungahlin town centre—noise standards.....	15
Migration—economy	17
ACT Fire & Rescue—electric breathing apparatus truck	18
Parking—Woden.....	19

Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (2.00): As members may be aware, Minister Paterson is away from question time today due to personal reasons. In this question time, the Deputy Chief Minister will take questions in the Women and Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence portfolios; Minister Cheyne will take questions in the Police, Fire and Emergency Services portfolio; and Minister Orr will take questions in the Corrections and Gaming Reform portfolios.

Questions without notice

Roads—St Clare of Assisi school

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, my office has been contacted by concerned parents of St Clare of Assisi Primary School in Conder regarding high traffic volumes at pick up and drop off. The high traffic volumes have resulted in cars jumping the median strip, which is used as a pedestrian crossing for both students and families. The school has been advised by WorkSafe ACT that they have done everything they can to manage traffic and ensure the safety of their students, staff and families. Minister, has this problem been brought to your attention and what actions has your government, whether it be under yours or others, taken to guarantee the safety of students going to and from the school?

MS CHEYNE: I thank the opposition leader for the question. I am aware of this issue but regrettably I do have to take the detail on notice, simply because I do not have it in front of me and we have a few different things on with traffic movement around schools, but I think that I can probably come back with at least a bit more information by the end of question time.

MR PARTON: Minister, what avenues are open to you or other ministers in protecting the safety of students, staff and families of St Clare of Assisi, given that cars are jumping the median strip?

MS CHEYNE: Well, this is how efficient my DLO is! The School Safety Program is going to contact St Clare of Assisi Primary School to offer support to promote safe driving behaviours around the school. That will include education materials to encourage alternative transport options rather than collecting the students from the school carpark, as well as recommending parents arrive after the school bell in the afternoon to avoid queuing.

A traffic impact assessment was completed on Block 13, Section 228 in November 2023, which included a survey on 13 September of the same year and it noted that the roundabout at Box Hill Avenue, Heidelberg Street, Charterisville Avenue and the T-intersection of Heidelberg Street and Lowcay Street were observed to operate a satisfactory level of service during the peaks, am and pm, but noted that there is capacity at the intersection to support additional traffic with the development of the site. There has not been another traffic impact assessment.

The working hours for the contractor are between 7 am and 5 pm. The contractor does not allow deliveries to be received between 8 and 9.30 am and 2.30 and 3.30 pm. The

contractor has also advised that there are very few deliveries between 3.30 and 5 pm and construction is expected to be completed in August 2026.

If there is anything in that information, Mr Speaker, that is contrary to the experiences that have been raised with Mr Parton's office, I am very happy to take that information and ensure the directorate is fully aware of all of the circumstances.

MR COCKS: Minister, what are you doing to deal with similar issues across other suburbs, such as those experienced in Pearce in my electorate?

MS CHEYNE: The short answer, Mr Speaker, is that it depends. On Pearce, I will take the detail on notice because I reckon I will get a 118AA—but I will take that on notice. I will not anticipate your ruling, but generally what I would say, Mr Speaker, is that it does depend. It really depends on exactly the configuration of the school, if it is on arterial roads or if it is on local roads or feeder roads. It depends on whether there is construction activity occurring around it. It depends on if there is one of site issues.

Certainly in my electorate in Belconnen, we have been progressively implementing a range of different methods to improve the safety around schools, including with Canberra High and Bowman Street and also at Melba Copland, where recently a new school crossing was installed. So there are options available to us, but it really depends on exactly the nature of the issue.

I will come back on Sacred Heart school, as I understand it to be, as soon as I can.

Outlaw motorcycle gangs

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, following the recent national run conducted by the outlaw motorcycle gang the Bandidos in Canberra—and noting that ACT Policing has had to monitor and engage with several OMCG events in recent years—why do OMCGs continue to meet in Canberra rather than in other jurisdictions?

MS CHEYNE: Look, the short answer is—and I don't mean to be cute—but in some ways you probably have to put that question to the Bandidos. I think the heart of what Ms Morris is asking is: 'what are we going to do about it?' With my AG hat on, and currently speaking for Minister Paterson a little, I can confirm that we do have work underway, including considering—

Ms Morris: Mr Speaker, point of order is on relevance. The question was why they come to Canberra, not what the government is going to do about it.

MR SPEAKER: I think that is fair. Do you have anything further to add, Minister?

MS CHEYNE: I believe I have already answered that, Mr Speaker. I do not think I can speak for the Bandidos or the Commancheros. I have never met them or spent any time with them, so I do not go what goes through their minds when they are deciding to spend any time in Canberra at all. I would like to be helpful, and I am trying to be helpful, but I do not know.

MS MORRIS: Minister, has the government paid for external assistance to monitor and engage with OMCG activities?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that on notice.

MS BARRY: Minister, why is the ACT the only jurisdiction that does not have a combination of anti-consorting laws, the banning of wearing colours or firearm prohibition orders?

MS CHEYNE: I really appreciate Ms Barry asking the question, because that is exactly what I was getting to! We have been working through exactly what tools are available that we might not have yet legislated for or employed.

