



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

5 December 2024

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* should be lodged in writing with the Hansard office no later than **Tuesday, 24 December 2024**.

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Thursday, 5 December 2024

MR SPEAKER (Mr Parton) (10.01): Members:

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

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.

Inaugural speech

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.02): I seek leave of the Assembly to make my inaugural speech.

Leave granted.

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

MR EMERSON: It is an immense privilege to have been elected by the people of Kurrajong and to take my seat as an independent member of this Assembly. I feel grateful to have been given this opportunity to represent the community I love and to serve the place I love to call home.

Becoming a politician was not a path I ever envisioned taking. Politics was not something that drew me in. Instead, I studied philosophy. Philosophy taught me to think more clearly; to question the world around me and to question myself; to adopt multiple perspectives and to be wary of the biases shaping my own; to develop my own life philosophy, grounded in values considered and carefully chosen; to be like a fish perceiving water for the first time and to reach my own position as to whether the water made for a good place to swim, rather than just seeking to be a good swimmer. Philosophy taught me that what makes human beings unique is that we can choose to live differently. Although we are victims of our past, we do not have to be. We can choose to change. My studies taught me that meaningful change starts not out there, at the level of the collective, but right here, at the level of the individual.

An extended experience with pain in my teens and early 20s reinforced that lesson and taught me the value of the body. Living with chronic pain showed me that, regardless of what we think, much of what we do is driven by a physical state. Over several years of study and practice, I learnt how much power we have over our state. I also learnt that so few of us seem to grasp that power and do something positive with

it. I learnt that we absorb ourselves with what is happening out in the world, while missing the fact that what we do each day, who we choose to practice being, how we carry ourselves, how we treat each other and how we respond to what arises most directly shape the quality of our lives.

I learnt from my pain that I was complicit in my own suffering and that it was up to me to create a different experience—a better experience for myself—and to exercise agency over my life and over my future. Unlike a fish, which cannot separate itself from the water in which it swims, we can. We have a choice. We can choose to live with more love, compassion and courage, to orient ourselves towards bringing about what could be, rather than resigning ourselves to what is.

These lessons motivated me to open Canberra's first holistic movement studio. I wanted to create a space to share the tools that had been empowering for me and helped me understand and address my experience of pain. I wanted to build a community around expressing our ability to choose, with a focus on choosing to be well. I called the studio *Praksis*—an acknowledgement that our theories are nothing without the practices that make them real; that ideas are great, but actions are better; and that we only really learn by implementing our ideas and paying close attention to the consequences, not wedding ourselves to what makes sense on paper without due consideration of the messiness of being human.

I started a family in 2022, five years after opening my studio. Having a newborn while running a small business during a global pandemic pulled my awareness outward. I was prompted to begin paying closer attention to politics. I did not feel encouraged by what I saw. I looked for inspiring leadership, but instead I found many people in positions of power taking decisions to protect their own interests, serving themselves rather than serving us. I saw simultaneous climate, housing and mental health crises tearing at the fabric of our social contract, which demands that we leave this place better than we found it and that we offer the next generation a better life than we were given by the generation before us.

I saw those crises met with complacency on the part of many political leaders. I felt frustrated to see people with the capacity to course-correct but refusing to do so and refusing to be bold; often refusing to even acknowledge that we need to course-correct. So I ask my colleagues in this Assembly: are we on the right path; do we need to course-correct?

Half the population has a chronic health condition. Eight hundred and seventy children accessed homelessness services here in Canberra last year. The ACT is the loneliest jurisdiction in Australia. Young adults are the loneliest. Twenty-five per cent of Canberrans report having a mental disorder, the second-highest rate in Australia. When will we start talking about root causes? Why are so many people in our community unwell? And what can we do to turn things around to help people be well and give ourselves hope for the future?

Hopelessness has become normalised. The climate is changing rapidly. Sixty-five local species face extinction. Ecoanxiety has left more than 50 per cent of young people fearing the future, while 80 per cent of our youth believe politicians think too short-term. Too many young people feel anxious and depressed, lacking the tools to

express agency over their lives. What if politics could help give them agency and could give us all a say in where we are headed? Would we then course-correct?

The ACT has the highest rate of persistent homelessness in the country, the longest category 2 surgery wait times, the highest Indigenous incarceration gap, the worst criminal reoffending rates, and the second-largest disparity in educational outcomes between disadvantaged children and their advantaged classmates. Canberra is the least walkable major city in the country, with the lowest public transport usage of all our capital cities. We have the fewest GPs per capita among major Australian cities and the lowest bulk-billing rate. Too many people are being left behind.

People facing disadvantage in our city are, on many metrics, more heavily impacted by their disadvantage than they would be anywhere else in Australia. That is the opposite of what would be the case in a truly progressive society. Given what we know about the lives of people who most need our help, is it okay to proceed with business as usual? Maybe business as usual is good enough. Perhaps nothing needs to change. This is, after all, the second-most liveable city in the world. I have to say that it is a very liveable city for me, thanks to the privileges I have been afforded. I love living here, on beautiful Ngunnawal country, and I feel incredibly fortunate to do so.

It is not a liveable city, though, for the woman I spoke with who needed a new public housing dwelling because she was living in constant fear, as she was soon to testify in court against her violent neighbour who had attacked another neighbour with a hammer. She could not get her case manager to arrange a transfer before the trial. It is not a liveable city for the young man who introduced himself to me at my local shops who, despite sleeping rough in a tent nearby, could not get homelessness services on the phone to seek help. It is not a liveable city for the woman I met recently who has been walking with a cane, waiting for a hip replacement in our public health system since 2018. It is not a liveable city for the parents I met who lost children to catastrophic road accidents involving repeat offenders. It is not a liveable city for the woman in her 90s who supported my campaign because she hopes to see improvements to her local footpaths so she can get around her suburb in her wheelchair.

After 26 years without any independents being elected to this Assembly, Canberrans voted for independents because they want change. What I heard from those who hope to see independent voices in this place is that people want politicians to be more than administrators; they want politicians to be leaders and take responsibility for what is and is not happening in our community.

People want politicians to be ambitious, not for themselves but for them, the people politicians represent, because for too many the system is not working. Canberrans have a strong social conscience. Failing those facing disadvantage is un-Canberran. We expect ourselves and each other to do what is right. I hope that, in this Eleventh Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory, we uphold that expectation and that we do what people wish politicians would do: put politics aside and work together to tackle the challenges we face.

Surely that is the true purpose of politics: to come together as a community and collectively decide what we want for our lives, for our children and for their children,

and exercise our shared agency over our future. So I ask my colleagues: do we want a future characterised by inequality, poor health, pessimism, social isolation and fear? Will we ignore the statistics and the story they tell about the suffering in many pockets of our community? Will we fail to engage with that suffering because our lives are okay? Or, instead, will we choose to take ambitious action for the sake of current and future generations?

I believe we can solve our problems. We do not need to be victims of history. The ACT is a small jurisdiction with one level of government that could move quickly. We have the highest median income in the country, and there is a social licence here to show ambition when it comes to pushing for progress and being progressive in the best possible sense.

We are innovators. We have a highly educated and highly skilled population. Canberrans are ready and willing to offer their expertise and come up with solutions that work. We should be leading the nation rather than dragging our feet and falling behind other states and territories. We should be looking up and out and drawing on best practice from across the world, while leaning on all the knowledge and wisdom we have here in our nation's capital.

I believe we can make Canberra a model city that others seek to emulate—a place that is designed specifically to support everyone in our community to live full and meaningful lives; a place where quality housing, health care and education are available for all, not just for those who can afford it. Canberra can lead the way in answering the question of how to bring people together and build connected communities in a post-pandemic and working-from-home world.

Our national capital should be a hub for the creative arts and major events—a place that people celebrate for its thriving nightlife and local music scene; a home for meaningful reconciliation where we go beyond symbolism and commit to taking ambitious action to close the gap for Indigenous Canberrans. We can draw on First Nations wisdom about responsible stewardship over the place we all call home and learn to live in harmony with nature, as part of nature.

Canberra should show ambition in transitioning to a better and more sustainable transport system that prioritises public and active transport. We can be agile and punch above our weight as a first mover, accelerating and implementing forward-looking innovations. Canberra should offer fertile ground for people who feel inspired to come up with new ideas and turn those ideas into successful business that support our community.

It is time for our city to become a place that offers young people a future they feel excited about. We can start by making the ACT the first jurisdiction in Australia to legislate a future generations act. I believe all of this is possible if every member of this Assembly uses their privileged position to make it so. We need to make our decisions as though we were not in such a privileged position—instead, from a position without privilege—and act in the interests of those in our community who will not be found in this building; who may not see themselves as being represented here; who, due largely to the circumstances around which they were born, struggle to even conceive of this kind of place as a place for them; who are most distant from

politics but whose lives will often be most heavily impacted by the actions and inaction of people in power. This place should serve such people.

I hope to play my role in ensuring that is the case by serving as a good local member, making clear to those I represent that I want them to share their ideas, concerns and experiences with me. My aim is to make them feel it was worth having done so, and to prove to people in my community that this is their Assembly.

I will also use my time in this place to repay the efforts of those who got me here, the people who backed me from day one: Leigh, Rob, Dani, Malcolm and Clare, David Pocock, Fiona, Rory, Linc, Sam and Tash, and the entire Praksis community. I also thank fellow candidates supported by the Independents for Canberra movement: Sara, Ben, Sue, Tenzin, Anne-Louise, Paula, Nathan, Robert, Kathleen, Mark, Leanne, Suzanne, Vanessa, Riley, Elise, David, Sneha, Vikram and Trent.

Having heard across our community that people wanted to see a different kind of politics, we built a movement not based on ideology, party membership or factional battles. We built a movement based on 10 principles intended to communicate the kind of political representation we are seeing from community independents across the country: one, every voice is heard, working to ensure nobody is ignored or left behind; two, no vested interests and basing our decisions solely on the needs of our community; three, empowering locals and taking a collaborative approach where we support local initiatives, businesses and community organisations; four, accessibility and being active participants in the life of the community we represent; five, hard work and doing everything possible to deliver for Canberrans; six, integrity, following through, being accountable and admitting to any mistakes; seven, long-term thinking and making decisions that reach beyond the election cycle; eight, evidence based policy, grounding our views on evidence and updating them when new evidence emerges; nine, collaboration and working constructively with other elected representatives; and 10, independence and remaining free of influence from any party interests.

These are the principles I intend to uphold during my time here. I know it is possible to uphold these principles despite perhaps being incentivised at times to violate them, and I know that thanks to the Independents for Canberra movement. We proved that, despite the apparent contradiction, there can be such a thing as a party of independents. We showed that it is possible for a group of political candidates to make a firm commitment to work together while always retaining their full freedom to disagree.

Our candidates were people whose voices you could believe and whose actions you could trust as authentic, because there was no mechanism within our organisation to force anyone to say or do anything. They put their hands up not because they believed in a suite of prescriptive political dogmas—we did not have any of those—but because they believed in a new approach to political representation. Our principle based approach allowed for honesty, for individuality, for multitude perspectives, for constructive disagreement and for genuine consensus-building.

Each of us did and said things that others in our group disagreed with, and that was fine because we understood the grounds for the disagreement, and the divergence was at the level of policy, not of principle. When we were tempted to be sucked into the

politics rather than sticking to our ideals, we used our principles to remind each other and ourselves of the fact that we had all come together, not because we wanted to become politicians but because we wanted to see positive change for our community. Without a party machine, a head office or any paid staff, we, the candidates, used our 10 principles to build a policy platform grounded in the diversity of our experiences and the views among our respective electorates. We developed policies that made our principles tangible, and we did so by listening to what people wanted to see change.

We heard our community wants this to be a fair society, the best place in Australia to grow up, regardless of people's background, where housing is treated as a right, not a luxury, where we support our most vulnerable, and with a criminal justice system that reduces recidivism and keeps our community safe.

We heard people across the ACT want to live in a healthy Canberra—but we remember that health does not start at the hospital—where community sport and wellness programs are available to all, where women and children feel safe and free from the pain and trauma imposed by family, domestic and sexual violence, where transport infrastructure is viewed through the lens of our health and the health of our environment, where we bring people together to strengthen community bonds while celebrating our diversity, and where we have access to a nation-leading healthcare system that does not keep you waiting.

We heard that Canberrans want our government to invest in a flourishing future and lay out a vision for Canberra that prioritises the wellbeing of current and future generations, that tackles root causes of the housing, mental health and biodiversity crises, that fosters a diverse economy where we back people who back themselves, supports small businesses and local producers to thrive, and that steps into Canberra's potential as a testbed city, pulling together ambitious ideas from around the world to be bold and take risks as a nation leader.

We heard that people believe these changes could be brought about by a new kind of politics: by making our government accessible, giving community members a say in the decisions that affect them, making ourselves accountable, always doing what we say we will do, and taking action, focusing ourselves on deliverables rather than announceables.

Although I hoped to have the company of some of my fellow candidates in the chamber to carry this platform forward together—in fact, some are in the gallery today—I am proud to be here to represent them in the success of this movement.

I thank the dozens of volunteers who put their hands up, put their faith in us and mobilised behind our principles and our objectives with the hope that we could come together as a community, through politics, to realise an ambitious shared vision for our future. Just as they pushed us forward, I will push forward the possibilities they believe in.

I also thank my parents, Cathy Hudson and Craig Emerson, for believing in me, giving me a privileged start to life, embedding in me the importance of social justice and modelling for me what it means to be a leader. I thank my wife, Chana Rose, for her patience, support and resilience, and for providing our children, Sebastian and

Luna, with a home full of love. I hope she will continue to keep me honest.

Inaugural speech

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (10.22): I seek leave of the Assembly to make my inaugural speech.

Leave granted.

MS MORRIS: It is because of liberal democratic values that I proudly stand before the ACT Assembly as an elected representative for the people of Tuggeranong in my electorate of Brindabella. I want to thank the people of Tuggeranong for placing their trust in me. Tuggeranong is home to a beautifully vibrant and diverse people: each with their own story to tell about their hopes and hardships, their aspirations and setbacks, who they are, where they have come from and why they have made Tuggeranong their home.

Like many people in my community, I was not born in Canberra. My journey started in Perth, Western Australia, the youngest of four children. When I was three, my family moved to Cape Town, South Africa. It was a turbulent time in South Africa's dark history. Apartheid was coming to an end, but the political violence and the unrest was not. Our Australian family pleaded with Mum and Dad not to go. "It is too dangerous", they said, "You could get hurt or even killed. What about the children?" But Mum and Dad would not be swayed. When others were fleeing the country they were moving towards it because their hearts were set on service. Dad would serve in education and Mum would help women in townships when she was not at home with us kids.

So they packed up our lives in Australia and off we went to begin our lives in Africa. It was only a matter of months before the realities of our new world became very clear. It should have been like any other Sunday, except on this particular Sunday my siblings and I decided we had had enough. We were overexcited and overtired, so Mum decided to keep us at home while Dad went off to the evening church service alone. Not long into the service, it was attacked by four men who threw grenades into the congregation and opened fire at unsuspecting families. Eleven people were killed and more than 50 seriously injured. Despite the tragedy, my parents were not going anywhere. They remained committed to serving in South Africa because in their hearts it was the right thing to do, even if it was not the easy thing to do.

My childhood in Africa was both beautiful and eye-opening. It was a very simple life. We never had much food in the fridge, but Mum and Dad always made sure that there was a meal on the table and a sandwich to spare when homeless people would knock on our door. My parents became very well known amongst the homeless in our neighbourhood. Word soon got around that we were the house they came to if they needed food, a blanket, something to wear or a word of encouragement. When one of them died, Mum and Dad were there to comfort and counsel. We lived in a place where the best and worst of humanity converged. We heard the gun fights, and we saw the poverty, the drugs, the crime and the human suffering. How do you describe that moment when you look into the eyes of a man who is robbing your home while you are there all alone and see nothing but desperation in his eyes? Or that moment

when you are travelling in a car, and it is blockaded and swarmed by an armed gang? Yet despite these experiences, we witnessed something much more extraordinary at work. We witnessed the transformational power of hope, aspiration, forgiveness, personal responsibility, freedom and enterprise.

Many people ask me why I joined the Liberal Party. The answer is simple: I know what bad government looks like, and I know what can happen when liberal values are injected into struggling communities. The fortunes of my childhood community started to turn when liberal values were introduced. A private organisation revitalised decaying real estate to create housing, education, community facilities and places of worship. This private investment attracted small business, and this attracted visitors not just from neighbouring suburbs but from around the world. Over the years, we witnessed our crime-ridden community show signs of life and productivity as people started coming to the area for study, work, worship and even to raise a family. You do not just have to take my word for it: the Liberal tradition has done incalculable good for societies around the world that have adopted it.

As a Liberal, I am proud to belong to a tradition that throughout history has fought for human dignity and legal equality as well as economic and personal freedoms. From the emancipation of slaves and the recognition that every individual has inherent value, to the enactment of religious freedoms and establishing equality before the law, Liberals have pioneered the way for more just, humane and prosperous societies. These were never easy political battles to win. The champions of these reforms dedicated their lives to the cause against fierce opposition and, sometimes, popular opinion. This is the Liberal tradition. Our duty now, as inheritors of this tradition, is to protect all the good, the beauty and the truth that it has yielded, so that future generations can flourish even more than ours have.

I believe that families are the bedrock of flourishing societies. Healthy families build healthy communities. Sir Robert Menzies described it as the home—homes material that one little piece of earth with a house and a garden which is ours; homes human, that place where you and your immediate family are; and homes spiritual, where human nature knows its place. So, like many Liberals who have gone before me, I come to this place to fight for families. I know I have a very big job ahead of me. Why? Because too many working families in Tuggeranong are battling through each day; too many families are on the edge with their mortgage or rental payments; and too many are struggling to make ends meet, even to put food on the table. I have spoken with them over the course of the year.

We all know that Canberra is a beautiful and a blessed city, but if you look closely there is hidden suffering, and it is widespread. Take Michael from Gordon, who described to me the shame he feels every time he goes to a food pantry for help with his next meal, or Tracey from Bonython, a single mother who broke down in tears because she did not know whether to spend her money on food for her children or a medical bill. Take Stephen from Gowrie, who wants to start a family but will not, because after they have paid the bills they can only afford two-minute noodles, or Karen, also from Gowrie, who has to take her daughter to Sydney once a month for lifesaving treatment because she cannot access needed healthcare here. Then there is beautiful Chloe from Banks, a first-time mum in her early 20s, managing the joys and challenges of a newborn on her own while her husband works two jobs to keep the

lights on. There is Ella from Macarthur, another young mum who wants to stay at home to care for her daughter but feels the choice has been taken from her because her family cannot survive on one income. Lastly, Brett Palmer and Rick, whom my husband spoke with at Lanyon shops during pre-poll, whose personal experiences shining a light on the importance for all of us being connected to our community.

