



**DEBATES**  
OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**DAILY HANSARD**

Edited proof transcript

4 December 2024

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## Wednesday, 4 December 2024

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**Wednesday, 4 December 2024**

**MR SPEAKER** (Mr Parton) (10. 01): Members:

Dhawura nguna, dhawura Ngunnawal.  
Yanggu ngalawiri dhunimanyin Ngunnawalwari dhawurawari.  
Nginggada Dindi wanggiralidjinyin.

The words I have just spoken are in the language of the traditional custodians and translate to:

This is Ngunnawal country.  
Today we are all meeting together on Ngunnawal country.  
We always respect Elders, female and male.

Members, I ask you to stand in silence and pray or reflect on our responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

## **Petitions**

### **Ministerial response**

The following response to petitions has been lodged:

#### **Charnwood-Dunlop School—playground—petitions 28-24 and 39-24**

By **Ms Berry**, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, dated 26 November 2024, in response to petitions lodged by Mr Cain on 3 September 2024, concerning funding for an all-abilities playground for the Charnwood-Dunlop School.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter dated 3 September 2024 regarding petition E-Pet 028-24 and E-Pet 039-24 - Funding of an all-abilities playground for Charnwood-Dunlop School (the petition). I am writing to provide the ACT Government response to the petition.

The ACT Government is investing strongly in upgrading and renewing ACT public schools to provide modern, inclusive and high-quality education facilities for all students.

The ACT Government will work with Charnwood Dunlop School to deliver a new all-abilities playground, during this term of government.

I trust this information provides the petitioners with assurance their concerns are understood, have been acknowledged and will be responded to by the ACT Government.

### **Motion to take note of petitions**

**MR SPEAKER:** Pursuant to standing order 98A, I propose the question:

That the response so lodged be noted.

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (10.02): It is encouraging to see community action leading to results for the community. I want to particularly thank Jessica Ascione from the Charnwood-Dunlop School and the many parents and supporters of that school for supporting these two petitions with the total number of signatures of 575. It is my view, and it would seem clear from the timing of the petition and the government's announcement leading up to the election, that the petition had a significant, if not determinative, role in forcing the government's hand to provide this much-needed resource at a local primary school.

However, it is with a bit of disappointment. To express my disappointment, I will read from the letter. The minister's commitment says: "The ACT government will work with Charnwood-Dunlop School to deliver a new all-ability playground during the term of this government." Is a playground going to take nearly four years, Minister? Why not the commitment to deliver this very important facility and infrastructure for the children of this primary school by, say, the end of 2025? Why not do that, Minister? In fact, it is open to you to do that.

**Ms Berry:** A point of order, Mr Speaker. Under the standing orders, the member should direct his comments to the chair and not to me.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Cain, could you comply.

**MR CAIN:** So noted, Mr Speaker. Again, I really commend the community, particularly Jennifer Ascione, the parents of the Charnwood-Dunlop School, supporters of that school and, indeed, people of the region who saw the need and sought my assistance, which I was very glad to give. I believe this is what swayed the government's hand and forced them to actually respond to such a strong need.

I close with a plea for the government to give a sooner delivery date for this important facility. I challenge the minister to take this proposal to cabinet and get this infrastructure built, at the latest by the end of next year. That is my petition to this government.

**MS BARRY** (Ginninderra) (10.06): I thank the minister for her response. I know that residents in Charnwood and across Ginninderra require that basic infrastructure. I am looking forward to making sure that happens sooner rather than later. As you know, whilst Ginninderra is a dated area, there are families who have moved there and require this infrastructure, so it would be really useful to have that happen for these families sooner rather than later.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (10.06): I thank Chiaka Barry for her comments today and particularly for the positive approach that she has taken in working with the community, particularly those at the Charnwood-Dunlop School, to build a new all-abilities playground at the school. Whilst I think that Mr Cain probably cares deeply about this

community as well, I found his comments to be less than positive or cooperative. At least the three of us, as members for Ginninderra, would want to see the best possible outcome for the Charnwood-Dunlop School.

It is my intention, as I have written in response to the petition, that we will work very closely with the school community, as we have done, and with anybody who has approached us about the Charnwood-Dunlop School, in particular with regard to the all-abilities playground. I will take the time to listen to them, get the project right and do it as quickly as we possibly can, but no later than the end of this term of government.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Inaugural speech**

**MS BARRY** (Ginninderra) (10.08): I seek leave of the Assembly to make my inaugural speech.

Leave granted.

**MR SPEAKER:** Before I call Ms Barry, I remind members that it is traditional that inaugural speeches are heard in silence.

**MS BARRY:** I promised my family that I would try to get through this speech without getting emotional, because I understand the weight of the responsibility that is placed on me, and I hope to keep that promise. But, if I do get emotional and shed a tear or two, I crave your indulgence.

Mr Speaker, esteemed members of the Assembly and my fellow Canberrans, today I rise as a proud representative of Ginninderra—a community as resilient and radiant as the name it bears, derived from the Aboriginal word meaning “sparkling like the stars”. The community’s beauty extends beyond its natural attractions, such as the scenery of Lake Ginninderra, with its breathtaking views and tranquil atmosphere. More importantly, Ginninderra shines because of its people. It is a community where bonds are formed at local shops, playgrounds, parks and community events. It is where strangers become neighbours and neighbours become friends.

For most migrants like me, Ginninderra is the first chapter in our Canberra story, not just because it is closer to Sydney Airport and we arrived through Sydney Airport but also because it is a more affordable area for newly arrived migrants compared to other areas in Canberra.

My journey to this Assembly, which, like the stories of so many, is one of determination and challenges that I had to overcome, but it is also one of unyielding belief that we can build a Canberra where every voice matters and every person thrives.

When I arrived in 2009, my family settled in a modest home near Kippax—a house where the curtains were torn, the carpets were stained and there was no insulation. Looking back, I would say today that the house would be unfit for habitation, yet to us

it was home and a place to start afresh, especially because we had just escaped the global financial crisis in the United Kingdom, so anything at that point would do.

My first feeling after arriving in Canberra was: “What a beautiful place.” People would stop to chat and were generally happy. The terrain looked different to the tube stations in London. It was peaceful and a lovely place to put down our roots and raise a family. People wore thongs to work, which was different to what I was used to, but that also emphasised how relaxed the Canberra community is.

Unlike most members in this Assembly, while I do not have memories of playing in the suburbs or attending primary school here in Canberra, my connection to this city runs deep. My daughter was born in Calvary Hospital Bruce 15 years ago and, through raising my children and living and working in this city for close to two decades, I can proudly call myself a Canberran. Further, the values instilled in me by my parents—values of gratitude, discipline and resilience, which are values that are universally shared—helped prepare me for this role. I had a balanced childhood that would prepare me for the challenges that I would face later in life.

My late father, a banker, taught me financial literacy. I recall that, during my boarding school years, my allowance was significantly less than what I knew my peers received. From that money I was expected to pay for my textbooks, feed myself and attend to other life necessities. When I asked my father why he gave me less, he responded, “If you do not learn to manage the little you have, you will never be able to manage when you have a lot.” That lesson stays with me to this day.

My mother, on the other hand, was a risk-taker. Although a banker herself, she successfully ran multiple businesses, including a catering service, a wholesale beverage business and a restaurant. Growing up, my late brother and I would often work after school, spending hours manually carrying and unloading crates of beverages from the delivery point to our warehouse. I would also assist with the day-to-day operations of the restaurant: cooking, taking orders from clients and making sure that we had stock.

My path to this Assembly has not been without challenges. At just 21 years of age, I arrived in Canberra as a young mother with a four-month-old baby, navigating a new marriage and the realities of starting in a new country. With no local support network and the need to requalify as a lawyer, I worked until there was no more energy left in me, just to make ends meet. I took on multiple jobs. I worked as a personal care worker during the day and a paralegal at night-time, while also braiding hair during the weekends. At the same time, I ran a small catering business. Sleep was a thing of the past for me.

Those years were also marked with profound personal loss, including the tragic murder of my brother and the passing of my father barely 12 months after my brother was murdered, as well as the experience of domestic and family violence. I began advocating for and working with survivors of domestic violence, and I gained an understanding of the complexities that can trap people in an abusive relationship. I was struck by the courage of those who managed to escape and was equally sympathetic and amazed by the resilience of those who, for various reasons, felt unable to leave their marriage, because, ironically, while I was often held as a strong

voice against domestic and family violence, I did not have the courage or the strength to leave. These hardships shaped my understanding of resilience and the systemic barriers that many people face, yet they reinforced my belief in the power of community and the importance of advocacy.

A comment I very often heard during my campaign was, “You are wearing the wrong colour,” obviously referring to my choice of political party. It was often said to us new migrants that the party in government was a beacon of progressivism, founded on principles of social equity, and that voting any other way was voting against our interests. I too shared the common perception, having come from a country where human rights were often disregarded and social equity was a distant dream, and felt ungrateful for questioning this notion. However, when I began to engage in community, the more I interacted with the ordinary Australians through my day job, voluntary work and recently through the campaign the more I realised that underneath the layers lies inequality. However, I consider the Liberal values of equality, social progress, equality of opportunity and individual freedom—the value that hard work should count for something—are values that are universally shared and resonate best with me.

Canberra is a city of immense potential, but we cannot rest on past achievement. Progress is not a static accolade; it is a commitment renewed daily through action, compassion and accountability. While Canberra is celebrated for its progressive policies, progress is not felt equally by all. Too many of our neighbours are struggling. Social inequality exists. Otherwise, how can we explain that in some public schools teachers are required to teach in an environment that affects students’ education and also takes a toll on their morale? How do we justify that victims of domestic and family violence sometimes have to wait three weeks for a domestic violence order to be served? How can we explain that it will take 25 years to clean out the waiting list for social and affordable housing?

What is progressive about the lack of footpaths in Latham and Scullin? What is socially progressive about playgrounds, which I and countless other parents took our children to 16 years ago, that have remained relatively the same? What is socially equitable about the fact that Illawarra Court in Belconnen looks like Detroit in the United States, whilst some parts of Canberra look like Singapore, or that a family of eight with a father earning \$60,000 is deemed ineligible for affordable housing? This scenario illustrates how bureaucratic benchmarks can fail to account for the complexities of real-life circumstances. This is the reality of many Canberrans. These are not just isolated incidents; they are a reflection of systemic issues and demand the need for urgent attention. These encounters and several others fuelled my frustration with the system and my desire to do something.

In Canberra, from where I stand and for most people in Canberra, history is valuable, but it does not put food on the tables of parents struggling to make ends meet. History does not fix footpaths or road signs or upgrades facilities for local sporting activities. History does not provide housing for young people or support children who are falling behind in their literacy and numeracy skills.

I had the benefit of good education, and it is for this reason that I could leave my family thousands of miles away and still be able to resettle in a new land. I want

future generations to have genuine choices. In the famous words of Nelson Mandela:

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.

I do not believe the government can solve all the problems of the world, but it can help its citizens prepare for the unknown. A progressive government should be balanced, considerate and genuinely committed to addressing people's concerns. We need to do more to help ordinary people overcome the challenges they face. We need to equip individuals with the tools they need to self-determine, self-regulate and self-evaluate. But, rather, we are bogging them down with bureaucracy and making it impossible for them to improve their circumstances. As Sir Robert Menzies once said: "We believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every human being. We believe that every Australian, regardless of background and circumstance, should have the opportunity to develop their talents and abilities to full potential."

As someone who has seen economies deteriorate, I know that prosperity is not guaranteed. Countries that are struggling today did not get there overnight. They got there through a series of action and inaction, often driven by lack of foresight and the failure to listen to the concerns of their citizens. I will work to ensure that this does not become our fate.

The people of Ginninderra elected me because they want leadership and representation that is relatable, responsive, result-driven and person-centred. They want representation that is diverse and brings life experience to the table—not just diversity of skin colour but diversity of ideas backed by extensive life experience across a range of issues. They are tired of the tick-a-box exercise to address the issues that matter to them. They voted, for the first time, for a person of African descent, and across Canberra they elected two independents to the Assembly. If this is not a call to action, a call to listen and a call to do things differently, then I do not know what is.

During the vote count, the feedback from my scrutineer was that I was picking up preferences from across party lines. What this tells me is that the challenges we face as Canberrans transcend political affiliation, and often solutions should too. People expect us to think about them as human beings who are affected by the decisions we make here in this parliament. My election is not just a milestone. It is a recognition that being different is not a disadvantage; it is actually a superpower. While looking good on a corflute photo can take you far, it is the substance behind the smile that truly resonates with people.

I do not take for granted the beauty of this city or the cohesion that we have built together. Forgive me if I sound like a downer, however, my tone reflects firsthand the desperation of the people of Ginninderra—a desperation that I witnessed firsthand while serving in the community. It is desperation for a government that delivers on basic infrastructure and service. People are suffering. The nothing-to-see-here approach simply will not cut it.

When I moved to Australia, I often heard the phrase, "Australia is the place of a fair go." I took those words to heart. I love Ginninderra and I am committed to representing its interests, its views and its aspirations, not just for the people themselves but for their children and their grandchildren.



People have often asked me how I feel about becoming an MLA. My response has been that, while I do absolutely appreciate the privilege, I feel no different, because for me this has never been about power or ambition. I see this role as an opportunity to lift the veil of bureaucracy and to put a face to the names of people affected by the decisions we make here, to listen to people in my electorate and to make genuine efforts to assist. It is about service, giving to my community, and giving people the opportunity to make the best life for themselves. I am passionate about building resilience in young people and preparing them for the future challenges they may face, as my parents unknowingly did for me.

To my colleagues in the Assembly, the issues we tackle—housing affordability, education and social equity—transcend political divide. Our constituents expect us to work together to create meaningful change, and I stand here ready to collaborate, to listen and to make a genuine effort to find common ground.

In conclusion, while my father is not here to hear me speak so positively about him—I am sure he would be surprised—my mother, my children and my partner are all here in the Assembly. I thank them all for their efforts. They have all endured my absence, not just during the campaign but also throughout my years of community service, often filling the gaps when I could not. Without their love, encouragement and sacrifice, I would not be standing here today.

Also, while it will take days to mention my 100-plus volunteers, I think there are people who are worth mentioning—people like Uche, Kofi, Winnifred, Kacey, Dan, Speaker Mark, Steve, Adam, Gordon, Nancy, Moses, Alvan, Molly, Peter and Elizabeth, just to mention a few. These were the boots on the ground who were advocating on my behalf and cheering on from the sidelines. To you all, I say thank you. My election is a testament to the power of hope and the belief that diversity strengthens us all. It is a reminder that the journey to equality is ongoing and that together we can make Canberra a city that gives everyone a fair go.

Let me close by acknowledging the historical significance of this moment by saying thank you to the people of Ginninderra in the various languages spoken across the continent of Africa and, by doing so, leaving our footprints in the sands of history. I will start with my language, which is Igbo, the language of my forefathers: “Daalụ unu elek m unu maka maka ohere unu yerem iji jeere unu ozi.” It means: “Thank you all. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve.”

Now for more of the major languages. From Nigeria, the Yoruba people of the south, I say, “E Seun.” From the Hausa people in the north, I say, “Nagode.” From my East African brothers and sisters, I say, “Asante.” From my Ghanaian brothers and sisters, I say, “Medaase.” From my Togolese brothers and sisters, I say, “Akpe.” From my Senegalese and Gambian brothers and sisters, I say, “Jërējěf.” From my DR Congo brothers and sisters, I say, “Matondi.” From my Kenyan brothers and sisters, I say, “Niwega.” From my North African brothers and sisters, I say “Tanemmirt.” From my Somalian brothers and sisters, I say, “Mahadsanid.” From my Malian brothers and sisters, I say, “I ni ce.” From my Ethiopian brothers and sisters, I say, “Galatoomi.” From my Malawian and Zambian brothers and sisters, I say, “Zikomo.” From my Ugandan brothers and sisters, I say, “Webale.” And from my Burundian brothers and

sisters, I say, “Urakoze.” Thank you very much.

## Inaugural speech

**MS TOUGH** (Brindabella) (10.28): I seek leave of the Assembly to make my inaugural speech.

Leave granted.

**MS TOUGH:** I am incredibly proud and honoured to stand here today as a member for Brindabella. Since I arrived in the Assembly, I have felt nothing but welcomed by everyone in this chamber and by the local community. It really is an honour. I wish to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on and recognise any people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. I wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city.

You do not pick your timing in politics, Mr Speaker. When Joy Burch announced her retirement from the Assembly back in 2023, it was a bit of a *Sliding Doors* moment. My friend Jen came over to my house on a Wednesday morning and hung out in my backyard, talking me through all the reasons that I should put my hand up, but I had a nearly three-year-old son and I was really happy in my public service career. She pointed out to me that I am the first to say we need more women in politics, that I am always standing there telling more women to put their hands up and make decisions for our community, that I have spent so much of my time encouraging and supporting other women, and that maybe I should consider that it was my time to stand up and take a chance.

How did I get to that moment and here in the chamber today? I grew up a pretty shy but stubborn kid in Toukley on the New South Wales Central Coast. I attended two local public primary schools and a local Catholic high school. If I did not want to do something, no one was going to make me do it! At the same time, once I set my mind to something, I would make it happen. I sang in the school choirs and in the school band, but I would not be caught dead public speaking. So standing here today in the ACT Legislative Assembly giving my first speech is a moment for reflection of just how far that shy kid from Toukley has come, and encouragement for what I can achieve in the future.

Like my fellow local member for Brindabella, Taimus Werner-Gibbings, I too am a millennial—just at the other end of the age range! When I was three years old, Paul Keating lost the election to John Howard. That night, *The Lion King* was on TV and my Auntie Jane, who is a primary school teacher, was babysitting. She thought it would be a really good chance to watch Simba, to watch some Lion King, but I disagreed. So that night she had to teach me civics instead, and I learnt all about the Australian electoral system. A few years later, while watching the re-election of Bob Carr, I asked my dad, who is here in the chamber today, the critical question: how do I get my name up on that board? Well, I got my name on that board, even if Antony Green did not know who I was on election night!

My dad travelled a lot for work when I was growing up, mostly across Southeast Asia.

When I was in year 11, we nearly moved to Singapore for dad's work. Instead, he was made redundant after over 20 years with the same company, which came as a bit of a shock. Dad turned that redundancy into what is now, 15 years later, a global multi-million dollar small business. It has not been without its challenges, but it has been a pleasure to watch him grow that business and do what he loves doing.

When I was in year 10, my mum was diagnosed with cancer. Mum is also here today. It was rough. Dad still travelled for work, although not quite as much. My little brother, Jacob, was in year 6 and an avid soccer player. I was studying for the school certificate. I was very active in my school music department, but there was something physically wrong with me. No one knew what, and I will get to that shortly. I landed two jobs that year and worked them simultaneously while going to school. The first was at a local pharmacy because we were there all the time getting stuff for mum. The second was at Kmart. I ended up working there and at another store here in Canberra once I moved here for uni. Mum being sick was really hard. I grew up a lot that year. I was always somewhat independent, but I started to find my confidence, increased my resilience and started to learn to roll with things outside my control. This is definitely a useful skill and something I have relied on a lot this year, and I am sure I will continue to into the future.

Then in year 12, I made what turned out to be a life-changing decision. Julia Gillard became Prime Minister. We had a female Prime Minister in Australia and I joined the Labor Party. By then I knew Labor was the party for me. The party that backs workers. The party of Medicare, and of education. The party that supports women. The party unafraid to look to the future, always working for the betterment of people, striving for the light on the hill.

Not long after, at 18, I made the big move to Canberra. I packed up my three-door hatchback and drove myself to ANU to start studying. I quickly fell in love with this city. I decided to stay after I graduated, eventually meeting Matt, my husband, who is here today, moving to Tuggeranong and making a life there. In the time I have been here, I have watched our city grow and develop into the vibrant place that nearly half a million people now call home, and I know that is because of the investment in our city by Labor governments. I live in the Lanyon Valley, possibly the first MLA from Lanyon in the 35 years of self-government. I would say that it is the most beautiful part of Tuggeranong and Tuggeranong, I am sure you would agree, Mr Speaker, is the most beautiful and liveable part of Canberra.

Tuggeranong is not a place without its challenges. My husband and I chose Tuggeranong as the place to buy a house and raise our family together. We want our son Lachy to grow up with the same opportunities as any other child growing up in any other part of Canberra or in any other capital city. I know firsthand the challenges faced by families in Tuggeranong: the cost of living pressures, the pressures of juggling family and work, and the challenges of living in the outer suburbs.

Growing up on the Central Coast, I learned the importance of community and looking out for each other and I see that in the people of Tuggeranong. People in Tuggeranong told me each and every day this year they want our young people to have things to do and places to hang out with their friends. Older members of our community want to feel connected and have access to the services they need. All of us want to have

access to good quality education, healthcare, affordable housing and accessible transport. While I am here in the Assembly I will be standing up for Tuggeranong and Brindabella because those who stand for nothing fall for everything.

I am proud of the Tuggeranong Plan ACT Labor took to the election and I will work to make sure it is implemented. As I said, I am very stubborn. I know, along with Taimus, we will be an annoying but constructive part of the Barr Labor government in making sure that the Tuggeranong Plan is completed and then some. The plan was the result of tens of thousands of door knocks across Brindabella by the Labor team, and I want to take a moment to acknowledge my fellow Labor candidates Brendan Forde and Louise Crossman and the former member for Brindabella, Mick Gentleman. This was the work of all of us.

As our city continues to grow, it is vital the Tuggeranong region is included in that conversation and reaps the same benefits as the rest of the city. Public transport is one way we can keep our city connected. I know the conversation in Tuggeranong around light rail can often be negative, but it is critical light rail makes its way to Tuggeranong and connects our town centre with Woden and the City. On top of the light rail, continued work to improve the bus network—keeping people moving around our suburbs, up to Woden, into the city and out to Belconnen, where a lot of our young people head out to study—is necessary. A new rapid bus route as part of the Tuggeranong Plan will assist the residents of Lanyon to get to the town centre in Kambah, but it is only going part of the way to ensuring we are all connected. Active transport is a consideration too. We have wide open spaces and a wonderful bike path connecting our suburbs, but Tuggeranong is a huge area and the connection into other town centres through Athllon Drive and the Monaro Highway does not encourage anyone but the most avid cyclists to undertake their commute that way.

As we grow, we need to do so in a sustainable manner. Tuggeranong is the region of big blocks and family homes, once affectionately called “nappy valley.” However, we are failing our younger generations who grew up in Tuggeranong but now as young adults have no place to live in Tuggeranong when they move out of home—if they can even afford to move out in the first place. So many of our young people end up in Woden or north side in townhouses, apartments or duplexes. Although many come back when they want to start a family or with a young family, Tuggeranong is not meeting their needs in those in between years. This is why I am supportive of investing in the missing middle housing. We need to wisely add in medium density housing, not ruin the feel of our suburbs, which I know is one of the things that makes Tuggeranong so wonderful. Instead, we should look to utilising our local shops by combining shops with housing and increasing housing along major transport corridors.

One thing we value as Canberrans is our local shops. They provide us with a central point in our suburbs; somewhere to meet up with friends, for our children to work and hang out after school and for us to quickly grab some groceries on the way home from work. Not every suburb has a thriving local shops, even when the community wants one. The suburb of Richardson used to have a wonderful local shopping centre, with an IGA, a hairdresser, a hardware store and many other shops, but over the last few years it has been left abandoned and derelict. I have spent this year talking to the people of Richardson and nearby suburbs, asking their thoughts on the abandoned shops and running a petition through this Assembly, calling on the government to do

something about the site.

I hope in this term, we see some movement on the Richardson shops and we see plans for it to turn into a vibrant community hub again, possibly including housing and new shops and a place for locals to come together. Sometimes in politics we have to choose between what is right and what is easy. It would be easy to leave Richardson shops derelict, to let it fall apart and to see what happens in the future. I want to always choose what is right for Tuggeranong and Canberra, not just what is easy, particularly when it comes to transport, housing and revitalising our local shops and community. I know the Barr Labor government does too.

I am no stranger to pain and having my health concerns dismissed as a woman. Like one in seven Australian woman, I have endometriosis. It is a debilitating disease that occurs when tissue similar to the lining of the uterus grows outside of it and can be found in any organ of the body. I first started experiencing symptoms 20 years ago when I was 11 years old. By 14, it was clear there was something wrong with me, which was not easy with mum going through cancer, and there were so many other things going on. I missed so much school. I was constantly told that it was all part of being a woman, that it was in my head, to get used to it, to grow up and to stop complaining.

It was not until I was 24 that I was diagnosed with endometriosis and finally had an answer, although there is still no cure.

Because I did not want to see another teenager go through what I did, I became an Endometriosis Australia ambassador, educating people on the disease and spreading awareness so the next generation of women and girls have a better life. But there is still such a long way to go. Just this week we saw Visanne listed on the PBS, the first endo drug in 30 years to be listed, as I spoke about in this chamber yesterday.

I am proud of the work that Labor does for health care and women's health care. I am a proud member of EMILY's List. I will make sure we do not fall behind in the services available here for women, including building on and improving the work of the wonderful Canberra Endometriosis Centre and making sure we always have access to safe, legal and affordable abortion.