Equally, we still need to make sure that we are being consistent with human rights and the Human Rights Act. As I hope has been demonstrated already, through each piece of legislation that I have introduced this week, we do prioritise community safety too. We have some policy work underway in our directorates at the moment about exactly what else might be available to us that would leave us consistent with human rights and the Human Rights Act while also intervening to give police some extra tools when it comes to these matters.

Murrumbidgee electorate—roads

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. At the last election, ACT Labor committed to several projects in the Murrumbidgee electorate. What is the current costing and project status for the commitments to improve traffic flow on Cotter Road, and increase service frequency on the R10 rapid bus line?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for this question. Of course, we will consider business cases for those projects in future budgets, where they have not yet been delivered. But work has already been funded in relation to the Cotter Road, under Minister Cheyne's portfolio as Minister for City and Government Services, and that work is underway—and got underway very shortly after the election. So, we have started delivering on our election commitments. Further election commitments will be delivered throughout the term and will be considered in the budget.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, are these and other government projects being delayed by the ACT's worsening financial situation?

MR STEEL: No. We are committed to getting on with the election commitments that we have made—noting that there are external factors that have already impacted on the traffic network itself. There has been a lot of construction happening outside of our control—particularly on the NCA bridge. So, as we consider the introduction of new rapid routes and our commitments around increasing frequency—in which we already made some improvements earlier this year—we would also need to take into account the traffic conditions. But we expect that construction work to be temporary, and so we can get on and deliver our commitments over the term.

MR PARTON: Minister, does Labor have any plan to begin repairing the territory's

finances to prevent further project delays?

MR STEEL: We began that process in the budget, Mr Speaker, where we put the budget on a more sustainable footing. We did make tough decisions in the budget. The opposition rejected those decisions. But they were important decisions—not just on the revenue side of the budget but on the expenditure side of the budget with the whole-of-government savings initiatives that we are currently undertaking. It will not just be a process for one budget but a process over many years for directorates. We are engaged in that process now, and as I say, every time that this is mentioned, every member of this Assembly has a responsibility to support the government's measures that we are taking to put the budget on a sustainable footing.

Community sector—pay and conditions

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services. Minister, yesterday you indicated that the onus is on employers and employees to negotiate an outcome as part of the community sector multi-enterprise agreement. However, the Fair Work Commission indicated that the participation of government in the supported bargaining process was a reason for proceeding. Given the ACT government committed at election time to move towards parity in conditions for community sector workers through the agreement, how can employers and employees meaningfully negotiate an outcome when the government continues to refuse to provide any indication of what, if any, level of funding it is actually prepared to commit?

MS ORR: I reject the premise of the question that the government is not willing to provide input. The government has provided input, including explaining the reasons, the parameters and limits or opportunities within what it can consider. Given that this is an ongoing process before the Fair Work Commission, and it is also under continuing consideration by cabinet, I will not be going into the detail of those discussions or the input that has been provided.

What I would add to the answer is the same point I made yesterday. In politicising these ongoing negotiations in the chamber, it does not help to have the conversation. In answer to the first part of Mr Rattenbury's question, given that the government is not the negotiator, and it is there to support the negotiations between the two parties negotiating, that is the advice that has been put to me.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, how do you respond to the perception that your government has created that, by rejecting proposals without providing an alternative, without outlining acceptable parameters, and without offering funding this financial year, you are walking back from your commitment to support gender equity through the enterprise agreement?

MS ORR: Again, I reject the premise of the question that the government has not put in place parameters or provided feedback through the proposal. Again, I refer Mr Rattenbury to my previous answers, where I have stated that the government is not a negotiating party; they are joined to proceedings. We will need to work within the obligations that we have under our legislation, and the Financial Management Act, in our consideration of what we can and cannot support. We will continue to work through that. We are still at the negotiating table as being joined to proceedings. We are still

providing our input to the ongoing negotiations. I reject the assertion that the government is therefore not progressing its commitments.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, what instructions have relevant directorates received regarding the government's position on MEA funding, and why have officials at the Fair Work Commission hearings and related negotiations been unable to provide a clear statement to bargaining parties to date?

MS ORR: I am not going to enter into a commentary of what has or has not happened in negotiations at the Fair Work Commission. I am not there, so I am not going to provide a reflection, as someone who was not a party to them. I also think it is highly inappropriate for me to be putting on the public record those discussions which are happening in an ongoing negotiation and bargaining process.

Sport and recreation—aquatic facilities

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, in the annual reports hearings you said it would take 12 months to develop an aquatic strategy. Will work on the aquatic strategy start at the beginning of 2026, and will the work be completed by the end of 2026?

MS BERRY: Yes; it will probably take around 12 months. I do not have information on when the strategy will begin, but, once it has begun, I will make that public, of course.

MS CARRICK: Minister, will you undertake a needs analysis in consultation with the community?

MS BERRY: There will be a range of work in the development of a strategy and in our consultation on what that strategy will look like. It could be the case that a needs analysis will occur. Those decisions have not yet been made.

MR EMERSON: Minister, when will a draft aquatic strategy be available for community consultation?