In this place, may we never forget that these are the people we are here to serve. My vision for Canberra is that it would be a place where all families—where people like Michael, Tracey, Stephen, Karen, Chloe, Brett, Ella and Rick—can be prosperous, safe and free, but on each of these fronts I fear that Canberra is going backwards.

When I returned to Australia at 18, I thought I had come to the land flowing with milk and honey. I only had \$50 to my name, but I never doubted for a second how fortunate I was that Australia was my home. I set to work immediately, handling fish and meat in the deli at Coles to get me on my feet. Despite having barely enough money to buy toothpaste, I was able to gain graduate and postgraduate qualifications. I will forever be grateful for that because I know many of my peers back in Africa would never have such an opportunity.

Australia is a great country, but that did not happen by accident. Relocating to Canberra, I knew I had found my home. It was not just the trees—so many trees—or the magnificent Brindabellas: it was overwhelmingly the people. We are a city built on service. It is at the core of who we are, and it is what we do. We serve our country and we serve our community.

The people of Tuggeranong have a heart of service. They are our nurses, teachers, public servants. They are tradies and local business owners. They volunteer at churches, charities and food pantries. They are working hard and they are earning their keep, but at the end of the day there is not always a lot to show for it. Why does it always feel like we are paying more but getting less?

I believe that strong economies build strong futures for families, but anyone who is vigilant to our economic environment would rightly be concerned for our future prosperity. Labor likes to praise themselves for 23 years of uninterrupted progressive government but I reject the notion that Labor has the monopoly on progress. Instead, what I see is 23 years of decline. Labor's record is debt and deficit with a downgrading of the ACT's triple AAA credit rating, and it is hardworking families who are paying the price for it. Increases in rates, taxes, fees and charges are hurting families and local businesses, and many people in Tuggeranong are struggling to see what they are getting in return.

Homelessness in Canberra has never been worse. Our health system is not coping with all the health needs in our community. Education outcomes in schools continue to decline. I am proudly the product of the public education system in South Africa, so I know the critical service it provides. Tuggeranong teachers have told me their concerns about declining outcomes, behavioural issues and aging infrastructure. Indigenous incarceration rates are among the worst in Australia.

Local businesses face prohibitive regulatory and taxation barriers and the great Australian dream of owning a home, that little piece of earth with a house and a

garden is dying in Canberra. Labor's stranglehold on land supply with the socialist dream of a high-rise concrete jungle are pushing up the cost of housing while removing genuine choice. We need to help more Canberrans realise their dream of owning a home, and everyone deserves to be safe in that home.

That is why I believe, in addition to building a strong economy, one of the most fundamental duties of government is to ensure the safety of its people. This is the social contract whereby individuals relinquish whatever vigilante dispositions they may have to a sovereign power that can ensure their safety and deliver justice, but in Canberra the social contract is not being honoured. Our criminal justice system is failing to deliver justice for victims, families and the community. Our under-resourced and overworked police force are doing their best to keep criminals out of our suburbs, but just as soon as they have been locked up, the system spits them back out, only for them to go on to re-offend. Our police do not always have the backing of the government and that is partly, I believe, because Labor is driving an agenda to decriminalise crime.

The Labor-Greens government committed an offence against its people when they decriminalised hard drugs like heroin, ice and cocaine. Drugs kill, and anyone who has spent any time in a drug-infested community could tell you this. Bobby, Aaron, Phil, Rick; these are just some of the young lives that I knew in South Africa that were cut short because of drugs or drug-related violence. Drugs usher in death, poverty and suffering, and many women are fleeing their homes because of drug-fuelled violence. Jurisdictions that have liberalised them are now trying to reverse course and we should do the same before it is too late. I will strongly reject any attempt by those opposite to weaken laws designed to keep our community safe.

But what good is safety if you are not free to enjoy it? Menzies was right when he said:

The real freedoms are to worship, to think, to speak, to choose, to be ambitious, to be independent, to be industrious, to acquire skill, to seek reward.

Increasingly, the Labor Party, with the support of the Greens, have been picking away at our civil liberties. They want to tell us what cars we are allowed to drive and how we can heat our homes and cook our meals—as if Canberrans were not mature enough to make these decisions on their own.

On just about every metric, including workplace culture, Calvary Hospital performed better than Canberra Hospital. So on what grounds could the government forcibly acquire Canberra's best-performing hospital? This was little more than an ideological attack; not just on religious freedoms, but on the freedom of health workers to choose their employer and on the freedom of health consumers to choose their health provider. A precedent has now been set, so what other freedoms will those opposite impinge on? I come to this place to do my very small part to safeguard the civil liberties that generations before us have secured. I know there is so much more we can do to advance the cause of freedom. For example, I want women like Ella to be free; free to return to work after having children, or free to care for her children at home without the fear of not being able to put food on the table or keep a roof over her head; equally admirable choices, yet equally prohibitive in their own way.

On each of these measures—prosperity, safety and freedom—I worry that we are going backwards, especially in Tuggeranong. Tuggeranong sent a loud message at the election, with a 6.9 per cent swing against Labor and 4.7 swing towards the Liberals. Tuggeranong residents have had enough of always being left behind. They have had enough of the lack of suburban maintenance, neglected local shops, less than adequate playgrounds and a long list of broken promises. They are paying for these services and I will fight, alongside my friend Speaker Mark Parton, to ensure they get them.

I said at the start that it was because of liberal democratic values that I stand here today, and that is because there is no other political system in the world that would enable young women like me to take office. Unlike some in this room, I do not come from a family of wealth, connections or pedigree. I was never surrounded by a party machine, nor did I ever have ambitions for political office as a young girl. What I inherited from my parents was far greater than any of that—the value of hard work, reward for effort, personal responsibility and a deep sense of service, and because of that, I feel the weight of my duty as an elected representative.

Before I close, I want to take this opportunity to thank the people around me, without whom I would not be standing in this place today. Some of you are in the gallery today. Please forgive me for not naming all of you individually. There are too many, but I want you to know that I will be forever grateful for the long hours, the moral support, advice and guidance you each poured into my campaign in your own way. To the two Johns, Ben, Jordan, Ethan, Patrick, Talisa, Greg, Dorner, Darryl, Vic, Jan, Linda, Rich and Matt, thank you so very much. I particularly want to thank my Mum and Dad for making the great trek from the west coast for your first ever taste of politics. Who would have thought that your near-dreadlock haired daughter, who once roamed the streets of Cape Town barefoot, would today be taking a seat in parliament! Thank you for always living your values and not just talking about them. Thank you for showing me what hard work, perseverance, grit and a life of service looks like.

Thank you to my family: to my husband, Adam; to Ava and Lucy; and to my little baby boy, Judah. To my husband, Adam, what a year it has been. I would not have wanted to share this journey with anyone but you. Thank you for being my confidant, for always encouraging me and pushing me forward. Thank you for not quitting my campaign when I would not listen to you. I promise I will get better at updating my social media and taking photos of myself. You are a domestic legend. Thank you for feeding not just me but all of our volunteers breakfast and lunch every Saturday, too. Thank you for waking up at 4 am to fix my corflutes and set up pre-poll booths.

Thank you Ava and Lucy for giving up your weekends and school holidays to help me hand out flyers throughout the campaign. I do not think there are many teenagers who would happily sacrifice time with their friends to work on a political campaign but you both did joyfully, and without grumbling or complaining. I know you won many hearts with your beautiful spirits and warm natures, not just in the community, but I think across the aisle too. I suspect many people were actually voting for you two rather than me, and I am very proud of the young women you are growing into. Thank you of course to the best baby boy I could ever have asked for. Little man, since day one you were my constant companion on the campaign trail. You chirped very happily in your pram at countless shopping centres and gurgled beautifully on the

doors, only cracking it a few times when conversations went on too long. So I thank you for your political astuteness to keep mum moving! I will cherish the memories you and I have made together on the campaign trail forever. When I entered the race, Ava, Lucy, Adam and I had only one condition, and that was: if I was going to run, we would do it as a family, and I am so very proud that we lived up to that condition.

At the end of my time in this place, I hope I will be able to say I was a good and faithful servant: I listened to my people; I heard my people; and I served my people. I hope that when the times get tough and the battles become overwhelming that I will have the strength and resolve that my parents demonstrated to us in Africa, to hold fast to my values and convictions because it is the right thing to do even if it is not the easy thing to do, because I know there are so many people in our community who are relying on us to fight for them.

Legislative Assembly Sitting pattern 2025

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) (10.43): I move:

That the Assembly shall meet as follows for 2025 unless an absolute majority of Members request, in writing, that the Speaker or in the absence of the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, or in the absence of both the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker, the Clerk, fixes an alternative day or hour of meeting or the Assembly otherwise orders:

February	4	5	6
March	4	5	6
	18	19	20
April	8	9	10
May	6	7	8
	13	14	15
June	24	25	26
September	2	3	4
	16	17	18
	23	24	25
October	21	22	23
	28	29	30
December	2	3	4

Debate (on motion by **Ms Tough**) adjourned to a later hour.

Standing order 122—amendment

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (10.44): I move:

That standing order 122 be omitted, and substituted as follows:

“122. The answer to a question on notice shall be given through the Parliament Portal and shall be signed by the answering Member. The asking Member shall be notified of receipt of the answer.

Questions may be redirected within 15 days, and the Member receiving the redirected question has 30 days to answer once the redirection has been agreed to.”.

This is a pretty straightforward change to standing order 122. It is basically just modernising how questions on notice are responded to electronically, no longer needing the hardcopy. It was agreed by Admin and Procedure after being suggested by the Office of the Clerk. So I think it is a pretty straightforward thing, and I commend the motion.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legislative Assembly—Ministerial staff

MS CASTLEY(Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.45), by leave: I move:

That, in accordance with standing order 213A, the Assembly calls on the Chief Minister to table a statement providing total staffing expenditure for each ministerial office, including his own, for each of the last five years and the current financial year, and any documents with this information.

MR BARR(Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.46): Well, I will endeavour to do that. I will not be able to do that today. It will take some time to pull together all of that information. That information is not held in my office; it is held within the public service, within the executive support area. So, as long as it is understood that that will take some time, it will not be here today, I am happy to provide that information. It is available in aggregated form in the annual reports and in the budget papers each year.

The breakdown by office is not always straightforward, because staff within Greens executive offices at times and within Labor executive offices have been shared between multiple offices. So it may not be straightforward to provide a breakdown by individual office because of shared staff. Shared staffing arrangements are allowed within the non-executive as well.

So, to be clear, we may not be in a position to the final dollar to be able to do that. In fact, it may be easier to provide information on allocations for individual ministerial offices and then an allocation for that for staff that are shared across multiple executive positions. Examples that I can provide now are that some ministers share media advisers or communications advisers. There are shared responsibilities for some of the executive chief-of-staff and deputy chief-of-staff roles that apply across ministerial offices. Management of government business has often been shared between staff across multiple ministerial offices.

So, to be clear, it is not straightforward. There have never been allocations that are strictly siloed by minister. There are always shared resources given the small nature of the executive and of the staffing arrangements. So, in noting Ms Castley's motion, I will take that on notice, effectively, and provide the information in due course.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (10.48): It is not the most appropriate use of the standing order 213A process here today. I just wanted to communicate on behalf of the Greens that we would hope that future use of that 213A involves, in writing, going through Admin and Procedures to be scheduled as a normal part of business as the appropriate way. But, given the fact that we will be suspending for lunch very shortly, we are quite happy to support this in the interests also of increased transparency.

This information is also quite pertinent in terms of some of the immediate commentary that has been made about the staff and allocations that have been made between various offices here. Firstly, there has been a significant increase in the staffing allocation made to executive budgets over the years. If you go back to 2015-16, about 44 per cent of the staff allocation budget went to non-executive versus the executive. That has now been reduced to about 23 per cent. So there has been a significant shift over that period of time where we are seeing an increase in the executive, despite a relatively comparative increase in both executive and non-executive members here within the Assembly.

Also, as part of that reporting, there has been commentary about whether there should be an independent process applied to determine what would be the political staffing allocation to offices here. That is something the Greens would be very supportive of, because there is an inherent conflict of interest within the current Lands Act. So we will be quite keen to collaborate with any parties here to ensure that we can come up with a non-partisan approach whereby that can be addressed.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.50), in reply: I note Mr Braddock's comments. In future, when we are not crushed at the end of the year, we will make sure we try to put these things on the notice paper, and I acknowledge that the Chief Minister is doing his best to get us the information that we want. I do believe it is important for transparency that everybody can see what everybody except the minister's office and the Chief Minister's office have allocated. So we are keen to see this information and appreciate everybody being willing to take the time to indulge me this morning.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Leave of absence

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) agreed to:

That leave of absence from Friday, 6 December 2024 to Monday, 3 February 2025 be given to all Members.

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) agreed to:

That leave of absence be granted to Ms Stephen-Smith for this sitting due to her

attendance at a Ministerial council.

Sitting suspended from 10.52 am to 2.00 pm.

Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (2.01):. Ministers Orr and Stephen-Smith are not present in question time, as they are attending ministerial councils. It is peak intergovernmental meeting season this week. Minister Berry, the Deputy Chief Minister, will respond to questions in the portfolio areas of disability, carers and community services, seniors and veterans, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. Minister Steel will respond to questions in the finance and public service portfolios, and I will endeavour—and do my best!—to respond to questions in all of the remaining portfolios: health, mental health, climate change, environment, energy and water.

Questions without notice

ACT Health and Canberra Health Services—staffing

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health—the Chief Minister in this instance. Minister, why is it that morale in health agencies has fallen to a point where government is struggling to retain specialist medical staff, nursing staff, allied health staff and even administrative staff?

MR BARR: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question—I think! I am sure the Minister the Health would disagree with the premise of the question and would outline in some detail the success of recruitment strategies that both Canberra Health Services and ACT Health have undertaken.

Mr Hanson: If you don't know, just say so, Andrew.

MR BARR: I do not know that the facts actually support the proposition that the Leader of the Opposition is putting. I am sure that when this matter is further explored, in either annual report hearings or estimates, further detail can be provided to dispel the assertion that the Leader of the Opposition has made in that question.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what will you do to address reports that the shortage of administrative staff means allied health and social workers are undertaking some patient discharges.

MR BARR: Clearly, we are in a period of full employment in the ACT. We have the lowest unemployment rate in the nation, so it is not straightforward to find applicants in every single area where there are job vacancies. Canberra Health Services continue recruitment campaigns locally—particularly in partnership with our university and TAFE sector—nationally and internationally to fill vacancies that we have across the health service. Where a vacancy cannot be filled, obviously work does need to be performed, and that work is performed within the Canberra Health Services team. But we continue to actively recruit locally, nationally and internationally.

MR CAIN: Minister, will you undertake to advise the Assembly on staff shortages, including measures of shortages across different occupations, and how these shortages are being managed?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Cain for the supplementary question. There are, obviously, reporting mechanisms within the annual reports and budget statements in relation to funded positions, staffing levels and outcomes that are achieved. It is clearly a dynamic system with nearly 10,000 staff in Canberra Health Services. So there will always be an element of new people being recruited and some existing staff either retiring or moving to other jobs.

I think there are appropriate reporting mechanisms, and we will continue to report through those mechanisms.

Crime—antisocial behaviour

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, my office has been informed of an incident of indecent exposure. This incident occurred outside a massage parlour in Dundas Court and involved topless women and condoms in public areas which host children's activities, such as a chess club and a martial arts facility. Minister, are you concerned by these reports?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. I am concerned if the reports have not been made to ACT police, because that is the appropriate avenue to report this. Thank you for raising it. You can always email my office and I am always happy to pass that information on to ACT police.

MS MORRIS: Minister, what have you done to protect children and the community?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. Crime prevention is a key responsibility of ACT Policing. I commend ACT police for doing an outstanding job in our community to reduce crime. I am sure members are aware that ACT Policing released their annual report yesterday or the day before. I am really pleased to report that crimes against people in the ACT have reduced by 11 per cent and crimes against property have reduced by seven per cent. I really commend ACT police on the work that they have done. Crime prevention is working. Over the last few years, ACT police have moved to a police services model which is more about prevention and community focused operations. It is intelligence led and evidence based. It is agile and mobile and is obviously reaping rewards for the community, because we are seeing such substantial reductions in crime.

MR COCKS: Minister, were you unaware of the incident outside a massage parlour involving topless women and condoms in public areas which host children's activities?

DR PATERSON: I was unaware.

Public schools—infrastructure

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood.

Minister, you recently promised that ACT Labor would upgrade classrooms, playgrounds, green spaces, staff rooms, and toilets in public schools across Canberra, if re-elected in October 2024. You said on 23 September:

We will conduct an audit of all our public schools ... to understand the intimate detail of every single school and what the priorities are for every school.

When will this audit be conducted and will it be published?

MS BERRY: Yes, we will be conducting an audit of all our schools, working with our school communities. Part of the work that we have been doing in government is the insourcing work with the building services officers, who have some intimate knowledge of their schools, which will help the Education Directorate work with schools to understand their priorities when it comes to maintenance and repairs of the schools. That will be an important part of the work we will do into the audit. I will have to consider whether or not the audit is made public and whether that is of use to the community, or whether it is information that is kept within the directorate and within schools to do that work.

MR HANSON: Minister, how many schools are you aware of that do not have adequate toilets or heating right now?

MS BERRY: The purpose of the audit is to understand what those kinds of issues are and what the priorities of the schools are within our community.

MS BARRY: Minister, after 23 years in government, why do you not know the condition of our schools?

MS BERRY: Previously, particularly under federal conservative governments, there was a move towards school autonomy which meant that information about schools and around infrastructure was not often passed on to the directorate. We are moving to a less autonomous approach with our public—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MS BERRY: We are moving towards a more system-wide approach to how we manage our school system—

Mr Cain interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain.

MS BERRY: We are moving towards a more system-wide approach within our schools so that all schools have contact with the Education Directorate. The Education Directorate is very clear with schools, understanding what they need as far as education supports and as far as infrastructure, maintenance and repairs. One of the ways that we have been moving towards that is through the direct employment of cleaning services across our schools, taking that work and responsibility off schools—relieving them to do the things that they need to do best, which is teaching. We are also moving building service officers into a more directly employed model to be able

to provide maintenance and repairs to schools in a more timely manner, understanding exactly what the priorities are within our schools at different moments in time and then being able to fund our schools to deliver that work.