I have worked in retail, in a family-owned community pharmacy, in an electorate office, in a family-owned Canberra law firm and most recently in the Australian public service. I have been a casual. I have been on rolling fixed-term contracts. I have been a permanent part-time employee and a full-time employee over my career. All through that I have stood up for the rights of workers. I have been a union rep and made change in the workplace. Professionally I have worked to make the lives of working people better in a number of my jobs because every person deserves to work in a safe environment with access to a fair safety net of entitlements. I am proud to be part of a Barr Labor government that supports workers and will always continue to do so.

Our future depends on education. Every Canberran deserves access to good quality education, and that should not depend on your postcode. Growing up we were well aware of how fortunate some postcodes were compared to others: 2259, where my second primary school and my high school were, was disadvantaged and well known

for being disadvantaged. But 2260 was definitely not. Labor values education and Labor invests in our future by investing in education. I do not want to live in a Canberra where the kids become aware that their postcode is a disadvantage or feel that being in the outer suburbs is a disadvantage. I will always stand up for our education system, particularly for the kids of Tuggeranong.

Learning starts at birth. We know kids learn so much in the first five years of life. My son has been a beneficiary of Labor's three-year-old preschool this year. It has not just saved our family money, but it has also given him the chance to learn through play with his peers in a structured environment that has seen his development come along in leaps and bounds. I am proud the Barr Labor government will be expanding this program. It has just been so wonderful for our son, and I know so many other parents of kids the same age have just been so grateful for it. I hope to see an education system in the future where four-year-olds can benefit from longer hours of free preschool care as well. This will make it easier for working families currently in a system that still seems to rely on one parent working and another taking responsibility for care.

The one thing that has absolutely floored and humbled me this year is the number of young women and girls of all ages who have approached me on the streets, usually with their parents, to talk to me, to tell me they want to be like me, to ask me what inspired me to be here. It is just so flooring to think that there are young women and girls out there looking up to me because I see myself as a woman from Tuggeranong who is doing a job that is going to make a difference. The 17-year-old me who joined the Labor Party would not have dreamed of this.

Just last Friday, I had a young woman approach me at the 2024 Canberra Young Citizen of the Year Awards to tell me she wanted to be just like me when she was older. She was shy; she approached me with her dad. She wants to be a doctor or lawyer when she is older, and then she is going to go into politics, all to help people as she has been helped growing up. So I hope to see her standing here one day.

I am going to take a moment now to indulge in a lot of thank-yous, because this was a team effort, and I could not have done it alone. To the corflute and folding machine extraordinaire, my incredible husband, Matt, thank you for everything, from supporting me when I said I was nominating in pre-selection and helping me write to all the Labor members in Brindabella, to standing by me all year, even on the days I was a bit cranky—although it should be known I never once cracked it—and fixing the folding machine more times than we could count and to going out corfluting daily, sometimes twice a day, to make sure no person in Tuggeranong could escape seeing “Tough, Tough, Tough, Caitlin Tough.” I am still having people repeat this to me when I have meet them in the last few weeks. So when people ask me how I did so well, it would be wrong to discount the power of your corflutes. You truly are a wonderful man, a great partner and father to our son with a great last name, and I could not have done it without you.

Thank you to Mum and Dad, who travelled down to be here today. Did you ever think, when I asked how I could get my name on that board, that not only would I get my name up there but I would win first go? I could not have asked for more supporting and loving parents. You have always given me the freedom to be me and have my

independence, while always being there when I needed you. This would not have been possible without your sacrifices.

To my little brother, Jacob, who could not make it because he has finally landed a job as a teacher, thank you for the last-minute design fixes and Canva assistance and for coming down for election day, even though it was in the middle of uni prac. To my Auntie Carolyn, thank you for flying over from Adelaide for election day and the last few days of pre-poll.

Thank you to my grandparents, Pa Brian and Nanna Chris. I know I have made you both proud and know I have made your parents proud too. You are probably still floating on clouds after the win. Pa has been handing out for Labor since he was a teenager. Seventy years on, he got to learn the strangest electoral system in the country and hand out for his eldest granddaughter. To share in election day and being with him and nanna when we got the results was absolutely magical. I would like to think I made Pa Jack proud too, if he was still here today, even if I was elected for the wrong party in his eyes!

To Jules, from the bottom of my heart, thank you. I know I have said it to you a lot since 19 October: I could not have asked for a better campaign manager. You had a plan, with the help of Dan, and you made sure we stuck to it. You never let me think I was winning. You checked in that I was out there, day after day, following that plan like my life depended on it. Then you would come out doorknocking and letterboxing every weekend. Thank you Jo, for putting up with my demands on Jules's time, particularly as you both had so many other things going on this year.

Thank you to Marc, for wearing through a pair of shoes with all the doorknocking and letterboxing as well as for making sure I was okay when I was bitten by a dog out doorknocking but not stressing about it, and for letting us continue with our doorknock for the rest of the afternoon. I mean, how many other candidates can say they were bitten by a dog on the campaign trail and still have a scar to show for it? The Tuggeranong Walk-in Centre certainly all knew who I was after that and, thanks to the Barr Labor government, the Weston Creek Walk-in Radiology did too. Of course I did not seek medical treatment straightaway. I went to the YWCA election event that evening and participated in the forum, where I reassured Elyse that I took the dog bite for the team so no other candidate would have to this election! If someone had told me at my second Young Labor meeting, that the outgoing president and the incoming president would one day be the two people who would help me get elected to this Assembly, I am not sure I would have believed it. So Jules and Marc, thank you.

Thank you to Jen, for sitting with me in that sandpit, talking me through all the reasons why this was a good idea. Thank you for trusting me to run your campaign all those years ago, showing me what the inside of a campaign is like.

To Lizzy and Cat, two of my oldest friends, thank you for always being there for the big and little moments of my life, for letting me vent and enjoying my gossip—even if you did not always know who I was gossiping or venting about—and for keeping me calm and carrying on. It really is mischief managed sometimes.

To the rest of the team and volunteers, thank you. Thank you, especially, Alex, for giving up your weekends and school holidays. We had some really fun doorknocking experiences this year. I am happy to have given you such a great introduction to ACT politics and how we can, through politics, change the community for the better. To Joy, Francis, Bindi, Daisy, Cameron, Laura, James, Joel, Teddy, Brent, Nick, Katelyn, Lucy, Alicia, Dan, Josh, Eva, Athol, Chris, Jim, Simon, the Carters, Johnno, Jenny, Jen, Emma, Joe, John, Robyn, and Rylee, thank you for the countless hours of letterboxing, doorknocking, stalls and pre-poll.

Thank you to Elizabeth, Ash, Taylor and Jess, who stuffed tens of thousands of letters into envelopes of an evening. Thank you, Melissa, for designing the trifold and letterhead, even though we had never actually met before; she was a woman from the Central Coast and she was happy to help out. Thank you to Nicole for her data entry. To Toby, Ash, Sandra and the rest of the team in party office, I hope you do not mind we did things our way a little bit, but thank you. Even to Liberal Matt, thank you for baking the cookies at pre-poll and on election day, and now that I am in the building, making sure I have always got a sugar hit when I need it.

Thank you to my wonderful former workplace relations colleagues. Workplace relations is in my blood, and I have been really lucky for the last seven years to have worked in the public service in workplace relations—and particularly the people in the Safety Net branch—for feeding my love of workplace relations and nerding out with me on so many things over the years. We had our ups and downs, but I learnt more in the last six months of 2022 working with you guys than should have been humanly possible. The experience of it and the following 12 months equipped me to deal with the stressors of an election campaign. So there are things you can learn in jobs that are definitely transferable to other things. Yes, those people got me through that time.

Sometimes there are things in life you just cannot control. You have got to roll with it and give it your all, even when it seems like you are breaking things left, right and centre. Sometimes just buying a muffin and chilling out is the best way to get through it. So to Tara, Peter, Alanna, David, Isobel, Nat, Justine, Cassie, Lucy, Ben, Chanan, Michael, Jess, Steph, Carl, Caitlin, Nick, Mel, Danica, Jasmine and Katelyn, who incidentally started working for me last week, and everyone else who has made up my WR family over the years, thank you. It is strange turning up to work and not seeing most of you. It has been quite reassuring having Katelyn here and helping me in this transition. I hope I make you all proud.

To my friends and family and mentors, particularly those who would drive past a corflute or receive something in the mail and send a message of support and reassure me, thank you. It would be remiss of me not to take a moment to properly acknowledge the previous member for Brindabella, Joy Burch. I first came to know Joy when I was a teenager. She was actually the first person I ever letterboxed for. I was still pretty new to Canberra and a guy called Michael Pettersson picked me up and drove me to Lanyon Marketplace, where I met this other guy called Chris Steel. So it is actually really nice to be in the chamber with the two of you, having known you for so long.

Many, many years later, when Matt and I were buying our house together, we ended



up buying in Lanyon, in that first place I ever letterboxed. The views are absolutely incredible. This year, Joy letterboxed 40,000 pieces of material for me and walked well in excess of 900 kilometres doing so. I do not know how I would be here without you Joy. Thank you and I hope you enjoy your next adventure.

I want to take a moment to especially mention David Harris MP and Emma McBride MP, two politicians from the Central Coast who have supported me, even though I am no longer really a coastie these days. David was the first person I handed out how to votes for. It was 2011. Labor was absolutely wiped out and David lost his seat, but he was not deterred and four years later, I was there when he won his seat back. Now he is a minister in the Minns government. He has been so generous in sharing his words of wisdom with me this year and taking time to catch up with me when I have been back on the Central Coast. That is how I met Melissa, who helped with the design work. The Central Coast is a wonderful family. In 2016 Emma contested the federal seat of Dobell for the second time, and I was there when she broke the bellwether that year and won the seat. Emma launched my election campaign this year, alongside the Chief Minister, at my local restaurant, Suburban Thai in Conder. It was really kind of her to take some time out to go all the way to Lanyon and see the sights of Tuggeranong. She has provided me with a lot of support and mentorship throughout the year. Thank you both for your support.

Finally, to the people of Brindabella, thank you. I will not let you down. When I look back on my time here, whether it is short or long—whatever is the will of the people—I hope to have made a difference for the people of Brindabella in Canberra. I hope to look to my son’s generation and future generations after that and know that they live in a better place because of what we were able to achieve in this place, because it is not what we say or think that defines us, but what we do.

## **Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee Reference**

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (10.53): I move:

That the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders inquire into the operation of the 2024 ACT Election and the *Electoral Act 1992*, and other relevant legislation and policies concerning election-related matters, with particular reference to:

- (1) the report of the ACT Electoral Commissioner into the 2024 ACT Election;
- (2) voter engagement, including:
  - (a) the timeframe and accessibility of early voting;
  - (b) the number and location of ordinary polling places;
  - (c) the sufficiency of access to mobile voting places;
  - (d) increasing voter turnout and participation in elections and encouraging political activity; and
  - (e) expanding voter franchise;

- (3) the voting process, including:
  - (a) the implementation, security and transparency of electronic voting;
  - (b) vote exhaustion rates; and
  - (c) voting instructions, as provided by the ACT Electoral Commissioner;
- (4) political electoral activity, including:
  - (a) rules for the authorisation and regulation of electoral matter on digital platforms;
  - (b) restrictions on roadside signage;
  - (c) the operation of truth in political advertising provisions; and
  - (d) restrictions on campaigning activities outside polling places;
- (5) electoral funding, donations and expenditure, including:
  - (a) definitions of electoral matter and electoral expenditure;
  - (b) regulations pertaining to political donations, including in the context of electoral reforms made by the Commonwealth and South Australian Parliaments, and with respect to ensuring compatibility with the Australian Constitution's implied freedom of political communication; and
  - (c) public election funding; and
- (6) any other relevant matter.

This is pretty straightforward. As is standard, there is always a review into the election that we have just had. I believe that we have consensus agreement across the chamber on the terms of this motion, which I think are pretty comprehensive. I would put on the record the very constructive nature of our engagements across all parties, particularly with the Greens, and acknowledge that we did discuss, given the commentary about having a potentially larger Assembly, whether it would be useful to do that within this inquiry. My understanding is that we have come to a position across this chamber that it is worth inquiring into but perhaps would distract from some other issues that need some dedicated attention.

So ACT Labor gives its commitment that we will support an inquiry into the potential expansion of the size of the Assembly at some point during this term, but it is not in these terms of reference simply because the terms are pretty comprehensive and detailed in and of themselves and those issues require our attention in the immediate. I commend the motion to the chamber.

**MR HANSON**(Murrumbidgee) (10.55): This is the sort of straightforward motion that gets put forward at the beginning of every term to look at the previous election. We are very happy with the terms of reference. We will be supporting the motion.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (10.55): I would like to thank Minister Cheyne and her office for the constructive and positive engagement that we had over this motion, which the Greens will be supporting today. In particular, I look forward on a personal level to a discussion about expanding the voter franchise. The Greens took to the election a proposal to give the vote to not just 16- and 17-year-olds but also to permanent residents, with the premise that, if you call this city home, it should be

appropriate that you have a say in the future of this city and how it is run. Many municipal governments offer voting rights based on residency rather than citizenship. So I am hopeful that this inquiry can explore a way that this could be achieved in the ACT.

This may also assist in addressing what was a record low voter turnout of 86.8 per cent of eligible voters during the territory election. In Kurrajong this went as low as 82.9 per cent, meaning one in six enrolled voters did not turn up and vote. If we are to maintain and strengthen our democracy, we need to examine this issue of voter turnout and what we can do to address it.

Also, observers may note the reference to the political donation reforms passed by the commonwealth and South Australian governments. I do not wish to express a view on what was passed by those particular parliaments, but it needs to be reflected on in terms of whatever ultimately does pass may have significant ramifications on what happens here in the ACT and how political entities operate. It will therefore be prudent to look at our laws for compatibility, consistency and efficiency.

As Ms Cheyne has already mentioned, what is not in the terms of reference is the expression about the expansion of the Assembly. I again thank Ms Cheyne for appreciating that this is an issue that we will need to look at and ask the question during this term. The 2013 independent review into this recommendation that the Assembly expand to 35 members no later than 2024 has now come and gone, making it important that this question be revisited, and I look forward to having this question examined by the committee later in this term.

Another issue is the use of roadside signs. The Greens continue to refuse roadside signs as they are visually polluting, hated by the Canberra community and often destroyed by mowers. This is not to mention the number that are subject to vandalism, graffiti or, even once in the case of Casey, tossed into a pile on the road and burned. It was amusing during the campaign the number of candidates across the political spectrum who would quietly come up to me and confidentially indicate their support for getting rid of roadside signs. I would encourage those people to speak up, work within their parties or provide submissions to the inquiry on this particular issue. Once again, the Greens will be supporting this motion, and I look forward to the community's contributions to the inquiry.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (10.58): I will be supporting Ms Cheyne's motion. I would like to thank the government for circulating details of this motion early and for agreeing to expand the inquiry's terms of reference. My hope is that including mobile voting places in the inquiry's remit will offer an opportunity to address feedback I received during the campaign about voter accessibility, especially in Oaks Estate.

While total voting numbers among the residents of Oaks Estate are considered to be low—which was the reason I was given by the Electoral Commission for having removed the Oaks Estate voting centre in 2024—it is also true that it is much more difficult for many Oaks Estate residents to travel to polling places with no dedicated public transport services offered by the ACT. This may be the most disadvantaged community in the territory. There is a risk that we are preventing some of the most

vulnerable members of our community from participating in our democracy. While mobile voting places have typically been restricted for use in discrete settings like hospitals, there may be utility in using mobile voting to maximise participation in our democracy more generally.

Additionally, I was glad that the government agreed to have this inquiry consider the appropriateness of the level of public funding dispersed to candidates after the election. I recognise that public funding is important to reimburse individuals for foregone income during the campaign period and to repay electoral expenditure. Empowering people from diverse backgrounds, including from our side of the party system, to become candidates is vital to the vibrancy of our democracy. But \$10.15 per vote is very high in comparison with the level of funding offered in other jurisdictions, and this warrants consideration.

I personally wonder whether a more modest amount may be appropriate, with consideration given to other mechanisms for lowering campaigning costs and levelling the playing field for non-incumbents such as, for instance, public funding for distributing all candidates' statements to residents by mail or providing equal public signage opportunities for all candidates. It is imperative that community members of all different backgrounds feel that local politics is open to them and that our democracy is their democracy. I hope to see this inquiry create opportunities to ensure that is the case and to increase the political participation of people in our community facing disadvantage.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Standing Committees Reference**

**MS CASTLEY** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (11.01): I move:

That:

- (1) this Assembly notes that:
  - (a) the \$64 million MyWay+ system was intended to be fully functional at the time of its launch on Wednesday, 27 November 2024;
  - (b) the system was not fully functional at launch and it is now uncertain it ever will be;
  - (c) pre-launch testing was clearly inadequate and having the launch at one of the busiest times of the year was an error;
  - (d) the government has already had to launch an audit of potential overcharging on the fourth day of operation; and
  - (e) the failed launch has created uncertainty and stress amongst Canberrans who rely on public transport;
- (2) the relevant standing committee inquire into and report on the procurement and delivery of MyWay+, including:
  - (a) the initial, failed procurement of a MyWay replacement;
  - (b) the decision to procure a bespoke product;

- (c) the capabilities and business case for MyWay+;
  - (d) impacts and potential impacts on public transport confidence and usage;
  - (e) the development and delivery of the MyWay+ system, including the adequacy of testing and consultation; and
  - (f) consideration of opportunities to improve the quality and transparency of public procurement processes in the ACT; and
- (3) the committee is to report by the last sitting day of June 2025.

This motion simply asks the Assembly to refer the procurement and delivery of the MyWay+ for an inquiry. I do not think there is a need for me to speak at length about the rollout and the issues that the community has faced. I am sure we all understand those already. But I do want to make the point that this referral is not about politics. This is not an attempt to undermine MyWay+, to undermine the minister for transport or to undermine the government. Instead, it is a good faith effort to recognise and understand why the launch has not gone to plan and, more importantly, what lessons we can learn for the future, because the simple fact is that new products and systems will have issues and will not always be delivered as expected.

To an extent, some challenges are outside of our control. But what we can control is what we take from those setbacks, what we can learn and how we can improve. Because this will not be the last major project that the ACT government delivers, if we can learn some lessons now, if we can improve how we communicate or test the rollout of major changes, we can support a better and a smoother experience for Canberrans.

I think all members recognise that there is room for improvement with the ACT government. Every day we hear stories from constituents who have experienced challenges and who have seen imperfections with how the public sector works. Just as we learn from those constituents and work to improve service delivery in health care and education and other government offerings, we also need to learn from our experiences of major projects and the procurement of IT systems. That is the outcome I am hoping to secure from this inquiry. It is the outcome that the community hopefully will secure from this inquiry. In conversations with others around the Assembly this week, I think that is what we are all looking for.

I want to share my appreciation for colleagues who have engaged in good faith with this motion. In particular, I thank Mr Braddock and the Greens, whose support means that we will have the opportunity to hold this inquiry and learn those lessons. I note there are a couple of amendments that have been circulated. The opposition welcomes the amendment from Mr Braddock, which we will be supporting. We also acknowledge the amendment from Mr Emerson, which is in the spirit of my motion and which the opposition will also be supporting. Thank you, members.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (11.03): The ACT government welcomes this motion and the good faith that has been brought into the chamber, and we support scrutiny of the implementation of MyWay+. We think that that is welcome and will enable us to further discuss the functionality of the MyWay+

system and also build confidence in the system, which is a long-term solution for ticketing in Canberra, and also other features as well like journey planning. We want to make sure that MyWay+ is a good ticketing solution for the community over the next decade. So we welcome that inquiry and the motion today. I note the amendments that are forthcoming, which we will also support.

In the statement that I provided to the Assembly yesterday and in responses to questions without notice, I provided detail on the functionality and rollout of MyWay+. I also acknowledge that there have been some issues that have occurred since MyWay+ went live across our public transport system last Wednesday 27 November that, unfortunately, have affected some Canberrans' experience getting onboard with the new system. Since these updates have been made to address those issues, we have been providing regular updates to the community on what is being done to resolve the issues. I would like to reaffirm that ensuring those issues that may still be affecting some passengers are resolved effectively and in a timely manner remains my top priority as the minister and a top priority for the government. We will continue to update and support the community as those issues are resolved.

We support this inquiry. My focus at the moment is on ironing out any remaining issues with the ticketing system. It is a solution that is providing people with the ability to tap on and off public transport with credit cards and debit cards for the first time, as well as traditional MyWay+ cards. But there are still some issues that are being resolved. I look forward to the inquiry taking place and the opportunity for the government to outline particularly what occurred prior to the launch in relation to the testing. It is disappointing that, despite that testing, there were some issues on launch day. It is my priority and focus at the moment to resolve those issues, but I look forward to the inquiry looking deeper into the testing undertaken by NEC and Transport Canberra.

**MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.06):** I move:

Omit paragraphs (2) and (3), and substitute:

- “(2) this Assembly requests that the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services inquire into and report on the procurement and delivery of MyWay+, including:
- (a) the initial, failed procurement of a MyWay replacement;
  - (b) the decision to procure a bespoke product;
  - (c) the capabilities and business case for MyWay+;
  - (d) impacts and potential impacts on public transport confidence and usage;
  - (e) the development and delivery of the MyWay+ system, including the adequacy of testing and consultation; and
  - (f) consideration of opportunities to improve the quality and transparency of public procurement processes in the ACT; and
- (3) this Assembly requests that, should the Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services agree to inquire into the matter, the Committee report by the last sitting day of June 2025.”

The goals of the MyWay+ system are ones that the Greens support. More convenient ways to pay with your bank card, live service updates and digital account management are among the improvements we are excited for with the MyWay+ system. They promise to improve Canberra's public transport system and bring Canberra in line with other cities that have enjoyed these features for a number of years. But what the community has seen as part of the implementation of this system has not inspired confidence both in the decisions of the government as well as the implementation of it. I have been clear, both publicly in the past week and in this chamber yesterday, about the concerns raised with me and my office from members of the community and stakeholders about this system, and hence why we will be supporting this motion today.

The rollout of the MyWay+ system does not occur without historical context, however. The ACT government in recent history has experienced numerous issues with the procurement and implementation of significant IT upgrades—the Human Resources Information Management System and the Digital Health Record for another—and, despite the fact that we have had inquiries where ministers and senior public officials have sworn that they have learnt the lessons, that adjustments have been made and that further reoccurrence will not be happening, the issues keep happening, and hence the importance of this inquiry. Accountability and transparency on the management of this IT upgrade is needed.

The amendment I have moved is relatively minor and goes towards achieving two ends. Firstly, ultimately MyWay+ should be a piece of great public transport system for the ACT and is essential to creating a well-planned and livable city. Therefore, my amendment specified that it should go to the Standing Committee on Environment Planning, Transport and City Services to look at the rollout of the MyWay+ system and wherever it has not achieved its goals of contributing towards the public transport system in our community. If it were to go to the Public Accounts committee, I am afraid it might lose some of that focus on what the outcomes were on the particular community.

Secondly, my amendment clarifies that the Assembly request, rather than directs, that the committee undertake this inquiry. This maintains the committee's autonomy to consider this request and decide if it will inquire and how, thus maintaining the conventions of this place to respect the committee and its members and their need to manage their own workloads. Therefore, I commend my amendments to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**Mr Braddock's** amendment agreed to.

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Ms Barry): The question now is that Ms Castley's motion, as amended, be agreed to.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (11.09), by leave: I move:

- (1) at (1b), omit "and it is now uncertain it ever will be";
- (2) after (2f), insert:

- “(g) the sufficiency and quality of public communications before, during and after the launch of MyWay+
- (h) the timing of the MyWay+ launch
- (i) an assessment of MyWay+ data security and any implications for users.”

The purpose of my amendments is to expand the focus of this inquiry. The timing for the MyWay+ transition, which has had its problems, to occur immediately after an election and precipitating free access to public transport during a campaign period warrant review and discussion.

I recognise the valuable role the public servants in the territory are playing to try to ensure a smooth transition to MyWay+. Notwithstanding their efforts, I am aware that many public transport users are particularly vulnerable and struggle to understand transition details in full. Therefore, consideration of the sufficiency and quality of public communications regarding this transition ought to be included in this inquiry.

We live in particularly perilous times with respect to cybersecurity and data protection, which is why I am moving an amendment to ensure that this inquiry considers the data security for the MyWay+ system, to ensure people’s private information is protected.

Lastly, I propose that the Assembly omit words suggesting that the MyWay+ system may never be fully functional. I think those words are unhelpful. If anything, I would rather vote on a motion promising to ensure that this system will be fully functional as quickly as possible. We seem to be headed in that direction. I am very happy to report to the Assembly that yesterday evening I travelled home by light rail and successfully tapped both on and off. I thank members for their consideration of these amendments.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**Mr Emerson’s** amendments agreed to.

Original question, as amended, agreed to.

## **Justice and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 (No 2)**

**Ms Cheyne**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (11.13): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.