MS BERRY: After it has begun and is completed.

Transport Canberra—bus services

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport. I have fielded a number of complaints from community members about the lack of bus routes to the National Botanic Gardens and to the National Zoo and Aquarium. Can you please explain why there are currently no bus services to these destinations?

MR STEEL: The short answer is that many years ago when Transport Canberra assessed the patronage on a previous that serviced those venues, there was very low patronage. So, in prioritising the resources and the allocation of bus routes around the territory to balance both frequency and coverage in the network, a decision was made, I think, well over five years ago, to not service those venues and to focus on moving

more people around the city where they needed to go.

I would not say that there are no plans in the future to potentially service those areas if demand is there. Transport Canberra reviews the bus network every year, takes feedback from the community and provides updates to the routes. We have commitments that we brought forward at the election around new bus routes, and that is what the government's priority is on delivering.

MR EMERSON: Minister, will the government introduce these new services or consider doing so within this term of government given the mention you just made of election commitments to increase bus services that do not include these?

MR STEEL: It is certainly not a priority of the government, but we will continue to review demand and take feedback from the community in relation to the priorities. Our focus is on delivering bus services to move the greatest number of people possible. Based on previous data, particularly the patronage data collected when those routes were serviced, I have not been presented with any alternative evidence that there would be great demand for accessing those venues. I absolutely understand that some people may wish to use bus services to access those venues. But, based on previous data, there is no evidence to suggest that it would be a viable route at this particular point in time, and bus services need to be prioritised elsewhere.

I will be providing an update later on today, in the noting of papers, in relation to the update to the network and timetable for next year, commencing in term 1, which will be dealing with the construction impacts of the federal government's major bridge renewal works. So, in the next two years, we will be very much focused on making sure that we can provide capacity in the network to move people around at a time when there is significant construction impacts and delay on the traffic network.

MS CARRICK: Minister, how does the lack of connectivity with these vital community assets, which particularly impacts elderly people and those with mobility issues who might not have other transport options, align with the government's Age-Friendly City Plan and Disability Strategy?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Of course, there are a range of other transport options that are available to Canberrans. We are very clear that we cannot provide a bus service on every street in Canberra and that we do need to prioritise. We have a balance of both high-frequency services that encourage more patronage and move more people around the city and coverage services, the local routes, that tend to move fewer people and stop more often and are more circuitous and tend to service more areas of Canberra. But even those cannot go on to every street. We just do not have the capacity to do that, and so we do have to prioritise.

We have used the best evidence to us, the patronage data, to make decisions on that. It was well before my time as the Minister for Transport. We will continue to monitor and, if there is enough demand that can be demonstrated, that will then be reconsidered. But there are also other priorities that we outlined very clearly at the election and sought a mandate for.

Budget—federal government funding

MS CLAY: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, thank you for reporting back on the outcomes of my September motion about commonwealth funding. The Board of Treasurers communique from 3 October 2025 says states and territories remain committed to the December 2023 deal to fund 42.5 per cent of public hospital costs by 2030, but under the arrangement now proposed by the commonwealth the actual share of commonwealth funding will be closer to 35 per cent. In the ACT that means we would miss out on over \$100 million each year. The Board is calling on the commonwealth to act in “good faith.” A call from eight governments to the federal government to act in ‘good faith’ gives the impression that negotiations are not going well.

In the budget you are preparing now, are you relying on the 35 per cent hospital funding figure or are you using a different figure, and if so, what?

MR STEEL: That is actually outlined in the budget papers. There is an entire section on the NHRA with a chart showing the commonwealth contribution rate in the budget, and indeed, in the budget we also effectively wrote down the level of funding expected under the NHRA based on what they had already provided in the one year deal and what was expected in the future. So I refer the member to the budget papers. It is outlined there but we are hoping for a deal, a five year deal would preferable, and we will continue those negotiations which, of course, mainly involve the first ministers. We are hoping to be able to get a five year funding deal where we can then provide an update in future budgets with further funding for our hospitals that meets the commitment that the Prime Minister made at national cabinet in accordance with the member’s question.

Ms Clay: Point of order on relevance, 118AA. I just wanted to know in the budget that is being prepared now, is it the 35 per cent figure or is it a different figure?

MR SPEAKER: Minister are you able to provide that?

MR STEEL: I am happy to come back on notice about that, but obviously it is over the forward estimates so I will provide some more information. It will not simply be one number.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Clay, rather than rely on 118AA, the minister has committed to take that on notice, so he will provide that information to you at some stage.

MS CLAY: What was ACT senator and Finance Minister Katy Gallagher’s response in relation to your letter about reimbursement for the \$550 million of commonwealth funding the ACT missed out on due to population undercounts?

MR STEEL: I do not believe I have received a response to that letter.

MR RATTENBURY: Treasurer, have you spoken to ACT federal member and Assistant Minister for Productivity, Competition, Charities and Treasury, Andrew Leigh, who is also responsible for the Australian Bureau of Statistics, about the \$550 million the ACT lost out on due to this commonwealth population undercount?