Children and young people—institutional responses to child sexual abuse

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, on 13 November 2024, the High Court allowed an appeal from a decision of the Court of Appeal of the Supreme Court of Victoria. The impact of this is that the Roman Catholic Diocese of Ballarat is not vicariously liable for sexual assaults committed by one of its priests. Attorney, what is the ACT doing to address this step backwards for survivors of institutional child sexual abuse accessing justice?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Rattenbury for the question. I assume that he is referring to the matter of Bird. In that case, I would note that we have recently had a meeting of the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General where the issue was raised and discussed. It obviously has national implications. Victoria is leading some work to present back to the standing committee at the start of next year. But, in the meantime, officers from JACS are already having a look at the implications and what this might mean for our own legislative program.

MR RATTENBURY: Attorney, what timeframe are you working towards to deliver legislative change in the ACT to ensure survivors of institutional child sexual abuse do not have their legal matters impacted by this decision?

MS CHEYNE: Obviously, we want to address this as quickly as we can, but we need to understand the full implications and the consequences of the outcome from the High Court. We want to make sure that we get this right, especially given that it does have national implications, and we do want, as far as possible, for the same approach to be adopted across states and territories.

MR BRADDOCK: Attorney-General, are you able to advise how many matters there are in the ACT on foot now that have been impacted by this decision?

MS CHEYNE: No.

Transport Canberra—fare-free travel

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, can you provide the Assembly with an update on the government's plan to introduce fare-free Fridays on public transport services?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question in relation to a key Labor election commitment that we made to deliver fare-free Fridays, which will start from tomorrow, 6 December. This is one of the initiatives that ACT Labor is implementing to support all Canberrans with cost-of-living relief. From when bus and light rail services start in the morning on Friday until they finish in the evening—in fact, to 1 am for light rail services on Saturday—passengers will not have to pay a cent to use them to travel around the city. This is also a great chance for Canberrans to try out our

public transport network and the new public transport ticketing system, My Way+.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how will fare-free Fridays benefit the community?

MR STEEL: We expect that fare-free Fridays will provide a number of benefits to the community. The primary benefit is with cost-of-living relief. Every Canberran will have the option to save on transport costs—whether that be fares, petrol or parking—and travel for free using public transport on a Friday. For a family of two adults and two children, we anticipate fare-free Fridays will save them around \$1,000 a year if they catch a bus or light rail service every day during the week for 48 weeks of the year.

Beyond just getting to and from work or school, this is really a great way for Canberrans to take the opportunity to visit a business in their town centre, or in the city, on a day when patronage is typically lower, with more people working from home. Currently, light rail services run from Gungahlin to the city every 15 minutes until 1 am on Saturday mornings, and rapid buses run every 30 minutes between the city and town centres until around 10.30 pm. Canberrans can now choose to use public transport as a free option to get home safely.

MS TOUGH: Minister, what do passengers need to do to access free public transport on Fridays?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Tough for her supplementary question. To take advantage of fare-free Fridays, we are asking Canberrans to tap on and off using their preferred payment methods, such as a debit card, credit card or My Way+ card or their smartphone, with Apple Pay, Google Wallet or a QR code. Passengers will not be charged any fees on Fridays—no matter which method they choose. We are asking Canberrans to still tap on and off public transport services so that we are able to collect data across the network that we will then use to improve network planning in the future. We will of course be monitoring patronage with that data, and it will provide us with important insights into how people are choosing to move around our city and whether they are taking up this new incentive of free fares on Friday.

Arts—Canberra Youth Theatre

MS CLAY: My question is to the minister for the arts. The Canberra Youth Theatre this week has announced a series of measures to ensure the sustainability of the organisation, including staff cuts, a reduction in training programs and a pause on public productions unless additional, ongoing funding can be secured. This 52-year-old theatre company is not receiving sufficient public funds to produce quality theatre with young people and local professional artists. Our young people will miss out; so will our culture, our artists and our economy, with the ACT's creative sectors contributing \$2.9 billion and around eight per cent to our local economy. The Greens took a policy to the election to increase arts organisation funding because we heard from the sector that they did not have enough funds to run programs or pay artists fairly, and that many organisations would fail as a result. How will you realise the ACT government's ambition to become Australia's arts capital if our leading arts organisations collapse from an ongoing lack of funding that does not meet the actual

demands of the sector?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank the member for the question. The ACT government does not resile from our ambitious agenda in the arts. ACT Labor took to the election a commitment to increase funding to arts organisations by 25 per cent. The Canberra Youth Theatre receives \$300,000 annually from the ACT government. The recent announcement by this organisation, a non-government organisation, to change their service offering does not impact that funding provided by the ACT government.

MS CLAY: Minister, why is the ACT government able to find \$8 million each year for a single industry, the horseracing industry, but it is unable to find an additional \$10 million for the entire arts sector?

MR PETTERSSON: The ACT government is proud to support the local arts industry. The current \$9 million that is provided to arts organisations in the ACT provides for a vibrant arts sector here in the community. We know that more funding will make the ACT more vibrant, which is why we have committed to increasing arts funding for organisations by 25 per cent.

MISS NUTTALL: What consultation have you done with the Canberra Youth Theatre about this issue?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Miss Nuttall for the question. I, like other members, received an email on Tuesday evening, which was then followed by media reporting. I am currently in the process of arranging a meeting with Canberra Youth Theatre.

Cardiology—waiting lists

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, I recently spoke to a constituent with a surgically-implanted heart monitor. The monitor had a three-year working life. He only had the monitor removed 10 years after it was implanted—seven years later than it should have been. This was despite visiting his GP and getting the referral every 90 days as required—for that seven years—to renew his referral so that he could stay on the waiting list.

Why are so many Canberrans having to wait many years longer than necessary for simple procedures?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Castley for the question. I do not know the details of the specific case. I will need to take that on notice on behalf of the Minister for Health.

More broadly, the issue of health funding is one that is the subject of considerable intergovernmental discussion. I note that I take any federal government commitment to increase their share of national health funding very seriously. I want to acknowledge that in the last decade, after the 2014 federal budget, then Prime Minister Turnbull, to his great credit, did increase commonwealth government funding. He closed half of the gap that was created by the 2014 Abbott-Hockey budget. We are now seeking, collectively, as states and territories—

Ms Castley: Point of order, Mr Speaker, on relevance. I am just wondering if the

Chief Minister could address the specific concerns of Canberrans waiting longer than necessary. This does not have anything to do with Tony Abbott.

MR SPEAKER: Stop the clock, please. The Chief Minister at first, at the start of his answer, suggested he would take the detail on notice. Chief Minister, you have 40 seconds to continue providing background on that if you want. I think he has been relevant to the question by taking the specifics on notice.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think the fundamental point is that waiting times across the entirety of the Australian health system is somewhat strongly linked to available funding. In the Australian federation, funding is a partnership between the Australian government and the states and territories. The idea that there were no consequences from that 2014 federal budget is rubbish. The consequences of that decision and those cuts to health have manifested over a decade. That is the point that we have been making repeatedly.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what will you do so that patients, like this constituent, are not required to renew their referrals so frequently—every 90 days—purely to stay on the wait-list?

MR BARR: We will continue to fight for more health funding from the Commonwealth government to make up for the cuts that the federal Liberal Party put in place in 2014. The consequences of those cuts a decade ago—a massive reduction in public health funding—have been seen all decade. The most recent period of government has seen the first serious increase in funding—for bulk-billing and for health funding—other than the amount that then Prime Minister Turnbull returned to the states and territories during his brief period as Prime Minister.

Funding cuts hurt health services.

Ms Castley: On relevance, Mr Speaker, I have a point of order, if I can. My question was about this 90-day period where my constituent must return to their GP to stay on—

MR SPEAKER: Ms Castley, I do not think there is a point of order. I think the Chief Minister is being directly relevant to the question, and I think he has concluded his answer.

MR CAIN: Chief Minister, why are health outcomes getting worse when health spending has increased?

MR BARR: That is because the rate of demand for health services is growing faster than the available funding at both commonwealth and state and territory level.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Members! Can we let the Chief Minister answer.

MR BARR: We continue to invest more every year in health funding. We provide more than 50 per cent. It should be a fifty-fifty funding partnership between the

commonwealth and the states and territories. This is what we are fighting for now, as we have been for some time.

To be clear, under then Prime Minister Abbott the commonwealth reduced their share of funding to 40 per cent or less, in some instances. That was 10 years ago, and the impact of that has been flowing through state and territory health systems for a decade. The inescapable fact for the Liberal Party is that they cut public health funding, and the consequences are there for all to see.

Members interjecting—

Ms Berry: A point of order. It is the third day of the new government, and there are constant interjections from the Canberra Liberals. It was relatively quiet over the last two days, but today it is a barrage.

MR SPEAKER: Members, if we can try to stop this from becoming a circus, that would be good.

Big Canberra Battery

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. The Big Canberra Battery started as a \$100 million government project, but the government ultimately entered a \$400 million arrangement with a Macquarie Bank subsidiary, Eku Energy. Under this arrangement, the financial benefits to the taxpayer are public, but the costs are commercial-in-confidence and kept from the public. Did the government prepare a business case or cost-benefit analysis for this project? If so, does it provide a positive financial return for taxpayers?

MR BARR: Yes. And the net benefit is contained in the budget papers.

MR COCKS: Minister, are you bound by any policies regarding the use of commercial-in-confidence arrangements or required to consider transparent alternatives?

MR BARR: We have been transparent by publishing the revenue stream in the budget papers. The commercial-in-confidence element relates, obviously, to the battery operator, Eku Energy, and their arbitrage in the National Energy Market. For obvious reasons, that is commercial-in-confidence, because that is clearly a commercial arrangement. There is a line in the budget papers: “Big Canberra Battery Stream Revenue”. It is there for all to see.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, how would transparency be improved if the use of commercial-in-confidence arrangements were minimised?

MR BARR: The approach by the government is to be as transparent as we can within the confines of commercial procurements in the National Energy Market, and we have been in that we have declared the capital cost of the project that is met by the proponent and we have declared the revenue stream. We have been clear that it is net present value positive for the territory. That was the basis of this. Our energy network

needs more storage for renewable energy. Canberra needs the assurance of having dispatchable power in that volume. It not only helps to store renewable energy but also assists our households and our businesses should there be shortages in the NEM. We have dispatchable power in Canberra.

There are already a number of batteries operating as part of the Big Canberra Battery and there are more to come. The idea is to store more renewable energy and be able to arbitrage in the NEM to generate revenue for the territory. It is, I guess, a 21st century renewable equivalent of the ACT government owning the energy generation. We procure it from renewable sources, we store it, it is dispatchable, it helps the NEM and it helps Canberra households. It is a good outcome for our city; it is good public policy. To touch on what Mr Emerson referred to in his inaugural speech, it is nation-leading—the sort of thing that Canberra should aspire to do. We are doing it and we are delivering it.

Coroner's report—inquest into the death of Rozalia Spadafora

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Tragically, five-year-old Rozalia Spadafora died on the evening of 5 July 2022. The preschooler went into cardiac arrest roughly 27 hours after being taken to the Canberra Hospital Emergency Department. Evidence reported in the media at that time suggested Rozalia died of myocarditis as a consequence of having contracted influenza A. Counsel assisting the inquiry, Mr Michael Fordham, indicated Rozalia could have been diagnosed with myocarditis up to 12 hours sooner than she was. It has been put to me just this week that the coroner's report, initially due to be released in May of this year, will be released tomorrow, after the Assembly is adjourned for the year, and two months before it meets again.

Can the Chief Minister, on behalf of the health minister, please advise the Assembly if the health minister has met with the coroner to discuss the findings of this inquest and inform the Assembly as to why the release has been delayed until tomorrow?

MR BARR: I will have to take that on notice. I am not in a position to confirm. I am aware that I have been advised that the coroner will make a public statement, indeed, that the findings will be released tomorrow, but in relation to the other part of the question, I will have to take that on notice.

MR EMERSON: Has the health minister sought a briefing from the coroner, and when, and will the government commit to expediting consideration and implementation of the inquest's recommendations, including as part of the upcoming budget?

MR BARR: I will take the first part of the question on notice. In relation to the second part, there is obviously a formal process for responding to a coronial report and the minister has advised she intends to provide a formal response to that report as soon as possible.

Rivers and lakes—safety

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services.

Minister, summer is well and truly here, with the heat we have experienced in the last few weeks, and that means one thing for many people, which is swimming. Devastatingly, we have seen a number of drownings in ACT rivers in recent years. Given that people have definitely started spending their weekends in the river already, why hasn't the government's targeted communications and awareness campaign, as recommended by the coroner's investigation, begun yet this summer, and when will it begin?

MS CHEYNE: I will just double check exactly when it is going to start, but I was briefed about this just this week. In fact, it has started. It started on 1 December. It will run for the entire summer season. It is the "Reduce your risk around waterways" campaign. It will be specifically targeting the culturally and linguistically diverse community through new translated advertisements and strategically placed communications, such as those located close to our university campuses and public transport. Radio advertisements, social media and online advertisements have been translated into Mandarin, Vietnamese, Nepali and Punjabi.

To enhance the messaging onsite, the Parks and Conservation Service have installed large swim safety signs at 17 key locations. To deliver the second recommendation, the Parks and Conservation Service has installed nine lifebuoys at popular riverside locations, including Casuarina Sands, Casuarina Pool, Cotter Bend and Uriarra east and west, where the river is that Miss Nuttall refers to. These devices have been placed next to swim safety signs to ensure that they are clearly visible in the event of an emergency.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, when will the Local Drowning Prevention Plan be finalised and made public?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that on notice.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, what improvements and upgrades have been made to signage around popular swimming spots and the installation of life-saving equipment at those swimming spots?

MS CHEYNE: I believe I answered that in detail in answer to the first question.

Schools—safety

MR HANSON: My question is to the minister for education. Minister, we are, sadly, all aware of the history of violence and assault in ACT schools against teachers, students and principals. The national survey has shown that more than 70 per cent of ACT teachers faced actual physical violence, compared with, for example, just 31 per cent in Victoria. Dr Paul Kidson from the ACU said that the survey showed that a strong intervention was needed.

Minister, what are you doing for the upcoming school year to provide strong interventions, as have been called for, against violence in ACT schools?

MS BERRY: I have been working with our schools over the last term of government on implementing the Positive Behaviours for Learning framework, which is a cultural

change across our schools. That takes time to implement, and it takes time to change culture in our schools. We are also making sure that we support school principals through our election commitment for a school principal health and wellbeing program. We are also committed to dealing, upfront, with bullying in our schools, which can also have an impact on our teachers and school staff.

We are not talking about just picking something up off the shelf. We are wanting to implement something that actually makes considered and lasting change within our school communities around culture and what is and is not acceptable within our school communities. It has become quite an issue across ACT schools, and we have talked over the years in this place about workplace violence in our school communities. It is a difficult matter, and we are working with our schools to address the concerns they have and with our school communities on what is expected behaviour.

MR HANSON: Minister, will you undertake to provide full, frank and open reports on school violence to the Assembly on a regular basis and outline specific steps undertaken to address that violence?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Hanson for the supplementary. We do provide public information on incident reports of occupational violence by financial year, and in any particular circumstances I am also happy to provide advice and particular briefings to the shadow minister on any particular incidents that he raises with me. I am reluctant to talk about individual schools in these circumstances. I do not think it helps the school community to address matters within a public space, and it really does interrupt their ability to be able to resolve the issues when they are constantly being talked about negatively in our community. We have seen the result that has on schools that have had those incidents in the past. When we work together to address these incidents as a community and as a government, respecting the complex issues that are sometimes involved, we can overcome these issues and schools can move on and become safer environments for students, staff and families.

MS MORRIS: Minister, why is the ACT so significantly out of step with the rest of the nation when it comes to school violence?

MS BERRY: I disagree with premise of that question. We have been doing significant work with our schools around understanding violence and how we can make sure school is a safe place for teachers, school staff and our students. We have strategies currently in place that actually have an impact on OV incidents in ACT public schools, and these include: teaching social and emotional learning; implementing the Positive Behaviours for Learning framework, which I have talked about; professional learning in trauma-informed practice and team teaching; reviewing students whose behaviours are of concern and high risk; and messaging school communities through the OV prevention awareness campaign, which we launched in February 2024.

There is no silver bullet. It takes a range of different programs, some that take some time to implement, for culture change to occur, and some need specified and specialist approaches. I understand that what we need is a safe workplace; children also have a right to an education. Sometimes those rights conflict with each other, but we work

through them, and we are keen to make sure that both those rights are implemented appropriately.

ACT Policing—road safety

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, how has the ACT government invested in the road safety capabilities of ACT Policing to ensure Canberrans remain safe on our roads?

DR PATERSON: I thank Ms Tough for her question. Tragically, again this year we have seen lives lost on our roads. As we head into the Christmas and new year period, it is time to call on the community to reflect on their behaviour on the roads and the safety of others on our roads.

ACT Policing and the government take road safety incredibly seriously. That is why ACT Labor invested in a \$5 million build for the new road policing centre in Hume. This is an outstanding state-of-the-art facility which replaced the outdated traffic operations centre in Belconnen. I visited this facility within a week of becoming the minister, with the Chief Police Officer.

Since it opened in 2023, this centre has enabled police to respond quickly to major traffic incidents across Canberra. This site houses not only road policing officers but also support staff, to assist them in their operations. At this facility, police have access to cutting-edge technology and expertise to be able to ensure that Canberrans are safe on our roads. Arming our police with these facilities to do the job they need to do is a commitment that this government will deliver on.

We are currently considering the requirements of a new city police station, as well as headquarters buildings, and we are committed to providing upgrades where they are needed throughout the community, including ACT Labor's commitment to build a new police station in Molonglo. As well as additional resourcing and facility upgrades, Labor committed at the election to recruit 150 new police personnel by 2029. As minister, I look forward to delivering this.

MS TOUGH: Minister, what ACT police campaigns are happening over the next couple of months to promote community safety in the lead-up to Christmas?

DR PATERSON: I thank Ms Tough for the question. At this time of year, we know that people like to let their hair down, and there is an air of celebration with friends or family and in workplaces across our city. The summer period in the ACT historically results in an increase in alcohol-related incidents and arrests, due to the increased traffic, parties and activity around licensed venues, along with the public holidays and events such as Christmas and New Year's Eve.