I am pleased to present this bill, an omnibus bill which makes minor and technical amendments to laws falling primarily within my portfolio as the Attorney-General. In short, the bill will promote better services for Canberrans and an improved regulatory framework for the ACT government and the community.

In every other Australian jurisdiction, consumer affairs and fair trading laws limit the ability of a body corporate and other persons, such as an employer, to use their representatives as a shield from liability. Similar provisions also exist in commonwealth legislation on competition and corporations. However, without these provisions, it is more difficult for people in the ACT to litigate disputes for breaches of consumer protections. It may also cause substantial delays in litigation.

That is why this bill proposes to introduce similar provisions into the Fair Trading (Australian Consumer Law) Act. In essence, these provisions allow for the state of mind and conduct of a natural person to be attributed to a body corporate or person other than a body corporate. This amendment ensures that the ACT's fair trading legislation reflects societal expectations about who the proper defendant is in fair trading disputes, and ensures that bodies corporate, directors, employers and principals cannot escape liability by hiding behind the actions of their representatives.

These are important reforms. They will enhance protections for consumers while reducing the time and cost burden on the community from lengthy court disputes over liability.

Secondly, official visitors are appointed to visit certain places where people are detained or where they are reliant on service providers across jurisdictions such as homelessness, disability services, corrections, mental health, and children and young people, to ensure that the rights and wellbeing of people in these places are upheld, including through addressing complaints.

The Official Visitor Act does not specifically authorise OVs to share information with each other across their jurisdictions. The explicit information-sharing provision in this bill will better support their effective cooperation in the interests of entitled persons and systemic improvements in places visited under the OV scheme. In particular, having previously held responsibility for the scheme overall, I know that this will make a very big difference across corrections and mental health, and other areas as well.

The bill also introduces clear statutory protection from civil or criminal liability for individuals who make complaints to OVs, encouraging honest reporting of concerns without fear of legal repercussions. This, in turn, promotes a culture of transparency and accountability in visitable places.

This new statutory protection reflects the strong public interest in ensuring that all members of the community feel confident and safe to share information with statutory bodies that investigate complaints or provide support to vulnerable members of the community.

The bill also makes a range of minor amendments to the Human Rights Commission Act to support internal efficiencies and transparency in complaints handling

procedures. This promotes the government's overall objective of facilitating accessible and informal resolution of complaints for members of the community.

I will focus on a key amendment to this act which will bring important benefits for the community. Currently, the commission has the power to open investigations into issues within its jurisdiction, in circumstances where there is no person willing or able to make a complaint. This "own-motion" power supports the commission to pursue matters affecting, particularly, vulnerable persons or where systemic change is warranted.

Currently, for discrimination complaints, once the commission has finalised its own-motion consideration, it may decide to refer the matter to ACAT for a binding determination of whether the law has been breached. However, for other types of matters—occupancy disputes, conversion practices and retirement villages matters—these may be referred to ACAT where the complaint originates from a member of the public, but not when it was initiated by the commission. The bill will ensure that the commission may refer own-motion considerations to ACAT in these matters where this is warranted.

Accordingly, it fills a gap in the referral competencies of the commission, so that systemic issues can be more efficiently addressed by the commission and, in turn, ACAT. This better supports vulnerable members of the community whose rights and interests are affected in conversion practice, occupancy and retirement villages matters.

The bill will amend the Retirement Villages Act to better support the governance of residents committees. At present, the act prevents a person from holding the same office on the residents committee for more than three consecutive years, except in certain defined circumstances.

Consultation has indicated that the following aspects of the legislation could be clarified: how the three-year period should be calculated; and whether it applies only to office holders on the committee or also to ordinary committee member positions. This bill clearly sets out that the three-year time limit applies only to individuals holding designated functions, such as the chair, on the residents committee and not to ordinary committee roles. It will also clarify that the three-year time period commences from when the person is first elected or appointed to a role.

Lastly, this bill proposes amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act to clarify and simplify processes for tenants and landlords by correcting minor errors. In particular, earlier this year, amendments were passed which supported co-tenants who are sharing a property to leave their tenancy more flexibly, including to enable victim-survivors of family violence to end their interest in a residential tenancy agreement immediately.

These earlier amendments introduced a requirement that the ACT Revenue Office must be notified of the co-tenant's departure so that the bond can be dealt with appropriately. This bill rectifies a minor drafting error, clarifying that notification to the ACT Revenue Office is only required if there is a bond held in relation to the property.

While minor, these amendments sustain the high quality of legislation in the territory. I am pleased to introduce this bill today, my first as Attorney-General, as I see it as a reflection of the government's ongoing dedication to ensuring that legislation in the territory is properly maintained and modernised, something that I am committed to in this term. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Cain**) adjourned to the next sitting.

## **Variation in Sex Characteristics (Restricted Medical Treatment) Amendment Bill 2024**

Debate resumed from 3 December 2024, on motion by **Ms Stephen-Smith**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MS CASTLEY** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (11.20): I rise to make a brief contribution to the debate on the variation in sex characteristics bill. I would like to acknowledge the health minister's staff for the briefing that they provided to me late last week.

From the opposition's perspective, this bill is both reasonable and sensible. The act was agreed by the Assembly last year, and it included a transitional period of 12 months. At the time it was thought that that period was long enough to establish the approvals process and approve treatment plans for certain individuals. But a small cohort—we are told around 10 to 20 people—have not yet had their treatment plans approved and could have their treatment cut off later this month.

This bill seeks to extend the transitional period by another 12 months. This would ensure that there is sufficient time for those approvals, without interrupting the treatment that anyone is currently receiving. As I said, this is quite reasonable, and the opposition will be supporting the bill. We recognise the urgent need for this legislation, and we will not stand in its way.

I would like to flag a couple of concerns. Firstly, I understand that it has been difficult for CHS to find or engage with the individuals who would be affected by this bill. The officials who briefed me were extremely confident that 12 months would be enough time to find them, engage with them and to have their treatments approved. That may well be true, but we also thought it would be true with the initial 12-month period. If the government would like to amend the bill to extend that period by more than 12 months, perhaps to 18 or 24 months, to ensure that we do not have to do this again, we, of course, will be open to having that conversation. This is not an ideological or political point; it is really just a practical one.

Secondly, I was briefed by Health officials on Friday afternoon. When I asked about stakeholder views, I was told that the minister's office had undertaken only internal consultation, to date. They added that external consultation would occur prior to the introduction of the legislation on Tuesday. So there was one business day for external consultation; and, presumably, that was the same day on which the bill was considered by the government party room and approved for introduction.

I am not sure that this is how community consultation is supposed to work. I do not want to make this political, and I do not want to hold up progress on this bill, but I think the government should reflect on how it engages with the community and whether its consultation processes are sufficient. Too often in the past, legislation has been rushed. The views of stakeholders and non-government members have not been given proper consideration. Scrutiny has been insufficient, and mistakes have been made; amendments have been required. We can do better than that.

Listening to the community should be an integral part of the legislative process. It should be more than window dressing. The opposition will be taking more of an interest in this issue, because it is clear to us that we could be doing better, and we should be doing better.

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (11.23): I rise to speak in support of the Variation in Sex Characteristics (Restricted Medical Treatment) Amendment Bill 2024. I would like to thank the minister for briefing us and keeping us up to date. We really appreciate her reaching out, and it certainly aided us in our deliberations.

Last year, the Assembly passed legislation to bring world-leading protections for intersex people. The act upholds the human rights of intersex people; in particular, their right to decide what happens to their body, and affirms their right to bodily integrity and non-discrimination. It does this by ensuring that intersex people, and in most cases children, are not subject to medical interventions that are inappropriate or occur without their full understanding and consent.

Intersex people have innate sex characteristics that do not fit medical or social norms of binary, female or male bodies. Variation in sex characteristics is common—about two per cent of the population—and are part of every society and community. Too often, medical interventions for people with variation in sex characteristics have stemmed from a deep misunderstanding of bodies that are perceived to be “different”. But intersex bodies are not conditions that need to be fixed. Intersex variations are a part of the broad and beautiful spectrum of human diversity, and every individual deserves to be treated with respect and dignity and be empowered to make decisions about their own body.

The ACT Greens were proud to support the legislation in the first instance, and we support the amendments moved today, to ensure that the implementation of the act does not have unintended consequences.

One of the challenges in doing something that no other place has done before is that you do not have a work blueprint on how to do it. It is therefore important that, as we implement new schemes like this, mistakes or unintended consequences are identified and fixed as soon as possible. That is what this bill does today.

The act creates obligations for people who receive certain types of medical treatment to have a treatment plan that is approved by the oversight body, which is the Restricted Medical Treatment Assessment Board. This bill ensures that people who have already begun receiving treatment will not have their treatment delayed or stopped because of the new oversight obligations that the act creates. This is

appropriate, and it is to be expected that, with any substantial shift in regulatory settings, transitional arrangements must be provided for.

However, I would like to note that, with these kinds of transitional arrangements, there is also risk. The transitional provisions provided in this bill will allow medical treatment that has already begun to continue, as it should, if that is the wish of the individuals receiving treatment. Of course, these kinds of treatment would come under scrutiny with the new arrangements for people who have not yet begun treatment, meaning that there is inevitably some inequity in the level of oversight that is being provided for different individuals. That is probably unavoidable. I am glad to see that this bill ensures that people who have already started treatment will get a treatment plan within the next 12 months.

It is also worth noting that this bill, in effect, extends the time frame for full implementation of the act. One of the issues that this bill addresses is the non-compliance of medical practitioners who are already providing restricted medical treatment to people without a treatment plan. That medical treatment is in breach of the act, which carries an offence. It is critical to ensure that this does not become a precedent for future surrendering to non-compliance or the first of many delays to the full implementation of the act. I do not anticipate that that will be the case.

The ACT Greens will continue to monitor the implementation of the act to ensure that intersex people receive full protection by the scheme as soon as possible. I hope that the minister will continue regular consultation with stakeholders and impacted people.

We need to get this done, but we need to get it right, so that every child today, and in the future, who has a variation in sex characteristics can trust our medical system, practitioners and policymakers to respect their bodily integrity and support them to be proud of who they are.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (11.27): I will be supporting this bill, as I understand that there is widespread support from clinicians for the provisions it contains, which will help to ensure that people already receiving vital treatment continue to receive ongoing care.

However, other concerns raised by doctors in our community remain unresolved. I have heard from doctors who still want clear guidance regarding precisely which kinds of treatments are covered by this legislation. The guidance is eagerly anticipated, given the penalties associated with non-compliance are due to come into effect this month.

I have also heard concerns about the sufficiency of resources dedicated to preparing general treatment plans. It is my understanding that no general treatment plans, which in many cases would cover common conditions that could be treated by one's GP, have yet been approved.

Clinicians are also concerned about expectations that they will be able to find the time in their already overburdened schedules to prepare and submit individual treatment plans. Faced with the threat of criminal penalties, I am told that the likely behavioural response will be to refer vulnerable patients under their care to our already

overcrowded public health system, delaying the provision of what is, in many cases, urgent care.

Addressing these issues is essential to ensure that the legislation achieves its intended outcome of protecting those who most need our protection, without compromising the quality and timeliness of care, or placing unmanageable pressure on healthcare providers.

With criminal penalties coming into effect shortly, I would ask the government to consider urgently allocating additional resources to the preparation of general treatment plans. Further, I hope and trust that efforts are being made to provide further clarity, particularly to GPs, regarding the scope of the original legislation, so as to avoid unnecessary referrals into the public system.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.29), in reply: I thank all members for their support today. I want to speak very briefly to thank a number of people. Firstly, I thank the ACT Health Directorate and Canberra Health Services officials, who had to work through a range of options to figure out how best to address the issue with the transition, which really became apparent only in September, when the training started rolling out. That was unfortunate, and I recognise the issues that Mr Emerson has raised. I hope that, through the training that is now rolling out, some of those uncertainties are being resolved.

I also recognise, in relation to the availability of clinicians to finalise general treatment plans, that that has been a challenge. I am advised that some general treatment plans have been drafted and are awaiting clinician clearance. Canberra Health Services has brought on additional visiting medical officer capacity to support that process.

Health Directorate staff, in particular, had to work through a range of options to try to identify the best transition arrangement that would ensure that we were meeting our human rights obligations, while also enabling clinicians to continue to work with some of these vulnerable individuals and their families, to ensure that they continue to get treatment. They were, of course, supported by the Parliamentary Counsel's Office and the Government Solicitor. I thank them for their support of the very quick drafting that they undertook to enable us to introduce the legislation this week.

In the Human Rights Commission, the advice of the Health Services Commissioner was absolutely pivotal in our deciding in which direction we would go, and her support for a 12-month transition period was very important. I also thank the Office of LGBTIQ+ Affairs for their input to the process, and the cabinet office in the Chief Minister's directorate, for expediting this process.

I thank members across the chamber who made themselves available for briefings last week. I thank them for their support for the expedited process and the bill itself. Finally, I thank my office, who have worked very hard to ensure that this process has been as smooth as possible, and the Chief Minister's office, who have supported our engagement with key stakeholders.

I can advise Ms Castley that, while officials may not have been aware of it, we have in fact had some conversations with stakeholders prior to Friday last week. It was a very quick process to get this through cabinet and there were some last-minute decisions being made in the cabinet process as to the direction in which we would go. Clinicians have been engaged in that conversation to get to that point; we were then seeking to engage with stakeholders like the AMA, RACGP and Capital Health Network about that—and, of course, our LGBTIQ+ stakeholders and members of the board itself.

I thank everybody for their positive engagement in this process. I take on board the comments that have been made. I am happy to keep people in the loop about the ongoing implementation of this nation-leading, and really world-leading, legislation. Again, I commend the bill to the Assembly. (*Quorum formed.*)

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

**Sitting suspended from 11.35 am to 2 pm.**

## **Ministerial arrangements**

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (2.01): Minister Cheyne will be absent from part of question time, as she is currently in a ministerial council, which she hopes will finish by about 2.30. If members have questions for Minister Cheyne and could hold them back to the second half of question time, that would be appreciated. If they cannot and must ask them in the first half hour, then I will endeavour to assist members with questions in Minister Cheyne's portfolios.

## **Questions without notice Government—procurement**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Treasurer.

Treasurer, both you and your government have overseen major projects that have come in over budget and failed to fully deliver for the community, including the \$78 million Human Resources Information Management System project and the \$64 million MyWay+ system.

Treasurer, what needs to change to ensure public money is better managed?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question, which does ask for an expression of opinion. We will, of course, ensure that as we make expenditure decisions in relation to new projects, and also on existing projects, that we have the appropriate expenditure controls in place as we go through the entire lifecycle of those projects.

We will make sure that there is appropriate design at the beginning of projects to make sure that they are setting out to achieve what they intend to—and the purpose of the project—right through procurement and into the contract stage, to make sure that any partners that we are working with to deliver those projects are doing so in accordance with the requirements of the contract.

There is no doubt that in the infrastructure sector in particular there have been large increases to the costs of materials required—and, indeed, of labour—to support those projects. Each of those needs to be considered, and they will of course be considered through the budget process as appropriate, as we have done on a range of projects—as demonstrated in the last budget. Of course, we will continue to work to deliver in a fiscally responsible way the agenda that we took to the election.

**MS CASTLEY:** Treasurer, will you support a charter of budget honesty to better safeguard the management of public money.

**MR STEEL:** We have a range of processes that we have put in place to properly scrutinise expenditure. We have an expenditure review committee. As a result of Labor forming government in minority, that committee now consists of four ministers, including me, as Treasurer; the finance minister; the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister. I think that will provide robust scrutiny to expenditure proposals and other budget decisions that need to be made. The ability that we have—working in minority—is that we will not have the calls on the budget that we have perhaps had when he have had to form government with another party. We will certainly be working to make sure that we deliver on the election commitments and the commitments that we have made in the parliamentary agreement—to make sure that we deliver those in a way that is fiscally responsible.

**MR COCKS:** Treasurer, given your government's track record, will you commit to any stricter oversight measures, such as mandatory milestone reporting, to protect against future financial mismanagement?

**MR STEEL:** With each of our ministers, and through the expenditure review committee, there are expenditure controls in place and oversight of projects. Infrastructure Canberra has certainly played an important role in having greater oversight, particularly of the capital program and infrastructure delivery. That, together with the project's boards and governance, does provide the scrutiny necessary to support good outcomes on projects.

Of course, we will need to consider individual projects from time to time. We will do that with the appropriate scrutiny of ERC and the cabinet.

### **Transport Canberra—bus driver safety**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Transport. The government finally announced safety changes two weeks ago, a number of years after safety concerns for bus drivers were raised. Dozens of drivers and passengers experience verbal and physical abuse on Canberra's buses. Why has it taken so long for the government to agree to these changes and begin their implantation?



**MR STEEL:** I note that we were the only party at the election that took forward a plan to address occupational violence through the introduction of transport officers, in our transport policy. That is something that we have committed to based on discussions that we have been having with the workforce, and it directly addressed their major call for action, which is about having a visible presence on public transport to deter occupational violence and to also educate the community. That is something that we committed to again after discussions with the drivers over the last few weeks. We have already begun discussions, including today when Transport Canberra met with representatives of the workforce to discuss the development of the model that will be used for those transport officers. We have committed to a legislative review of powers that they can use as well.

**Ms Castley:** Point of order on relevance, Mr Speaker. I did not ask the minister about their election commitment but said that they have known about this for such a long time. It has been two years. Why has it taken so long to address this?

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, Ms Castley. I do believe that the point of order here has merit. The question was very specifically about why it has taken so long. I am wondering if it is possible for the minister to give an answer to that.

**MR STEEL:** I had not finished giving my answer, Mr Speaker. I am happy to continue in the short time that I have left. Of course, the occupational violence issues are not new; they have been raised by the workforce in the past. That is why Transport Canberra has an occupational violence management plan that was put in place with the workforce. We have committed to additional measures with the workforce, and that includes the four that I mentioned yesterday in the Assembly that we are working closely with the workforce on to design and deliver.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, isn't it true that you only agreed to these changes because of the driver strike—serious action?

**MR STEEL:** No. And that is proven by the fact that Labor took to the election a commitment to introduce a team of transport officers that would deter that sort of violence on buses and also at our interchanges, as well as a legislative review to give them the powers, the tools, that they need to be able to tackle that violence as well, such as move-on powers. Those are two actions that we have undertaken of the four actions. We had already started work on procuring screens to retrofit on some of the old buses for drivers. I understand those have been arriving, and we will be testing those with the workforce and their representatives to make sure that they are fit for purpose before the rest of the screens are ordered to fit to the buses. We have been talking with the workforce for some time. I note that, at the election, your party did not commit to do anything in relation to transport officers or a legislative review. We did. We are committed and we are getting on and delivering on it.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, does this mean the government is only going to fund public safety measures when there are issues reported on the front page of the *Canberra Times*?

**MR STEEL:** No. I refer the member to the answer that I just gave, where I said that,

clearly, at the election we committed to address things that had occurred, before the industrial action, the strike, that occurred after the election.

### **Transport Canberra—bus driver safety**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Transport. On 16 November, the day after the bus driver strike, you told ABC Radio that the government had only been in office for “a number of weeks.” Isn’t it true that you had been the Minister for Transport for 280 weeks when you made that comment?

**MR STEEL:** That was in the context of the election commitment that we had made around the transport officers, which was the specific ask that had been made by the Transport Workers’ Union. I met with them in August. They made that specific request of the Labor party and me at the August meeting. We then committed to it. The meeting was actually in June—my apologies. The meeting was in June, I believe, or July, and then we made the commitment I think in August, just before the election.

We then had the election period, the caretaker period; then the caretaker mode finished and the government was appointed. I was re-appointed as the Minister for Transport, and we are getting on and delivering that commitment. There was a specific incident of occupational violence that occurred on a bus which obviously triggered the strike and the industrial action. That was very concerning for us and it is why we are absolutely committed to getting on with that commitment, and I welcome the representations from the Transport Workers’ Union and their support for the four actions that we have agreed to do.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, did you make this comment to avoid taking responsibility for the government’s failures on workplace safety for Canberra’s bus drivers—that you have known about for years?

**MR STEEL:** No and you never committed to deliver the transport officer commitment, which is what I was referring to. Only the Labor party did. We are getting on with designing and delivering it.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, what engagement have you had with WorkSafe ACT regarding providing a safe working environment for Canberra’s bus drivers?

**MR STEEL:** When we become aware of incidents they are made known to WorkSafe ACT, including the incident that triggered the strike earlier this term. We will continue to work with them, but what WorkSafe ACT wants to see is that we are taking action to address the issues as they arise. We do have an occupational violence management plan for Transport Canberra, which identifies a range of different actions and we have now undertaken further actions—

**MR SPEAKER:** I have a point of order Mr Steel, if you could just be seated. Mr Cocks.

**Mr Cocks:** The point of order is on relevance. The question was very specific about what engagement the minister has had, not a broad, general “we” have had.

**MR SPEAKER:** I am not sure there is a point of order. Mr Steel, are you done?

**MR STEEL:** I have answered the question, thank you.

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you.

### **Education—public schools**

**MS TOUGH:** My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Minister, how is the ACT Labor government working with the federal government to build a better and fairer school system?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Ms Tough for her question. On 19 November, I signed an agreement with the commonwealth to provide more funding to ACT public schools. The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement commits the Australian government to increasing its funding to ACT public schools by an extra 2.5 per cent of the School Resourcing Standard, SRS, by 2026. This amounts to an extra \$110.5 million to ACT public schools over the first five years of the agreement and over \$250 million in additional funding over the 10-year life of the agreement.

This funding builds on the ACT government's already strong investment in public education, making sure every student in Canberra gets ahead with a great education. It is great news for ACT students, families and teachers as well as school communities. This funding boost will mean that extra resources are directed where they are needed most, with funding tied to practical initiatives that will ensure ACT public schools continue to be great places for students to learn and great places for staff to work.

**MS TOUGH:** Minister, what initiatives will this additional funding go towards?

**MS BERRY:** To support learning outcomes, part of this additional funding will add to the ACT government's existing investment in the new literacy and numeracy reform program Strong Foundations. This will include implementing multi-tiered systems to target supports for students and schools that need the most, year 1 phonics and numeracy checks, school literacy and numeracy coaches, professional learning and quality assured curriculum resources to support teachers. To support student wellbeing, some of this new funding will go towards establishing more community coordinators and mental health professional roles in ACT public schools; improving supports for schools to address bullying and complex student behaviours, using the most up-to-date and latest research and evidence; and expanding flexible education offerings. For our invaluable workforce, this funding will provide additional investment in principal health and wellbeing programs as well as the implementation of workload reduction initiatives.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Minister, what else is the ACT government doing to ensure every public school student, like my three children, can engage fully in their education?

**MS BERRY:** I thank the member for the supplementary question. ACT Labor believes that every student, regardless of their background and circumstances, should have access to a great education. That is why we are supporting all students to fully

engage in their education, regardless. It is why I established the Future of Education Equity Fund, which supports more than 5,000 students each year with payments of up to \$750 to cover the cost of educational expenses like uniforms, excursions, camps and extra curricula activities. It is available to low-income families or families experiencing financial stress in all school sectors. So far this year, over \$3.3 million has gone to families and students to support educational expenses.

In response to parent and carer feedback, the ACT government has already opened applications for the 2025 round of the equity fund, which started earlier this week. This will help families to manage back-to-school costs and ensure their children can start the year with the items that they need. It supports families by addressing cost-of-living pressures before the new school year begins. Payments will be made available to families as early as 6 January to help them with the start of their school year.

### **Transport Canberra—MyWay+**

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is for the Minister for Transport. Minister, community members provided feedback that they believe the MyWay+ system does not meet website accessibility standards, potentially making it harder for those with a disability to access and use the system. Can you confirm whether or not the MyWay+ system is compliant with website accessibility standards and hence accessible for those with a disability?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. I am happy to come back on notice around the specific access requirements that he is talking about. Certainly, we have been working closely with the accessibility reference group that I established in Transport Canberra and City Services on the design of MyWay+. There has been considerable effort gone into, particularly, working with community groups, like the Council on the Ageing, in the lead up to the launch of My Way+ over the past year to make sure their feedback was provided into the design and in relation to providing those community groups with information about how to use the new system as well.

I note that the system, particularly in terms of the physical media that is available, like the traditional travel card, is a world leading system, where we do actually have a Braille component to the card. So those sorts of things have been, in partnership with NEC, delivered with the system, but I'm happy to come back with some direct confirmation in relation to the accessibility standard.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, did the contract specify website accessibility standards to NEC?

**MR STEEL:** Again, I am happy to take that on notice.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, what is being done to address community feedback that on-board bus screens are too small, can be confusing and often lack audio announcements?

**MR STEEL:** Sorry, I did not hear the first part of the question, but I think it was something about the small screens, which I am assuming are the validators—the hardware within the buses.