MR STEEL: Yes, I have talked to Dr Leigh on a range of occasions in relation to the population undercount, which is by the ABS but used by the Commonwealth Grants Commission in its allocation of GST to the states, using that population data which is flawed for net interstate migration. It is a source of continued conversation between officials in the commonwealth government. Some of those conversations have been productive but while we have seen some of that population recognised, which was captured in the most recent budget—of around 5,000 people living in and around the ADFA campus—there are still tens of thousands of people who have not been counted. So we are continuing that advocacy and the papers that I tabled yesterday demonstrate that we are continuing that advocacy on population at every level, which includes with the Treasurer, Jim Chalmers.

Housing—Housing Supply and Land Release program

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, can you please update the Assembly on key measures and government plans to enable 30,000 new homes by 2030?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. The ACT government remains firmly committed to enabling 30,000 new homes by 2030 to ensure Canberrans have access to diverse, affordable and sustainable housing options.

We have done a lot this year, particularly on missing middle housing reforms, which have now gone to the Assembly's planning committee and are crucial to meeting our housing target. Just this week, we have seen the Committee for Economic Development of Australia release a report backing in missing middle housing reforms as a way of making sure that we have enough homes to support our growing population here in Australia and locally here in the ACT.

They are particularly focused on gentle density, and that is exactly how we have described this—providing more townhouses; providing dual occupancy, tri-occupancy and multi-occupancy housing; and providing terraces and low-rise apartments. The draft major plan amendment that has gone to the committee is based on the strong support and feedback that we heard from the community about the construction of missing middle homes.

The government has also undertaken substantial work on boosting construction productivity, which goes hand in hand with the zoning changes that we are making. Just last week, I announced a series of measures that will support noticeably shorter timeframes for building and development approvals to be completed—again, this is based on feedback from, in particular, the construction industry about what we on the government side can do to speed up approvals.

I welcome the Assembly's support for the legislation that we moved and passed yesterday to make sure that we can build more community housing projects and more public housing projects more quickly and without delay.

Together with the zone reforms around transport-oriented development that have been out for consultation, this will make a real difference to enabling 30,000 new homes.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how is the government supporting more housing choice in existing suburbs across our city?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Through reforms to the Territory Plan, we are expanding opportunities for housing that was prohibited in existing suburbs over the last few decades. In particular, we were missing middle housing and also well-located housing close to transport stops, shopping centres and schools. Public transport is a major focus.

Key changes that we have made to the draft missing middle housing reforms, based on feedback from the community, also include refined subdivision policies to support appropriate residential block subdivision, with clearer and more flexible rules and without the requirement for a dwelling to be constructed first—that was a clear piece of feedback. There are strengthened solar access protections to safeguard sunlight for neighbouring properties, clarified dwelling densities and updates to tech specs to support good design and amenity. Additional heritage controls have also been added to clarify heritage requirements that need to be considered.

These changes will allow for gentle density—a middle path that respects urban character while providing more diverse and affordable options for families, downsizers and young people who want to stay in their community.

We are also enabling dual occupancies and better use of established blocks supporting high-quality design, sustainability standards and accessible layouts. Based on the advice of CEDA, the Grattan Institute, the New South Wales government and the work that they are doing—and a whole range of others—we will be considering further reforms that we will bring to the Assembly next year to support the streamlined delivery of missing middle housing.

MS TOUGH: Minister, can you please explain how the government is supporting the construction productivity agenda to support more housing?

MR STEEL: Construction productivity is a key part of delivering on our priority of enabling 30,000 new homes by 2030. To build more housing sooner, we are streamlining planning and building approval processes and reducing building costs.

The first tranche of these reforms has been announced. It has a few simple ways that we can improve and streamline some of our processes to make it easier for consumers and industry alike. These reforms will support more efficient delivery of homes and other structures. The first tranche will be brought forward and includes: making greywater piping requirements in new homes voluntary, with a direct cost savings for homebuyers of around \$1,500; simplifying energy efficiency upgrades for extensions and renovations; recognising Passive House certification as a compliance pathway for energy efficiency requirements for new homes; and expanding exempt development for low-impact minor building works and the types of development that can apply for an exemption declaration.

This work will continue throughout the term under the National Competition Policy framework as well. I recently settled an ACT Jurisdiction Specific Reform Plan with the commonwealth Treasurer, Dr Jim Chalmers, which enables us to access some

funding to be able to continue to progress this work.

City and Government Services—Christmas lights

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. The Huddy Street Christmas lights in Forde are an annual event which attracts residents from all across Canberra, particularly those from my electorate of Yerrabi. This tradition has been ongoing for several years without interference from the government. However, this year the community received a notice that they would need a permit to put up their Christmas decorations. Minister, have the changes to the Public Unleased Land Act stolen Christmas?

MS CHEYNE: No.

MR MILLIGAN: Can the Minister confirm if a decision on these applications will be made before the 25th of December?

MS CHEYNE: I cannot, because it is made by the team in the public land use section of the directorate, and they are continuing to engage with event organisers and are actively considering the public land use application. It was only received earlier this week. I can say that we are committed to achieving a safe and enjoyable experience for the local community. But, as even some commentary in the local media has said, including on talkback radio, there are limits on what people can do within their property bounds and then what they wish to do on nature strips. So that is what is being worked through.