Tomorrow I will be launching the Summer Safe campaign with the Chief Police Officer in Garema Place. The Summer Safe campaign has been developed so that ACT Policing can effectively educate and engage with the Canberra community about dedicated enforcement throughout the summer period. The Summer Safe campaign will run until 28 February next year and will focus on reducing alcohol-related violence, and promoting safe behaviours and road safety. Community safety is always

a top priority for this government.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how can Canberrans work with ACT Policing to report dangerous driving behaviours?

DR PATERSON: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question and for raising this important point. ACT Policing are really keen for community input into their monitoring of dangerous driving behaviours. In May this year, ACT Policing expanded the capability of their online reporting portal. This allows residents to upload video footage of dangerous driving behaviours. Community members who capture dashcam or mobile phone footage of driving offences, including dangerous driving, road rage, careless driving, mobile phone usage, running red lights or seatbelt offences can now upload this information directly to the portal.

Dangerous driving is the latest crime type to feature on the online reporting portal, but there are other options for people, with portals around historical sexual assaults, petrol drive-offs, property damage and vandalism incidents as well.

As of September this year, ACT police have received 555 online reports of dangerous driving. Of these reports, 318 have resulted in a traffic infringement notice, 48 have received a caution and 73 have received a warning. I think this is great evidence that the online reporting portal is actually working and achieving the outcomes. I encourage members to get out and about and tell the community to provide input through this portal.

Transport Canberra—concessions

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Transport. According to Transport Canberra, the requirement for tertiary students' concession fares is that they must be attending a public or private Australian university or CIT full time.

There are more than 200 students in the ACT who study at Charles Sturt University at the Barton campus. However, CSU students are unable to choose the concession fare as CSU is not included as one of the university options. Why are ACT students studying full time at Charles Sturt University not eligible for concession fares with MyWay+?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I think he is aware of what the issue is, because he raised it with me previously. I believe that is something to do with the way that Charles Sturt University provides information on their student cards. I have asked Transport Canberra to work with the university to look at ways that we can provide students with that concession status. I am happy to come back with some further information on notice.

MR SPEAKER: So you are taking that on notice?

MR STEEL: Yes.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, why are no tertiary concession fares available for Canberra residents who are enrolled online or remotely in full-time tertiary studies at

Australian universities?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I am happy to come back in relation to where those discussions with Transport Canberra are up to.

MR HANSON: Minister, are concession fares available for part-time students attending tertiary institutions in Canberra? If not, why not?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I understand that they are typically not provided with the concession status if they are part time. It has been for full-time students. The reason for that is they have to attend face-to-face learning around the city across more days of the week. Therefore, the concession applies to provide them with some relief while they do that full time. Of course, many part-time students—not all; I accept that—do also have a job as well. So they have income-earning capacity, which they can then use to pay for public transport.

Planning—Gungahlin cinema

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, a constant complaint I hear from Gungahlin residents is: where is the cinema? A Crown lease for the site was allocated for that purpose and required development to be completed by 28 February 2024. Can you please provide an update on what the government is doing to enforce the lease conditions on that site and whether any extension to the development application for this valuable site in the Gungahlin Town Centre has been awarded?

MR STEEL: It is frustrating that a cinema has not been delivered by the private owner of the site that has the lease requirement on it to deliver a cinema. I understand that the development has experienced unexpected delays due to factors like COVID-19 and, subsequently, the challenge of securing an operator of the cinema. The Territory Planning Authority is currently liaising regularly with the developer to ensure that development approval remains active. The Authority will continue to assist with progression of the development where it is appropriate and where they are able to do so. They, of course, understand that another developer has also been engaging with the Gungahlin community and is proposing a mixed-use development on another block, which is in section 11 of the Gungahlin town centre. It is a separate site to where the current cinema lease requirements are. If another developer wishes to propose a different cinema in the Gungahlin town centre, they would need to be assessed by the Territory Planning Authority.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, is the government still satisfied that the developer has met the requirements of the deed for that parcel of land?

MR STEEL: If the building covenant timeframe in the Crown lease expires, then the lessee would be in breach of their lease and the ACT government may take action. Given that there is currently no breach by the developer, there are limited opportunities for the government to intervene at this point in time. But the ACT government is assisting with progression where appropriate.

MS CLAY: Minister, what is the ACT government doing to ensure lease conditions

are actually enforced to make sure that remaining land is used properly?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. As the new planning minister and also minister for sustainable development, it has been a topic of discussion that I have already had with Access Canberra and EPSDD. They have assured me that they are taking action in relation to a range of planning requirements and lease conditions. I am happy to provide some more information through the various ways in which members have opportunities to ask questions in the Assembly, including through upcoming annual reports hearings, where that may be a topic of interest.

Planning and development—National Capital Plan

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, one of the key principles of Canberra's urban structure in the National Capital Plan is a hierarchy of centres, with each town having a centre acting as a focal point for higher order retail functions, commercial services, offices and community facilities. The hierarchical principle means that town centres provide retail, commercial, cultural, entertainment and other facilities to meet community needs. They also serve as a location for office-based employment. The National Capital Plan also states that:

Continued expansion of services and facilities should be provided for and encouraged in each of the town centres.

The Territory Plan cannot be inconsistent with the National Capital Plan. With the loss of recreation facilities in the Woden town centre, how does the Territory Plan remain consistent with the National Capital Plan?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I do note the very strict hierarchy of centres that we have here in the ACT. We recently made Molonglo a town centre as well. We had to change the National Capital Plan as a result, to then allow us to do that in our own Territory Plan, to provide those facilities. The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate has been undertaking community needs assessments. They have been doing that in the Molonglo Valley recently to inform the planning for the new town centre.

They have also been doing that ACT-wide to look at the range of different needs of the community that we may need to take into account in planning, particularly when we are providing more housing, and the recreational facilities, community facilities, school facilities and other facilities that may be required to support that as well as transport infrastructure and other infrastructure may be required as well. So that is an ongoing piece of work.

With the district strategies, we consulted with the community to understand what the current community and recreational facilities are and what we may also need to look at in the future. It identified some areas of future work, which now EPSDD is taking forward, including in the Woden district.

The government, more broadly, continues to invest in recreational facilities. We have made some specific election commitments as the Labor party that we intend on

delivering in government. One I note particularly: upgrades to the existing fantastic Mawson Playing Fields—providing new facilities there, toilet facilities and change facilities—that will enable the community to get better use out of those very important and vital areas for the community. There are other things I am sure that we will be doing as well. (*Time expired.*)

MS CARRICK: Minister, we have been talking about this for nearly 20 years and we still do not have sites identified in the Woden town centre for an arts centre, an aquatic centre or an indoor sports centre. Minister, who is responsible for ensuring the Territory Plan is compliant with the National Capital Plan?

MR STEEL: The Territory Plan is compliant with the National Capital Plan, and we are continuing work to plan for more facilities and renewing aging facilities. The new Woden Community Centre—a Labor election commitment, something that we fully funded in the last budget—will provide a place for a lot of that community activity to take place in the Woden town centre, including arts activities.

Mr Cocks: Meeting rooms! That is it, isn't it? A couple of meeting rooms?

MR STEEL: No, it is a large multipurpose facility. It is a four-storey facility that will provide a very large space for the community to use in a wide variety of activities—something you have never committed to! We also committed at the election to bring forward a feasibility study—

Mr Cain: Point of order. The question was: who is responsible for compliance? That has not been touched on at all.

MR STEEL: I think I have been relevant. I reject the premise of the question.

MR SPEAKER: It is up to me to judge the point of order, Mr Steel. I think he has been relevant. Do you have any more for us, Minister?

MR STEEL: Yes I do! I have plenty more! We committed to so much in the Woden Valley, particularly the work we have committed to around the feasibility work, looking at future indoor sporting facilities as part of consideration about a future high school in the Woden Valley. So we are continually looking at what the recreation facilities needs are in both the Woden Valley but also other regions in Canberra as well. That is an important part of the planning work that we will do; to look at what community needs need to be reflected in our planning.

MR CAIN: Minister, are you responsible for compliance with the National Capital Plan?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Yes and the independent Territory Planning Authority, as they assess development applications as well. We will continue to work closely with the National Capital Authority who have direct responsibility for the National Capital Plan itself and of course, we also propose to them amendments to the National Capital Plan which may be required to facilitate important infrastructure investments in the territory and a range of other planning needs.

Treasurer—conduct

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, this week you have been asked dozens of questions regarding issues of significant and legitimate community interest—including MyWay+, the safety of our bus drivers and the Phillip Pool development—but you have provided almost no meaningful answers and little transparency or accountability. Treasurer, why is it appropriate for ministers to be accountable to the community through questions without notice?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question, but I reject her question. I have been very much accountable in not only answering questions from members in this place—

Ms Castley: Mr Speaker, on a point of order—

MR SPEAKER: Well, I mean—

Ms Castley: I know it is very quick. My point of order is on relevance. The question was: why is it appropriate for ministers to be accountable to the community through questions without notice?

Mr Barr: There is no expression of opinion.

MR SPEAKER: I don't think it is. Mr Steel.

MR STEEL: Again, I reject the premise of the question. I have been providing answers to Ms Castley and I have also been incredibly accountable in relation to projects like MyWay+ by continuing to front the media day after day to answer questions and provide the community with an update on how we are addressing the issues with that system.

Mr Cain: Why didn't you apologise then?

MR STEEL: It is in stark contrast with the Liberal Party, particularly in the election—

Mr Cocks: Point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR STEEL: where they never stood up in front of the media and fronted the hard questions.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Steel, if you could be seated and, Mr Cain, if you could be seated. Mr Cocks?

Mr Cocks: On relevance and under standing order 118: the minister is debating the question.

MR SPEAKER: And I would agree. If you could respond to the question—

MR STEEL: I have answered the question.

MR SPEAKER: You have answered the question. Thank you.

MS CASTLEY: Treasurer, do you accept it is essential for ministers to be transparent and directly relevant in responses to questions without notice?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Yes, I will always answer the questions in accordance with the standing orders. That also means that the opposition leader cannot dictate how ministers answer questions.

MR CAIN: Minister, will you make a commitment to be more forthcoming and relevant in your answers to questions without notice—yes or no?

MR STEEL: I refer the member to the answer to the last question.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Members. We have made it through question time for the year.

Mr Barr: Noting the deterioration in the quality of questions, Mr Speaker—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Barr: It fell off a cliff at the end there, Mr Speaker. I do ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answer to question without notice Coroner's report—inquest into the death of Rozalia Spadafora

MR BARR: Earlier Mr Emerson asked me a question, or asked the Minister for Health a question, which related to engagement with the coroner. I am able to advise the Assembly that the minister has advised me that the minister has never spoken with the coroner on this matter or on any matter. I repeat: the minister has never spoken with the coroner on this matter or any other matter.

Papers

Ms Cheyne, pursuant to standing order 211, present the following papers:

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act—

Pursuant to section 13—Annual Reports—

2023-2024—

ACT Human Rights Commission, dated 2 October 2024—Addendum, dated December 2024

Canberra Health Services, dated 4 October 2024—Corrigendum, dated December 2024

Director of Public Prosecutions, dated 27 September 2024—Addendum, dated December 2024

Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency and the National Boards, reporting on the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme—Annual reports—2023-24, dated December 2024

Civil Law (Wrongs) Act—Pursuant to subsection 4.56(3) of Schedule 4—Professional Standards Councils—Annual reports—2023-2024, dated December 2024

Crimes (Assumed Identities) Act—Pursuant to section 38(4)—Annual report—Australian Crime Commission Assumed Identities—2023-24, dated 12 September 2024

Education and Community Inclusion—Standing Committee—Reports presented—2024—No 12—Inquiry into Skateboarding and Skate Parks in the ACT, dated 18 June 2024, together with a copy of the extract of the relevant minutes of proceedings—Government response, dated

Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity—Standing Committee (Tenth Assembly)—No 14—Inquiry into the Climate Change and a Just Transition, dated 17 September 2024 and 23 September 2024, including additional comments (Ms Clay), together with the relevant minutes of proceedings.—Government response, dated December 2024

Freedom of Information Act—Pursuant to section 39—Copy of notice provided to the Ombudsman—

Community Services Directorate—Freedom of Information request—Decision not made in time—

FOI-CYF-22/40, dated 27 September 2023

FOI-CYF-22/58, dated 23 September 2024

Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate—FOI-24/103, dated 23 October 2024

Gene Technology Act—Pursuant to subsection 136(2)—Operations of the Gene Technology Regulator—Annual Reports—2023-2024, dated 24 September 2024

Health (National Health Funding Pool and Administration) Act—Pursuant to subsection 25(4)—Administrator of the National Health Funding Pool—Annual Report 2023-24, dated 20 September 2024

Information Privacy Act—Pursuant to section 54(3)—Annual report—Australian Government—Office of the Australian Information Commissioner—Memorandum of Understanding with the Australian Capital Territory for the provision of privacy services—2023-24, dated 13 September 2024

Judicial Commissions Act—Pursuant to subsection 61A(5)—ACT Judicial Council—Annual Report—2023-24, dated 27 November 2024

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee—Reports presented—2024—No 29—Inquiry into Cashless Gaming in the ACT, together with relevant extract of minutes of proceedings, dated 19 June 2024.—Government response, dated December 2024

National Health Funding Body—Pursuant to subsection 25(4)—National Health Funding Body (NHFB)—Annual Report 20223-2024, dated 20 September 2024

National Health Practitioner Ombudsman and Privacy Commissioner—Annual report—2023-24, undated

Public housing—Minimum energy efficiency standard—proposed Upgrade—Assembly Resolution of 29 November 2023—Government response, dated May

2024—Report to Legislative Assembly—Six Monthly Progress Report, dated 5 December 2024

Waste Management and Resource Recovery Act—Pursuant to subsection 64U(2)—ACT Container Deposit Scheme—Annual statutory report—2023-24, December 2024

Transport Canberra—bus frequency

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (2.59): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the best way to get Canberrans onto buses is to make them frequent, reliable and convenient. The Public Transport Association of Canberra’s ideal targets for local bus routes are 15-minute frequencies or better during weekday peak and 30-minute frequencies off-peak and on weekends;
- (b) that the current minimum bus frequencies is every one hour or better on weekdays and every two hours on Saturday evenings and Sundays;
- (c) during the 2024 Election campaign the following parties made the following commitments to minimum bus service frequencies by 2028:
 - (i) the ACT Greens committed to run weekday suburban buses every 20 minutes or better during weekdays and every 30 minutes or better on weekends;
 - (ii) the Canberra Liberals committed to run weekday suburban buses every 30 minutes or better during weekdays and every 30 minutes or better on weekends; and
 - (iii) ACT Labor committed to run weekday suburban buses every 20 minutes or better during weekdays and every one hour or better on weekends;
- (d) other parties also reflected on their websites community concerns about bus service frequencies; and
- (e) the supply and confidence agreement between the ACT Greens and ACT Labor states:
 - (i) “Progressively increasing bus service frequency to every 20 minutes on weekdays throughout the term starting in 2025”;
 - (ii) “Increasing frequency on weekends starting in 2025 (hourly) and making further improvements subject to future engagement with the workforce”; and
 - (iii) “Increasing frequency on key existing Rapid bus services and introducing new Rapid bus services before the end of the term”;

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) commit that the ACT shall, by October 2028, improve frequency for all bus services to at least every 20 minutes or better on weekdays, and 30 minutes or better on the weekends;
- (b) table in the Assembly by 31 March 2025:

- (i) the Government's plan to increase bus frequency:
 - a. to every 20 minutes on weekdays, and at least hourly on weekends starting in 2025; and
 - b. on key existing Rapid bus services and what new Rapid bus services will be introduced before the end of the term; and
- (ii) specific information as to when in 2025 these bus frequency improvements will become available for bus system users and to which services; and
- (c) provide progress reports to the Assembly every six months on bus frequency until these objectives are reached, or to October 2028, whichever is sooner.

Buses are an essential public service. They enable economic, social and community participation for all in our community. This includes access to education, health services and community activities.

High-quality public transport increases ridership whilst reducing the use and ownership of private vehicles. These benefits flow to individuals and households through reduced cost of living and to the community through reduced pollution and reduced congestion. The benefits also flow to government through reduced expenditure on public roads, including externalities such as emergency services and healthcare costs. Leaving ACT residents to rely on private cars to get around Canberra is choking our roads and our planet, all while hurting household and government budgets.

If we want people to use public transport, we need to make sure it is reliable and convenient. We know that having reliable and convenient public transport encourages people to make the switch from private cars. Communities in my area of Gungahlin have benefitted from light rail stage 1, which opened in 2019. But the rest of Canberra cannot be left waiting decades for light rail to come to their doorstep. For most people, buses are a mode of public transport that is available to them, and the service currently provided is just not good enough.

We need to remove the barriers to using public transport. The good news is we already know what those barriers are. Canberrans have repeatedly told us loud and clear. Transport Canberra's surveys show that the frequency and reliability of buses is the biggest barrier to most people catching the bus. What does frequency and reliability look like? It looks like a bus service that gets you where you need to go, when you need to get there. We need to know that our buses will run often, turn up on time and take us to our destination, whether it be on a Sunday, a Monday or any other day of the week. We do not live Monday-to-Friday lives and we cannot rely on a transport system that only works Monday to Friday.

The Public Transport Association of Canberra have also defined what a frequent bus service looks like, calling for local bus routes to operate on a turn up and go basis with ideal targets that would be 15-minute frequencies or better during the weekday peak and 30-minute frequencies on off-peak and on weekends. The other part of their call is for rapid bus routes and light rail services to operate at higher frequencies, with ideal targets being five-minute frequencies or better during weekday peaks and

10-minute frequencies on off-peak and on weekends.

Light rail stage 1 has shown us what a frequent, reliable service can achieve right here in Canberra. In October 2024, the light rail ran on time at an impressive rate of 99.01 per cent. It runs at least every 15 minutes at quieter weekend times and as often as every five minutes in peak weekday periods. That is what frequent, reliable service looks like. It has been so popular, I suspect we will soon be having debates about how we can further increase the capacity of the system.