**MR SPEAKER:** You can repeat the question, Miss Nuttall.

**MISS NUTTALL:** What is being done to address community feedback about the on-board bus screens, so the ones up the front, and the other—

**MR STEEL:** There are a range of aesthetic improvements that have been identified and raised with Transport Canberra, and those are being addressed and will be progressed through further improvements to the system. We are, obviously, prioritising measures that go directly to the functionality of the system at the moment, and then some of those other features, whether they are aesthetic or accessibility related, will be then rolled out in further updates to the software. I noted yesterday in my ministerial statement that there are some programmed updates that are due to occur in relation to some of the on-board screens, particularly as they relate to the live, real time information for customers as well. We will be continuing to respond to that customer feedback and making improvements to MyWay+ as the rollout and transition continues.

### **Sport and recreation—funding**

**MR EMERSON:** My question is to the Chief Minister, primarily in his capacity as the Minister for Tourism and Trade. I appreciate the commercial imperatives to boost Canberra's tourism and the government's efforts to build our city into a more dynamic and vibrant place, which is why it is disappointing to see such a large disparity in the funding afforded to our elite sporting codes. Earlier this year, we saw the near-collapse of Canberra United, which, thanks to community fundraising and a temporary injection from the government, has been able to stay afloat for another season. This was after Tillies fever rocked the nation, breaking national television records in 2023. While an interstate AFL team, the Greater Western Sydney Giants, receives around half a million in ratepayer dollars for each match it plays in the ACT, our only women's soccer team, which has produced more than its fair share of Matildas, receives a little over \$20,000 per game. Does the government see the writing on the wall for elite women's soccer in Canberra? When will the government seriously invest in elite women's soccer, both to encourage community sport participation and to support the growth of women's sport as a commercial product?

**Ms Orr:** On a point of order, I note that there were two questions asked. The first asked for an expression of opinion, and there was also a lot of preamble.

**MR SPEAKER:** I am not sure that it was, Ms Orr. I think that both ministers, who are contemplating which one will answer it, are quite happy to answer the question.

**MR BARR:** Most of the question is not in my portfolio areas, but I can answer in the context of the reference to tourism. I do not know the level of understanding that Mr Emerson will have about the nature of the commercial arrangements with the AFL and the Giants, but I can certainly correct for the record that the way he presented the match fee is not the nature of the commercial arrangements with the Giants—not to that quantum. There is a significant component of the government's partnership with the Giants that is not sport and recreation related but is indeed in the tourism context, and it relates to marketing Canberra in our biggest market, Sydney, in partnership

with the Giants and the AFL.

In relation to the other questions around viability of the W-League and Canberra United, there are obviously a considerable number of issues associated with professional football codes in Australia. Rugby Union and soccer are the least financially viable of the four. I think that is well understood.

**MR EMERSON:** Chief Minister, will the government similarly partner with Canberra United, lift its gaze beyond the current commercial dollars earned and develop an investment plan focused on the commercial potential of elite women's sport so that they can receive the level of funding that they deserve?

**MR BARR:** Certainly, the government, through sport and recreation, and through our National League Team Program, does support teams in national leagues. The commercial opportunity, I understand, could be there, but it is very strongly linked, of course, to broadcast arrangements and market reach. There is then another factor around the level of government funding; that is, broadly the ACT government does not want to be a whole owner of a sporting team. The cost of running a team in a national competition varies dramatically, depending on the sport, the number of players and the level of travel associated with a team's participation.

Of course, there are clearly significant differences in the level of media exposure in our key tourism markets. Brand Canberra, CBR, which you would all be familiar with, is the principal mechanism by which we seek to utilise jersey sponsorship, for example, to promote Canberra, and that is broadly consistent across a number of different sporting teams, whether they principally play their games in Canberra or, indeed, play only some of their games in Canberra.

I do not think that you can draw parallels between different sports or, indeed, the size of audiences. I have to fundamentally disagree with the direction of the question, because our decisions in relation to promotion of Canberra in our key interstate markets must necessarily be driven by their commercial returns and the capacity to reach key tourism markets, which is an entirely different proposition from supporting community sport or ACT teams in national league competitions.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Chief Minister, when will the government act on the sport sector's input to the government request in early 2023 relating to facilities upgrades, which revealed that 267 community sports facilities across the ACT are also in need of upgrades?

**MR BARR:** It does not really relate to the first question. It is not in my portfolio, but I will take that on notice for Miss Nuttall.

### **Ginninderra electorate—roads**

**MS BARRY:** My question is to the Minister for Planning. Minister, a number of constituents have raised concerns about traffic issues along Pro Hart Avenue, Drake Brockman Drive and William Hovell Drive. These are exacerbated by increased development at Ginninderra Estate and the single exit from Pro Hart Avenue onto Drake Brockman Drive. I expect it will be made even worse by upcoming roadworks.

Minister, what plans do you have to mitigate the traffic chaos experienced by my constituents?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question. This probably relates more to my transport planning portfolio but is very much tied to land use planning as well. We continue to work closely with the Suburban Land Agency, who are part of the joint venture in Ginninderry and the work that is being undertaken that Mr Barry alluded to, around upgrades to Drake Brockman Drive in particular, which will support the growing population in Ginninderry and provide an access point for them to William Hovell Drive.

The government—overseen by Minister Cheyne, who, as the Minister for City and Government Services, is responsible for roads, including new road infrastructure—has been investing in the infrastructure required to support those growing populations. The duplication of William Hovell Drive is a project that continues to be a commitment of the government to deliver—to provide that capacity for traffic that will eventually come onto that road from the growing areas of Ginninderry.

Of course, other road connections into Ginninderry will be required as well in the future, and a significant amount of planning work has been going on. I know that those proposals are active, in terms of the design and development approvals process, and I expect that construction will then follow to provide that augmentation that is needed for the community.

At the election, Labor brought plans forward to deliver a new rapid bus service, which would replace the small bus service that we delivered into Ginninderry through to Kippax early in the life of that suburb. This will also provide extra capacity on our transport network for those who want to use public transport.

**MS BARRY:** Minister, will you commit to prioritising the development of an alternative access road, given the single access road from Ginninderra Estate along Pro Hart Drive and the potential for risks in the upcoming fire season?

**MR STEEL:** Yes, there is transport planning underway looking at alternative access points. That work is continuing with the Suburban Land Agency and the joint venture partner, with a view to continue work to design those and get approvals for those alternative access points into the future developments and estates in Macnamara.

**MR CAIN:** How are you going to prevent even worse congestion in this area, given the upcoming years-long roadworks along Drake Brockman Drive and William Hovell Drive, and your promised decade of disruption?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question, even though, on the one hand, he is criticising us for not doing anything, but also then acknowledging that we are doing something in making significant road augmentations—

**Mr Cain:** A decade of disruption!

**MR STEEL:** Which do have a disruptive effect; there is no doubt about that. But they are necessary to provide the capacity on the road network to connect new

communities. That is the work that we are committed to doing. It will be disruptive. We will continue to work with the community and provide them with the communications they need to make sure that their travel around the transport network is as easy as possible. But those are important investments to provide the capacity to connect those growing communities. And, of course, we will continue to invest in public transport as well. That will also provide additional capacity for the transport network overall.

### **Domestic and family violence—Safer Families Levy**

**MS MORRIS:** My question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence. Minister, following the release of the Auditor-General's report on the Safer Families Levy, the ACT government said that, from 1 July 2024, the levy was almost entirely directed to frontline services. Minister, exactly what percentage of the levy is currently being directed to frontline services?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank the member. Thank you very much for giving me my first question in this place. The Auditor-General's report was released last week. The levy, over years, has matured in what it has funded. One of the discussions in the audit report went to the levy not funding any non-frontline ACT government employees. That was a decision that was made by the ACT government on 1 July. That does not necessarily mean it does not fund non-frontline services. Some of the programs that are funded through the levy include enhancing access to justice for non-English speakers. This is largely—

**MR SPEAKER:** Dr Paterson, could you take your seat. There is a point of order.

**Mr Cocks:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is on relevance. I thought the question was fairly clear. It was about the percentage of the levy currently dedicated to frontline services.

**MR SPEAKER:** Dr Paterson, I think there is a fair point in the point of order, because it was a fairly specific question on the percentage directed to frontline services. You have a minute to get to that answer.

**DR PATERSON:** I will take that question on notice.

**MS MORRIS:** Minister, why hasn't the government directed 100 per cent of the levy to frontline services?

**DR PATERSON:** The levy directs funds to domestic and family violence initiatives. From 1 July last year, the government decided to ensure that the levy was not funding any non-frontline ACT government employees. Because of this decision, the levy funds are now almost entirely committed to frontline services delivered by either the community sector or areas of government that directly provide victim services.

**MR SPEAKER:** A point of order, Mr Cocks?

**Mr Cocks:** A very similar point of order. This question was about why the government has not directed 100 per cent of the levy. It goes to something different.



**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Cocks, I do not know that there is a point of order. I think Dr Paterson is getting to the answer to that question.

**DR PATERSON:** These are some of the services, depending on your take on them, that are funded by the levy that would not necessarily be considered frontline services. There is the domestic and family violence information sharing scheme. This is a centralised training package for information sharing entities, which include our frontline service providers like police, Victim Support and the Domestic Violence Crisis Service. There is the Safer Families Collaboration, which has \$60,000 per annum for child and youth services to train child protection workers through their Safe and Together program. Responding to coercive control training is provided to frontline service providers like ACT Policing and our courts to better detect, assess and respond to coercive control. Section 8 of the budget papers clearly articulates where all of the funding for the levy is spent.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, has the government undertaken any analysis of the number of people turned away from frontline family and domestic violence services over the life of the levy? And, if so, how many have missed out on these important supports?

**DR PATERSON:** We know that there is a crisis of violence in our community. We hear stories all the time about how domestic and family violence victims are struggling to get the supports that they need. What we know is that the levy contributes about 20 per cent of whole-of-government funding that goes to addressing domestic and family violence. This is something that the government acknowledges is a significant problem. What we are trying to do is support the service sector to work with victim-survivors to address this problem.

**Mr Cocks:** Point of order. Again, it is on relevance. The question was very clearly about the number of people who have missed out on services over the life of the levy and any analysis provided to the government. I am not convinced that the minister got to that.

**MR SPEAKER:** I am not sure that she did either. Dr Paterson, I do not know whether you have finished or if you want to have a—

**DR PATERSON:** I do not have any more to add.

### **Planning and development—Hawker group centre**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Woolworths submitted an application for the direct sale of land at the Hawker Group Centre in March 2024. The government has started site studies about trees, engineering and geotechnical constraints, for strategic planning opportunities for this group centre, but the government has not released any of those studies. Many members of the community have asked me to put community interests ahead of the developer's interests and to make sure this process is transparent. Are you considering a market process for the site or are you only considering a direct sale to Woolworths?

**MR STEEL:** That advice has not been provided to me yet. I have provided extensive

information to Ms Clay in the previous term of the Assembly in relation to the process that we undertake in relation to direct sales. The point that we are up to is that I have not yet been provided advice on the direct sale application from the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate. I cannot answer the broader question that she has. I will be able to answer that after I have received the advice and will be able to make a decision.

**MS CLAY:** Will you publish the government's site studies about trees, engineering, geotechnical constraints and other issues?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question. I will have to seek advice on that. We are of course looking at the opportunities for the renewal of many of our shopping centres, including group centres, around Canberra. We are also looking at the opportunities for more housing as part of that process, consistent with the election commitment we brought forward around 'shop-top' housing, for example. We are looking at a range of different group centres at the moment. Hawker is just one of those. Other group centres are also included in due diligence work undertaken that would then inform future decisions. I am not sure of the status of that information, so I will not commit to providing it at this point in time.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, why would you not provide these government generated reports to the community for their information?

**MR STEEL:** Because it may inform a cabinet decision.

### **Education—building and construction courses**

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations. Minister, last week you announced additional free TAFE places for construction. How will this benefit our city and our economy?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I thank the member for the question. It is my first question as minister—so thank you. Last week I joined with the commonwealth minister for skills, Andrew Giles, to announce an additional 340 free TAFE places in construction, including 80 in pre-apprenticeships. This has been made possible by an additional \$1.5 million investment in the ACT's vocational education system and will make around a dozen construction-related qualifications and short courses available for eligible students.

Free TAFE reduces the barrier to entry to vocational education and encourages more people into the workforce, particularly in key sectors like our construction industry. This initiative will get more Canberrans into our construction workforce, with a particular focus on women, First Nations Australians, young people who have left school, jobseekers, unpaid carers, people with disability and veterans.

As the ACT's population grows, our city will need more housing, more schools and more civic infrastructure to ensure the ACT remains a great place to live and work. For students who take up the offer of free TAFE in construction will have plenty of work here in Canberra as we deliver against our \$14 billion infrastructure pipeline and build 30,000 more homes by 2030. Initiatives like free TAFE in construction will

ensure Canberrans get the valuable skills required to build the homes and community infrastructure that our growing city needs.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Minister, what other courses are available through free TAFE?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I thank the member for the question. There are a wide range of courses available, with a particular focus on areas of skills needs in the ACT. Free TAFE supports the health and care sectors by enabling students to have fee-free access to qualifications and courses like a diploma of early childhood education and care, a certificate IV in mental health, a certificate III in individual support, specialising in aged care or disability support. It also supports the tourism industry through offerings like a certificate III in hospitality, a diploma of travel and tourism and hospitality and compliance skills sets.

There are also opportunities in our key and emerging industries, including through a diploma and certificate IV or certificate III in information technology, a certificate IV in cybersecurity or a skills set in battery electric vehicle inspection and servicing. There are also courses to support core and specialist workplace skills, including literacy, numeracy, communication in the workplace and project management. I would encourage anyone interested to visit CIT's website to learn more.

**MS TOUGH:** Minister, have many people taken up the opportunity to enrol in free TAFE at CIT?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I thank the member for the supplementary. As you would expect, there has been very strong interest in free TAFE. Over the past two years, we have seen more than 3,700 enrolments. Further to the 340 construction places I recently announced, CIT will offer an additional 1,200 places in 2025 and another 1,200 places in 2026. We anticipate that there will be strong demand for these places, and I would once again encourage anyone interested to visit CIT's website to learn more and submit their application.

### **University of Canberra—governance**

**MISS NUTTALL:** My question is to the minister for education. Amid a wave of lay-offs for university staff, the University of Canberra is set to have their third interim vice-chancellor in under a year. This has come as a matter of significant concern to the ACT Greens, who have been backing the National Tertiary Education Union's call for a review into UC's governance.

I was encouraged to see the Chief Minister propose to the Auditor-General that he conduct a performance audit of UC's governance arrangements. Minister, will you commit to a review, in some form, of the governance of the University of Canberra in the near future?

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Barr, I understand you are taking this one.

**MR BARR:** For the benefit of members, higher education sits within my portfolio responsibilities—the university sector. I take the point of Miss Nuttall's question.

That is why we have already begun a number of processes. The University of Canberra itself will be undertaking further governance reviews. The chancellor will take such a proposal to the university council on Friday. They have already undertaken a number of reviews through calendar years 2023 and 2024, and I would, of course, remind members who were here in the last Assembly, and advise those who are new, that the government brought forward an amendment bill to University of Canberra governance in this calendar year, 2024. It did pass unanimously with the support of all members.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Chief Minister, have you met with the NTEU, or UC staff, directly to understand the support recently laid-off staff require?

**MR BARR:** I have had engagement with the NTEU, with the chancellor, with the last interim vice-chancellor and the incoming vice-chancellor in relation to the university's budget, its governance and the way forward for the University of Canberra.

**MS CLAY:** Have you made representations to the federal government for increased oversight of the university administration in light of these job cuts?

**MR BARR:** Yes, and, in fact, the ACT Labor position going into the election was that the governance reviews that would be necessary would include engagement and alignment with the federal governance reviews that the federal education minister, Jason Clare, is leading.

### **Crime—Kippax shopping centre**

**MS BARRY:** My question is to the minister for police. There has recently been a sharp increase in violence around the Kippax shopping centre, particularly at the end of the school day. I have heard from constituents who have been threatened and even had rocks thrown at them. The shopping centre have employed additional security, at significant expense to them, but this has not restored public confidence. What will you do, Minister, to protect residents of suburbs surrounding Kippax?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank the member for her question. ACT Policing do an incredible job in protecting our community. I can definitely provide that feedback to ACT Policing. I am also happy to go and chat to the Kippax shop owners about their experiences. We can see whether there is extra support that can be offered.

**MS BARRY:** Minister, will you agree to arrange a stronger, regular police presence around the shopping centre, to keep the community safe? I understand that you have committed to meeting with them, but would you make that commitment?

**DR PATERSON:** I cannot direct police on operational matters, but it is definitely feedback that I will raise with them, and I am very happy to hear their concerns myself.

**MS MORRIS:** Minister, will you agree to recruit more police officers than your predecessor did to enable better and more proactive policing across the ACT?

**DR PATERSON:** ACT Labor invested in the most resourcing of ACT police that there has ever been, in terms of increasing police numbers. I will get the exact budget number in terms of the number of ACT police that will be recruited. Ultimately, there will be about 107 new police officers recruited over the next five years. ACT Labor took an extra year commitment, to see more recruitment to our police. I have had the pleasure of attending recruitment ceremonies for both AFP and ACT Policing over the last couple of weeks. We have some pretty incredible new recruits coming into our system.

I think that ACT Policing is a fantastic place to work. It offers far more opportunities for our police than other jurisdictions, in terms of working nationally and internationally, and on very specific areas of crime prevention. I encourage anyone who is keen on a job in ACT Policing to go to their website. They have open recruitment. We have had full recruitment numbers, as well as sergeant recruitment, just over the last few weeks. I am very keen to keep talking about that.

### **Domestic and family violence—Safer Families Levy**

**MS MORRIS:** My question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence. Minister, in the Auditor-General's report on the Safer Families Levy, the Auditor-General confirmed that more than \$46 million has been raised since the levy was introduced in 2016. Minister, where did the \$46 million go?

**DR PATERSON:** The money went to the prevention of domestic and family violence.

**MS MORRIS:** Minister, why did it take eight years for the ACT government to direct revenue generated from the levy to frontline services when frontline family and domestic violence services have been crying out for more resources for years?

**DR PATERSON:** I reject that. If Ms Morris has read the Auditor-General's report, it is very clearly articulated in the appendix that money from the levy, from the very beginning, has always been provided to frontline services. What we also see in the budget papers of this year is that, actually, the levy funding is a small amount of the whole-of-government funding. That includes extra resourcing to domestic and family violence frontline services.

I very much appreciate the Auditor-General's report. There are four recommendations, and they very much speak to the ACT developing a strategy. That strategy has been really clearly articulated through expenditure from the levy, and I look forward to working on that.

**MS BARRY:** Minister, how much of the \$46 million granted from the Safer Families Levy was used to train public servants on domestic and family violence awareness?

**DR PATERSON:** The levy has funded multiple programs to train the frontline sector in their response to domestic and family violence. We have really committed to supporting the sector and to resourcing them to be able to work with our communities to better address this really complex issue—

**MR SPEAKER:** Dr Paterson, we have a point of order from Mr Cocks.

**Mr Cocks:** On relevance. Dr Paterson may not have heard the question properly, but the question was about how much was used to train public servants, not how much was used to train the sector.

**MR SPEAKER:** I think that there is relevance in the point of order, Dr Paterson, if it is possible for you to be relevant to the question.

**DR PATERSON:** I feel like I answered the question in a relevant way.

### **Planning and development—Ainslie Volcanics**

**MR RATTENBURY:** My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, despite community opposition and ecological values, the Territory Planning Authority has approved a development application for Indara to build a telecom facility on the site known as Ainslie Volcanics. Minister, what environmental studies were undertaken on the site to determine that the approved development will not impact the site's ecological values?

**MR STEEL:** I am happy to come back to the Assembly with some further information about that. Obviously, the broader Ainslie Volcanics area has also been subject to an application in relation to provisional registration as a place of heritage in the ACT. I am happy to come back with some specific information for the Assembly about that matter.

**MR SPEAKER:** That is taken on notice?

**MR STEEL:** Yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, did any ecological studies undertaken on the site take into consideration the significant efforts that community groups, such as Friends of Ainslie Volcanics Grasslands, have undertaken to restore the quality of native temperate grassland habitat?

**MR STEEL:** I am happy to come back in relation to whether the authority considered those matters and how they addressed them. I note that Mr Rattenbury is referring to the independent Territory Planning Authority. They obviously assess those at arms-length from me as minister. As minister, now under the new Planning Act 2023, I have no direct role in making decisions on planning applications or the conditions attached to them.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, have you received briefings from EPSDD or the Conservator of Flora and Fauna about environmental values on the site and environmental impacts from the proposed development?

**MR STEEL:** I have not received any direct advice that I am aware of at this point in time. However, I am aware of the heritage matter that I raised earlier in my answer.

**Mr Barr:** I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

## **Supplementary answers to questions without notice Crime—Kippax shopping centre**

**DR PATERSON:** I would just like to correct the record. It is recruitment of 150 police by 2029.

## **Transport Canberra—MyWay+**

**MR STEEL:** Yesterday in question time, Mr Cocks asked me about the API permissions attached to the MyWay+ app specifically relating to the Google Play Store. I can provide information to the Assembly that the MyWay+ app does not allow access to user photos or documents and does not share these files with third parties. The privacy statement on the Google Play Store was the default statement. It has now been updated to reflect the privacy conditions that were developed and have been in place for MyWay+ since its launch.

## **Child care—Genius Childcare Gowrie**

**MS TOUGH**(Brindabella) (2. 55): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) high quality early childhood education and care play a critical role in supporting children to learn and grow;
- (b) families deserve access to high quality, affordable early childhood education and care close to where they live and work;
- (c) the community expects providers of early childhood education and care to provide a good quality service;
- (d) early childhood educators and teachers are cherished by the children they teach and care for and trusted by parents;
- (e) employers are obligated to provide a safe workplace and pay their staff on time and in accordance with the law;
- (f) Genius Childcare operates five long-day care centres in the ACT, including a centre in Gowrie;
- (g) Genius Childcare Gowrie has let down its staff and the families it provides care to by not paying staff on time, not paying superannuation and not communicating with families and staff about the situation;
- (h) since Genius Childcare took over the operation of the Gowrie centre in early 2024, staff have reported issues of unpaid superannuation and not being paid on time, resulting in nearly all employees resigning, with the majority ending employment on Friday, 6 December 2024;
- (i) at least 48 families of the approximately 100 have withdrawn their children from care at Genius Childcare Gowrie in the past month;
- (j) in the lead up to Christmas, the staff and families have been placed under immense stress not knowing what will happen after 6 December 2024;

- (k) staff and parents have been contacting the Fair Work Ombudsman, the Australian Taxation Office and the Children's Education and Care Services regulator to report the issues; and
  - (l) the ACT Government has set up a hotline to assist families and educators to find alternative care and employment options in surrounding centres in the Tuggeranong region;
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) support the staff and families of Genius Childcare Gowrie, and other Genius Childcare centres that may be facing similar situations;
  - (b) promote the hotline to assist families and educators;
  - (c) work with other regulators to ensure Genius Childcare is complying with its obligations to the community;
  - (d) work with state, territory and Commonwealth Governments on the improvements to the regulatory framework to prevent similar situations arising in the future here or across Australia; and
  - (e) report back to the Assembly by the end of the first sitting week of 2025; and
- (3) calls on Genius Childcare to:
- (a) ensure all current and previous staff are paid any owed wages, superannuation and other entitlements, and continue to pay staff in accordance with all laws;
  - (b) provide a safe environment for staff and families; and
  - (c) pay all suppliers, past and present, any outstanding amounts, and continue to pay suppliers on time.

This motion is an important motion, as it recognises that what should be a trusted service provider in our community, a childcare centre, has failed its employees and the families it cares for.

High quality, accessible and affordable early childhood education and care plays a critical role in supporting children to learn and grow and provides trusted support to these families who access these centres. In these centres, early childhood educators and teachers are invaluable members of the community and are both cherished by the children they teach and trusted by the parents.

Genius Childcare is a national childcare service operating centres across six jurisdictions in Australia, including five centres here in Canberra, with three in my electorate of Brindabella. These centres are Bonython, Conder, Gowrie, Gungahlin and Symonston. Genius took over the operation of these centres from the G8 earlier this year, with some reports that the centres were handed over with money from the G8 rather than actually being purchased by Genius. It has been reported to me that in a number of these centres there has been nothing but trouble since that takeover.

Although employers are obligated under law to provide their employees with proper pay and a safe working environment, recent events have demonstrated that these essential staff are being grossly neglected, and it is evident that more must be done to ensure proper pay and working environments for these educators. With a background



in industrial relations, I am outraged that there are businesses here that are not paying their workers properly and on time and are creating an unsafe environment in which children are being cared for.

Since Genius took over the operation of the Gowrie centre in early 2024, numerous employees have reported that their pay and superannuation have been withheld past the agreed date of payment. There have been staff who have been paid late and there has been the non-payment of super. This is just not acceptable. We are now in a position where nearly all the educators and teachers at Gowrie have resigned, with the majority set to end their unemployment this Friday 6 December. All that the management can tell the parents is that there are a couple of staff who will be continuing on next week and they will get in some agency casual staff to help. This means that parents may be turning up to drop off their children next week only to be told, “We are already full, we have met the ratio and we cannot take your kids today.” But parents will not know that until Monday, which is just an unacceptable situation from this provider.