Also, I reject what Mr Milligan said earlier about years without interference. Actually, the ACT government has been engaging with Huddy Street residents and organisers for many years.

And, on the question, “by Christmas?” the whole point of the lights is the lead-up to Christmas, so I just found that quite illogical.

Importantly, the government is working through it, Mr Speaker, and I will just underline again that the application was only received this week.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, has any ACT resident been forced to pay fines such as this, and what is the government’s estimate of the total cost to the homeowner?

MS CHEYNE: I do not believe so. I know that there have been notices issued, where there have been some structures which have been put on public unleased land without having an appropriate permit yet. So, there are just a few moving parts at the moment. So, I think, at the state of play when those were issued, I do not believe that there was an application in place. Now there is an application in place and there is a time within which that notice would have directed the structures to be moved or removed. But while there is an application underway, and while we are working in good faith with the residents of Huddy Street, no fines have been issued as far as I am aware. If that is incorrect, I will correct the record—but I am pretty confident.

Parking—Theatre Lane car park closure

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for the Night-Time Economy. Minister, were you consulted, in your capacity as the Minister for the Night-Time Economy, on the recent closure of the Theatre Lane car park? If so, what advice did you seek on the impact that the closure of the car park would have on the existing hospitality businesses that rely on that car park?

MS CHEYNE: I think we have been very clear with the community for some time now that that car park would be required to be closed. I have certainly been in those conversations for a long time, both as night-time economy minister and, before that, as minister for the arts. I did not seek any modelling on what the impact would be because, ultimately, we are trying to reshape the city, and people's behaviours and how they are going to change are hard to predict.

I would note that there are some venues that have stated they are being really heavily impacted, but I also know that CRA has established a new grants program, with micro grants, to encourage more events. I have met with King O'Malley's, Mooseheads, the AHA and others very recently. The number one thing that they have mentioned to me is about how we ensure that there are appropriate places for people to be picked up after midnight. I should have an announcement about some of the further work that we have done there imminently.

MS LEE: Minister, again, in your capacity as the Minister for the Night-Time Economy, have you subsequently sought advice from either the Chief Minister or the minister for planning on the significant impact that the closure of the Theatre Lane car park will have on the viability of the businesses that rely on the car park? I know that you mentioned King O'Malley's, but I am talking about the businesses that rely on the car park.

MS CHEYNE: It is something about which I have had constant conversations with my colleagues. I think everybody is aware that there are impacts there. But I would also note that there are two venues opening this week and, with one of the venues that recently closed, the owner did not sell it. The venue rebranded and reopened as a different type of venue. It does show that there is still flexibility within our licensing system, and it also shows that businesses are responding differently to the conditions but that there is still confidence in the CBD for businesses to be there, including near that car park. While I mentioned King O'Malley's, I would note that it is relevant, because previously many people, if they were getting an Uber, would have got it near or adjacent to that car park. That is why I flagged that.

MR CAIN: Minister, do you support the total closure of the city lane car park, or do you support a partial closure, which is the preferred option of local businesses?

Ms Stephen-Smith: A point of order, Mr Speaker. This question is clearly asking for a personal expression of opinion from the minister.

Mr Parton: In response to the point of order, I think it is a question about whether the minister, as a minister of government, is supportive of this option or that option. I do not think it is—

Ms Berry: It sounds like an opinion to me.

Mr Parton: It is really asking the minister, as the minister. It is not—

MR SPEAKER: It is a fine line. I will invite the minister to answer the question, if she does have a response.

MS CHEYNE: Technically, it is only partially closed, anyway. There are parts of the car park that are open. It is certainly not half-open, but it is not entirely closed, and the government has been working—

Opposition members interjecting—

MS CHEYNE: Can I just answer the question?

MR SPEAKER: Don't get baited by them, Minister. That is my advice.

MS CHEYNE: Going to the direct question that has been asked of me, it is moot, because there is no other option, as we have canvassed extensively in this place.

Government—freedom of information

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. This year, federal Labor initiated reforms to the Freedom of Information rules. Is ACT Labor planning to follow suit with any changes to local FOI rules, including costs or narrowing the scope of what can be produced?

Ms Stephen-Smith: A point of order, Mr Speaker: this question is clearly asking for an announcement of policy.

MR SPEAKER: It probably is, to be frank, Ms Castley. Do you have a supplementary question that you can go to? It is asking about a change in policy, so it is out of order.

MS CASTLEY: Why is there no easily accessible determination of costs for FOI requests available online for ACT directorates?

MR BARR: I will take that on notice, Mr Speaker.

MR COCKS: Chief Minister, how often do directorates review fees for FOI requests to ensure they are kept as low as possible and ensure maximum transparency?

MR BARR: I would imagine that would be annually. Determinations are normally an annual process, but, if I am wrong, I will correct the record.