There will always be a need for private vehicles. Some people do need to drive to get around for work, like delivery drivers, shift workers, cleaners and tradies who need to carry their equipment. Physical accessibility barriers mean that, for some people with disabilities, driving is their only option. We still want people who need to drive to be able to drive and not be stuck in traffic alongside thousands of others who could be in a more efficient mode of transport. But a lot of us probably do not need to drive as much as we do. If everyone drives everywhere within our city, our city will choke on the cars. Congestion is a real problem here. Canberra's congestion is growing at a rate three times faster than in any other mainland city. We cannot keep doing it the way it has always been done. If everyone drives everywhere, soon we will all be all stuck in traffic. Canberra's cost of congestion is predicted to reach over half a billion dollars a year by 2031.

Many Canberrans want to make the switch to public or active transport but are forced to drive because the public transport is not frequent or convenient. When the choice is between an hour and 15 minutes on the bus or a 20-minute drive, I know the option that Canberrans are likely to take. A lot of people give up. If you are deciding whether to catch a bus or drive and you know you cannot go out on the weekends unless you have a car, you will buy a car if you can afford it. Once you own that car, why not drive to work and to the shops or everywhere else; you have already paid for it? But, unfortunately, it is bad for them, it is bad for our city and it is bad for the climate.

Public transport is most likely to benefit those who live along the most convenient routes and corridors within the city. We see this with light rail and we see it with the rapid bus corridor to Belconnen and the city. With turn up and go frequency, the patronage levels on those services is extremely high. Clearly, those are popular services that Canberrans can rely upon. But many people often have to catch a local bus service from their homes to connect with the light rail or those rapid routes. If you miss a connection on your way home, you might be left waiting for the next bus, and, if your luck has it that this happens on a Sunday, you can be left stranded for up to two hours.

Earlier I said some people drive for accessibility reasons. On the other hand, driving may not be an option for others. That may be due to age-related conditions or medical conditions. These people should not be inadvertently excluded from job opportunities, medical services or a social life because of limited transport options.

It is also expensive for Canberra's households to own a car. In a cost-of-living crisis, we know people are thinking about the cost of everything: rego, insurance, servicing, repairs, financing and running costs. They all add up. The latest Australian Automobile Association's affordability index report shows that Canberra's

households spend on average \$23,337 per year on private vehicles. Appallingly, this figure does not include the costs of parking. Even the cheapest vehicle to run costs approximately \$12,000 per year. After housing, transport makes up the largest component of household budgets. How great would it be to not have to think about these costs and simply hop on the bus when it is time to go somewhere? Those costs do not include the cost of congestion. Idling in peak traffic—which is only getting worse as Canberra grows—is not a great way to start your day, and it is a waste of time and money.

I am sure the minister, and perhaps the Chief Minister, will talk about the fiscal responsibilities and the constrained budgets that we experience. The 2024-25 budget shows that the ACT government plans to spend nearly \$1.2 billion over the next four years on road maintenance. The Infrastructure Investment Program also shows road construction to the value of \$593 million planned for the same period. That is because road duplication is expensive and, whilst it may provide some temporary relief, over time these roads choke back up as population grows and people's commuting habits change in accordance with induced demand. Better public transport is about better city planning. We need to change our infrastructure and our traffic priority. We need to ensure basic levels of investment in our public and active transport.

There was recognition across all the parties in this Assembly that Canberrans deserve better public transport, in particular in the form of more frequent bus services. The ACT Greens commitments remain the most ambitious: to achieve a vision of turn up and go public transport systems that you will not have to plan your day around; and that Canberrans should not be left waiting for any more than 20 minutes on weekdays and 30 minutes on weekends for any bus, no matter where in the city you may live. I appreciate that the other parties may not be willing to commit to the Greens election commitment, and I understand there are amendments to be moved that will seek to water down that element of my call. To all parties here, I would like to remind you that the Public Transport of Canberra Association's calls went even further. They were calling for 15-minute frequencies or better during the weekday peak for local bus services and 30 minutes on the off peak and for the weekends. I think that is something that we as an Assembly should be aspiring to.

Whilst I do not necessarily support the amendments that will be moved, I will not vote against them, because I want to see this motion pass. I want to see some form of agreement from this Assembly in terms of committing to increasing the frequency of buses within the city. I want to have clearly defined goals on what that bus frequency looks like and to have accountability measures to ensure that the government takes real steps in meeting the promised improvements on public transport in the ACT. That is because my motion also calls on the government to follow through with and provide transparency about progress towards commitments as to how to improve that bus frequency. It calls for a clear road map of how these improvements will be rolled out over the next four years across the entire network so that our bus ridership know they can turn up and go on a bus.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (3.10): I am pleased today to speak to the Assembly in response to the motion by Mr Braddock on expanding bus services within our transport network and particularly the frequency of

public transport services.

We know very well that frequency does improve people's experience of public transport and builds patronage on public transport. It is one of the reasons that major changes were made around five years ago to introduce new Rapid routes across Canberra, now made up of 10 Rapids, including light rail, which is the sort of R1 service, that provide high levels of frequency of 15 minutes or better—mostly better during the peak times. This provides people with a turn up and go service. They do not need to look at a timetable; they can simply go down to their local Rapid bus stop and know that a bus will be showing up within a very short period of time.

Why is that important? It is because frequency is freedom. That is the name of the chapter from Jarrett Walker's sort of authority publication, which I encourage members to put on their summer reading list. It is in an updated form in the ACT Legislative Assembly library if you do want to take it out. I want to quote from my old copy, where it says:

In transit the real test of freedom is spontaneity. Can I change my plans suddenly? Can I get home if I need to, or to my child's school if something comes up? Can I simply move freely around my city following whatever impulse I may feel at the moment?

That is the reason why frequency is so important: it allows those changes to happen. It is why we moved away from the old what were known as espresso routes, which only operated a few services at peak time and, if you missed that service, you were left stranded. So we try to replace those with Rapid buses and we have a plan that we brought to the election to do more of that.

The recent election did show that there was at least one thing that all parties in this place agreed on, and that is the value of high-quality public transport services for the community. Their level of agreement lessened a bit as you got further into the detail of which services would be delivered and how. I am sure there will be opportunity enough to speak to the benefits of delivering light rail as well, as part of the government's future focus plan to deliver and integrate a public transport network to meet future growth and support a sustainable, liveable city for all Canberrans. But light rail does deliver that service.

As Mr Braddock said, it runs every five minutes during the morning peak. That was actually increased; I increased it as transport minister. I remember the announcement with Minister Pettersson in Gungahlin, where we were seeing people packed like sardines when it was running every six minutes. So we actually increased to every five minutes, and there is scope to potentially increase it further, should patronage require it.

Public transport is a critical government service for the community. For many, it is their only feasible option for travelling long distances and accessing the city centre or getting around to key shopping hubs, appointments and social activities. The government recognises that. We are committed to maintaining a bus network which provides a balance of both coverage and frequency. That is the balance that we always need to strike when designing a public transport system in Canberra—which is not a

very dense city; it is a very spread-out city—and we also need to make sure that we provide value for money when we invest in those services.

The current bus network already provides 4,000 weekdays daily services and covers 97,000 kilometres each day. Every effort is made to ensure that communities have reliable and consistent access to public transport across the ACT. I would like to thank the driver workforce, who play a critical role every day in delivering those services and supporting passengers' experience on our network. The network and current timetable commenced on October 2023. It represented the first stage of uplifts and increased frequency on local services.

All local services—with the exception of route 47, which services one of our newer suburbs, Whitlam, going through to Denman Prospect—now run at least every 30 minutes from first service to 8 pm weekdays. And our existing rapid services continue to run at least every 15 minutes or better, with some routes up to every six minutes during the morning and afternoon peaks. When you have double Rapids running—and Athllon Drive is a great example—the frequent buses are often running every couple of minutes to the same destinations. In April 2024, following the new enterprise agreement, which included a trial that incentivises drivers to volunteer for more weekend shifts, the government delivered further uplift through a new Saturday timetable. So all local bus services now run at an hourly frequency from the first service in the morning until 6 pm.

A good point that is made in Mr Walker's book—who, by the way, was a former ACT government consultant informing network improvements in Canberra—is that we have this network of Rapid services but we also have these local route services, and, to build confidence in a transport network, we know that it is important to have as much frequency as we can get out on local services as well as those high-frequency Rapid routes from the main transport corridors, because it means that people's experience is generally that there is frequency across the network, not just on particular services. That is something that we want to build up to.

The bus network is regularly reviewed. When considering uplifts, the government's focus is ensuring that they are implemented only when there is confidence of service reliability, and that is critical for trust as well. Transport Canberra has had high service reliability across the weekdays and the weekend, and that is because I have really focused on that since I became transport minister in 2019. The TCCS annual report shows that the percentage of cancelled trips or incomplete trips compared to scheduled trips was 0.27 per cent and 0.08 respectively, which are both well below the target of one per cent. This is partly due to a positive increase in driver establishment numbers by a series of successful recruitment campaigns and the replacement of some of the aging vehicles in our fleet with new, more reliable and comfortable buses, including the battery electric buses that we are seeing on the roads.

We are also seeing a very positive increase in patronage on both local and weekend services, including a notable increase in weekend boardings following the commencement of the new Saturday timetable, and we want to continue to build that growth. We have heard accounts from our driver workforces of increases to patronage across some of our services during the recent fare-free period, and we hope to see this continue with Canberrans jumping on board with fare-free Fridays from tomorrow,

which will be trialled over the next year—a chance to try out our public transport network for those that may not have used public transport before, particularly utilising the new ticketing options.

The opening of the Woden bus depot next year presents further opportunities in developing a new network. The new three-depot network will enable the optimisation of service delivery through reducing dead running, which is needed to position buses from the existing depots across the network to deliver services.

At the election, ACT Labor brought forward a comprehensive and practical public transport plan for Canberra. It was the best plan, in my view. It included more Rapid services, more frequent local services and more weekend services delivered progressively through network and timetable uplifts throughout the term. By the end of the term, ACT Labor has promised to deliver local service uplift to 20 minutes on weekdays across the whole of Canberra for all local bus routes. We will also increase the frequency of existing Rapid services. This will start with the popular R2 route from Belconnen to the city to increase capacity along the route and better meet demand during the morning peaks, followed by increased services on the R10 from Denman Prospect to the city as the population of Molonglo Valley grows.

The uplift to local and Rapid service frequencies will be delivered progressively as staged uplifts in line with the regular annual network review timings and will commence with the 2025 network. Through the new 2025 network, we will also look to implement connection improvements between services and major bus stops through timetabling. Following the success of hourly local services on Saturdays, the next planned uplift to weekend services will be implemented next year. The frequency of local services on Sunday will be increased to also run on an hourly basis from first service in the morning until 6 pm. Further improvements to weekday bus timetables will also be considered throughout the term, subject to engagement with the driver workforce to ensure no impacts on service availability.

We are also committed to expanding the successful Rapid network, which Labor introduced in government, by delivering three new Rapid bus services to better connect our growing city. This is a commitment that Labor made at the election. The Greens did not commit to any new Rapid bus services. So—far from watering down the motion, as Mr Braddock has mentioned—Labor is actually adding this additional plan, which we intend to deliver in government, of these three Rapid bus services. One of these is to service Tuggeranong between Lanyon and the city to replace an existing peak bus service, which will be delivered alongside through improved infrastructure, such as new and upgraded bus stops and park and ride facilities. Another is a new Rapid bus service to support growth in West Belconnen to replace the existing small bus service—which I mentioned in question time to you, Madam Assistant Speaker Barry, yesterday—which currently runs from Ginninderry to Kippax. We will look at how we can provide this new Rapid service to provide services and also supported by bus priority improvements along the Belconnen to city bus transitway, and supporting infrastructures such as new and upgraded bus stops and park and ride facilities. We have also committed to deliver a new Rapid service for the Molonglo Town Centre in addition to the R10, which will follow the completion of the new Molonglo River bridge to connect north to other town centres or the city, depending on consultation with the community.

These new services will be staged throughout the term and delivered in time with regular network reviews. The government will also be engaging with the community, who will be invited to have their say on the final route for the new services in their area.

We cannot deliver more services without the fleet and workforce to support them. That is why ACT Labor has also put forward a practical plan to grow the bus fleet to achieve planned service expansion and maintain workforce stability to ensure ongoing service reliability. We have committed this term to purchasing an additional 110 electric buses over the next four years, more than any other party committed to. This will also see us continue our pathway to a zero-emissions bus fleet by 2040 or earlier by retiring compressed natural gas buses and all the high-emission diesel buses, all while expanding and operating the bus fleet. We have also committed to recruiting over 350 new bus drivers over the term and will ensure that they continue to have secure and well-paid public jobs.

We will also continue the work that we have been doing in investment in roads, particularly to look at bus priority. That was part of our regional plans in Belconnen and also in the Molonglo Valley, where we committed to look at the bus priority improvements along John Gorton Drive and the Cotter Road. We know that investment in roads is important for public transport because buses run on the road. That is an inconvenient truth for the Greens party, who are ideologically opposed to investment in roads but actually support the public transport system. It is important and it is demonstrated in the work that we have been doing on the Athllon Drive duplication, for example, where that includes bus priority improvements and bus lanes to support access particularly into the new Woden bus depot. It is important on the Belconnen transitway, which is a roads project, to provide bus priority to enable those high-frequency bus services to be able to move through that corridor in a timely way.

We will continue to make those infrastructure investments to support public transport as well as the broader transport network. I guess one example is that, when you do not invest in those things, it holds up the rest of the transport network. The commitment by the Liberal Party to have a busway on Commonwealth Avenue, which would remove lanes from Commonwealth Avenue, would hold up the rest of the transport network. That is why, of course, we are increasing the capacity of the transport network by continuing the work to design light rail stage 2B, which would add an inset bridge providing capacity for up to 2,500 trips per hour on Commonwealth Avenue overall for the entire transport network. The alternative of a busway to take lanes off the road would cause traffic chaos for the inner south, Woden and Weston Creek residents on the transport network.

We need to invest holistically in the things that are required to support greater frequency and capacity of our transport network for public transport and transport more broadly. The ACT government is committed to delivering a worldclass public transport network for Canberrans, and I look forward to updating the Assembly as we deliver on this over the term. I move the following amendment:

Omit all words after (2)(a) and substitute:

“(a) commit that the ACT shall by October 2028 progressively improve

frequency for all bus services to at least every 20 minutes or better on weekdays, and increase frequency on weekends starting in 2025 (hourly) and make further improvements subject to future engagement with the workforce;

- (i) table in the Assembly by 31 March 2025:
 - a. the Government’s plan to increase bus frequency:
 - b. to every 20 minutes on weekdays over the term, starting in 2025;
 - c. on weekends starting in 2025 (hourly) and making further improvements subject to future engagement with the workforce;
 - d. on key existing Rapid bus services and what new rapid bus services will be introduced before the end of the term; and
 - e. specific information as to when in 2025 bus frequency improvements will become available for bus systems users, and to which services; and
- (ii) provide progress reports to the Assembly every six months on bus frequency until October 2028.”

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (3.25): I do not have long to speak this afternoon. I will just make a few really brief remarks on Mr Braddock’s motion and the government’s amendment.

The amendment adjusts the “calls-on” that Mr Braddock has proposed here today, and we will not be supporting the amendment. I would like to be clear, though, that this is not a sign that the Canberra Liberals oppose bus services and public transport. Being a recent public transport user myself, I would like to tip my hat in the ring and say that the buses are very important to everybody in our community.

The message from voters at the last election was that many of them do rely on our public transport system and want it to be better, faster, cleaner, safer and more reliable. They deserve high-quality, frequent services. Canberra is home to the nation’s public service and the quality of services here should be world class.

Voters were certainly supportive of the policy that we took to the last election, because it was focused on delivering these improvements, as well as quality-of-life changes like more reliable and up-to-date information for public transport users. But, at this point in the term, we are not in a position to commit ourselves to a Labor or a Greens public transport policy. We do not know the plan or the cost. Continued progress and expenditure on light rail mean that we will need to re-evaluate our policies and how we can best support those Canberrans who rely on public transport.

We also, as I said, do not know how much the budget will deteriorate between now and the next election. Obviously, it is in a parlous state right now. We hope it is turned around, but the early signs are not encouraging, and any major new expenditure needs to be considered in this light. For too many years, this government has been able to get away with not being transparent and not being subject to proper scrutiny.

The Canberra Liberals stand ready to work with the Assembly to secure more information from the government about their plans—we have no problem with that part of the motion—how they intend to implement their commitments and their actual performance.

As I mentioned earlier, we will not be supporting these amendments today, but we will be watching, with keen interest, the tabling of the government’s plan and the cost to these increases in bus services.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (3.27): I want to address a few of the comments made by the transport minister to make sure that we have the correct information on the record. I held the transport portfolio for the Greens in the previous term, and we spent four years talking about the fact that we did not have enough buses and about the fact that Canberra has fewer buses now than we had in 1990, despite the fact that our population has grown and we have a lot more suburbs now than we did back then. We did not manage to persuade our Labor colleagues during that term to increase the bus fleet, so we took to the election a commitment to have an additional 100 electric buses. We were thrilled, after four years of asking, to finally have Labor agree that we probably did need some more buses and to have them say they would get 110. That was a great result. I am very happy that we have landed in that happy place now, and it looks like we do have a genuine commitment to have more buses.

I am disturbed to hear the transport minister once again make some incorrect comments that he made during some of the forums before the election, and I just want to make sure that people can have that corrected. We did have a pre-election commitment to more rapid bus services, and I am going to read it out to you. You can find it with a word search if you look at our policy document. It is only five pages long, but if you do not want to read the full five pages, just word search “rapid”, and you will see it:

Once we’ve improved suburban services to every 20 minutes we will have some additional buses available to make targeted improvements where they’re needed most. This might include turning the 32 into a Rapid Bus running every 15 minutes, recognising it’s the busiest route that isn’t currently at Rapid frequency. More School Services to help more kids and parents choose public transport. A full-sized local bus for Ginninderry, recognising the growing suburb needs a proper public transport service.

We did commit to more rapid bus services. We did commit to upgrading the west Belconnen minibus Ginninderry service to a full bus service. And we were thrilled when Labor came out, after we had already released our policy, and matched our hundred buses, matched our rapid bus services and matched our upgrade of the Ginninderry minibus.

I am sad that we seem to have lost some of the really positive commitments that we took to the election that I think would have a really big impact on Canberrans’ lives now. We suggested that we should make bus travel free all the time for the people who really need it—that is, for seniors, concession card holders and students, including part-time students. That came up in a question today in question time. We think fare-free Friday is great, but we think that some people in Canberra need fare-free every day, every time, all the time, not just at peak hours and not just in the

narrow concession bands that we have now. That would make a really big cost-of-living impact for a lot of people, and it would encourage more people onto our buses.