This situation has resulted not only in the loss of employment for members in our community who felt powerless to do otherwise but also in half the 100 families of Gowrie withdrawing their children from the centre’s care in the past month, because they are worried that there will be no care if they turn up next week and they are getting on the front foot in finding alternative care arrangements for their kids. These are troubling numbers. There are huge numbers of families, right at Christmas time and as the holiday season approaches, trying to find more care for their kids—and it is hard at this time of year. I have a four-year-old. He starts pre-school next year. If we were told now that there was no care for the next couple of weeks, it would be an impossible situation, because I could not find care for him for a few weeks before starting a new centre—and I know that there are a lot of parents in this boat.

There are a lot of parents whose kids are only a year away from pre-school and who do not want to go through the upheaval of going to a new centre when there is not long until they will be transitioning to pre-school and school. There are staff who, at this time of the year, do not have a job and do not have money coming in and there are those who are still there being paid late, right as Christmas approaches. They want to be spending time with their families, not having to worry about paying their mortgage or the rent.

On Monday evening, the ABC broke the story, having been in contact with parents at Gowrie for the last couple of weeks. The ABC reported that on Monday the Symonston centre was forced to close because most of the staff called in sick with a medical certificate for stress leave because they had not been paid. This then caused a flow-on effect with the centres in Bonython and Conder being short staffed—but it did result in the staff from Symonston being paid. A Gowrie employee reported that they did not think that staff at some of the centres in Canberra had ever been paid on time—and I have heard rumours that educators at the Conder centre have also had issues with their pay being late and issues with super. This employee at Gowrie estimated that the departing staff will be owed annual leave entitlements of over \$20,000. That is a huge amount of entitlements that are possibly not going to be paid to employees right before Christmas.

The staff are experiencing high levels of stress. They are unable to pay for their rent and their groceries, despite contacting management multiple times through numerous means. They are just being ignored and they have not heard back. There is a complete lack of communication. Genius, according to the ABC report, blamed a technical area and some payroll problems. After months and months it seems ridiculous that it is still just a technical issue, meaning pays are happening late. One parent phoned earlier today and told me that the staff report that, every time they get paid, the money going into their account is coming from a different bank account. So it is not even consistent who is paying them, let alone being paid on time.

We know this is not just isolated to the ACT. Earlier this year in June, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported staff across the country had been paid up to five days late on multiple occasions, with super not being paid on time—in some cases taking more than six months. Genius never gave notice for the late payments, nor gave an explanation, creating financial hardship for a lot of these employees.

In the past month I have had a number of parents from Genius Gowrie reach out and contact me, share their stories and pass on the stories of staff in these centres. It is not just issues around the staff being paid; I have heard of providers of gardening and cleaning services not being paid for their services either. So the reputation is getting around that, if you provide a service to this childcare centre, you are likely not going to get your bills paid. In some cases, the staff themselves have had to pay out of pocket to local businesses to get some tasks done. There was one example where the cleaning services were not being paid, resulting in the employees having to empty the sanitary bins and the nappy bins. These bins had been left there for so long they were full of mould and flies, which is breaching work health and safety regulations, creating an unsafe workplace for these staff and an unsafe environment for kids to be in. Frequently, staff ended up vomiting after this exposure because it was just so disgusting.

There was another example at Gowrie where there was a window broken at the centre, creating a hazard for staff and children. When the window was replaced, Gowrie did not pay the builder who replaced it, meaning that one of the staff members eventually paid it out of pocket and was never reimbursed by Genius. The staff had to do the general cleaning and gardening all the time until they personally paid a local gardener to do it for them, because this was on top of their ordinary duties.

When staff were not being paid on time, a lot of the parents were bringing in resources for the centre. Some educators were bringing in resources they paid for out of their own pockets. Staff were getting lifts with each other. They were carpooling. They were buying food for each other, because there were staff members who were being paid so late they could not actually afford their own groceries. Particularly during a cost-of-living crisis, it was just awful to hear that some had to cancel medical appointments and some did not purchase vital medicines.

Throughout these events, the staff and the parents have been contacting the Fair Work Ombudsman, the tax office and the regulator, the Children's Education Care Services, to report the issues. I have made an online anonymous report to the Fair Work Ombudsman about it. I have written about it to our local federal member, David Smith, who made a 90-second statement in the House of Reps last week. I know that

there has been contact with my fellow member for Brindabella, Mr Parton, the Speaker. My concerns were passed onto the Fair Work Ombudsman, and I have had a response from them. Concerns have been raised with the federal early childhood minister and I have written to Minister Berry and her office—and I thank her for writing to the parents who have been in contact.

In response, the ACT government has set up a hotline to assist the families to find alternative care, and to assist the educators who are without jobs or are looking at quitting their jobs to get new employment in the Tuggeranong region. We do actually have a shortage of childcare educators in Brindabella and across Canberra. So there are jobs for these people. We just need to help them find a provider that is actually going to pay them and look after them.

I do not want to see another ABC childcare situation happening here in Canberra or across the country. There are hundreds of families here in Canberra who rely on Genius to provide education to and care for their children, and there will be thousands of families across the country affected if Genius goes under. There is a centre in Melbourne that has been taken to court. There have been underpayments and late payments in Perth. A few months ago, Symonston nearly closed because the rent had not been paid. These do not sound like the actions of a business following its obligations.

This motion is calling on the ACT government to support the staff and families of Genius in Gowrie and other Genius childcare centres around Canberra that may be in a similar situation. We can do this by promoting the hotline, reaching out to families and helping them to make sure that we do not have a situation where these providers go under with nowhere for these kids to go. I am calling on the childcare regulating authorities across the country—it works under a national law, so each jurisdiction has a law that mirrors the others—the states, territories and the commonwealth to work together to make sure we do not have situations where we know providers are doing bad things but they just never reach the threshold for the regulators to intervene and stop them acting in such bad faith.

I want to make sure that we do not have another ABC. I feel for the families of Gowrie and for Genius across Canberra. I know it is an awful situation. But, if we can learn something from what is happening in Gowrie and stop that happening at the other centres and stop that happening around the country, I think that is important. We need to look at how Genius is operating, and we need to step in and make sure this cannot happen again.

I am calling on Genius to pay their current and previous staff members all owed wages, super and any other entitlements, in accordance with all laws. It is clear that they have failed their staff and they have failed the families through the lack of pay and the lack of super and by providing an unsafe work environment and an unsafe situation for the families. I want to make sure that everyone is safe, that everyone is looked after and that we never have a situation where we have a collapse in child care.

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (3.07): I rise to respond to this motion, both as shadow minister responsible for workplace relations and as a father who relied on child care for years. The motion before us today goes to the emergency situation at Genius

Childcare. It is a situation which Mr Parton spoke to during his adjournment yesterday and which he has been taking commendable carriage of on our side and fighting for as a local member. I have to say that I was absolutely astounded and shocked when he first brought this to my attention: staff not being paid, highly concerning business practices, families losing their child care, and a regulator apparently unable to get things fixed and make things right.

The Canberra Liberals will be supporting this motion. But I think it is important to note that, on a technical level, section (3) of this motion does not necessarily have the power to compel action. I am not sure we have the power to call on a private company for an inquiry or to force it into action. So, while we absolutely support the intention of this, we acknowledge that it may not be practical and we may not see action from this company.

The situation that has arisen is absolutely astounding to me. I am a passionate supporter of the power of business to do good in the community, so it pains me doubly when we see bad behaviour like this, and this is happening in one of Australia's most regulated industries. It should not be able to happen. Employees deserve to be paid fairly for their work. It is a simple statement of fact. During the cost-of-living crisis that we face now, families are already stretched. They deserve to be able to see the care that they are paying for, and parents want to know that their children are getting the best care possible at the same time.

Let's be honest: if a business cannot take responsibility for paying its staff, how can we trust it to take care of our kids? This situation has clearly gone on for too long and it has reached an absolute critical point. There have been numerous red flags that the federal government has failed to address. However, as Mr Parton pointed out in his adjournment speech yesterday, there is a local regulator under the Education Directorate. It is important to consider whether the regulatory framework in the ACT is sufficient and what we can do, as a parliament, to strengthen it.

Genius, the provider at the centre of this crisis, seems to have done very little to support the affected families—largely, it seems, due to their reluctance to accept responsibility. But we also need to ask whether the ACT government has done enough.

Finally, it is important to think about how we can ensure that this situation never happens again. Ms Tough referred to ABC Childcare, which hangs over the top of all of this. I absolutely pay tribute to those in the federal public service who were left trying to mop up the mess. Many of my friends were involved. It took months, it took lots of money and it should not have happened, and we cannot afford to get into the same position again.

I really want to thank Mr Parton again for his adjournment speech yesterday and for his continued advocacy on behalf of the families and the staff involved. As I said, the Canberra Liberals will be supporting this motion.

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (3.11): I would like to begin by saying that, as both the ACT Greens education spokesperson and a member for Brindabella, the ACT Greens will be supporting this motion. The behaviour of Genius Childcare has been deeply concerning. One of the biggest issues I have been fighting for in this Assembly

is to improve the treatment of early childhood educators. It is an underpaid, unseen and deeply undervalued field.

There is clearly more work to be done here in the Assembly, and there is certainly more work to be done at the federal level to improve the pay and conditions for early childhood education and care workers. However, this kind of complete mismanagement by the private sector drives home how poorly the early childhood education and care sector is treated.

I want to give Ms Tough credit for bringing this motion forward, as it is simply good local member work to bring attention to this issue. I am a little concerned that this has had to come from a backbench member of the same Labor Party that holds the education portfolio both here in the ACT and federally, and it has for a while. I do understand that this is a difficult situation, particularly with the intersection between federal and territory issues, and I really do appreciate Minister Berry briefing us on the federal context for the Gowrie Genius Childcare situation.

The Labor government has held the education portfolio since well before the issue with Genius Childcare emerged. It is worth asking: is this a systemic problem, a symptom of a lack of oversight or a loophole that we should identify and close? We need an approach where early childhood regulators have enough teeth to prevent situations like this from happening and do not just respond to a crisis when it arises.

There are so many early childhood education providers doing an awesome job, especially in the not-for-profit sector. I would hate for their diligence to be devalued by other less scrupulous providers who are able to play the system. As it stands, I am concerned that, despite this worthy motion, federal and ACT legislation and regulation, as written, will allow the situation to happen again in the future.

I support every part of this motion. I certainly condemn the behaviour of Genius Childcare. Considering the resources available to the Labor government, I hope to see a proposal with even more teeth to prevent something like this from happening in the future. My thoughts are with the staff and families impacted by the poor management of Genius Childcare, and I sincerely hope the Labor government continues to prioritise their needs.

The staff deserve to be paid. What do you do if you cannot afford to pay for rent, groceries or medication? That is the situation that some staff are finding themselves in. What do parents and carers do if they have to work or study and rely on the centre to teach and care for their children? Do they take the day off and forego pay until they can find another centre? We have a cost-of-living crisis. People actually might not have that money. That is the situation that we are in. As usual, this will disproportionately impact people on a low income. As a government, there is a responsibility to be there for them.

Everyone deserves to be looked after. This includes any employees staying with Genius Childcare who potentially face massive challenges meeting work ratios and other work health and safety obligations. I am worried about the people who might not be able to afford to leave. The worst possible outcome from this entire affair would be if the hardworking employees of Genius Childcare, who are absolutely

victims in this whole situation, were left feeling unwelcome in a field that so badly needs people with their skills and passion.

As much as I do appreciate the efforts being made by the Labor government to ensure that both staff and families have new childcare centres made available to them, I do not want to discount the difficulty that goes with needing to change your place of employment on such short notice and under such unpleasant circumstances.

The ACT Greens will be supporting this motion. In particular, we will be holding Labor to their commitment to work with the state, territory and Commonwealth governments to improve the regulatory framework in order to prevent similar situations from arising here or across Australia.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (3.15): I am most pleased that this motion is before the chamber, because it is an exceptionally important issue. I thank Ms Tough for bringing it forward in the form of a motion. As a local member, I have been having conversations with parents and staff about this issue for many weeks. Many of those conversations are related to the centre at Gowrie. The overwhelming sentiment from those who have contacted me is that we are about to see a very bad outcome in this centre and potentially in the other four.

It is not as though we could not see this coming from a long way off. It is not often that you will see Liberal members in this place stand and quote the United Workers Union, but that is exactly what I am going to do today. I refer to correspondence from Mr Jack Johnson, an industrial officer with the United Workers Union based in Melbourne. On 28 May this year, Mr Johnson wrote to the management of Genius Education Holdings and he pointed out that, on multiple occasions, Genius had paid staff up to five days late, in contravention of clause 18 of the teachers award, and that Genius had not made contributions to superannuation funds, in accordance with section 116 of the Fair Work Act.

This correspondence referred to Genius nationally. It does not necessarily refer to the ACT, but it certainly would not surprise me if we were included in this. The problems concerning Genius have been apparent for a long time. Maya wrote to me early in November and said, very simply, “My children attend daycare at Gowrie. Their educators have not been paid on time. They are good people.” No-one is disputing the fact. I have been there and met them, and they are wonderful salt-of-the-earth people who are at the core of providing services. Maya said, “I am a concerned parent, because many of our cherished educators are leaving because of this.”

Some staff have contacted me about their superannuation entitlements, which, by and large, have not been paid this year, according to them. Another staff member told me that, when the centre was first transferred, “My colleagues had to do all the cleaning five days a week,” as was suggested by Ms Tough earlier. She went on to say, “Educators were not given any budget to buy much-needed resources for the centre. Soon our educators began to go out and buy their own resources for the centre. Parents have also been kind enough to donate any clean and safe resources that they do not use anymore.” These resources were needed for the centre to remain compliant in national Quality Area 1. Apparently, they did remain compliant, but it was because of the generosity of parents and staff.

As stated yesterday, I have written to and have had conversations with the ACT minister with responsibility in this area, Ms Berry, and she has been most helpful. She arranged a briefing with the ACT regulator, who explained the framework around which they are operating. I have written to Genius Childcare demanding some changes in the way that they are acting as an employer. There has been no response. I have met with the federal member for Bean, Mr Smith, and, as was noted by Ms Tough, he made a statement in the federal parliament about this situation, and we all welcomed that. I have also written to the Fair Work Commission and have expressed my frustration to the ACT regulator.

I can tell you, Mr Assistant Speaker Cain, that, since my adjournment speech yesterday afternoon, I have been contacted by quite a number of parents, staff and former staff, and their stories are very similar. One of the most pressing issues is Genius's apparent failure to comply with the mandated superannuation contributions. This lack of compliance has affected ACT services since the beginning of the year, but it is my understanding that employees of the company across Australia are also experiencing problems in that space.

There are serious questions being asked about the original deal between G8 and Genius. There are major questions about the oversight within our regulatory framework. As we debate this motion today, the question needs to be asked: is the framework sufficient? I think the very clear answer is no; it is not.

We also need to talk about the treatment of employees. Multiple informants have suggested to me that there were threats—not necessarily physical threats but threats about continuation of employment or otherwise—made against staff for raising legitimate concerns about non-payment of superannuation and non-payment of wages. A number of staff members from across Canberra are now communicating with the likes of me, Ms Tough, journalists and others, but they do point out that, in the first instance, they sought to address their concerns with management. They did the right thing but did not get the result that they were looking for. The responses from management have ranged from being outrightly dismissive to threatening staff for daring to raise these issues. This is rubbish, isn't it?

Through all of this I note that Genius is putting on a brave front. I will present their side of the story. Debbie Hale from Genius sent a letter to Gowrie parents in the past week detailing the company's commitment to the wellbeing of the children and acknowledged some staffing issues. I guess, if 16 of your 18 staff resign, you would describe that as a staffing issue, wouldn't you? The letter speaks of meaningful and positive change at the centre. Pretty much all of the staff have resigned. Sixteen of the 18 will finish up on Friday. The communique speaks of the opportunities that are created by that staff turnover and that there are new educators apparently commencing on Monday.

I feel for everyone who has been affected by this situation. I am here to support all who have been impacted. I thank Ms Tough for bringing forward this motion in her first sitting week, and we, the Canberra Liberals, will be supporting this motion.

**MR PETTERSSON** (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries,

Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (3.21): I would like today to speak briefly in support of the motion and express my relief at the collective support that we are witnessing in the chamber today for addressing corporate misconduct. I only hope that this enthusiasm continues throughout the term and that this is not a one-off.

It is distressing to hear of families and workers in this situation, particularly so close to the holiday season. Protecting workers will always be a priority for the ACT Labor government. In this particular instance, the industrial relations matters relating to timely payment of salaries and alleged non-payment of superannuation largely fall within the commonwealth's jurisdiction. It has been entirely appropriate that the impacted staff and parents have been in contact with relevant commonwealth agencies, including the Fair Work Ombudsman for pay matters and the Australian Taxation Office for superannuation.

The ACT Labor government is committed to doing what we can to protect workers and ensure good, fair working conditions. That is why we are progressing with initiatives like expanding portable long service leave, ensuring we have a robust workers compensation scheme and delivering our secure employment framework, which largely comprises three components: secure workforce conversion, to provide permanency to workers where we can; our insourcing framework, to provide more secure employment for workers delivering public services; and our commitment to ensuring our workers receive the same pay for the same job.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (3.23): The ACT government will be supporting Ms Tough's motion in the Legislative Assembly today, and I thank her for bringing this issue to the attention of the chamber. It is an important issue, and I have been pleased to see so many people involved in the conversation.

I, like everybody else, have been absolutely appalled to hear reports from staff of Genius Childcare services of unpaid wages and superannuation, as well as reports of unpaid rent and invoices. Early childhood educators in the ACT deserve better. Our families deserve better. Our youngest citizens deserve better. Genius Childcare needs to be up-front with the community, ensure staff receive all of their lawful entitlements and put the interests of children first.

I want to be clear: the issues that we are debating today are not at all the fault of the professional, dedicated and caring educators and staff at Genius Childcare services. These educators and staff have been let down by their employer and treated with a lack of basic respect. A lack of respect for a highly qualified, vital workforce is absolutely disgraceful behaviour. I understand, and I empathise with their frustrations.

I have written to my federal, state and territory colleagues, seeking their assistance to ensure that all relevant regulators at all levels of government are cooperating to ensure that Genius Childcare is complying with all of its obligations. I encourage staff with concerns about industrial matters to contact their union, the United Workers Union, in the very first instance. If they have complaints around pay and conditions, they can



also contact the Fair Work Ombudsman. For complaints around unpaid superannuation, they should contact the Australian Taxation Office. Anyone who has concerns relating to the health and safety or wellbeing of children while they are being educated and cared for in early childhood education and care services should contact the Children's Education and Care Assurance, otherwise known as CECA.

I want to refer members of the Assembly to the national law. The national law is the regulation that all early childhood services are obliged to comply with. Our regulator in the ACT, as with regulators across the country, focuses on child safety and wellbeing. CECA is actively doing risk audits and, almost daily, is visiting Genius centres across the ACT.

I again remind everybody that it is not the early childhood educators' fault that these kinds of investigations are occurring. We know that they are under significant pressure, under these extraordinary circumstances, which have been created completely beyond their control. As I said, I am angry and frustrated, too. The regulator cannot consider all these other circumstances, but I will come back to that in a moment.

The issues that we are debating today demonstrate what happens when players in the early childhood education and care market do not have the best interests of the children as their primary focus. It exemplifies the issues within Australia's current market-driven model of early childhood education, and now the Canberra community is paying the price.

These issues were also highlighted in the recent federal Productivity Commission and ACCC inquiries. After many decades in the sector, during which sector employees have fought for this recognition, and following what I had hoped this country would never have to go through again, with the operations of ABC early childhood centres, I hope that we can have a conversation around what needs to occur within this market-driven system to make sure that this does not happen again. Early childhood education and care should never be about profit; it is all about children's learning and development. It is that simple. It is about brain-building. It is about supporting parents back into the workforce, if they choose, and it is about relieving families of financial stress. That is why ACT Labor has started phasing in three-year-old preschool, because we get it.

There is clearly more work to do to respond to the market failures in the early childhood education and care sector and stop it from ever happening again. For these reasons, today I also wrote to the federal government, asking for a national conversation around options for policy responses to respond to these challenges, including consideration of amendments to improve the national law regulatory framework. I want to ensure that children, not profits, sit at the heart of early childhood education and care.

Regulators need to be able to take swift action against approved providers who do not operate in the best interests of staff, children and families. I am committed to driving this work nationally and I will continue to advocate for that work to occur. It is a place I have always worked in, prior to working here in the Legislative Assembly. I am so happy that now, here in the Assembly today, we are seeing a united front

being shown by all members of this place. It surely warms the cockles of my heart.

To make it easier for community members to find information relevant to their circumstances, the ACT government has established a hotline that community members can call. I encourage members of this place to push that number to people who contact them, so that they can get the best possible advice on the situation that they may be experiencing. That number is 6205 2076.

I have also asked the Education Directorate to work with local services to understand their capacity to accommodate additional children. As information on the capacity of surrounding services is collated, it will be made available to hotline staff to ensure that parents can be provided with the most up-to-date information.

I will continue to work with my Assembly colleagues, the early childhood education and care sector, the United Workers Union, and my ministerial colleagues in other jurisdictions to address the immediate issues with Genius Childcare. I will also advocate for a future where every child has access to high quality early learning and the benefits that come from it.

Before I finish, I want to note that I, too, would like to see our regulator be able to consider all the other circumstances that are involved in the behaviour that this particular employer has shown. At the moment, their regulation powers go to the welfare and safety of children, and they cannot take into account all the other workforce issues that are being experienced by workers within these early childhood centres. That is the national conversation that I want to have. All these other circumstances must mean that the employer is held to account; that the owner of the services who is profiting from this work is held to account for the way they are delivering early childhood education and care within the ACT.

As I said, I will absolutely hold my hand to my heart and continue to advocate for this work to continue at a national level. As I said, I am so grateful that there is such support in this place. I appreciate and thank Caitlin for bringing this issue to the Assembly today. I appreciate and acknowledge the work that Mr Parton has done, as well as Miss Nuttall from the Greens, and also Taimus.

I know that everybody is deeply concerned about what is happening regarding this particular employer and the way that they are treating their employees and citizens of our community. We simply must continue to advocate for change and call on this centre to be held to account, regardless of whether we have the power to do it or not. As a community, as people and as legislators in this town, I say that our citizens deserve more, and we will continue to work towards that.

**MS MORRIS** (Brindabella) (3.32): I wish to speak very briefly in support of Ms Tough's motion and to thank her for bringing this to the attention of the Assembly.

As a mother with a young child, I understand how difficult it can be to leave your child in the care of other people. To do so requires a great level of trust between the parents, the childcare provider and their staff. Parents deserve to have the peace of mind that the environment in which they place their children is safe and supportive and working in the best interests of children and staff. Staff deserve to have the peace

of mind that their wellbeing is being looked after by their employer.

The events that we have seen transpire at five Genius Childcare centres in Canberra, including in my electorate, is a breach of that trust and it cannot go unaccounted. Parents have been betrayed; children have been betrayed; and, importantly, staff and contractors have also been betrayed. The staff at Genius Childcare centres have dedicated their time, their efforts and their goodwill to the children in their care without being given what they have rightly earned. The cost of living is getting very hard for so many families, especially in my electorate. But just imagine trying to feed your family and pay your bills when you have not been paid for days, weeks or maybe even months on end. The Genius Childcare centre has committed an offence against its workers and contractors and the families who trusted them with the care of their children. So I say to them: give the workers their dues.

I thank my colleague Mr Parton for the tremendous work that he has done to get to the bottom of this, and I thank Ms Tough for bringing this motion forward today.

**MS TOUGH** (Brindabella) (3.34), in reply: I want to acknowledge the support for this motion from across the chamber. It has been wonderful to see my fellow members for Brindabella from all parties showing support for the workers and the families of Genius Childcare and for this motion. I know my colleague Mr Werner-Gibbins is also in support, but is unable to be in the chamber this afternoon due to family commitments. I appreciate the work of Minister Berry and Minister Pettersson, and it is heartening to hear that Minister Berry agrees that we need to change the power of the regulators and work to make sure they can consider more things than just the safety of children in a very narrow context, to stop these situations from happening again.

These business practices are concerning and need investigating. I am optimistic that, with all the reports being made to the multiple regulators, including CECA, here in the ACT, the Fair Work Ombudsman, and the ATO, something will come of this and Genius will be investigated. With all these reports, it is something that must happen, because we must prevent this situation from occurring again anywhere else in the early childhood education sector.

Where we know that business operators with questionable track records are acquiring services, we need to be able to prevent that from happening and prevent having to watch the downward spiral of those centres. If we know that a questionable service provider wants to come into our jurisdiction and purchase services, there should be powers to step in and say, “No; we know in six months or 12 months that that centre will be in an awful state and the families will not have care and educators will not have a job.” We need to be able to step in.