Planning—rural leaseholds

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, succession planning is critical to the livelihoods of rural farmers. Intergenerational living is an important component of that, and often there are many generations working on-farm at any particular time. This poses a challenge for

housing, as many young people want to live close to their families but not necessarily under the same roof. We have less than 200 rural leases in the ACT, but they are an important part of the ACT's community, environment and economy. Minister, are you willing to investigate the challenges and opportunities that our current planning system poses to rural leaseholders looking to build second dwellings on their properties for specific succession planning purposes?

MR STEEL: I thank Miss Nuttall for her question. I have met with rural landholders to hear about the many issues that they have—succession planning being one. I was very clear to them that the opportunity to raise that issue and some of the broader changes that they would like to see in terms of the use of rural land, which currently may not be permitted, really needs to be a discussion that is around the refresh of the Planning Strategy.

The Planning Strategy is pretty clear that 70 per cent of new dwellings should be built within the existing urban footprint of Canberra and the remainder within greenfields areas in Canberra. If there is a proposal that more homes should be built in rural areas, that is a pretty significant change to the current Planning Strategy. We review that every five years under the new Planning Act. That will come up this term, and we will consider those views as part of that process. I was very clear to them that they should not have any expectations that there is going to be immediate change here but that we would be interested in their views as part of that process.

I know the party of Miss Nuttall has quite strong views on new housing being built in rural areas that are on the western edge of Canberra. If that is what you are suggesting, then that really needs to be considered as part of the Planning Strategy, because there is not support for it at the moment in the Planning Strategy.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, what kind of flexibility do you think our planning system should provide to support innovative housing models for the needs of specific communities?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Of course, at the moment, we are looking at prioritising the reforms that we brought to the election. I outlined in my statement planning priorities which reflect those commitments. Our plan to get to our housing targets is through missing middle housing reform, transport-oriented development and shop-top housing—housing in well-located areas for people where we can get more housing built, meet those targets and meet the broadest possible needs of our community. Rural land will only, I think, meet a very small portion of that. So it is not a priority at the moment to focus on that.

Also, under the planning framework that we have, I cannot approve zoning changes that are inconsistent with the Planning Strategy. That is why actually looking at a refresh of the Planning Strategy is a first step, because it then leads to enabling other things to be considered, such as rezoning and changes to district strategies. There is no district strategy for some of these areas, particularly the western edge—if that is what you are asking about. We need to go through that process first.

We are interested. We will continue to have a chat with landholders about what their opportunities are. But we also do not want to constrain the agricultural opportunities in

those areas. I was pretty clear to them that I did not see that Canberra's rural areas would turn into Royalla Estate. I do not think we want to see that kind of development happening with small rural blocks that mean that you cannot do other things with the land that is productive and is supporting food production and other agricultural uses. But we will hear from them as part of the Planning Strategy and we will consider those issues. But, at this stage, the Planning Strategy really does not support it.

MS CLAY: Minister, what are your next tangible steps to ensure that farmers can plan for their families while looking after our rural lands?

MR STEEL: I have been clear to the rural landholders that, if they have things that they want to do on their lands within the current restraints of the planning system, they should bring those forward for consideration and that the City and Environment Directorate is there and that, if they want to seek advice through the Gateway Team, they can do that and bring forward proposals.

If their lease allows for a second dwelling to be added or the rural zoning allows for a second dwelling to be added, for example—amongst many other things that they raise that they want to do—they can bring that forward and that will be considered by government, through the independent Territory Planning Authority, based on the current Territory Plan and the law that we have at the moment. But, if they want to do stuff that is outside of that, that really requires another process, and that is where the Planning Strategy refresh comes in. It is not too far away. It is something that we will be getting on to. But the absolute priority at the moment is building more homes within the existing urban footprint.

Ms Lee: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the time was not running on the answer to the question.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms Lee. He may never have stopped! So thank you for pointing that out.

Public schools—Tharwa Preschool

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Minister, recently, the Canberra Liberals have been contacted by multiple constituents suggesting that the ACT government is seeking to close Tharwa Preschool by stealth. We are told that the public promotion of enrolment at Tharwa has been noticeably restricted, creating a perception that preschool was not being offered as an option for enrolment next year. Offers from the P&C to undertake their regular community promotion were rejected. Are you seeking to close Tharwa Preschool by stealth and if so, why?

MS BERRY: Absolutely not, and I have made that very clear to Mr Parton who has made representations to me about Tharwa Preschool. That is not the case. However, Tharwa Preschool had received only one enrolment application for 2026. Now I understand that there were some other families—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Ignore them Minister.

MS BERRY: That student has been enrolled with their priority enrolment area school at Charles Conder Primary School. I understand that there are some other parents and families who have identified that they have a wish to enrol at Tharwa Preschool in future years. However, a preschool program requires more than one, two or three students for it to be viable or even a good outcome for students because the main purpose of preschool is to prepare them for primary school and to provide them with those social and emotional opportunities by engaging with other students. Three students are not enough to run a good, viable program that gives young people the best possible outcomes in preschool. So that is the reason a preschool program could not be run at Tharwa, because at this stage, as far as I am aware—I do not believe that information has changed—one student had enrolled. There is no benefit for that student by themselves in a preschool program. It is certainly not the case that the preschool would be closed. However, in circumstances like this because there are no preschool programs operating, it will not be operating in the 2026 year.