We also had some great commitments in there about upgrading our bus shelters—having better lighting around them and making them more comfortable—and making sure that our footpaths are more accessible so that people of all different levels of ability can use those services. And I am very much hoping that Labor has a look at some of those other genuine improvements to the network. But we are pleased that we are going to get 110 more buses and that we do seem to be getting some of the other commitments we asked for, like more Rapids and the upgraded Ginninderry service.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.31): I would like to thank the minister for the addition to my summer reading list. I would also like to draw his attention to some of the academic articles by Paul Mees, where he documents the decline of bus services provided here in the ACT. He describes how in the mid-1980s—and you need to recall this was in the days of the NCDC, who were basically lovers of private vehicle transport—ACTION was providing the whole of Canberra with 15-minute, or better, bus services across an extended peak and gradually extending this to off-peak periods as well. During this period of time, the public transport share of all work trips was 11 per cent. Canberra has done this before—15 minutes. It is practical. It can be done. It is proven, as the minister described, in terms of the uplift of patronage on the weekends following an increase in the frequency.

Whilst the minister may describe Labor's plan as the best, I severely doubt this and argue against it because it is still based on hourly services on the weekend. This reduced frequency does not meet community needs, which the community is calling for. We do not need to just focus on the Monday to Friday; we need to focus on all of the hours that people wish to actually catch the bus. What has happened is that we have gone from being third-best in bus trips per capita in the whole of Australia, back in the 1980s, to now being third last. That is the decline of the public transport system here in Canberra, and that is why we keep on pushing this issue.

I am sorry that the Liberals will not be supporting the “calls” in the motion and that they have stepped back from the commitment they took to the election. As mentioned, I thought we were on a unity ticket, where all parties were supportive of improving bus services, and we would be able to achieve some form of a commitment towards that today.

I am, reluctantly, not going to vote against the government's amendments, because I still want to capture some form of commitment in the motion, as well as also ensuring we get the reports back on regular occasions throughout the course of this term as to how we are actually achieving greater bus frequency for the community of Canberra. As Canberra's population grows, public transport should be getting better and more convenient. A vision of fast and reliable and accessible public transport, now and into the future, is achievable. We have done it in the past. Other cities have done this. We too can do it.

Rather than the never-ending spending on duplicating roads and building carparks that do not have widespread or intense community benefit, we could be investing in more

buses and more drivers to allow our city to adapt to its growing needs and changing needs. Modest public transport priority infrastructure, like more dedicated bus lanes, will complement the increased frequency of services and encourage a mode-shift from private vehicles to public transport. This is something we will continue to push for—how we can achieve these dedicated bus lanes, whether they be to Belconnen or elsewhere, so as to improve the operation of the network as a whole.

The question here is, ultimately: what are the decisions made to meet the travel needs of our community? The government has spoken about free public transport on Fridays as a cost-of-living measure. As Ms Clay mentioned, it is no good having that cost-of-living measure if there is not a convenient and frequent service, where someone can turn-up at the bus stop when they need to go and be able to be confident that the bus will turn-up shortly. Otherwise, they are still going to be forking out thousands of dollars on private vehicle use.

Hopefully all parties in this place recognise that better buses are needed, and this motion will make sure that the community is provided with transparency and accountability on the government's plan of how we are going to achieve that. We will keep pushing the government to go further to meet the needs of the Canberra community in terms of a frequent and convenient bus service. If the community knows what improvements are coming to bus services, they can plan to make the switch to public transport, and they can be assured that Transport Canberra has their back. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 13

Noes 8

Andrew Barr	Michael Pettersson
Yvette Berry	Shane Rattenbury
Andrew Braddock	Chris Steel
Fiona Carrick	Caitlin Tough
Tara Cheyne	Taimus Werner-Gibblings
Jo Clay	
Laura Nuttall	
Marisa Paterson	

Chiaka Barry
Peter Cain
Leanne Castley
Ed Cocks
Thomas Emerson
James Milligan
Deborah Morris
Mark Parton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Deafness Resource Centre—funding

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (3.40): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) the Deafness Resource Centre (DRC) is a critical service provider of information, referrals, resources and advocacy to the deaf and hearing-impaired communities in the ACT and surrounding regions of NSW;
 - (b) after 40 years of dedicated service, the DRC is facing closure by 31 January 2025, leaving a significant gap in support services;
 - (c) the decision by the DRC to close is affected by funding uncertainties associated with changes currently being made to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and a lack of consultation with affected service providers; and
 - (d) the possible closure of the DRC comes as the community is already facing barriers in accessing essential AUSLAN services;
- (2) further notes that:
 - (a) in response to the 10th Assembly inquiry into access to services and information, the ACT Government recognised the critical need for access to AUSLAN services to ensure the wellbeing and full participation of Deaf, Deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals;
 - (b) the ACT Health Language Services Plan identifies the need to provide a link to AUSLAN interpreter bookings on its website but has not prioritised this work; and
 - (c) regrettably, the Labor Government's actions fall short of their rhetoric. Rather than providing tangible support, reassurance, and certainty, they offer empty promises, leaving the Deaf and hard of hearing community feeling disregarded and uncertain about their future; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
 - (a) work with the DRC and the Commonwealth Government to ensure transparency and certainty of ongoing grant funding for the DRC;
 - (b) provide support as a transitional measure to ensure the viability of Deaf ACT and the DRC. Such measures to ensure that important community resources are not put at risk because of changes in government policy; and
 - (c) give priority to the ACT Health Language Services Plan and ensure that links to AUSLAN interpreters are urgently provided on ACT Health's websites.

This motion seeks urgent assistance for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community in the ACT. I would have preferred to have an interpreter accompany me in presenting this speech. Unfortunately, due to the short notice and the limited number of interpreters available in the ACT, this has not been possible. I apologise to the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community for not making that available.

This motion draws attention to a very serious issue affecting a number of communities across Australia, relating to changes in the way the commonwealth is managing grant funding for disability and related community services. Community organisations rely

on a combination of commonwealth grants and community donations to provide essential and highly valued services to the disability community. In the current financial environment, community groups are finding it increasingly difficult to attract the level of donations that they may have received in better economic times.

Government grant funding is increasingly critical to keep this important service going. Since the establishment of the National Disability Insurance Scheme—the NDIS—there have been numerous changes to the way grant funding has been provided. The recent NDIS review found that grant funding was limited in its effectiveness because of the short funding time frames and the administrative burdens that these short-term arrangements place on community groups.

It appears, from what we have heard from conversations with the community, specifically the Deaf community, that the commonwealth is in the process of transferring cost responsibility for some disability services back to the states and territories, but the detail of these changes has not been well communicated to the community organisations, creating a sense of confusion and despair.

The funding crisis has resulted in many community organisations hanging on by their fingernails, relying on volunteer staff working long hours without remuneration. It is a blight on this community that we rely on these essential services but tolerate the extensive use of unpaid volunteers. As a community, we need to invest in our community organisations to ensure the ongoing delivery of services. They do the heavy lifting for us, and the least we can do is support them. It is great that people volunteer their time, but when volunteering becomes a full-time job and community organisations depend on that work, there must be a way to compensate people appropriately.

My motion today is specifically in relation to the Deafness Resource Centre and Deaf ACT. Both of these organisations provide critical services to the ACT Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities, and both organisations are facing an existential crisis caused by the uncertainties of ongoing funding. In the case of the DRC, it will close if nothing happens by 31 January 2025.

The DRC will close because the organisation, unfortunately, missed the cut-off for the next commonwealth grant round. Without urgent financial assistance, they will have to shut their door on the very vulnerable people in that community. This will seriously impact the Deaf and the hard-of-hearing community, as the DRC provide the only outreach service in the ACT to assist clients to choose, trial and discuss with an expert the merits of various hearing support equipment.

They also provide an onsite service and battery replacement service in nursing homes—a very vulnerable cohort—for people who cannot travel to other providers. After 40 years of providing a service which is highly valuable for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community, this would be an irreplaceable loss. Sadly, this will mean that vulnerable aged-care residents may lose the benefits of their hearing aids. I cannot imagine what it would feel like not to be able to hear.

I acknowledge that there are legitimate questions about which level of government should be providing funding, and I understand that the ACT may be reluctant to pick

up the funding for an organisation that should be funded by the commonwealth. I would say, however, that the DRC is a special case. It missed the window for the next commonwealth funding round, and it has no opportunity to make a late request for funds.

I think it is very much the case that the ACT should consider whether the provision of the services of the DRC is important and valuable. It is certainly very much within the capacity of the ACT government to provide some relief to keep this vital service afloat.

Whatever the government decides, action is urgent, and the window in which to take action is limited. The DRC needs to know by Christmas whether it will receive an act-of-grace payment from the commonwealth that would enable it to survive its current problems. If the act-of-grace payment does not arrive, the viability of the service will be lost permanently.

I note that, longer term, it is possible that the responsibility for funding disability support may fall to states and territories. If the government does not act now, it may find itself having to re-create these services from scratch, and it may rue the missed opportunity that my motion presents.

Deaf ACT are another organisation that have struggled with short-term support grants and periods of financial uncertainty. Their staff are working unpaid hours to keep the organisation afloat. They advise me that they have had many conversations with the government in the past and are trying to get better support for the Deaf and hard of hearing in the ACT. They expressed frustration and disappointment at the lack of an adequate response from the government, as well as the failure to take on board suggestions.

Deaf ACT are frustrated—and, quite frankly, rightly so—that this government and the Health Directorate do not seem to understand the importance of Auslan and the need to regard it as a language in its own right. Deaf ACT enthusiastically participated in the government's Auslan inquiry but are disappointed and dismayed at the lack of action on the 25 recommendations. Even where the recommendations have been agreed to in principle, there has been no action to progress them and no funding provided through the ACT budget.

Deaf ACT have also sought to engage with the Health Directorate in relation to the expansion of the Canberra Hospital but were unable to meet until after the expansion had actually opened. This gave no opportunity for proposals to make the hospital more accessible and ensure that it was Deaf friendly.

Deaf ACT are particularly distressed by the lack of respect for Auslan as a language and consider responses like, "They can just read my lips," to be utterly inappropriate. Deaf ACT are concerned that the current ACT Health documentation relating to booking Auslan interpreters lists only organisations that provide translation services—for example, translating a document from one language to produce another document in another language—for non-Auslan languages, and currently have no local Auslan interpreters to provide essential face-to-face interpreting services. I reiterate that it is important to note this distinction between translators and interpreters, in that

translation is often not immediate and interpreters need to be a live engagement.

There is a risk of serious impacts to the health and wellbeing of Deaf patients if the Canberra Hospital health service cannot provide access to Auslan interpreters in a timely manner. I note that the ACT Health Language Services Plan identifies the need to provide a link to Auslan interpreter bookings on its website but has not prioritised this work or provided a time frame for its completion. It is a minimum expectation that information be available to ACT Health officials about their obligation to use Auslan interpreters and how to access them, and for information to be available to the Deaf on their right to have an Auslan interpreter and how to arrange this.

This work needs to be prioritised. It is important that the government takes urgent measures to ensure that staff at ACT Health are aware of the importance of booking an Auslan interpreter, noting that it is preferable for those interpreters to be onsite, assisting with the translation of complex medical and legal information. Interpreters must be fully qualified level III interpreters to perform this work.

Recognising the constraints on motions, in that they should not seek specifically to appropriate funds, I have not made any such specific proposals. My motion is simple. It calls on the minister to turn her attention to this issue and make her own judgement on what supports should be provided. I ask the minister to engage with the DRC and Deaf ACT and to advise this chamber at the earliest convenience of decisions made by the government.

I commend this motion to the Assembly, in the hope that the government can intervene urgently to ensure the sustainability of DRC and Deaf ACT.

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) (3.51): On behalf of Ms Orr, I move the following amendment:

Omit all words after (1)(a) and substitute:

- (a) the Deafness Resource Centre (DRC) through funding provided by the Commonwealth Government and sales of Assistive Technology provide information, referral, resources and advocacy to deaf and hearing impaired people in the ACT and surrounding regions of NSW, have indicated they will be permanently closing;
- (b) the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services first became aware of this matter by Ms Barry placing her motion on the notice paper. The Minister and her office are in the process of reaching out to the DRC to better understand their circumstances and any impacts that may result;
- (c) the closure of the DRC has raised concerns in the community regarding ongoing provision of support and care especially given other acknowledged challenges including access to essential Auslan services; and
- (d) restructuring and changes to the NDIS is creating uncertainty across the wider disability service sector including for individual providers and in turn people with disability who are seeking certainty of support and

care.

- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) as part of its ongoing commitment to support inclusion, work with the deaf and hearing impaired community to continue to understand and respond to their accessibility, health and wellbeing needs and to identify and respond to service provision gaps either existing or emerging;
 - (b) re-affirm its commitment to ongoing consultation with community service providers and impacted communities to ensure timely and proactive support and a shared understanding of current and future changes to NDIS funding arrangements;
 - (c) implement its commitments under the various ACT disability strategies to ensure deaf and hearing impaired people are supported in their wellbeing and full participation in the Canberra community; and
 - (d) give priority to the ACT Health Language Services Plan and ensure that links to Auslan interpreters are urgently provided on ACT Health's websites."

I would like to thank Ms Barry for bringing this motion to the Assembly and for providing us with the opportunity to consider the needs of Deaf and hard-of-hearing people in Canberra.

The amendment circulated by Minister Orr, and which I have moved in her name, reflects the importance that this government and members of the Assembly place on the accessibility and adequacy of supports for Deaf and hard-of-hearing people in the ACT. Minister Orr's office has been in communication with staff and board members of the Deafness Resource Centre, and both parties are committed to continuing discussions.

The minister also wishes to acknowledge the uncertainty for service providers and people accessing those services, given the wider NDIS reforms that are underway. As we work through these with our commonwealth counterparts, the ACT government will endeavour to keep the sector and the community as informed as possible. We thank our colleagues across all parties and groupings for their proactive and collegial engagement on this issue. It is clear that there is a shared concern to ensure that Deaf and hard-of-hearing people have the supports that they need.

There has been significant policy work undertaken by the ACT government over the last few years, co-designed with the community. The ongoing implementation of these policies and their action plans remains a focus across the health, education, justice and community services portfolios of government, including the ACT Disability Justice Strategy 2019–29, the ACT Disability Health Strategy 2024–34 and Inclusive Education: A Disability Inclusion Strategy for ACT Public Schools 2024–34.

The ACT Disability Strategy was developed through an extensive consultation process co-designed with and led by people with a disability. This process demonstrated that Canberrans who are Deaf or hard of hearing want to feel part of the community and to know that they have neighbours and friends who can support them. They want to have fulfilling careers. We heard that they want to be able to use their

first language as much as possible and have access to technology such as voice to text to overcome barriers as needed.

The Deaf and hard-of-hearing community would like the wider community to understand the needs of a person with hearing loss. Like all people with a disability, they want health care, including mental health care, to be accessible, along with other essential services. They want access to technology to keep them safe at home and in other settings, such as flashing smoke alarms, videos for the front door and smartphones to make calls in Auslan.

They would like the wider community to have more opportunities to learn Auslan to break down barriers. The Tenth ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion inquiry into access to services and information in Auslan identified the need for, firstly, a clearly stated commitment and requirement to ensure all Canberrans have equal access to information, services and programs through the use of language services, including Auslan, under the ACT Language Services Policy. The second was to ensure that the ACT courts and tribunal processes support the rights of Deaf people throughout their participation in all legal proceedings, including as witnesses or members of the jury, with Auslan interpreters utilised as required. The third was to provide Easy English training to all ACT government staff. The ACT government has provided Easy English training to 198 people across government, including ACT Corrective Services, the Education Directorate, the Health Directorate, and the Community Services Directorate, to improve information accessibility.

The next is a mechanism to allow human rights complaints to be considered by the Human Rights Commission to provide a more accessible means for human rights issues to be identified and resolved in the ACT. Finally, an agreement between the Deaf society and Emergency Services has been in place since 2015 for the provision of Auslan interpreting services for announcements and information sharing during emergency events, and training for ESA personnel on working with Auslan interpreters and deaf awareness, translation services for key safety information on the ESA website, and communication with Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities outside emergency events.

We know that there is always more that can be done. Of highest importance is improving timely access to Auslan interpreting, audiology and other hearing health services. We reaffirm the commitment to ongoing consultation with the community and will continue to work with the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community to ensure and improve supports and services.

I would like to thank Minister Orr for providing me with the opportunity to read her speech today on this very important issue.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.57): I move the following amendment to Ms Orr's amendment:

After paragraph (2)(d), insert:

“(e) that the Government work with the DRC and the Commonwealth Government to ensure the ongoing viability of the DRC and prevent its

closure.”

I appreciate the shared objectives around this chamber regarding ensuring that people experiencing deafness across the ACT have access to the services and supports they need. It is important that we support people with disabilities of all kinds. Certainly, across the conversations we have had in recent days, it has been very clear that everyone in this place supports the intent of the motion when it comes to that side of the equation.

In the amendment that has been brought forward by Ms Orr, a very important part of the equation has been lost; that is, the very important calls for the government to work with the DRC and the commonwealth government to ensure that the DRC stays open. I cannot imagine what the experience would be like for someone who depended on the services and supports that the DRC provides, and for them to lose those. I cannot imagine what it would be like to go through life without the types of supports that Ms Barry outlined earlier.

We think it is extremely important that this provision stays in the motion, and that is the entire purpose of this amendment that I have moved.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (3.59): I want to touch on the heart of Ms Barry’s motion and thank her again for bringing it before this Assembly. It is wonderful to see her, in her first week as a member, bringing in a motion. The ACT Deafness Resource Centre, based at the Grant Cameron Community Centre, Holder, offers information, referrals, resources and advocacy to the Deaf and hearing-impaired communities in the ACT and surrounding regions.

The DRC provides consultation sessions, workplace assessments, home safety assessments and awareness training opportunities to workplaces, the registered NDIS provider and a tax concession charity. This is an organisation that clearly has the wellbeing of the ACT community, particularly those Deaf and hearing-impaired Canberrans, at the forefront of everything that they do.

Canberra has up to 400 Deaf people who use Auslan sign language. One in six Australians has some form of hearing loss, with that number projected to increase to one in four by 2050. The ACT must promote the provision of community services for Deaf and hearing-impaired Canberrans as these numbers are forecast to increase over the coming decades.