Fundamentally, employees should be paid their entitlements on time and correctly. For an employer, the most basic part of running a business is ensuring that their employees are paid correctly and on time. We all expect that, when we go to work, we will be paid—and it is deeply concerning that this is not happening. Everyone has the right to work in a safe environment and children should be cared for in a safe environment. As a mother, the thought of leaving my child somewhere where they might not be safe terrifies me. From speaking to so many parents from Genius Gowrie,

I know that they are so worried.

I had a conversation with a mother at lunch time today and we talked about how you go into a centre when you are working out care for your child and sometimes you just get a gut feeling and go, “This one is not for me today.” We spoke about how my son nearly ended up in a centre that is now run by Genius, but it just was not really the right fit. We just have those feelings. She has been with this centre for over five years with multiple children and she thought she would see all her children through this centre, because it was a wonderful centre before Genius took over. It is very stressful for her now that she is looking at moving two of her children.

I am really worried about the children of Gowrie and the other centres, going forward. If Gowrie does have new educators starting on Monday, like they claim, where is the handover for children’s needs? What about the kids with allergies or additional needs? What if those educators have questions about a child’s medical plan or a child’s allergy plan? Who is there to actually ask about the child? If a child is having a meltdown and not having a good time at drop off, who is there to support the new educators and go, “Yes; this is how that child is every day,” or “No; this is completely out of character, and we should be caring extra for this child”? How do families feel supported at drop off? How do they know that this is going to be right for their families? But, in saying that, how do they have time to find new care right before Christmas if things are going to get even worse?

I want to particularly thank Liz, Courtney, Craig and Jess for reaching out with their stories, for the incredible amount of information they have shared with me and for sharing the stories of others at Gowrie. They have provided me written stories from many of the educators and some of the contractors, and I just really want to thank them and the other parents for reaching out. I also thank the government. Thank you, Minister Berry, for setting up the hotline for affected families and staff.

In conclusion, I want to say that my thoughts are with the educators, the staff and the families at Genius Gowrie and the other centres across Canberra, and even across Australia, because who knows what is happening in those centres, too. I commend the motion and thank everyone for their support.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Domestic and family violence—Safer Families Levy**

**MS MORRIS**(Brindabella) (3.39): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) community safety, including addressing domestic and family violence, is a core responsibility of the ACT Government;
- (b) domestic and family violence is one of the key drivers of demand for ACT Policing services;
- (c) in 2022-23, there were 1,412 reports of family violence related assaults, representing 44 percent of all assault related offences reported to ACT

Policing;

- (d) when the Safer Families Levy was introduced in 2016, the ACT Government claimed it would partially fund initiatives to tackle domestic and family violence;
  - (e) since its inception, the levy has raised more than \$46 million;
  - (f) since the levy's inception, frontline family and domestic violence services have continued to draw attention to the critical need for more resources;
  - (g) the ACT Auditor-General's Performance Audit Report on the Safer Families Levy found that the ACT Government's administration of the levy lacked transparency, accountability and strategic planning;
  - (h) the ACT Auditor-General made four recommendations to improve transparency, accountability, communication and strategic planning of the levy; and
  - (i) the ACT Government claims that, from 1 July 2024, no non-frontline ACT Government employees are funded from the levy; and
- (2) calls on the Government to:
- (a) implement all the recommendations outlined by the ACT Auditor-General;
  - (b) provide evidence to the Legislative Assembly that no money generated through the Safer Families Levy has been directed to other areas of government service and administration;
  - (c) establish a discrete fund, separate from consolidated revenue, for the receipt, management and reporting of all activity related to the levy;
  - (d) set out the income and expenses of that fund during the Budget process to ensure transparency and accountability;
  - (e) develop a comprehensive and long-term strategy to guide the ACT's commitment to ending domestic, family, and sexual violence in collaboration with relevant community sector stakeholders; and
  - (f) report back to the Assembly on progress by the last sitting day of April 2025.

I rise today in an attempt to correct a terrible wrong that has been inflicted on some of the most vulnerable people in our community. It is a wrong that has left women and children in harm's way and has amplified the stress of frontline responders who, at the best of times, must navigate a traumatic work environment.

I am speaking of the ACT government's failure to administer the multimillion-dollar Safer Families Levy with transparency and accountability or in a strategic, evidence-based manner. The Safer Families Levy was supposed to help people escaping family and domestic violence. It is a well-meaning initiative, and it was accepted in good faith by the opposition, because we recognise that keeping the community safe is one of the most fundamental duties of government.

Since its inception in 2016, the levy has raised more than \$46 million from ACT ratepayers. While many households have struggled with rising cost-of-living pressures, I believe that this levy was, overwhelmingly, something that family budgets were

willing to sustain. We have all heard the harrowing stories of women and children who live in fear or who have had their lives cut short by wicked acts of violence, at the hands of someone who, in the natural order of things, should love and protect them.

Canberrans have been willing to do their small part to help stamp out the threat of domestic violence for our community. After eight years and a damning audit report, we now have to ask the \$46 million question: where has all the money gone?

I thank the ACT Auditor-General for his comprehensive performance audit report on the Safer Families Levy. This report confirmed what many in the sector had feared and had tried to voice over the years. Many families escaping violence in their home have not been served well by the levy. As YWCA Canberra CEO Francis Crimmins said, the question they kept asking themselves was: why are we turning women away when millions a year is accrued in the name of this levy?

Families at risk of violence have been denied lifesaving services because those on the front line have not been provided with the resources they need. I do not believe there was any malicious intent on the part of the government or the former minister to deny vulnerable women on the front line, or frontline responders, the financial support they desperately needed. I suspect this was more likely the result, perhaps, of carelessness, a failure to listen to community sector stakeholders, a failure to hear the evidence or to apply due diligence with regard to transparency and accountability. Nonetheless, a terrible wrong has been committed, and it is our duty in this chamber to set it right.

I note that the ACT government say that, as of 1 July 2024, “funds are now almost entirely committed to frontline services”. What they do not say is how much “almost entirely” constitutes. Is it 80 per cent of total funds or 90 per cent? Furthermore, they are asking us to trust them that now, after eight years of raising revenue, years of opposition probing and community sector prodding, we can rest assured that the money is going to those who need it. While we in this room would like to take the government at their word, we owe it to every woman and child attempting to escape violence to demand better. We need more than assurances. We need hard-as-wood proof that the millions of dollars that this levy reaps every year is going to victims and frontline responders.

That is why I am seeking the support of this Assembly to require the government to establish a discrete fund, separate from consolidated revenue, for the receipt, management and reporting of all activity related to the levy. In doing so, the government should set out the income and expenses of the fund as part of the budget process.

This is just one solution to what has been a \$46 million mystery. It is one solution to help bring transparency and accountability where there was none. It is one solution to make sure that no woman or child is ever turned away from lifesaving support. But it is not the only solution.

In addition to a discrete fund, there are other ways and means to restore trust in the government’s administration of the levy, and to ensure that the levy is being spent to its best potential. The government should adopt all the recommendations of the ACT

Auditor-General's report. These recommendations go to improving transparency and accountability, with the introduction of performance monitoring, public reporting and a clearly communicated ACT domestic, family and sexual violence strategy and plan.

There are so many moving pieces that need to be brought together to prevent family and domestic violence. How do we ensure that police, housing, health, community services and other frontline responders are working harmoniously together to guide a family exiting a violent relationship? The government should develop a comprehensive and long-term strategy to bring all of these pieces together. Everyone in our community deserves to be safe; but, every day, we see the newspaper headlines that remind us that not everyone in our community is safe.

I come to this debate trusting that everyone in this chamber—Liberal, Labor, Greens and crossbench alike—want to keep families, women and children safe from violence. I trust that there is goodwill across the floor to support our frontline responders, who carry a heavy burden in the course of their duties.

I thank members across the floor for their consideration of and collaboration on this motion. If my trust has been well placed, I welcome the Assembly's support for and passage of my motion. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (3.46): I thank Ms Morris for bringing this private member's motion to the Assembly today. The ACT Greens will be supporting it, but we will also support the proposed amendment from Dr Paterson, apart from the fact that she wants to omit paragraph (2)(c), which calls for the establishing of a discrete fund, separate from consolidated revenue, for the receipt, management and reporting of all activity related to the levy. The Greens do see merit in exploring this concept. We are uncertain about the exact mechanism for that. We want to make sure that this is not creating an unnecessary administrative burden. I have outlined in my amendments, which I will move shortly, a proposal that the government explore establishing a discrete fund.

What the original motion calls for, and it remains in the proposed amendment from Dr Paterson, is a further point around providing the detailed income and expenses in the budget process to ensure transparency and accountability. I think that is an important consideration. We certainly think that is a bare minimum. We remain open to but uncertain about the merits of a separate fund. That is why I propose, rather than completely deleting the point, as Dr Paterson proposes, exploring establishing that fund, and the government can report back to the Assembly, as part of the reporting requirements, on the relative merits of that approach. That is the approach that we will be taking there.

I believe Mr Emerson will move some amendments as well, and we will be pleased to support those. I will come back to more of my proposed amendments later.

Certainly, in thinking about the levy itself, every ACT household pays a \$50 levy through their annual rates. This is an amount of money. Ms Morris described it well when she said it is a levy that people are willing to pay because they know this is an important issue. But they do want to know that it is being spent well and have a good sense of the impact of the investment.

The audit found that planning and development of domestic and family violence initiatives have been undermined by the lack of a territory-specific strategy for responding to domestic and family violence and an up-to-date understanding of what the needs of the ACT are when responding to domestic and family violence. The audit also found that the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office has not developed a performance monitoring strategy or evaluation framework to measure the outcomes and impacts of domestic and family violence initiatives funded through the Safer Families Levy, and does not effectively use existing monitoring and reporting arrangements to assess the performance of safer family initiatives.

These are important findings, and I am certainly keen to see the government's response to this. Having been a part of some of these discussions over time, I know that the former minister has worked to improve the fund over time. There have been important learnings as we have gone along, and there have been changes. I have always held the view that the value of these reports from the Auditor-General is that they provide an external and objective assessment of programs in government and opportunities potentially to improve them.

Of course, we have never seen an Auditor-General's report that gave anybody a clean bill of health, so I think it is fairly normal that there will be some recommendations on how to improve processes. That is the Auditor-General's job and the nature of their work. I am sure the government will embrace this report in the spirit in which it is intended, which is that there is always room to think about how these programs might be improved.

One of the other parts of Dr Paterson's proposed amendment is that the government "consider", rather than "implement", the findings of the Auditor-General's report. I think that is appropriate at this point. There will, of course, be a formal process by which the government will respond to the Auditor-General's report down the line. There is a time frame for that to happen. I think it is appropriate that the government be allowed to go through the normal public service and cabinet consideration processes, rather than, having not had that opportunity, committing today to implementing all the recommendations. I think they are recommendations that the government should positively consider, but that is part of the reason why we support that particular element of the amendment today.

Mr Assistant Speaker, I seek leave to move the amendments circulated in my name together.

Leave granted.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I move:

(1) Omit (2) (c) and substitute:

“(2) (c) explore establishing a discrete fund, separate from consolidated revenue, for the receipt, management and reporting of all activity related to the levy;”

(2) After (2) (e), insert:



“(2) (f) advise how it will invest in providing more Justice Housing properties so that people on court orders can reside in places other than the family home, and also that women on court orders can be accommodated with their children.”

I have already spoken about the rationale for my first amendment. With the second amendment, members of this place will know that the Justice Housing Program provides accommodation for people in the justice system and plays a critical role in keeping people on a positive rehabilitation pathway, reducing recidivism and improving the wellbeing of the individual and their families. It ensures that people are not released into homelessness or unnecessarily held in detention because they do not have a place to go. Stable housing is a key consideration in decisions related to bail, community-based sentencing and parole.

For many women, the current set-up of the program means that they are unable to reconnect with their children, which is an important part of their rehabilitation, and often a protective factor for the children themselves to be with a parent they love and care about. I encourage the government to consider expanding the program so that there are properties with more than one bedroom, to better suit the range of clients who need housing to meet their needs.

Certainly, the Greens took to the election campaign our proposal that the government should also invest in additional beds for people on bail for domestic and family violence offences so that, if assessed as appropriate, they can be accommodated away from the family home, to minimise the disruption to the rest of the family and to protect the victims. Often, when male perpetrators of domestic violence have nowhere else to go, they are more likely to attempt to return to the family home, which may compromise the safety and security of women and children.

This expansion would help to protect victims of domestic and family violence, allowing those accused to de-escalate and genuinely engage with rehabilitation programs without the stress of not having somewhere to live. Certainly, the feedback we have had is that this is a real pressure point. Where there have been alleged acts of family and domestic violence, and the alleged perpetrator is taken away, potentially charged and then given bail, the issue of where they are going to stay can be a real question. If they have nowhere else to go, the feedback we hear is that they do seek to return to the family home. There is a real opportunity here to think about alternative ways to address this issue, and that is what the second part of my amendments go to.

With those few remarks, I commend my amendments to the Assembly. I thank Ms Morris for the original motion and note the proposed amendment from Dr Paterson, which the Greens will be supporting.

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**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (3.55): I will contribute to this conversation as the former Minister for Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence. I congratulate Dr Paterson for taking on this portfolio. It is a difficult portfolio but a rewarding one, and I know she will do excellent work in this space. I am happy to support her with that work as we try to

address this wicked issue. It is a terrible issue that we are still struggling to comprehend and manage. I cannot see that problem moving on any time soon. It is so complex. We are still learning every day about how to manage it, how to respond to it and how to support victim-survivors.

You simply cannot start the story of the Safer Families Levy from the Auditor-General's report. That is not where this story started and that is not where it will end. I acknowledge and thank the Auditor-General for analysing the levy. I agree with Mr Rattenbury's comments that it is not there to provide a positive and glowing report, and nor would I expect one, but the government can consider the recommendations that the Auditor-General has made and will respond to them in due course.

When the levy was introduced, it did two things: it provided much-needed funding in addition to what was already being provided to the domestic and family violence sector, and it also raised awareness within our community, because Canberrans would see it every day. It was introduced eight years ago, so I thought I would take the Assembly back to when the Safer Families Levy was developed and the government, the community and the domestic and family violence sector worked together to try to combat domestic, family and intimate partner violence in our community. It was one part of our government's response, and it now provides 20 per cent of the total funding that is provided to address this diabolical crisis which continues to impact our community.

For members who may not have been around at the time, 2015 and 2016 were terrible years. There were three deaths in 2015: Tara Costigan, Sabah Al Mdwali and, about a month after Sabah, another woman was murdered. There was also the death of a man who was killed by his stepson. All were domestic and family violence related. Three women were murdered. In 2016, a little boy, Bradyn Dillon, who was nine years old, was murdered by his father after years of torture. It was such a sad and shocking time for our community.

Three reports came out of these terrible circumstances. The key report was by Laurie Glanfield and it looked at the systemic responses that were triggered by the death of that little boy who liked lizards and BMX bikes and was good at making friends. The death review and the gap analysis were the other two reports. The government responded and agreed with all of the recommendations, and part of the response to that was the introduction of the Safer Families Levy.

Some of the funds from the Safer Families Levy went to frontline services run by ACT government public servants. I know that, at the time, the community sector, the domestic and family violence support sector, generally supported that funding initiative, but, over time, they wanted that funding to be moved away. Some of the funding went to things like funding two police officers to be able to write family and domestic violence orders. That funding was moved away from the directorate for ACT Policing because the sector said that they no longer wanted public services funded by the Safer Families Levy, even though they are frontline responders.

So to suggest that it is something that just came out this year as a result of the audit is simply untrue. We have been moving that funding to make sure that it goes to the

community services sector and not to public service frontline responders, although I believe that public service frontline responders do important work in responding to domestic and family violence and supporting people.

One of the other comments that I have heard is around the training for public servants and people who work in the community services sector, to make sure that there is clear understanding of domestic and family violence and how victim-survivors can be supported through that process. That was also supported by the sector. Imagine 20,000 people not being aware that domestic and family violence exists, not being aware that victims and perpetrators work in ACT government buildings right now, not knowing how to respond to that, not knowing how to support victim-survivors or tell them where to go, and not knowing how to identify that somebody might be surviving domestic and family violence and needs that additional support. That training was provided by the experts in the sector—experts like the Domestic Violence Crisis Service and the Women’s Legal Centre. I think even the YWCA delivered some of that training as well. It was so important for us to start making change by educating people about the complexities of domestic and family violence, so I do not apologise for that training. It was important, and I think it made a difference. I hope it did.

As Dr Paterson has said, the safer Families Levy has matured over the years. Eight years on, its priorities have changed as new approaches are identified and we shift our focus from victim-survivors to make sure that we have eyes on perpetrators—trying to change perpetrator behaviour, supporting young people and children, and making sure that we have places where people can go to get the support they need, wherever they are and wherever they feel safe. They might not necessarily have to go to the police. It might be in a health environment; it might be a child and family service; it might be in a college through some of the legal professionals that are part of our education justice program. These are the kinds of things that this Safer Families Levy funds.

In fact, I welcome the conversation around domestic and family violence and the Safer Families Levy because it brings attention to this diabolical issue. It is important that, even despite all of this funding and the increase in funding and support from the community to work harder and do better, there are still victim-survivors every day—even today—surviving domestic and family violence in their own homes. It still remains mostly hidden within our community. There are still children living in homes exposed to domestic and family violence, and there is intimate partner violence and assault every single day.

So, as a community, as an Assembly and as a government, we do need to do more and we need to do it together. Competing against each other is not the way that we will resolve this issue or even attempt to tackle it. It is something we all need to do together—through funding, absolutely, but also through a change in attitude around the causes and the symptoms of domestic and family violence, and how we resolve them.

With that, I will leave it for the rest of the Assembly to have a conversation. As I said, I know Dr Paterson will do well in this portfolio. She has her own personal experiences and I think she has the respect of the community to be able to deliver in this space. I will continue to work with the community in my own areas, where we connect in education, in sport and in housing, to ensure that I can do what I can to

support Dr Paterson and people in our community who need the help.

I note Dr Paterson will be moving an amendment. When she does that, I will support it. I look forward to hearing continued conversation around this matter and what more we can do together to address this wicked issue.

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (4.05): I regret following such a meaningful and heartfelt speech by the Deputy Chief Minister with something that is procedural, but I thought I would explain to everyone what is going on.

After I sit down, we will vote on Mr Rattenbury's amendments. Minister Paterson will then move her recirculated amendment, which incorporates the elements that Mr Rattenbury has put forward and that we will have voted on. Because hers is an "omit all" amendment, that is why it has been recirculated and it will combine both. We will vote on that. Mr Emerson will then move his amendments to the amended motion; then we will vote on that.

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (4.07): I wish to speak to the heart of Ms Morris's motion. I will allow others to speak and relate to the amendments moved by Mr Rattenbury. I thank Ms Morris for bringing this matter to the Assembly's attention and commend her on moving her first motion in this place. Family and domestic violence is a scourge in our society. It is the responsibility of all of us to do whatever we can to reduce and hopefully eliminate family and domestic violence in the ACT and across our nation.

The Safer Families Levy was initiated in 2016 to help fund reforms to tackle domestic violence. This was in response to a number of tragic deaths in the ACT resulting from family and domestic violence in the 2010s. I want to thank the Deputy Chief Minister for recounting some of those tragic stories.

Over \$46 million has been raised from the levy since its inception in the 2016-17 ACT budget through to 30 June 2024. With the levy originally set at \$30 per household and paid through annual rates, it will increase to \$50 per household by 2024-25. This is an example of Canberrans pitching in a little, as has been pointed out—and I thank Mr Rattenbury for his endorsement—without complaint from the ACT community, despite a cost-of-living crisis, to achieve better outcomes for a good cause.

However, it appears that the ACT Audit Office review has shone a new light on the use and management of funds generated by this levy. The ACT Auditor-General's recent performance audit report on the Safer Families Levy found that the ACT government's administration of the levy lacked transparency, accountability and strategic planning. I welcome the four recommendations, to improve transparency, accountability, communication and strategic planning of the use of the Safer Families Levy. I thank the Auditor-General for his continued commitment to transparency, efficiency and good governance.

The cause of the prevention of family and domestic violence is one that we all stand

behind and support, because family and domestic violence can and should affect all of us; it is something that we should all abhor. People in this very room have been affected by family and domestic violence, including in my own upbringing. Countless more in the ACT have been affected as well.

That is why it is so important to properly resource frontline responders, who deal with family and domestic violence regularly. By resourcing frontline responders, we are helping victim-survivors to receive the support they need. The misuse and mismanagement of funds generated by the Safer Families Levy is an embarrassment for all Canberrans. In fact, it is not just embarrassing; it is truly shameful. I call upon all members in this place to support Ms Morris's motion, or, if amended, the heart of the motion, and put victim-survivors and frontline responders first.

I commend Ms Morris's motion to the Assembly.

**Mr Rattenbury's** amendments agreed to.

**MR DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question now is that the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (4.10): I seek leave to move my revised amendments to Ms Morris's amended motion.

Leave granted.

**DR PATERSON:** I move:

Omit all after (1), and substitute:

“(1) notes:

- (a) addressing domestic and family violence is a core priority of the ACT Government;
- (b) domestic and family violence response is a key priority for ACT Policing;
- (c) in 2022-23, there were 1,412 reports of family violence related assaults, representing 44 percent of all assault related offences reported to ACT Policing;
- (d) when the Safer Families Levy was introduced in 2016, the ACT Government stated it would fund initiatives to tackle domestic and family violence;
- (e) since its inception, the levy has raised more than \$46 million;
- (f) since the levy's inception, frontline family and domestic violence services have continued to draw attention to the critical need for more resources;
- (g) the ACT Auditor-General's Performance Audit Report on the Safer Families Levy found that the ACT Government's administration of the levy lacked transparency, accountability and strategic planning;

- (h) the ACT Auditor-General made four recommendations to improve transparency, accountability, communication and strategic planning of the levy;
  - (i) from 1 July 2024, no non-frontline ACT Government employees are funded from the levy; and
  - (j) the ACT Government 23-24 financial year saw \$40.5 million invested into domestic, family and sexual violence initiatives, of which \$8.4 million came from the Safer Families Levy; and
- (2) calls on the Government to:
- (a) consider all the recommendations outlined by the ACT Auditor General;
  - (b) provide evidence to the Legislative Assembly that no money generated through the Safer Families Levy has been directed to other areas of government service and administration;
  - (c) explore establishing a discrete fund, separate from consolidated revenue, for the receipt, management and reporting of all activity related to the levy;
  - (d) set out the income and expenses of that fund during the Budget process to ensure transparency and accountability;
  - (e) develop a comprehensive and long-term strategy to guide the ACT's commitment to ending domestic, family, and sexual violence in collaboration with relevant community sector stakeholders;
  - (f) advise how it will invest in providing more Justice Housing properties so that people on court orders can reside in places other than the family home, and also so that women on court orders can be accommodated with their children; and
  - (g) report back to the Assembly on progress by last sitting day of April 2025."

I welcome the motion that Ms Morris has brought to the Assembly and I thank her for bringing it here today. I have to say that I reject some of the tone and assertions in her speech, and again would recommend that she reads the Auditor-General's report. Table A1 at the back, pages 91 to 117, clearly outlines from 2016 to now what the audit money has been spent on.

I would also like to thank Ms Berry for her service in and commitment to this portfolio for the last eight years. It is an incredibly challenging policy space, but it is one that we all recognise has significant importance and the implications of it are so significant. So I would like to thank Ms Berry for all her work on this over the years.

I am very committed to addressing domestic and family violence and see it as a core responsibility of the ACT government. Rates of domestic family and sexual violence within the ACT community are shocking and they are absolutely unacceptable. It is distressing that, since the age of 15, one in three women in the ACT have experienced physical violence and one in four have experienced sexual violence. These are figures that we absolutely have to change, because the implications of this violence are so significant. The government remains strongly committed to achieving the best possible outcomes for victim-survivors and their families in the ACT. I know that

doing this will require strong partnership, collaboration and consultation with community sector partners, and I am strongly committed in this role to working with them and building on our relationship.

On 22 November, the ACT Auditor-General's Office tabled the report on the Safer Families Levy. The ACT government welcomes this report. I will take the findings and recommendations of this report seriously and look forward to working with colleagues to address those findings. I acknowledge that decisions on the use of the levy funds have changed over time, as Ms Berry outlined, and they have responded to continuing and evolving community need. I stress that it is important that we continue to respond to that evolving need. It is not a static fund, and we should keep it that way so that it can respond to emerging trends.

The Safer Families Levy has always been used for a broad range of domestic, family and sexual violence responses. The audit report provides a detailed and comprehensive breakdown of what the levy has been directed to since it was introduced. The audit report made four recommendations to improve the planning, development, performance monitoring and public reporting of the levy and initiatives funded by the levy.

The government has already made significant changes to ensure that the levy is focused on frontline responses to domestic and family violence. Both government and non-government organisations provide frontline services to respond to domestic and family and sexual violence. The levy has also funded initiatives such as the Justice Health Partnership, which embedded the Women's Legal Centre and Legal Aid ACT to work alongside staff in ACT hospitals and child and family centres to provide free and confidential legal advice and assistance to victim-survivors.