MR CAIN: Minister, why has the public promotion of enrolment at Tharwa Preschool been so noticeably restricted compared to previous years, and does that actually explain the low enrolment?

MS BERRY: No, I do not believe so. I think the Tharwa community is quite a small community and does not have the number of children of that age group to enrol and run a viable and successful preschool program. That does not mean that it is closing. Again, as I said, it is just not fair for those students and those families to run a preschool program that has one student in it.

MR PARTON: Minister, can you simply come clean today and admit that this was just a cost-cutting exercise from a directorate that is struggling to keep schools open in the way that the community expects them?

MS BERRY: I absolutely reject, absolutely reject the assertions that have been made in that question by Mr Parton. Frankly, I am disappointed that he would come in here and start spreading that kind of misinformation to our community about Tharwa Preschool when I have been absolutely clear that the preschool is not closing, but it will not be operating—

Mr Cain interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain.

MS BERRY: —it cannot operate successfully with one student. That student is now attending another school and the directorate will continue to support parents who wish to enrol their students in our public schools. But one, or two or three students does not lead to a successful program for preschool education in any school environment. The school will remain a school, it just will not be operating in the 2026 year.

Gungahlin town centre—noise standards

MR BRADDOCK: My question is for the Minister for the Night-Time Economy. Minister, the Territory Plan recognises areas within the Gungahlin Town Centre as an entertainment precinct. However, feedback from the community and businesses indicates that the regulations—particularly on noise standards—have not been updated to support the night-time economy in that area.

Minister, what is the plan and associated timeframe for the development of noise standards for the Gungahlin Town Centre entertainment precinct?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Braddock for the question and his interest. When we were working through the entertainment precinct for the city centre, we also went through seeking consultation on the Gungahlin Entertainment Precinct—seeking to get enough views to help guide us about what appropriate noise standards might be. Regrettably, when consultation—which did canvass noise standard options including for different times of day—concluded there were only 24 responses received from people identifying as residents of Gungahlin, and no businesses responded. Because this is a pretty insignificant sample size, we made the decision to pause any further work on Gungahlin and focus on the city. But I would note that residents who did respond—those 24—were supportive of increasing noise standards there.

As I have explained a few times in this place, we wanted the City Centre Entertainment Precinct to be in place for 12 months before we evaluated it. It has now been in place for just over 12 months, and that evaluation is undergoing. The learnings and outcomes of that review are expected to inform a template or guiding principles, which I hope will be achieved soon. Then I intend to start using those to guide us on other town centres, including Gungahlin.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, what are the government's plans to foster a night-time economy in the Gungahlin town centre?

MS CHEYNE: I direct Mr Braddock to the Territory Plan assessment requirements for developments that are in entertainment precincts. They include:

- Developments should help make the area more vibrant, including supporting entertainment and nightlife activity.
- Entertainment venues must consider how they manage loud music, especially bass sounds, through building design and venue management.
- Buildings must meet soundproofing standards to reduce incoming noise, including bass sounds.

Those are specific Territory Plan assessment requirements for developments that are in entertainment precincts.

On top of that, as I said, we will look at the noise standards for the Gungahlin Entertainment Precinct and anything else we might need to do to give effect to it being an entertainment precinct within my portfolio.

And, of course, there are a stack of initiatives that we have rolled out over the last two years that are available to licence holders. There really is something for everyone. If Mr

Braddock is receiving representations, he can certainly share them with our office. Equally, there is a lot of information about all of the liquor licence fee discounts and encouragement for venues to have more artistic and cultural experiences and, in return, get a liquor licence discount if they wish to.

MS CLAY: Minister, which night-time economy businesses in Belconnen have you engaged with on this work?

MS CHEYNE: I have not engaged with night-time economy businesses on this work in particular, because, as I said, the City Centre Entertainment Precinct was the priority. Leaving that so that we had 12 months of data and experiences to draw from was exactly what we said we would do, and what we have done.

Now we are at the other side of those 12 months, and it is that work and that evaluation which will inform other entertainment precinct consultation. Then I intend that we will have intensive consultation with multiple town centres at the same time, because we will have the guiding principles—the guiding template—to work through what different entertainment precincts look like and what the appropriate noise standards are, depending on all the circumstances in an area.

More broadly, I think it is well known that I am a frequent attendee at all of the time-time economy venues in Belconnen! So I am regularly engaging, but just not quite on this at this stage.

Migration—economy

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, can you outline the importance of migration to the Territory economy, particularly our tertiary education sector?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Tough for the question. I will say from the outset that migration is fundamental to the territory's future and plays a vital role in strengthening our community and our knowledge economy. In relation to the tertiary education sector, as members are aware, this sector is the territory's top export industry. With this in mind, the recent federal government decision to increase student caps for ACT universities was a particularly welcome development, ensuring sustainability in growth of enrolments for our local universities. Canberra's universities and vocational education providers welcome international students, not only for their contribution to the territory's economic output, but also for the global perspective that they bring to our classrooms and research institutions.