The DRC ethos is simple. I quote:

We aim to help manage the effects of hearing loss on everyday life by providing information, advice and guidance.

The ACT must work with the DRC to ensure that appropriate support is provided to protect the great community health work that they perform.

Ms Barry’s motion strikes the right chord to make sure that Deaf and hearing-impaired Canberrans are able to access the services and support they need, and has only been triggered by the lack of certainty to DRC from this government. I will leave

it in the hands of Ms Barry and our whip, in terms of dealing with the amendments. I want to commend Ms Barry for bringing this important motion to the Assembly's attention.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.02): I rise to speak to Ms Barry's motion, which raises some important issues about critical disability services for our community and the tough time that many of our small community organisations are having. I sincerely thank Ms Barry for bringing this motion forward.

As noted in the motion, organisations like the Deafness Resource Centre provide critical information, referral, resource and advocacy to Deaf and hard-of-hearing people in the ACT and surrounds. Although there is not accurate data on the number of Deaf and hard-of-hearing people in the ACT, the 2021 census said that there were over 16,000 people across Australia using Auslan in their home.

In their submission to the last Assembly's inquiry into access to services and information in Auslan, Deaf ACT said that Deaf people across the ACT and across the country encounter barriers and challenges to accessing serviced and information, and a lack of understanding amongst people on how to support and engage appropriately with Deafblind people. It shone a light on the lack of qualified Auslan interpreters.

Having recently taken on the role of disability spokesperson, and unfortunately without being able to consult directly with the organisations mentioned in this motion, despite our best efforts, I would like to use the "nothing about us without us" principle here and speak more broadly to the importance of service providers in meeting the needs of the community. I commit the ACT Greens to keep striving to consult, represent and advocate for people with a disability in the ACT and fight for good and well-resourced services so that everyone has access to the supports that they need.

I would like to take this opportunity to talk more about the regulatory settings that govern community service organisations like these, and the importance of these services and the important work that needs to be done to ensure that past and future changes to federal settings like the National Disability Insurance Scheme are in fact delivering positive outcomes for the people that need them.

I am sure there are a lot of distressed people in our community who are wondering what the recent changes and the unfortunate closure of services like those from the Deafness Resource Centre mean for them, their carers, families and loved ones.

I am proud that, particularly under the leadership of former Greens disability minister Emma Davidson, the ACT wants to take a different approach to the federal government's gutting of the NDIS and the failure to act on the disability royal commission's key recommendations. Emma Davidson was fearlessly committed to ensuring that people with a disability are recognised, respected and listened to, and that decisions made about their lives, their bodies and the services are made with them. I have faith that the new minister for disability will continue that legacy, given her important contributions to the ACT via the Disability Inclusion Act, which embeds the social model of disability within the ACT.

I am very much looking forward to engaging with the implementation of this act.

I hope it ensures that the implementation of things like the ACT Health Language Services Plan and links to Auslan interpreters are prioritised and delivered quickly.

I support the amendment from Minister Orr, which clarifies that the ACT government have a crucial role to play in ensuring that they identify and understand community needs and services gaps, and have a significant role in addressing them. This includes working with community organisations and the commonwealth government to support the delivery of community services that are adequately resourced, so that there is harmony between the community's needs and the supports that they can access.

Going to this point, the ACT government should have a role in supporting community service providers through changes to regulatory and funding settings. We think that taking a proactive approach to ensuring there is a shared understanding of the funding environment will help to deliver this outcome. I sincerely thank the minister for her support on this commitment. I sincerely hope that, with our best efforts, we do not have to see the closure of any more important services, like those provided by the Deafness Resource Centre.

Mr Cocks's amendment to **Ms Orr's** amendment agreed to.

Ms Orr's amendment, as amended, agreed to.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.07): I want to say a few things. It has been a very long week, and what a way to close off our first sitting week. I thank everyone present for discussing this motion. I thank the minister for bringing this forward on Ms Orr's behalf. I thank my colleagues for engaging collectively. It shows that when we agree, we can have a meaningful impact.

This amendment makes clear the intent of the original motion. It is a good outcome for the Deaf community, and a sign that the Assembly can work together on shared objectives. I again thank everyone for engaging so productively in the debate.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

Motion (by **Mr Deputy Speaker**) agreed to:

That the papers presented under standing order 211 during presentation of papers in the routine of business, be noted.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legislative Assembly

Sitting pattern 2025

Debate resumed.

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) (4.08): I seek leave to speak again.

Leave granted.

MS CHEYNE: Moving this motion earlier in the day and adjourning it was simply to allow parties to have more time to work through the pattern that has been proposed and the reasons why, and for everyone to get a shared understanding.

As Manager of Government Business, the whips and I met at lunchtime today, and we had an incredibly constructive conversation. I do now believe that the sitting pattern, as it appears on the notice paper, has been agreed by consensus.

I would note some features of the sitting calendar, including some elements that were particularly important, and raised by other members, and that have been agreed to, including that the annual report hearings that will be undertaken in February will not lead straight into a sitting week. There will be a week break before the sitting week, which is now in March, and the same has occurred for the annual report hearings in November, with the sitting week then being in December—again, allowing a brief break for members so that we all maintain some semblance of sensibleness in this place by that final week—I would hope!

Of course, there was some discussion about the number of weeks we are to be sitting, and we have come to an agreement. I understand that 13 weeks is a balanced sitting calendar, which allows us to ensure that there is still a real rhythm to this place. It allows the government, and any other member, of course, to present legislation and to have it referred to a committee, and to the scrutiny committee, and then for those committees to have enough time to do their work—if they choose to inquire into it—and to report back so that things can keep moving without having established standing committees not having any time to do their work.

We think that balance has been struck. We have also achieved some clear air, both in the lead-up to the budget being handed down in that final-ish week of June, and in having some time to prepare for estimates for both the executive and non-executive—and for the estimates committee to run its hearings and to prepare a report following those hearings.

I thank all of the whips, and particularly Mr Rattenbury, for engaging constructively this morning and agreeing to allow a little bit more time for everyone to understand where we are each coming from. And I particularly want to thank Mr Cocks for being such a terrific whip. It has been a pleasure, quite genuinely, to work with someone who approaches things very transparently, and he has worked so closely with us. I have said, I think each day so far, that Ms Tough is amazing and has made my job very easy, and that has certainly been true today. We were just reflecting that maybe this is a federal-public-servant process thing—about us all getting excited about these nerdy things. But there is a reason behind it.

Thank you again to everyone, and, hopefully, the next thing that we get to talk about is establishing an estimates committee, but that can be next year's problem. I commend the motion to the chamber, Mr Deputy Speaker.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.13): I would first like to say that I am really pleased that the government has listened to the estimates committee in allowing enough time for all the things that need to happen between the end of estimates hearings and the budget debate.

I know my colleague Ms Clay made this point in the chamber last year, and I experienced firsthand how rushed the process was when I was on the estimates committee earlier this year. Estimates is a part of the Assembly calendar that is close to my heart, and so much valuable information is conveyed that fundamentally shapes how MLAs approach various issues.

With that in mind, we do need the time to sort through the huge pile of information that comes out of estimates, especially on a crossbench, where we juggle many more portfolio areas than the government or opposition. And I am sure our new independent colleagues will also appreciate having a good amount of time for this process too.

The Greens have been vocal in pushing for more sitting weeks, and we want the right number of sitting weeks for the parliament as a whole. The government's original notice of motion to establish the sitting calendar had only 36 days, or 12 weeks, and since then, we have been really pleased and happy to see the government respond to our call for more sitting days and that today's notice paper has increased the total sitting days to 39. More sitting weeks are important for government oversight. It gives the crossbench and opposition more time to ask questions of the government, and it means we are not rushing legislation and motions through with less time for debate and scrutiny.

We do remain just slightly wary that the Assembly would sit in a two-week period when the government is supposed to be responding to the scrutiny of the estimates committee report. We believe that two-week scrutiny period is important. We want the government to be using those two weeks to really listen to and respond to the recommendations from the estimates committee.

It is disappointing sometimes to work hard on a committee and get back the response "noted", so I would really like to give the government the appropriate amount of time and bandwidth to respond so that we can be sure that if they respond with "noted", it is not because they did not have enough time.

We were, however, also pleased to see the government respond to our feedback that we should not have sitting weeks directly after annual reports. It is really important that we do not go straight from annual report hearings into sittings so that, again, we have time to finish off that important scrutiny role that committees play in this single-chamber parliament.

Committees are really important for scrutiny. This parliament does not have an upper house. Parliamentary committees perform that role. Scrutiny is particularly important for a minority government that has not been elected to rule in their own right. It is a delicate balance between more sitting weeks and adequate time between sitting weeks, but I personally believe this version is a happy compromise.

Time between sitting weeks is so important. It is good for democracy, and we can all take the time to become better educated on emerging issues. It is good for oversight, as we have more opportunities to make use of briefings and other Assembly tools that are difficult to access while we are in the chamber. It is good for the community, as we not only have the time to be out in our electorates between sittings, but we can take the time to hear what issues are impacting the community and come back better prepared to argue for them. Additionally, we will all benefit from the additional time between annual report hearings and sitting weeks, especially at the end of the year. This will give us adequate time to process the information and to then, hopefully, hold the government to account with some questions on notice.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone across the aisle who has worked to get the best possible outcome here. Thank you in particular to Ms Tough, Mr Cocks and Minister Cheyne for their very open and good-hearted engagement. Thank you for engaging in good faith. I sincerely hope that we can all agree that this proposal is best for the Assembly as a whole. Thank you.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (4.16): I thank members for their support, noting, as Miss Nuttall has outlined, that there has been good engagement and good compromise in relation to this.

Just on the point of the government having time to respond to the estimates committee report, I believe that will be the case; my understanding is that that first sitting week in September—September 2, 3, 4—will be the week in which the estimates committee report will be tabled. The government will then have two weeks—with no sittings—to respond, and we will then commence the budget debate in the sitting fortnight 16, 17, 18; 23, 24, 25. So I believe the government will have time to respond, without any parliamentary sittings, and to give the estimates report the consideration that the estimates committee is asking of us. This sitting schedule achieves that. I commend it to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Statements by members

Housing and housing services

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.18): I want to rise and speak briefly about the honour and privilege of serving Canberrans as the new Shadow Minister for Housing Services. Housing was one of the biggest issues at the recent election. I look forward to engaging with stakeholders, tenants and community members to ensure better outcomes in the areas of housing and homelessness.

I wholeheartedly believe in the mission of public, social and affordable housing, and I am committed to serving any and all Canberrans who need a roof over their head. I want to thank the opposition leader, Ms Castley, for the trust and confidence in me to work in this portfolio towards positive outcomes for Canberrans. I want to acknowledge, as well, the tremendous work performed in this space by Mr Deputy Speaker, who now takes the chair, as well as the prior service of Ms Vassarotti.

I look forward to working with the Minister for Homes and New Suburbs, holding her to account and working cooperatively for good outcomes where that is possible—as well as with all members interested in this important portfolio area. And, of course, to any Canberrans who may have issues or the need for assistance with housing or homelessness, including heritage issues—please feel free to contact my office.

Multiple sclerosis—Gowrie Christmas Lights for MS

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (4.19): I am rising on this most yuletide-adjacent of Assembly afternoons to help us focus our attention on our Tuggeranong neighbourhood's spectacular December moment. It is, of course, the Gowrie Christmas lights.

The Werner-Gibblings's have lived happily in Gowrie for 10 years, so we have been able to walk to the fantastic Christmas lights displays every year since 2017, when Ben Walker and James Crowther, two very young men, at that time—now just quite young—whom I know very well, began decorating and festooning their family homes in Stacy Street and Ruthven Street with Christmas lights, sparkly reindeers and enormous inflatable Santas that light up the nights and raise funds for multiple sclerosis.

Since then, these chaps have raised over \$100,000 for multiple sclerosis. They were finalists for the community champion under 40 award and have received Multiple Sclerosis Australia's 50 years president's medal to recognise their outstanding contribution to raising the funds and volunteering. For updates and useful info, we can follow James and Ben's Facebook page at Christmas Lights for MS.

Walk a few metres down Castleton Crescent from Ruthven Street, Mr Speaker, and you will come to Middleton Circuit. You will see Kay and Roger Harrison's extraordinary display immediately. For more than a decade, they have been making Christmas magic and the best homemade rocky road in Canberra to raise funds for cancer charities. We always visit their house last, take it in, thank the Harrisons, buy the rocky road and eat it on the walk home. It is a lovely evening. I encourage everyone to visit.

Legislative Assembly closed captioning service

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.21): Mr Speaker, I rise to make a personal statement about some concerns that I wanted to bring to this Assembly's attention. This morning, it was brought to my attention that the live feed of my maiden speech on the parliamentary website was accompanied by an AI-generated translation. I am very concerned about the quality of the translation, particularly as it contained misinformation and mistranslation, and it was inaccurate to the extent of completely changing the meaning of my speech.

One phrase, in particular, which I cannot, unfortunately, repeat in the Assembly was mistranslated and found really offensive to my community. Now, I understand, obviously, that this error was an AI-generated translation, and this error was that; there was no human involvement. I am also pleased to say that when it was raised

with staff, the deputy clerk took action and made sure that the translation was removed.

I note that this has not been tested—a person with an accent in the Assembly. This particular technology has not been tested in this Assembly, but it will be something that I would be eager to explore further. Thank you.

Sport and recreation—rock climbing

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.22): Canberra Indoor Rock Climbing gym is a longstanding, unique and integral part of the Canberra sports community. It has been located at Mitchell for over 20 years and in other locations prior to that. Their aim is to promote the sport of indoor rock climbing to anyone who wants to try to engage in this unique sport.

Over the years of operation, they have supported a wide range of charities, youth groups and sporting clubs, as well as the local Canberra and surrounding climbing community. Their commitment to community has helped countless people over the years, and they do this because they want to share their love of rock climbing with anyone who is interested.

I strongly support the Canberra Indoor Rock Climbing gym and the important role they play in the community. It is a safe space for young people in Canberra to build skills, friendships and confidence. It can be used by a regular and large community of climbers who will not transition to non-roped or bouldering gyms where there is a higher risk of injury.

Climbers were stoked to see climbing made an official sport in the Olympics back in 2020, and sport climbing has been one of the three core disciplines since. For all of our young climbers, Canberra Indoor Rock Climbing is the only place that accommodates indoor league climbing. It is the only place where they can properly train and make the transition to competitive local sport climbing without leaving the territory.

This closure would be an incredibly sad loss to a significant number of Canberrans and take away an irreplaceable fitness and community space for all ages.

Active travel—footpaths and cycle pathways

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.24): Earlier today, the government tabled their response to the climate change and a just transition inquiry. I was pleased to see that. I have not had a chance to fully absorb it, but I have skipped through the recommendations. In particular, one recommendation was that the ACT government complete the missing bike lanes and footpaths, and the response was that it is existing government policy. We are really pleased it is existing government policy and we know that it is existing government policy. The committee did not recommend for a policy change; the committee recommended that government build the bike paths and the footpaths.

The Greens actually costed what it would cost and how we could go about completing those bike paths and footpaths. We did that before the election. We recommended lots

of insourcing. We costed what it currently costs to build them. We said how much we need to set aside to get them built by 2030, and that is what we took to the election.

I am a little concerned that we have the glossy brochure. We have a really good Active Travel Plan. Everybody is very happy with that Active Travel Plan, but we are not, in fact, seeing the footpaths and the bike paths being built. I would encourage the government to not just state what the existing policy is but also fully engage when a community recommends that we do something. Maybe the government could say, “Yes; we will do that,” or “No; we will not do that.”

Ms Joy Burch—tribute

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (4.25): I rise to thank the former member for Brindabella, Joy Burch. In my first speech yesterday, I said that she delivered 40,000 pieces of material and walked over 900 kilometres for me. She wanted me to correct the record: she actually walked over 1,200 kilometres this year! So mark it on the record that Ms Burch, the former Speaker, walked over 1,200 kilometres for me. I wish her well in her next steps and thank her for the continuing correspondence to my office about little things that need to be fixed in the Tuggeranong region, such as bus stops, graffiti and a few other things. I welcome her continuing to send those through, now that she is enjoying not being here with us in the chamber.

I also pass on my thanks to Mick Gentleman, the former member for Brindabella, for the work he did in representing the people of Brindabella and Tuggeranong and wish him well for the future.

Transport Canberra—bus frequency

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.26): I would like to take a moment to clarify a vote I made earlier today on Mr Braddock’s motion to increase the frequency of bus services in the ACT. I voted against an amendment that changed that motion. The original motion committed the ACT government to improve frequency on weekends to 30 minutes or better and the amendment committed the government to make further improvements, subject to future engagement with the workforce.

I would have voted in full support of Mr Braddock’s original motion, and I agree with the sentiment the Greens have shared in this place that we need to increase frequency on weekdays and weekends. I just wanted to clarify that point for the Assembly.

LGBTIQA+ community—SpringOUT

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.27): I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many passionate volunteers who made this year’s SpringOUT such a wonderful event. It was a pleasure to be able to see the queer community of Canberra celebrating and how diverse and proud the community is. It was really nice to see events pop up all over Canberra. On the north side, we had the hustle and bustle of Fair Day in Glebe Park to mark the start of SpringOUT and the beautiful music of the choir performance in Llewellyn Hall. On the south side, we had the lovely Diversity ACT picnic day, where a small but very bubbly gathering showed that Kambah absolutely has a part to play in the queer identity of Canberra, complementing the more visible

communities in the inner north.

Twenty-five years of SpringOUT is a huge achievement. I was enormously proud to be part of the queer Canberran community celebrating this year. I sincerely hope that SpringOUT is able to continue thriving in this city for another 25 years, and, especially, I will be out there doing my best to make sure south-side pride is even more visible next year.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Disability—Legislative Assembly closed captioning service

MR SPEAKER: As the presiding officer of this parliament and given that we are not sitting again for a long time, I want to respond to the concerns raised by Ms Barry. We have obviously had a private conversation, but, publicly, I want to pass on my apologies and, broadly speaking, the apologies of the Legislative Assembly for any offence that was caused by the captioning incident. This morning at 9.08, the broadcast team contacted the provider of the broadcast system and asked them to disable the closed captioning of an inaugural speech. That has been done.

The closed captioning, as members know, is generated by AI. It frequently makes errors, and some of them end up being quite positive. Look at how many “Ken Behrens” t-shirts there are around Canberra! There is obviously no ill-intent. AI generation is a blunt instrument. The error rate was considered to be an acceptable trade-off given the additional accessibility that the captioning provides to the Deaf or the hard of hearing, which is obviously extremely pertinent based on the motion that we had in this chamber earlier.