In the 2024-25 budget, all funding from non-frontline ACT government employees was transitioned out of the Safer Families Levy. It remains a priority of the government to ensure the frontline service system is adequately resourced to respond effectively. Details on what the budget funds from the levy can be found in appendix H of the ACT Budget Outlook, which provides a comprehensive overview of the funding priorities.

I would like to speak to my amendment regarding the discrete fund and the reason that we support the Greens amendment to explore this. Ultimately, why we rejected the note in the Canberra Liberals motion was based on the understanding that the revenue is collected by the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, which is territorial in nature and passed on to the Territory Banking Account and, for the purposes of the Financial Management Act, this account is a singular account and all consolidated revenue is transferred into this one account. To establish a mechanism to separate the Safer Families Levy from the Territory Banking account will require significant resourcing, manual reconciliations and potential legislative changes. So I appreciate the change in the amendment to explore this.

The ACT government is also committed to developing a comprehensive evidence-based ACT Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Strategy. This strategy will drive ambitious reforms and support Canberrans to feel safe in their relationships. Development of the ACT strategy will complement the National Plan to End Violence

Against Women and Children 2022-2032, which provides a national vision for ending gender-based violence. The strategy will build on this national plan through a local systems-based approach to delivering on our reform agenda and will align the ACT government's existing commitments under the national plan. These cover a full spectrum of prevention, early intervention, response and recovery, and healing, and the strategy will deliver on each of these areas. Consultation for the strategy will take place throughout 2025, and it will focus on centring victim-survivors and engaging critical frontline organisations with expertise in prevention.

It is important to note that there are continuing efforts, such as implementing the recommendations from the *Long yarn*, which is the second *We don't shoot our wounded* community consultation report, to address the disproportionate rates of gender violence perpetrated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The findings of the *Long yarn* will inform our ongoing and future collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to ensure safe and effective self-determined responses to domestic and family violence.

We are also implementing recommendations from the *Listen, take action to prevent, believe and heal* report on responses to sexual violence and the Sexual Assault (Police) Review, aimed at improving justice responses for victim-survivors. We are addressing service gaps by increasing investment for men's behaviour change programs and expanding innovative service responses, including for children and young people who have experienced or are using domestic and family violence. We are continuing to prioritise housing for those experiencing domestic and family violence. For the first quarter of the financial year, all of our new allocations of public housing, 99.5 per cent, were to those in greatest need. This includes those experiencing domestic and family violence and those experiencing homelessness.

Since 2023, the ACT government has committed \$4 million to Aboriginal community-controlled Organisations to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led initiatives. Prior to this, the government did not fund any Aboriginal organisations. I again congratulate Ms Berry on reforming that and seeing that we are now investing in five Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. The initiatives that are funded through that include services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have experienced violence; services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have experienced sexual violence; early intervention; healing camps and yarning activities; systemic advocacy and individual advocacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women; and healing and prevention activities through community sporting events.

We are also taking measures to strengthen the cultural safety of mainstream services. I am prioritising opportunities to strengthen contract requirements so services are more transparent about measures to improve the cultural safety of our services. The ACT government has also provided a one-off grant to some critical frontline agencies such as Legal Aid to support them to enhance their service offerings in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

All governments, all people in this place, have a profound responsibility to lead and support the work to prevent and respond to domestic and family violence. We must continue to progress, reform and embed gender equity and understandings of



respectful relationships across our community so that over time we build a society where women are respected and safe and fewer people hold attitudes that condone and drive this violence.

I would like to finish by thanking the ACT Auditor-General and his staff for their comprehensive audit and the associated recommendations. The government is committed to addressing domestic and family violence and continuing to improve outcomes for victim-survivors and their families in the ACT.

**Dr Paterson's** amendments agreed to.

**MR DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is that the motion, as amended, is agreed to.

**MR EMERSON**(Kurrajong) (4.22): I seek leave to move together two amendments to Ms Morris's motion.

Leave granted.

**MR EMERSON:** I move:

(1) After (1)(j), insert:

“(k) the ACT Government made commitments in 2020 and 2024 to provide culturally safe family, domestic and sexual violence support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;

(l) Frontline crisis service providers are reporting being forced to triage women and children experiencing violence due to insufficient dedicated housing options for victim-survivors.”

(2) After (2)(f), insert:

“(g) implement its commitments to meet the particular needs of First Nations people escaping family, domestic and sexual violence, including by ensuring all frontline services are equipped to provide culturally safe support.

(h) invest in providing more suitable ongoing housing options for victim-survivors to a level sufficient to meet demand and avoid asking vulnerable people experiencing violence to remain in, or return to, unsafe conditions in their homes.”

It is incumbent upon this Assembly to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our community receive the support that they need. People in this place need to listen to Indigenous people when they call for the culturally appropriate provision of family, domestic and sexual violence support services.

Systemic inequities and intergenerational trauma compound the experiences of our Indigenous communities, leaving many vulnerable to cycles of disadvantage and suffering. Sadly, close to seven in 10 Indigenous women report experiencing family and domestic violence. Domestic violence, of course, does not discriminate, but its impacts are acutely felt in First Nations communities, where cultural, social and economic barriers to accessing support services are unique and deserving of specific attention. As is so often the case, First Nations people just want a seat at the table and

for government to support them in carrying forward the solutions they know are needed.

I am conscious that standing here as a white man I cannot pretend to understand the cycles of trauma suffered by First Nations people, but I can try to listen. What I am hearing over and over again is that First Nations people want solutions designed for them by them and that, when it comes to family, domestic and sexual violence, that starts with culturally safe housing and crisis support services. Programs led by Indigenous organisations have shown success in providing holistic and healing sensitive care. We must always be sure to include their expertise and knowledge in our decision-making in this place.

My amendments also speak to the need for more dedicated housing for people in our community experiencing violence. We need readily available, secure and ongoing housing solutions that prioritise the needs of vulnerable women and children escaping violent situations. I have been distressed to hear of people in our community telling me they had seen women and children living in their cars. Housing is a fundamental right and, as rates of domestic violence continue to rise, we have an increasing crisis of housing on our hands that must be addressed. Telling women to wait it out at home because we do not have housing for them is not good enough.

We have all heard stories of vulnerable people being turned away by service providers. I would like to share with the chamber some of the important stories told by women who have been able to access services provided by one local crisis service provider, YWCA Canberra. One woman said: “I seriously have no words. I came here in such a terrible shape, emotionally and physically drenched, not knowing what I should do, and you took care of everything in such a way where I did not even have to think about anything.” Another said of the support she had received: “I feel it has had a massive effect on my mental health. As a result, I can function better and I am getting my confidence back. I see so clearly now. I can breathe with ease. I am free.” Finally, another woman said: “Thank you so much for everything. The kids and I are very grateful for all you have done for us. Words truly cannot express how grateful we are.” I wish to thank YWCA Canberra and all our FDSB crisis service providers for their immense work in helping those who most need it.

I ask that we reflect here on the stories of gratitude that would not be heard from the women who have been reluctantly turned away by service providers due to a lack of investment, vulnerable people who in many cases feel they are left with only one option: to return to living in fear at home hoping things might improve despite all the evidence that they will not. I have been moved by the crisis support workers who have expressed the difficulty they endure in having to refuse women and children access to services due to a sheer lack of resourcing. This Assembly has the power and the responsibility to ensure that victim-survivors not only find safety but also regain dignity and power over their own lives. I commend the revised amendments circulated in my name.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (4.26): I want to speak briefly to the amendments that Mr Emerson has provided and to inform the Assembly about Labor’s commitment to supported

housing and crisis accommodation, and particularly supporting Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

During the election, we announced a supported housing program that will make a real difference for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who are escaping domestic and family violence as well as people experiencing chronic homelessness or youth homelessness, older women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and those experiencing or escaping domestic and family violence. This program involves making 75 more public housing properties available for specialist housing and homelessness services, which include Aboriginal community-control organisations. This is on top of more than 700 already operated in partnership with community housing providers.

I want to advise the Assembly that the government is currently undertaking an integrated land release and funding opportunity for affordable housing projects which are especially targeted towards Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. Just recently, Yerrabi Yurwang, who are one of the Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, has just been certified as a tier 3 community housing provider. So they will be one of the organisations that will be able to access and be part of these projects, and other ACCOs who might partner up with another community housing organisation will be able to be part of this project as well.

This program involves releasing two sites for community housing projects in Moncrieff and Gungahlin as well as other options and financial assistance through the Affordance Housing Project Fund. In recognition of some of the barriers that Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, ACCOs, and ACCO-led consortiums, these will be weighted favourably towards them through this EOI process. The ACCOs will be able to access up to 100 per cent of the purchase price of the block plus other ongoing financial support. Financial support is also available for those with their own sites that they might have available.

The government is also offering dedicated support to ACCOs to navigate this process through the BADJI—the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Business Support—Program, which has been really pivotal in providing advice and support to getting ACCOs up in the ACT. It was not until the last few years that ACCOs have really developed in the ACT. So we are supporting them through this business support program and other opportunities like the one that I have just described.

The EOI opened on 7 November and will close on 21 January. There was an information session on 27 November, which was well attended by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. I just wanted to share that for the Assembly, and particularly for Mr Emerson's information, to show that we are taking this situation seriously. We are not forming ACCOs or Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, but we are supporting and providing the assistance to those organisations for self-determination to set up their own organisations that provide housing.

**Mr Emerson's** amendments agreed to.

**MS BARRY** (Ginninderra) (4.30): I rise to note the Auditor-General's performance

audit report on the Safer Families Levy, report No 10 of 2024. As we heard from Mr Rattenbury and my colleague Mr Cain, the report has obviously highlighted concerns about the management of public funds and the outcome of achieving the objectives in addressing domestic and family violence.

But, before I go into the detail of my speech, I want to acknowledge Ms Morris for bringing this motion forward. Obviously, the issue of domestic and family violence is quite dear to me. I would not be seeking to politicise this, but the reality is that there is an issue that has been reported in the Auditor-General's report. The report specifically notes that consultation is inadequate, with the result being that programs may not be achieving the best possible outcome for victims of domestic and family violence. The Auditor-General has also found a failure to develop a performance monitoring strategy or an evaluation plan that effectively uses reporting arrangements to assess the performance of these initiatives.

Again, as I indicated, I do not wish to politicise this, but what our constituents want to know is how the activities of government have actually made a difference to the scourge of domestic and family violence. Clearly, the government will have to respond to the Auditor-General's report. What we on this side of the chamber would be looking for in a response is evidence of broader consultation, which affects communities, and the establishment of a robust evaluation framework that will focus on identifying what works and what does not. We accept that the program needs to change over time to reflect emerging trends and new opportunities. We hope that the government will take this report seriously and use it as an opportunity to improve the lives of affected victims.

The Safer Families Levy is very important to Canberrans. We all want the program to succeed, and that is reflected here in the room through the agreements to the amendments. I look forward to working with the minister in the spirit of collaboration, as I mentioned in my speech today, to ensure that we have constructive and high quality outcomes.

I would also like to note that there are many hardworking public servants and community organisations working to prevent and mitigate family violence. It is a really difficult area with complex needs, and I acknowledge that there are people, frontline workers and also public servants who are doing their best. Those hardworking frontline workers need those of us working in this place to come together and give them the tools and frameworks to help them succeed.

Once again, I commend the report and I commend the Auditor-General for his independence and the diligence of his team. His frank and fearless advice to the government is to be commended but, as my colleague Mr Rattenbury mentioned, the Auditor-General's report always highlights things that could be done better. As always, I and the Liberal team will work diligently through the committee process and through estimates to hold the government to account and to deliver to Canberrans the quality outcomes that they deserve. We need to work together as a community to win the struggle against the scourge of domestic violence. Not one area of government has the answer, but it is really important that we are collaborating to resolve this issue.

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (4.34): This is a genuinely important motion. In

addition to paying tribute to Ms Morris for bringing this motion, I want to pay tribute to the many ordinary members of the Canberra Liberals who advocate to all of us on this side of the chamber quite regularly around making sure we are doing better when it comes to domestic and family violence. This is an issue that affects people right across our community. We have passionate advocates in this space, throughout this chamber, and we want to see every cent available from this levy dedicated to tackling and addressing the scourge of domestic violence and family violence.

I want to go very quickly to the issue of the core ‘calls on’ here around establishing a fund. I note the minister was speaking earlier, saying that there were some complexities around it. But the degree of mistrust in the community now around this fund and the use of the money that every Canberran, whether you rent or whether you own your home, pays into this fund, either through our rates or through our rent, must be addressed. This fund is a way that we can do that.

I appreciate that it has not been done before in this jurisdiction, but other jurisdictions deal with it. Other jurisdictions can make it happen, and so can we. It is absolutely vital that every Canberran can see every dollar that goes into this fund and be assured that that money has been spent where it is supposed to be spent and where Canberrans expect it to be spent. It does not matter whether a retrospective Auditor-General’s report looking back over eight years incorporates this information or not. It must be there every day, going forward. We must be assured that the government is doing the right thing with that money.

I do not mind if you call it a fund or if you call it an account. The critical thing is we must have that accountability there. This is all about accountability and transparency when it comes to this very special, long-lasting levy. We have to be confident that that money has been spent the right way on services that the Canberra people believe this money is being spent on. I am glad that we have managed to come to the position, going forward, where the government will come back to us in April and tell us exactly where the potential is around this sort of fund—and I would note that the minister herself called it a fund when she was speaking. It is what people expect. We are paying something special here. It should not just go into consolidated revenue. We have to know what is happening.

**MS CASTLEY** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (4.38): I want to make some really brief remarks. We have all spoken about this today, and it is very important to everybody. That is crystal clear. I want to thank Ms Morris for this, her first motion, and it is a real kicker, honestly. As Mr Cocks was saying, this is a special fund and it is about what is happening from now on. We have the report. We would love to know where that training was, what the course looked like and all of these things, and questions can be answered.

I took on this portfolio almost a year ago now, and I will never forget the volume of calls from the sector, getting in touch with me, saying, “You must look into this. This has been going on for too long. We do not know where the money has gone.” I really want to thank those people. I know they are watching. I have been receiving messages throughout this entire debate from other members of the public who are invested and want to see that this money is going to go directly, 100 per cent, to those frontline services in a way that Canberrans buy it as well. People are absolutely shocked to hear

that we have had to get an Auditor-General's report into this to understand where the money has gone. I want to be crystal clear that this is a lot of money that people are happy to pay as long as they know it is going to those frontline services. Serious questions do need to be answered and scrutiny must be applied.

I want to thank everybody. There have been many motions. I was in the anteroom watching while I was doing media. So well done to everybody for bringing this together this afternoon, and thank you all. This is something that Canberrans are fired up over and we want to make sure that that scrutiny is applied and we can, hand on heart, explain to our constituents that this money is going directly to those services that need it.

**MR DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is that the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

**MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (4.40):** I thank members for participating in this debate respectfully and in good faith. There are many things that will be discussed in this chamber that go beyond politics, and I am pleased to see that the prevention of family and domestic violence is one of them.

I thank Mr Emerson for his thoughtful consideration of how to make this motion even stronger for vulnerable women and children. The opposition was very pleased to accept his amendments.

I also thank the Greens for their contribution to this debate. I am heartened to see that they are willing to work with the Canberra Liberals when we can find common ground. The opposition was somewhat disappointed that the amendments watered down our ambition for a discrete fund, which would have guaranteed the transparency and accountability that Canberrans deserve. It should not take an Auditor-General's report to learn where \$46 million has gone; but, in the interest of finding a practical way forward, I am glad that we can agree that the government should explore the establishment of a fund. I look forward to the government reporting back on that in April.

I want to acknowledge the heartfelt contribution of Minister Berry. I can appreciate that the burden that she carried, as Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, was a very heavy one.

I would also like to acknowledge the current Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Dr Marisa Paterson. Like me, she barely had the opportunity to get her feet under the desk when this Auditor-General's report was presented. I thank her for receiving this motion in the spirit in which it was intended. I look forward to her update in the Assembly in April.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Statements by members**

### **Health and fitness**

**MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early**

Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (4.42): I want to reflect on the work and the connections that we make in this place and what a great privilege that is. We are brought together with people who we would not normally have the chance to meet.

This year I met a great crew, who I fondly now refer to as my fitness family, and, of course, our fabulous coach. I have been, and continually will be, eternally grateful to have met these awesome people. They are so supportive and motivating to me and each other, even though I would never have imagined before that I would be part of this group, or that I would ever have been a boot-camper. I did not think that I could do it. It is now something that I look forward to and, dare I say, enjoy each week.

I always wonder each week what kind of new torture—I mean fitness challenge—our coach will present us with. I want to acknowledge and thank them for letting me be part of the fitness family. I feel that I am stronger both physically and emotionally. I want to thank them for letting me be part of their group and for welcoming me so warmly, even though I complain every time we have to do bear crawls or burpees.

### **Tuggeranong—SouthFest 2024**

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (4.44): I would like briefly to thank Tuggeranong Community Council for their amazing work in putting on SouthFest on 16 November. I am, of course—as I am sure you are, Mr Speaker—a huge fan of any chance to celebrate Tuggeranong, and SouthFest is maybe the best chance to do that every year. It is nice seeing all the groups that make Tuggeranong such an incredible place come together.

I say to all the volunteers from the Tuggeranong Community Council: thank you so much for coming out in the sweltering heat and helping everyone to coordinate. It was a small but incredibly mighty team coordinating, arguably, the biggest Tuggeranong event of the year. Their ability to wrangle and keep us organised was greatly appreciated.

I had the pleasure of being a stallholder, alongside many community groups, and had a great time touching base with many of the hardworking people who want to see an even better Tuggeranong than the one we already have. Thank you in particular to SEE Change, Valley FM, Jindebah Cafe, Living Streets and Rags, to name a few, for some excellent chats. I am keen to chat to more people next time.

It was a fantastic time. I was honoured by the opportunity to tap in as MC to cover lunch breaks until the real professional got back. Highlights included seeing Ms Castley effortlessly running sound-tech for the entire day and singing *Sweet Caroline* with Lord Joe—but no-one asked for the video, thanks.

I am already excited about going again next year. I am confident that SouthFest will be bigger and better every year, as word gets around about how much there is to do there. Can we get 25 members for SouthFest 2025?

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, Miss Nuttall; it was quite the rendition of *Sweet Caroline*.

## Planning and environment

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (4.45): I rise to speak about what an honour and privilege it is to serve Canberrans as shadow minister for planning and environment. In order to address major issues, such as planning, housing affordability and supply, building defects, climate action, energy, biodiversity, water and heritage, I expect it will be a busy term for me and my team. I am looking forward to getting stuck into it.

As I did last term, I will always maintain an open-door policy regarding consulting with stakeholders and community members. As a Liberal, I remain committed to making sure that there are enough homes for people in Canberra, while appropriately protecting the environment within which our bush capital exists.

I want to thank opposition leader Ms Castley for having the trust and confidence in me to work towards positive outcomes in this portfolio. I look forward to calling to account—and, where possible, working with—Mr Steel and Ms Orr, and all members interested in this important portfolio area.

*Discussion concluded.*

## Adjournment

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

## Nepal—Help Nepal Network Australia

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (4.47): It was my privilege and honour recently to attend the 25th silver jubilee anniversary celebration and fundraising event for Help Nepal Network Australia.

The Help Nepal Network is a global not-for-profit organisation founded in 1999, with active chapters in Nepal and across countries with a significant Nepali diaspora. In 2003, the Nepalese community in Australia officially registered Help Nepal Network Australia as a charity. Their mission is to support disadvantaged communities, primarily focused on health, education and disaster relief, and with a strong commitment to rural Nepal.

Some examples of their good work include a health post serving remote areas in north-western Nepal, which provides crucial healthcare services to a marginalised community that otherwise lacks access to essential health care. There is also a children's home dedicated to providing a safe and nurturing environment for children in need, offering opportunities for education and growth. Finally, a school has been rebuilt and supported by the Network, following an earthquake in Nepal.

This organisation's 25th anniversary event was not only a celebration of its past achievements, which are significant, but also an opportunity to raise funds for ongoing and future projects that uplift communities in need. I pay great respect and



gratitude to Santosh and Krishna, and everyone in Help Nepal Network Australia. I thank them for a fantastic evening and for the tireless good work in helping those who need it most in our global community.

## **Valedictory**

**MR PETTERSSON** (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (4.49): It feels strange to be making end-of-year remarks, because it seems like just a few weeks ago we were giving end-of-term remarks. I did use all of my best material a couple of weeks ago, so I will be quite short.

I would like to start by thanking the wonderful constituents of Yerrabi for placing their faith in me once again. It is a tremendous honour to be elected to this place once, but to do it more than that is truly an honour. I will be forever grateful for the many constituents who have placed their faith in me to represent and advocate on their behalf.

I would like to thank my office—Jasmine, Harry, Max and Sarah. They have been so kind, understanding and helpful in the past few weeks as we have made the transition from level 1 to level 2 in this place, which has been an absolute whirlwind, Mr Speaker, as I am sure you can understand, having made the transition yourself to a different office.

I would also like to thank the staff that are no longer with me. Liam, Georgia and Aggi have done tremendous work in my office this year, and I am very grateful for their assistance. I will be continuing to monitor their adventures, because they are bright, talented young people and I know they will do fantastic things. I will always keep an eye on seeing what exciting things they are up to.

I would like to thank the workers that make this Assembly more broadly work: all the attendants, Hansard, committee and business support, the education office, chamber support, the cleaners, HR and IT. Everyone in the OLA plays a fundamental role in our democracy. Not enough people appreciate the important work that you do, but I do, and I want to thank you for it.

I would like to acknowledge the hardworking officials across the ACT public service and say thank you for all your hard work this year. You are the backbone of this city. You make it the amazing place that it is, and I am so excited to work alongside you this term. I have had the great fortune to meet many wonderful officials in recent weeks who have been so helpful in getting me up to speed. I will be visiting offices and workplaces in the coming weeks and into the new year to meet the people I am yet to meet. I am excited to make those introductions and meet those people as we work together to make Canberra the best it can possibly be.

It is an election year, so it would be remiss of me not to thank the true believers of ACT Labor, its rank-and-file membership. You are truly the engine behind this government. Thank you for everything you do and the inspiration you give us here in this place. I would also like to thank the mighty ACT trade union movement. This

year, like every year, they have advanced the cause of working people, and I thank them for that.

I would like to thank the ACT Labor Party office—Ash, Toby, Sandra and Lara—for their tremendous work this year. I have seen firsthand the amazing lengths they have gone to throughout an election year to support us and the wider party. I know that they well and truly deserve a break over the summer period. In particular, I would like to mention Toby, who is off to bigger and more exciting things up on the hill.

Every year in this place is a big year, but, in particular, election years are the biggest years. Elections take up a lot of time. They are very stressful. There is conflict; there are challenges. At the end of it you are exhausted. To put it mildly, I am, along with most members, looking forward to taking a bit of a break over the summer period. But I know that is not the case for all members of our community, so I would like to thank the members of our community who will continue to work throughout this time, when many of us can take a break and rest, as they look after us and keep us safe.

I am looking forward to being back here next year in this wonderful Assembly, ready to go, to make Canberra even better.

### **Royal Australian Navy—Freedom of Entry parade**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (4.53): I rise today to reflect on the recent HMAS *Canberra (III)* Freedom of Entry Parade, which took place in our city on Saturday 30 November. Despite wet conditions, it was wonderful to see more than 250 officers, sailors and cadets of the Royal Australian Navy, plus representatives of that ship from the Australian Army and the Australian Air Force, parade through the city of Canberra and exercise their traditional freedom of entry. This practice is a tradition that dates back to medieval times and is a mark of trust and respect between a city and a named military unit.

HMAS *Canberra (III)* is the third Royal Australian Navy vessel to carry the name of Canberra. It has a length of over 230 metres and can range for 6,000 nautical miles at 20 knots, with a maximum speed of more than 20 knots. It is technically an amphibious assault vessel and, as of March 2015, was designated the flagship of the Royal Australia Navy. How appropriate that it is linked to the capital of this wonderful country. HMAS *Canberra* was launched on 17 February 2011 and commissioned on 28 November 2014. It is a very impressive ship. It has its own entry on the Royal Australian Navy website. It is crewed by 358 Australian service men and women, including from the Australian Army and Royal Australian Air Force. Interestingly, the first HMAS *Canberra* was sunk during the Battle of Savo Island in the Pacific in 1942 during World War II.

It was a special honour and an unexpected treat to meet a former sailor from the original HMAS *Canberra*, Des Jones, who is 100½ years old. He spoke eloquently on the radio during that morning parade and gave me some of his time and an opportunity to take a photo with him. I commend Mr Jones for his extraordinary service to this nation. It was also an honour to meet the commanding officer of HMAS *Canberra*, Captain Brendan O’Hara. He was quoted as saying:

It is such an honour for us to march through the streets of our namesake city and is an opportunity to express our appreciation for the Australian community.

I am sure that I speak on behalf of my colleagues in this place—especially my Liberal colleagues who were also in attendance: Ms Castley, Mr Parton, and shadow veterans minister, Mr Hanson—when I say it was our honour to witness this parade. It was my great pleasure to join the crew and officials during the lunch event as well.