Mr Speaker, migration strengthens the human capital of our territory, with many students remaining in Canberra after graduation, joining our workforce, starting businesses, and contributing meaningfully to our community and our society. This is essential for the future of our economy and aligns with the government's long term strategic priority to build the workforce capability in the territory.

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, how does migration help to address skills shortages here in the territory?

MR BARR: Skilled migration assists in addressing skills shortages right across the

economy. We know that industries such as health, early childhood education, information communication and technology, and construction continue to face recruitment challenges driven by strong demand and competition for talent across Australia. So, through targeted migration pathways—including the state and territory nomination programs—we attract highly skilled workers into our city who meet specific needs. Skilled migrants contribute immediately by filling critical gaps in our workforce, supporting service delivery, and enabling local businesses to innovate and grow.

Enhancing our migration settings is about so much more than just population growth, Mr Speaker. It is about strengthening resilience and productivity across the territory's workforce and our economy.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, how does migration contribute to the overall culture of our community?

MR BARR: I believe our city is a clear example of the success of multiculturalism in Australia. People from around the world come here to study, to work, to make a life. They enrich our culture and strengthen our economy. Canberra succeeds because we embrace the world, Mr Speaker, not because we shut ourselves off from it.

So, I take the opportunity this afternoon to call out this so-called mass migration rhetoric that has been pushed by some on the political right. Migration is not the cause of our challenges, Mr Speaker, it is a critical part of the solutions. It brings talent into our city—helping in our hospitals, our construction sites, our research institutions and our small businesses.

Let us be absolutely clear: this scare campaign is a political fiction at its worst. It bears no resemblance to the lived reality of Canberra, where we experience a skills-focussed migration program that supports our education institutions, sustainably grows our economy and our workforce, and, more importantly, promotes inclusion in our community and makes Canberra a better place to live for all of us.

ACT Fire & Rescue—electric breathing apparatus truck

MS BARRY: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, on 23 October you advised the Assembly that the Volvo electric breathing apparatus truck, which had not been in service since it was delivered in August 2023, was finally operational. Minister, on what day did the electric breathing apparatus truck become operational?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Barry for the question, noting that I am acting for Minister Paterson during question time. I will take that question on notice.

MS BARRY: Minister, how many incidents has the Volvo electric breathing apparatus truck attended?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that question on notice.

MS MORRIS: Minister, is the Volvo electric breathing apparatus truck fully

operational?

MS CHEYNE: I refer Ms Morris to the advice that Minister Paterson gave about it in the last sitting period. Regardless, I will take it on notice, to confirm without doubt.

Parking—Woden

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, back in October, I asked the minister for business about parking for businesses impacted by the government's construction of the Woden bus depot on the corner of Athllon Drive and Parramatta Street. The minister responded to the question taken on notice with figures from the Woden interchange on Callam Street and not the Woden bus depot on Parramatta Street. I ask again: how many parking spaces have been removed specifically for the construction and operation of the Woden bus depot on Parramatta Street?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. The two—the depot and the interchange—are often confused, mainly by the Liberals in previous years. We have done a lot of construction work on both. The depot has been finished. It was always part of the project to have Transport Canberra employees able to park next to the Woden depot, using not only existing car parks but also underutilised space that was not being used for parking previously. We were very up-front about that in the project. It was part of the consultation that we did with the community on the development application. I am happy to come back on notice to provide the exact number of parks that have been built, but I note that parks were built in areas where there were no parks previously.

I am sure Minister Cheyne would also be happy to continue to receive feedback from Phillip businesses in relation to parking. We have been very clear to Philip businesses over a very long time that, if they have a unanimous view about the improvements they would like to see about parking in Phillip, in terms of the current arrangements for parks that are publicly accessible, they should come to the government with a proposal for consideration. But we have not heard a unanimous view from businesses, and that is because they all have different views. In years past, when we have put proposals to them about changes, we believe they were initially supported and were then rejected, so they had to be reversed. That is why we have the position that, if they have a view, it should be supported by all businesses. We would be happy to hear that in the future.

MR MILLIGAN: What consultation has the government done with businesses in the areas that we are talking about since construction was completed?

MR STEEL: I do not know in relation to parking. It is not directly in the area of my responsibility. That is Minister Cheyne's responsibility, in the City and Environment Directorate. We have not done any consultation, from a Transport Canberra operations perspective, around the car parks that were built, because consultation had already been undertaken as part of the development application process for the project.

MR COCKS: Minister, what confidence can business and constituents around Parramatta Street have that their concerns are being properly monitored when you are dismissing any view unless, as you say, it is a unanimous view, given the long track

record of advocacy from the Phillip business community?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. There is not a unanimous view, and the government will not be putting in place changes unless they have the support of the businesses that are using the area. Whenever a change has been put forward, it has had to be reversed because there was not unanimous support. We want to hear from businesses if they have a unanimous view around the traffic changes that they want to see in relation to parking in Phillip, but we have not heard that at this point in time. We look forward to receiving it if there is ever such a view.

Mr Barr: Mr Speaker, I have a feeling there is a unanimous view that all further questions should be placed on the notice paper.