We are all so appreciative of the service, sacrifice and dedication that all serving members on HMAS *Canberra* give to our nation and, indeed, all those in our military forces who put themselves in harm's way for the sake of important national security issues. We hope to host the amazing crew of HMAS *Canberra* again soon, hopefully with better weather next time around.

### **National Tertiary Education Union**

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (4.57): I would like to briefly thank the National Tertiary Education Union for their incredibly hard work over the past few weeks. The sudden and poorly managed mass layoffs at both the University of Canberra and the Australian National University have been a blow to all of Canberra, considering how important the tertiary education sector is to the city.

The NTEU have done an amazing job in organising visible opposition to the way university leadership has handled these job cuts, and I am glad to see the NTEU supporting people who may be facing unemployment by the end of the year. In particular, I wish to congratulate the NTEU and the staff of the ANU on their overwhelming success in opposing the demands put forward by the ANU leadership for staff members to have their pay cut during the cost-of-living crisis. It is good to see that solidarity among university staff is still strong. The dubious promise of possibly fewer job cuts at the ANU was not taken seriously by the impacted staff. I would like to thank the NTEU for their advocacy in the Vote NO campaign.

There is a false idea going around that university staff are particularly well-paid or have higher-than-average job security, but the huge number of job cuts sweeping the university sector show how false those notions are. Right now, people working in the tertiary education sector need strong support and capable organisers, and the NTEU have demonstrated an outstanding ability to provide both. I thank them again for their fierce advocacy and wish them a lot of luck in getting the best possible outcomes for the staff who are now in uncertain situations.

I would like to once again take this opportunity to echo the NTEU's call for a review of the governance of the University of Canberra. The Greens are committed to ensuring that this does happen and have been encouraged to see the Chief Minister's comments indicating that he is open to a review. We clearly need that review soon to ensure that the students, staff and community around the University of Canberra are supported and can have faith in the institution that plays such a large part in their life.

Yesterday, we heard that yet another interim Vice-Chancellor has resigned from the University of Canberra, citing a lack of confidence in the University Council. How can this be acceptable? How can we treat this as business as usual? The arrival of Bill

Shorten as the new Vice-Chancellor is not going to solve these fundamental problems, and we in this place need to take action to ensure that more is done. A review is absolutely necessary, and we look forward to progress being made towards a more transparent and sustainable university sector in the ACT.

### **Mr Mick Gentleman—tribute**

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (4.59): I want to take time in the adjournment this evening to acknowledge the contribution of Mick Gentleman to the community of the ACT and Tuggeranong, as well as to my time in this place. I think we can all agree that Mick is genuinely a good bloke. Mick spent most of his career working to help people and improve the lives of others. Before he came into this place, he was a single parent and worked multiple shift-work jobs in hospitality and security, working incredible hours to support his family as a single parent.

It was during his time working in security that he got involved in politics after the dismissal of Whitlam in 1975. He was one of the few people in Australia who was present for Gough Whitlam's famous speech on the steps of Old Parliament House during the constitutional crisis. He had that kind of historic story to tell. I certainly felt privileged to be able to hear it from Mick and felt that I was part of that story as well. He went on to serve as a security officer for both Bob Hawke and Paul Keating. I bet people did not know that about him.

He is a keen vegetable gardener. He absolutely dotes on his grandson, Seb. He likes cars. He has at least three and a number of bikes—I will not even attempt to say how many—and he enjoys camping. There are a lot of things that we do not know about people who have worked here—the special people that they really are and the connections that they make with their community. Mick is certainly one of those people.

He was always involved in a union and he was a delegate across his career. He ended up working as an organiser for the Transport Workers Union. He often spoke about his relationship and deep thanks for being involved with the trade union movement. He was eventually elected into this place as Labor member for Brindabella, first in 2004 and then regained his seat in 2012, after losing it in 2008. That is when I was first elected to this place.

To me, it really felt like he was the father of the building. When I was first elected and needed to pick up my daughter from early childhood education, I said, "Mick, who do I tell when I need to leave the building?" and he said, "No-one. You just go." I thought that was really weird. I said, "Well, I will tell you," and made it a habit to let somebody know the purpose and when I was leaving the building.

Mick and I worked together particularly closely during the 2019-20 bushfire season. It was during a period of time over Christmas when I was Acting Chief Minister. Minister Stephen-Smith was here as well. We were kind of like the last ministers standing while everybody was taking a well-deserved break. He was the Minister for Emergency Services. As we all know, during that time we were facing a crisis as the

city was surrounded by fire, with the Orroral Valley fire approaching rapidly.

Mick was instrumental in guiding me and Minister Stephen-Smith on the decisions that we would ultimately make over those couple of days when we were basically in charge of keeping Canberra safe. He declared a state of emergency, and that allowed me to appoint Georgina Whelan as the Emergency Controller, which gave her what she needed to coordinate services across the ACT, bring government together and respond more effectively to that situation. I felt that I was always briefed by Mick and the directorates of his portfolios well enough that I could make those decisions and felt that they were the right decisions to make.

One of them was not a decision that I would ever like to make again—it was not enjoyable or easy. Minister Stephen-Smith and I agonised over it quite a bit before we finally came to the point of cancelling the New Year’s Eve celebration. It was not fun for everybody, but it was simply too dangerous to allow it to go ahead. I had Mick’s backing in making that decision. I knew that the information that I had was the right information for us to be able to make that decision together.

Mick and I also worked on establishing the emergency relief centre at the Molonglo Rural Fire Service after the wild and unprecedented hailstorm on 19 January 2020. We still see the results of that hailstorm when we travel around the ACT. When the storm occurred and we could see that West Belconnen and the city were some of the areas that were most badly hit, I said to Mick, “Can we set up some kind of emergency relief centre?” It was difficult to do it in a school. He said, “Yes. No worries. The Molonglo RFS centre in Belconnen is the best place to do it,” and it was fantastic. He got it up and running really quickly, and the team there were fantastic at supporting everyone. I liked that I could call Mick and there was no bother, no stress and no worry about him being able to help in any way that he possibly could, whether that was personally or professionally in his role in administering this space.

To reflect on Mick’s care for the community and helping people, he knew the Tuggeranong area as intimately as perhaps yourself, Mr Speaker. He spent a lot of time walking around the suburbs during and outside of election periods.

I know that he will miss this place and I know he will be greatly missed as well. I wish him all the very best in his future and hope that he gets to spend as much time as he can camping, spend time with his grandson, spend time with his cars and bikes, and establish a beautiful vegetable garden for his family to enjoy.

**MR SPEAKER:** Hear, hear. I think we all miss Mr Gentleman. Gentleman by name and gentleman by nature.

### **Courts—sexual assault trials**

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (5.06): I rise this afternoon to speak about a difficult topic—the prevalence of sexual assault myths and misconceptions, known as “rape myths”, in the community and therefore in our juries, comprised as they are of community members. I acknowledge that there will be people listening today, including in the chamber, who have survived sexual violence.

It is timely that I talk about this, as we are about halfway through the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, an international movement that calls for an end to violence against women and girls. I am also motivated by an inflammatory statement put out by the ACT Bar Association on 19 November, expressing concern that there—and I quote:

... may be a perception, based on recent comments attributed to the ACT Chief Justice ... that juries in sexual assault trials are getting it wrong because they do not believe the allegations made by complainants.

The Bar Association went on to say:

Hypothesising as to why complainants may not be believed by juries does not advance the criminal justice system.

Around the same time, local barrister Jack Pappas was interviewed on ABC Radio and echoed the views of the Bar Association.

My simple response to these comments is: what utter nonsense. I believe it is part of the role of our most senior judicial officer, Chief Justice McCallum, to speak about trends she observes and to encourage discussion.

I am grateful to Dr Rachel Burgin and Margie Rowe, the Acting Victims of Crime Commissioner, who quickly and eruditely expressed their views, informed by their experience and expertise in the field, following the bar's commentary.

There is just one small problem with the bar-Pappas assessment: we have decades of evidence, internationally and in Australia, that establishes the presence of rape myths in society and in juries. In fact, their commentary is a perfect example of how rape myths are entrenched in the community.

It is also important to remember that they speak about it from the perspective of people who have an interest in the status quo being continued. They have an interest in the system believing rape myths because it means that their clients charged with sexual assaults are more likely to be found not guilty.

It was among the greatest honours of my previous role as attorney to meet with victim-survivors of sexual assaults. I learnt from listening to these courageous, resourceful, dogged women and men who survived sexual assault. I heard—and this is borne out by the evidence—that it does not matter what you were wearing, your past sexual history, how much alcohol you consumed or what you consented to until the point when you said, “Stop,” and they ignored you and kept going. It does not matter how your body reacted to what was happening to you, or how you behaved during the assault or afterwards. But these assumptions still persist. In fact, they are widespread.

This is borne out by evidence, including a world-leading survey. The National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey—NCAS—is a periodic, representative survey of the Australian population that is conducted every four years. The survey benchmarks the community's understanding and attitudes regarding violence against women and gender inequality, and how these change over time. Poor understanding and problematic attitudes regarding violence against women

at the population level reflect a culture that allows this violence to perpetuate.

The survey measures and identifies that these myths about sexual violence persist in the community, such as that women lie about being sexually assaulted and that they are to blame for the sexual violence, for instance, because of what they were wearing. There is a sizeable minority of respondents who agree with attitudes that mistrust women's reports of violence, agreeing that women make up or exaggerate claims of domestic violence to gain an advantage in custody battles or use sexual assault allegations as a way of getting back at men, or due to regretting consensual sex.

Respondents agreed with attitudes that objectify women and disregard consent, and minimise violence against women and shift blame. Eighteen per cent of respondents believe rape myths like sexual assault being primarily committed by strangers, and seven per cent believe that genuine sexual assault victims immediately report their assault to police. These beliefs inform how jurors make decisions.

Justice Lee, in his Federal Court judgement in *Lehrmann v Network Ten*, quoted Associate Professor Jacqueline Horan and Professor Jane Goodman-Delahunty's article, which dealt with how so-called rape myths play a role in jury decision-making. I quote:

Legal authorities in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America accept that sexual assault myths and misconceptions have a potential to exert an undue influence on triers of fact when deliberating about a sexual assault case. To avoid this undesirable influence, courts rely on traditional processes to educate juries so that they can better assess the evidence in a sexual assault trial on a sound factual basis. The two primary mechanisms to counteract the undue influence of sexual assault myths are expert evidence and judicial directions.

Over the last decade, counterintuitive expert evidence has been permitted to educate the jury as to how complainants vary in their behaviour both during and following a sexual assault. Legal practitioners and academics have noted that this provision remains underused, despite the widely acknowledged need for this type of educative intervention.

Perhaps it is time to consider how and when we allow expert evidence and judicial directions, so as to better counter this undue influence of sexual assault myths. Maybe we need prosecutors objecting more to problematic defence questions.

Justice Lee went on to summarise the paper by Patrick Tidmarsh and Gemma Hamilton for the Australian Institute of Criminology titled "Misconceptions of Sexual Crimes against Adult Victims: Barriers to Justice". I quote:

Empirical evidence ... shows most victims who experience rape or sexual assault delay disclosing and reporting, or never disclose their experiences. Indeed, 83 percent of Australian women did not report their most recent incident of sexual assault to the police ... and only six in 10 women who experienced sexual assault sought advice or help from others ...

Members of the community, including legal professionals, may hold this misconception that reports of rape and sexual assault are easy to make and

difficult to defend, and that most sex offenders are swiftly convicted and face severe punishment for their crimes ... However, both national and international research consistently demonstrate that incidents of rape and sexual assault are significantly under-reported, under-prosecuted and under-convicted.

Common reasons for victims' non-reporting or delays in reporting or disclosure include:

- confusion, guilt, or shock about the assault ...
- fear of the perpetrator ... and consequences of reporting ...
- fear that they will not be believed ... and
- rape myth acceptance where victims do not recognise they have experienced sexual assault or blame themselves for what has occurred ...

Also, the criminal justice system is a difficult, stressful, expensive, and time-consuming process that requires exposing oneself to police and public scrutiny, and potential cross-examination. This may have serious legal and psychological consequences for both the complainant and others involved ...

I have led a lot of reforms in the territory to improve the experiences of victim-survivors through our criminal justice system. We also have an offence here for non-fatal strangulation, which comes up with a lot of sexual offences. Stealthing was introduced as an offence.

Of tremendous concern to me is the police process review which found that ACT police officers were relying on rape myths to make decisions. We have victim impact statements, intermediaries and restrictions around past sexual history. The sky has not fallen in, despite some resistance from defence practitioners, and their assertions that these measures will impact on a fair trial.

The pervasive attitudes and the views expressed by the likes of the bar and Mr Pappas show that rape myths still fester in the community. Jurors are selected from the community. The myths are also entrenched in the minds of people who survive sexual assault, people who doubt themselves: "Was it sexual assault?" or "Will I be believed?"

We have a responsibility to listen to victims of sexual assaults and to believe them. This does not mean that there should not be a presumption of innocence until guilt can be proven, because that is fundamental to our criminal justice system. As found by the NCAS survey, to counter them we need to correct myths and misconceptions about the nature of sexual assault and genuine victims, including among police, and correct hostile, gendered stereotypes of women as untrustworthy. We should also raise awareness that false sexual assault allegations are rare.

As a member of this place, I welcome the opportunity to stand up to the status quo and to challenge outdated views, because sexual assault survivors deserve better.

### **Mr Mick Gentleman—tribute**

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.15): I would like



to speak briefly, as the Deputy Chief Minister did, to reflect on the contributions of our former colleague in this place, Mick Gentleman.

In his inaugural speech after being elected as a member for Brindabella in 2004, Mick noted:

In 1979 I rallied through the streets of what is now Richardson, and watched the Castrol international rally in what is now Macarthur. Neither is an option now, with the development of the area as a home for many residents of Brindabella. But it is clear that, where we develop, we must also develop the possibilities for people to be involved. These opportunities need to be accessible and supported by government, from ensuring the maintenance and protection of public space to support for local community organisations. Government has a powerful role in encouraging the development of opportunities for all Canberrans to participate in the community around them.

Mick's connection to his community in Tuggeranong runs deep and, while I am pleased to be joined by our new colleagues Ms Tough and Mr Werner-Gibblings, it is fair to say that Tuggeranong has lost another champion in this place. Mick was a valuable member of this Assembly and a valued colleague in the cabinet and Labor caucus. He was proud of the legacy of the labour movement and took seriously his role in advancing the cause. He was proud of his work with unions before joining this place, including the Transport Workers Union. Indeed, Mick's first motion in this place was about marking the 150th anniversary of the Eureka Stockade.

Mick's marquee achievement in his first term, however, was his work on solar feed-in tariffs, which helped set the ACT on our path to 100 per cent renewable electricity more than a decade later. As a blokey suburban car nut, as the Deputy Chief Minister reflected on, Mick might have been an unlikely environmentalist, but he is a committed one—something which anyone who had heard him talk about visiting the high country bogs and fens would have been left in no doubt whatsoever.

Mick probably got the most questions in this place in his role as Minister for Police and Emergency Services. In that role, Mick was always striving to support our police and our emergency services workers. Indeed, part of Mick's legacy will be the record investment in more police officers for the ACT made under his tenure in recent years. This is the cap on Mick's work to deliver successive investments across our emergency services workforce, and he leaves a strong legacy in this for the community. I think it is also worth reflecting on the role Mick played to support our emergency services agencies to do their job during the horrific 2019 bushfires and the subsequent hail event. Ms Berry reflected on the challenges that we experienced during that terrible summer.

Mick also made his mark as a robust member of this chamber. I do not think any member on our side of the chamber truly relishes the theatre of parliamentary politics like Mick did. As Manager of Government Business, he kept our wheels turning during every sitting week, but he never missed an opportunity to get a bit of a jab into the opposition when he saw the opportunity—"You didn't vote for the funding, did you? No; didn't vote for the budget." Clearly, something rubbed off on him during those years he spent working as a security officer for Paul Keating.

Mick has left this place before, losing his seat in 2008 and coming back in 2012. I am not sure what the future holds for Mick, but I am glad to take this opportunity to reflect on what he achieved in this place over many years, and there was much more than I have been able to touch on today. I wish Mick all the very best for whatever lies ahead—and who knows, Mr Speaker, maybe he will be back in 2028.

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, Ms Stephen-Smith. We can only hope.

### **Valedictory**

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.20): I took the risk of leaving my end-of-term valedictory to the end of the year after the election, and I am honoured to be back to deliver it. I would like to thank the people of Murrumbidgee who supported me at the election and for our engagement last term and, indeed, those who did not support me at the election. I value the literally thousands of conversations that we have had about local and national issues that affect us and the policies that can address them. I look forward to continuing to deliver on the commitments that we took to the election, particularly Labor's regional plans in Woden Valley, Weston Creek, Molonglo Valley and the inner south. I am looking forward to be an engaged voice for us to deliver in government.

It has been a big year for me, not just with it being an election year but also the year in which I have had my first child with my partner, Kurtis. I would like to thank Kurtis, who has had to take on the huge majority of parenting duties with our now nine-month-old daughter Maeve. Kurtis has been an incredible support and has shown a lot of understanding about election duties, while facing our third election campaign together now with a third member of our family. Thank you to Maeve, also, for sleeping 12 hours every night uninterrupted so that we were both not as tired. I am looking forward to spending more time with the both of them over Christmas. Thank you also to my parents, Jayne and Phil, for stepping in to care for Maeve during the campaign and for their support on the campaign trail, particularly on pre-poll.

My heartfelt thanks go to our core campaign team—Kerry, Keith, Malcolm, Chris, Samuel, Noah, Shane, Lucky, Marcus and Angelena—who were there keeping me motivated week in and week out and putting Labor's case to the community about our values and our commitments that we intend to deliver this term. Thank you also goes out to the ACT Labor office, including Ash, Toby, Sandra and Lara and the team who ran the election campaign that delivered Labor victory. I also want to recognise that it is a massive team effort and it is an effort of all of our candidates that we run in each electorate. In Murrumbidgee, we had an incredibly collegiate team. I want to particularly recognise my colleague Minister Paterson but also Nelson Tang, Noor El-Asadi and Anna Whitty. It was a real joy to campaign with them.

I also want to thank my dedicated and loyal staff. Thank you for your hard work this year and during the campaign. I am grateful for your advice and support as we start this new challenging term. Thank you to my chief of staff, David Ferguson, and to advisers Anton Gallacher, Teleatha Holohan, James Eveille, Grace Buckle, Brodie Thurson, Mick Inman and Kaaren Dynon, and thank you to Faheem Khan who has also been providing support in the transition to Treasury. Thank you to all the

department liaison officers in my office and all staff in the EPSD and TCCS directorates, CMTEDD and also Treasury for their advice this year.

I am proud of our ACT Labor team, led by Andrew Barr and Yvette Berry. It is a team that has been refreshed by our new members and new ministers. I am incredibly optimistic about the term ahead, where we have kept the conservatives off the treasury benches and we have the opportunity, without COVID dominating half of the term this time, to get on with a practical progressive government reforming housing and transport and delivering our local priorities, as well as much more.

I also thank Mick Gentleman for his service to Canberra, his service to the Assembly and the legacy that he has left, particularly in the planning portfolio where he made a major contribution in shaping our city, particularly most recently through the planning system review, which he embarked on as minister—which was quite a courageous thing to do—and has resulted in a system that is now laying the foundations for some other planning work that we brought to the election to get a mandate to deliver, which I look forward to taking on in this new term.

Merry Christmas to all members, their staff and the Office of the Legislative Assembly. I hope you all get a well-earned break over the Christmas and New Year period.

### **Rotary Club of Belconnen—Trash and Treasure markets**

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (5.24): Sundays are special for many people. Family gatherings, rituals and worship are synonymous with that day of the week. In a corner of Belconnen, in a shopping centre car park, no less, there is a particularly special Sunday service—one which has been underway, week after week, for more than 50 years.

In September, Rotarians young and old, new and founding charter members, supporters, friends, volunteers, stallholders and market devotees, came together to celebrate 50 years of a Canberra institution—the Rotary Club of Belconnen Trash and Treasure markets.

Trash and Treasure began in 1974, in the Jamison Plaza car park, and it has remained there to this day. Anyone can be a stallholder, with a modest fee applied. Some stallholders are regulars—fruit and veg, spring rolls, vinyl records, and plenty of bric-a-brac. Others are there once, for a particular purpose. Market goers are also asked to donate a gold coin for entry.

Over 50 years, intergenerational memories have been forged. Parents who used to go as children now bring their own. For some, the markets are purely for enjoyment—a browse, a surprising find. For others, the markets are a necessity, having regard to the affordable products and their quality.

The first celebration of the 50 years was, fittingly, at Trash and Treasure itself. It was a particularly memorable occasion, with 100 \$10 vouchers distributed to random

market goes to spend with the stallholders. Ten charities were each presented with a \$500 donation from Rotary Belconnen, being the Shepherd Centre, UnitingCare Kippax, Parkinson's Australia, St Vincent de Paul Society, Pegasus, St John's Care, Marymead CatholicCare, Karinya House, Kids in Care ACT and Barnardos. Those 10 charities then had the opportunity to win \$5,000, and Kids in Care was the lucky winner.

A terrific raffle was held, and I was very grateful to be invited to take part. The many tickets sold was thanks to Mary Cruickshank, who had done an amazing job in organising and making it such a memorable event. And, of course, there was cake.

The following week we gathered more formally at the Belconnen Labor club, reflecting on the 50 years, enjoying a dinner, in the presence of the district governor, the Deputy Chief Minister, Minister Berry, and a previous member of this place, Michael Moore, who is a past district governor. The festivities were hosted by current president Wayne Jeffs.

Mal Ferguson, who was right there at the beginning of the markets, who led their opening, who was the club community service director and who did much—I believe the lion's share—of the organisation to get it running, together with Dr Fyfe Bygrave, my friend, the sole remaining Rotary Belconnen charter member, and who was also present at the very first Trash and Treasure, were bestowed as Paul Harris Fellows. Becoming a Paul Harris Fellow is the highest form of recognition in Rotary International. It is presented to a Rotarian or a member of the community who has made an outstanding contribution. Congratulations to Mal and Fyfe.

The celebrations were made possible thanks to the efforts of long-term Belconnen Rotarians Bob Greeney, Peter Kain and Mary Cruickshank.

Trash and Treasure existing for 50 years is a worthy achievement, but what is behind that is even more extraordinary—that is, the people, the Rotarians. Trash and Treasure has existed, and it has thrived, for 50 years because of the volunteer hours given up week after week in organising and running the markets, which had been the brainchild of past president Ron Morrison.

Indeed, the original objectives of the Rotary Club of Belconnen were to raise money for disbursement to various worthy community organisations, to provide a means by which community organisations could raise money for themselves, to provide an outlet for cottage industry products, and to generate a carnival atmosphere in an area that would otherwise be deserted on a Sunday.

The Jamison Centre car park was chosen, initially from 10 am to 4 pm, but now it is in the early morning hours, until about midday. There was an area of 50 stall spaces, essentially a car parking spot each, available to vendors at \$3 each. Visitors to the market were requested to pay 20c each.

The money that is raised is entirely invested back into the community, with disbursements ranging from supporting our most vulnerable to building infrastructure that furthers civic engagement and pride, especially for our youth. Indeed, Belco Skate Park's establishment was driven by the efforts of Rotary members, who

provided \$25,000 for its construction after a local community member got 3,700 signatures on a petition for a north side skate park. On 16 December it will be 24 years since Belco Skate Park was opened by the then minister, Craig DUBY.

Rotary International has a proud history of supporting international student exchanges, both people coming to Canberra and Canberrans going overseas, and the Belconnen club supported its first student exchange in 1976. Rotary is the founding partner of the National Youth Science Forum, and Rotary clubs around Australia, including the Rotary Club of Belconnen, supports students with the costs associated with attending. To emphasise the power of that program, someone who participated in the very first National Youth Science Forum was amateur astronomer and world-famous astrophotographer, discoverer of galaxies, official strongman and our own principal attendant, Mike Sidonio.

Other notable projects that funds from Trash and Treasure have contributed to include crisis accommodation at the Canberra Hospital, the Rotary Cottage at the now North Canberra Hospital, and hundreds and hundreds of projects—in particular, support to charitable organisations like Vinnies and the Salvation Army, to support Canberrans to get on with their lives, and particularly if they are in stress or strife, or whatever it may be. Over \$4½ million had been disbursed, thanks to the Trash and Treasure markets, back in 2011, which, in today's dollars, is probably more than \$6 million. Of course, hundreds of thousands of dollars have been raised since then.

I am very proud and humble—a bit of a paradox there—to have had an association with the Rotary Club of Belconnen since I was elected to this place. It has been eight years now, but it is a short amount of time compared to its longevity. I am looking forward to joining members again on 14 December for the Christmas hamper packing—something which began 31 years ago. I very much enjoy joining with them in the early hours of a Saturday morning in Florey. This year, 350 hampers have been arranged, with the products bought thanks to the Rotary Club of Belconnen. They will be packed that morning and then offered to schools and charities

These are just a few small insights into what sits behind and what is achieved for our community, thanks to one of Canberra's most well-known Sunday services. Long may it continue.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 5.34 pm.**