There has been at least one previous incident where the AI error was particularly unfortunate. This parliament will continue to consider closed captioning. I am certainly suggesting that, as the chair of the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure, I will be taking this matter to the committee so that we can consider how we proceed, moving forward.

Valedictory

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (4.30): Mr Speaker, on this final sitting day, I extend my best wishes for the festive season to you and all members of the Assembly, all our staff, the staff of the Assembly and the broader ACT public service.

It has been quite a year in the four-year cycle. A huge amount of effort is put in every year, but for one year in four that effort is extraordinary. I thank members again for their support in me continuing as Chief Minister. I am very well aware of the

significance and enormity of that role and the leadership that entails. But, of course, I am but one of 25 members in this place, and we all have responsibilities to our electorates and our community. They are responsibilities that we all take very seriously. That has been evidenced in inaugural speeches this week and by the conduct of this chamber.

There will always be areas of political disagreement, but this week we have found many examples of compromise in the best interests of our community and in the best interests of the functioning of this place. If this opening week is an indication of how this Assembly will operate over four years, I believe it is a very encouraging start, and we would seek to continue in that spirit. I note that there will of course be robust exchanges, points of difference and areas of competing priority. That is all that you would expect of a robust parliament.

Often, this place cops a bit of a bad rap. I think that is unfair. When you benchmark the workload and effort, representation across two levels of government from 25 members and our team of support staff, we compare very favourably with other state and territory parliaments of this nation and, indeed, other sub-national parliaments around the democratic world. With the very clear direction that we are taking as a parliament, we can look positively to the next four years around what we will be able to achieve together.

I was asked to do an interview for the ABC to wrap up the year and comment on the first week of sittings, and I made observations similar to that I just made. I observed that, generally speaking, the ABC do not hold the lead story of their nightly bulletin with, “Everyone agreed in the Assembly today”! What is reported in the media is often only conflict in this place. As long-term members and, indeed, newer members know, more often than not there is agreement or compromise to reach agreement, and I think that spirit is important to continue.

Before I conclude my remarks, I would like to pay tribute to a couple of members of my staff who will not be with us in the new year, as they are moving to new opportunities. I particularly thank and acknowledge Michael Cook, who has been my chief of staff for the best part of a decade. Michael has worked incredibly hard for me and the government but has also been the chief point of contact for the opposition, the Greens and, indeed, new independents as well in their engagement with the CMO. It is a very important role. I am a big fan of *The West Wing*, which might not surprise many people. There is a line when the President says, “Your chief of staff should be someone who is smarter than you and one of your best friends.” I think Michael fills both of those categories very well. I thank him for his tremendous amount of work. I will miss him dearly. I know, though, that, from whichever new role he is in, he will continue to provide timely advice to me.

I also say farewell to Faheem Khan, who has been my Treasury advisor for five years. Faheem has been at the centre of the Expenditure Review Committee process, working across ministerial offices for five budgets, five mid-year reviews and at least one or two economic updates over that journey. He would be the person who probably has to say no to ministerial officers and staff more than anyone else in the building. On occasion, he was able to be the bearer of very good news. Faheem is an outstanding individual with very sharp intellect. He is someone that I have been really

pleased to get to know over the past five years. I wish him all the very best in his next endeavours and thank him for his service, not only in the Treasury portfolio but also across my other portfolios and in working across the government and the Assembly.

As members we are only as good as the staff who support us. They go above and beyond. So, in concluding today, I wish all staff, particularly in my office but also across the board, all the very best for the festive season. May it be a safe and happy time, and may people come back refreshed for a busy year in the Assembly in 2025. Happy Christmas, everyone.

Valedictory

MS CASTLEY: (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (4.37): It certainly has been a year, as the Chief Minister has just reflected, and this sitting week has been a wonderful start to the new term. It was a year of hard work, change, new opportunities and challenges. While I am grateful for everything this year has offered, I am also very pleased that it is drawing to an end, because I am ready for a break, and I do not think I am the only one. We are all ready to return to our communities, our friends and our families, hang up our lanyards, spend some time with those we love, and rest and recuperate, because we will have a lot to do in this place over the next four years. The four years are looming and we do not want to rest on our laurels.

This city is wonderful. It is the place we call home and it is hungry for change. We all know that things can be better. Next year, we have to get stuck into the work of making that change a reality. This means building our vision for Canberra—our vision of a city where young people can own their own their own home in a city that is affordable for families, a city where people can start and grow their own business, and a city where everyone can access world-class services. This is a vision every Canberran can get behind, and it is a vision we all deserve to have as our reality. I am not doing this for myself; I am doing it for my family. Of course, I want things to be great for my kids and my grandson, but I am also doing this for our community. We do deserve better, and it is our job to turn our community's desire for change into a plan for change.

Like those who have spoken before me this afternoon, there are plenty of people to thank. The changeover after the last election has been huge. I would like to thank all of the Assembly staff for everything that they have done throughout the term, but in particular in the transition and getting new members' offices ready and moving us all around, up and down floors. They have done a remarkable job, so I wish to thank everyone for their help. Nothing is too hard, and that is something that I have come to know in this place. The staff are amazing.

Moving on to my Liberal colleagues, I thank Elizabeth Lee for leading us over the 10th Assembly. She did a great job. I would like to thank the deputy leader, Jeremy Hanson, for being willing to step in and for the wealth of advice that he has for us. I would like to thank, as Ms Cheyne reflected, our amazing Whip for the good job he has been doing for us over the week. He has kept every one of us in line. There are our new members, Deborah Morris and Chiaka Barry. These wonderful women have hit the ground running and I am so thrilled that they are part of our team.

I am also thrilled that Mark Parton is in the Speaker's chair. This is a great time, and I am very happy for him. Peter Cain is continuing great work in his portfolios, including Attorney-General, and in keeping up the dad jokes and the never-ending adjournment speeches. We are very happy to see that continue. Mr Milligan always has a fun joke for us, and that moustache is the gift that keeps on giving, but he also has an amazing commitment to our local community. There are none quite like it. We could reflect on the large head, if we wanted to!

I would love to thank everyone in Yerrabi who voted for me. Without them, I would not be in this place. I am thrilled that they have given me the opportunity to spend another four years in the Assembly. I thank my colleagues for entrusting me with the leadership of our team. I am honoured, and I am excited to work through the next four years.

I thank all my volunteers and wish them a very Merry Christmas. So many came out of the woodwork over the term and I am very grateful to all of them. I thank my office staff from last term. They all had different jobs to go to at the end. I would like to thank James Donnelly, Will Roche, Will Coats and Chris Fryar. They got us through a very busy and difficult couple of years. There are my staff from this term, and, as the Chief Minister said about the chief of staff, they are second to none. JD—Jonathon—without you, this week would not have been the same. Liam Devlin, who is not here—he has taken a job in Queensland—stepped in very quickly and, without him, JD would not be here, I believe. He did some cajoling and coaxing and all of that, so thank you, Liam, if you are watching. JD, you are here and I am very appreciative. We also have the gorgeous Gabby in the office taking care of everything. They have all made today wonderful, as well as the few weeks that we had together. Scott is back in the saddle again, and we have Jonathan “Johnno” Hawkes. As I said, they have made today special, but, honestly, this week would not have been the same without them. Let me say that. The Canberra Liberals have given me this opportunity to represent our community and our Liberal values.

I thank my beautiful mum—I believe she is upstairs right now preparing some after-sitting drinks—for always being available. Any time I ask, she is always there. Aunty Lou often watches from Queensland and I thank her for her support. I thank my kids, Beth, Lachlan and Jamie, and our gorgeous new addition Ty. I thank Shannon for always being there with a calm word, a glass of champagne, a hammer, cable ties, a battery charger or simply making sure that Ruby, my dog, and I are fed. Without these people, none of this would exist and I am so grateful. I wish everybody a Merry Christmas.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.43): I join my colleagues in taking this opportunity to offer a few end-of-year reflections, thanks and acknowledgements. I particularly acknowledge the people associated with the functioning of this place: the team in the Office of the Legislative Assembly and all the folks we do not see much of the time but enable us to turn up and do the job we do in the ACT Legislative Assembly.

Also, as an outgoing minister, I want to take this opportunity to thank the public service agencies I have worked with over recent years. We are very lucky to have the ACT public service full of people who are passionate about their work, bring a great

deal of expertise and enthusiasm to it and, as Canberrans, want to do the best job they can for our city. I thank them for their service.

I thank all the Greens' staff. They know who they are—I am not going to rattle them all off—across our offices. They are a really passionate bunch, they are fun to work with, they are dedicated and they bring a lot to the role. I acknowledge my fellow MLAs—the Greens in particular. It has been an interesting time for us. They are a great team to work with, and I look forward to what 2025 brings. I take this opportunity to particularly reflect on our two outgoing colleagues, Rebecca Vassarotti and Emma Davidson. As Greens' members of the Assembly, they made significant contributions to our community and advancing Greens' policies and values during the past term of the Assembly. Both will be missed greatly by our team here in the Assembly. I have had numerous people comment to me on how disappointed they are to have seen them lose their seats.

Emma carried a significant load during her term as a minister with a wide range of portfolios. Her efforts to defend the National Disability Insurance Scheme were particularly appreciated by the disability community, and she has left a lasting and positive impact on Canberra's mental health system, directly improving the lives of many of Canberra's most vulnerable people. She delivered the ACT's first publicly run residential eating disorder centre and has positioned Canberra's public health services to better meet people's needs into the future.

Across her portfolio, Rebecca has driven important reforms in heritage protection in key environmental areas. She delivered record funding for homelessness services and environmental groups. She played a central role in shaping the new planning laws and implemented groundbreaking reforms like property developer licensing, which has been around for some time. She actually got them delivered. Rebecca was highly regarded by stakeholders in community organisations for her drive to get things done and for her analysis of difficult issues. She also had a lot of fun hanging out with a range of fabulous native wildlife and endangered species during her time as minister.

I would like to touch on a few departing staff. As we have heard across the chamber, this is a time when some of our longer-term staff go on to new things. There are a few I would particularly like to mention. Firstly, Fiona Walls is the definition of a quiet achiever—the type that every team needs—who gets on with it, gets it done and is the glue that means the team is able to perform at its best. Fiona has worked several stints in the Assembly—first with Meredith Hunter back in the Seventh Assembly and, subsequently, as part of my team. Sharp as a tack, she is the type who does not always speak up, but, when she does, you need to make sure you are listening because it is likely to be a point that you would want to hear. I am pretty sure we have not yet fully understood the gap that Fiona's departure leaves, but I am both pleased for her to head on to new challenges and, of course, disappointed to lose her from our team.

Secondly, Anna McGuire has worked with me as the lead on climate, energy and water policy for a number of years. She is both passionate about these issues and an incredibly astute advisor. She understands the big picture but also how to get it done, translating the science to the practical, ensuring we translate our ambition into the policies that are implemented on the ground to help cut our emissions and protect our environment, and ensuring the transition to a clean energy future is, indeed, a just one.

Anna has made some excellent lifestyle choices and is chasing new dreams. We will miss her sorely. We are envious of her next stages. I am so grateful for her support of me and her contribution to our city.

I wish to say a few words about my outgoing chief of staff, Matt Georgeson, or, as the *Australian* like to call him, Matt “Jorgensen”. Matt has been with me in the Assembly for over 12 years and part of the Greens’ team for even longer. His contribution to the team and our movement has been immense. He would absolutely hate me speaking about him in here, because he is as shy as a quail. I do not want to use “foul” language, but I think Matt’s love of birds warrants a few ornithological references in his farewell remarks. Matt, you crack us up with your brilliant and understated wit. You are as wise as an owl, yet strong and brave like an eagle. On the surface, you are as zen as a majestic swan, yet underneath your legs are paddling at a million miles an hour like a duck’s. You are often barefoot and always brilliant. You have supported me for so long. At the risk of crowing on too much, I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to you, Matt. Thank you for your counsel, your contribution and your friendship. Fly free, Matt.

I would like to take a moment, as I did on election night, to quickly indulge. I thank all members of this place who have asked about my partner, Louise. She has had a rough time. We had an extraordinary election campaign where, instead of a couple of days in ICU, she spent 2½ weeks there. I particularly acknowledge the staff of Canberra Health Services. In this place, there is often some pretty feisty debate about the health services. I have to say, it has been nothing but exemplary. It has been one of those situations where it could have gone many different ways, but it has gone very well for us. I want to provide the Assembly with a quick update: she is going so much better now, and I thank everybody for their well wishes.

Finally, I wish all of you a restful and festive season. As Ms Castley noted, it has been a hell of a year. I think we all need a good break, so I hope everybody takes the opportunity to do the things that rejuvenate their soul over the coming months.

Valedictory

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.50): I want to reflect very briefly on the year 2024—a very significant year for all of us here in this Assembly—and to give thanks to a number of very, very deserving people who have been with me on this journey. On the 2024 election campaign, does anyone love Hare-Clark? It is a challenge, of course, because it is not just about preselection; it is about election. I appreciate the very hardworking Liberal candidates across our electorates, who all put in really massive efforts. Obviously there can only be a select number of successful candidates, and I am certainly very, very grateful to have been one of those.

I thank the people of Ginninderra—and not just those who voted for me. As I am wont to do when I am at people’s doors and people tell me, “Sorry, I will never vote for you,” I say, “I am not the member for people who vote for me; I am the member for Ginninderra. How can I help you?” People have sometimes taken up that offer to give me an opportunity to produce an outcome that is to their benefit or to the benefit of that area.

The Cain Train volunteers were many and varied across age ranges. I thank them all for their letterboxing and the erection, maintenance and picking up of corflutes. I even had one delivered to my home yesterday that a very supportive individual found on the side of the road. I was very grateful that he was able to drop that off at my home. I thank the Cain Train volunteers for standing at shops, sometimes wearing a Peter Cain t-shirt—which I am not sure always made them the most likely person that someone would come and talk to—and engage with shoppers and other enquirers. I give particular shout-outs to Dan, Michael, John and Craig.

During the term, I was certainly grateful for the leadership of Elizabeth Lee during the Tenth Assembly, and I look forward to the many achievements I believe we are going to have under the leadership of Ms Castley. I particularly want to thank my staff in 2024. I am so grateful that my senior adviser John is staying on for at least 12 months or so and that junior adviser Sophie is also staying on with me with an increased number of days, starting next week. She has been with me for a few weeks already. I also look forward to the return of Jess in the middle of next year from maternity leave. Good wishes to Costa, who joined us for a short time for his overseas placement; and a special thanks to Sam, who was with me for two years and has now found employment in Sydney, closer to his family.

I want to thank the interns and work experience students that I hosted in my office. Sometimes the joke would be, “Yes, I love slave labour.” But, no, I just love the opportunity to give a high school student or, in some cases, a university student the chance to have the experience to be in a parliamentary office, to get a benefit for their own course work and study and, where possible, to provide a benefit to my own policy development. I intend to continue that practice of being an open office for that professional development.

But the biggest thanks, of course, go to my family, especially to my wife Claire—who, I remind my advisers at the office here, is my chief adviser. They have got into the habit where, if they are kind of unsure about something amongst themselves, they tell me, “Peter, you need to go home and ask Claire,” which I do, although sometimes the answer that she gives me is: “Who are these people you have been talking to at your office?” I say, “They are my advisers,” and her answer is, “Well, why aren’t you listening to your advisers?” That is pretty good advice as well.

I want to wish everyone a safe and wonderful Christmas. To any travellers: please do so safely, and I wish you all the best with safe travels. As I think I did in my first pre-Christmas speech in 2020, I encourage all members in this place and all those who hear this to reflect on the reason for this season called Christmas. Maybe just take some time to think about the first syllable in that word. If you want to know a little bit more, there are four source books where you can find out a bit more. If you are not sure what they are, just come and ask me. I hope that you think about why on some date at some time about 2,024 years ago something happened that has affected the rest of the world in a very, very significant way and maybe it can even affect individual lives for any enquirers.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thank you to all the staff, in the secretariat and in the chamber, for your work. I do hope the best for you and your families during this Christmas break. Thank you.

Climate change

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.56): We have just had the hottest spring on record, and we are in for a hot summer. Climate changes our daily experience. I was at Rising Tide in Newcastle just over a week ago. There were thousands of peaceful protesters there. It was the biggest act of civil disobedience in Australia's history. One hundred and seventy people were arrested for blocking the shipping channel. That shipping channel services the world's biggest coal port. Coal exported from Newcastle is responsible for one per cent of global carbon emissions. In a climate crisis, this is unconscionable. A few days later, my Greens colleagues and I joined protesters here in Canberra at Parliament House. Everyone there had been affected by climate change in some way. We feel it. We see it. We are worried about it. In Belconnen we have had hyper local impacts. We have had massive storms and damage to trees, hail, six days without power and locals who felt abandoned at a time of crisis.

The crowds at Rising Tide contained people who had lost their homes in floods and fires and people who had been hospitalised due to heatwaves and smoke. We heard from teams telling us they would never have children, because they were so worried about the future of the planet.

There were more arrests here in Canberra for peaceful protest. Why are people protesting and risking arrest? They want climate action. They want no new coal or gas, a proper tax on fossil fuel exports and for us to use that tax to fund jobs and renewables. It is the only sensible thing to do in a climate crisis. Since coming to power, the Albanese Labor government have approved more than 13 fossil fuel projects. There are 117 more in the pipeline. It is almost as if they do not believe in climate change or they do not know what to do about it. We can share some lessons here from the ACT, and I hope my ACT Labor colleagues are taking these lessons up to their friends on the hill because federal Labor certainly did not step outside parliament to come and talk to the protesters last week.

Here in the ACT we have had a Greens climate minister for two terms, and we have had really effective climate action—100 per cent renewable electricity, phasing out fossil fuel gas and phasing in EVs. This week the new Labor minister tabled the latest update. So where are we up to right now? Overall, our emissions have declined by four per cent this year and by 50 per cent since 1990. It is a great result. The ACT is on track to reach our legislated reduction targets by 2025. So we are on track. We have been meeting those targets for the last eight years with a Greens climate minister at the helm, and I hope we continue to do so with a Labor minister in charge.

Our plan to phase out fossil fuel gas is working really well. I am proud we Greens took that to the 2020 election and that our Greens minister delivered it. I asked one of my advisers what the technical term was for the amount of gas we had already phased out, and they just said, "It's a lot of gas. This is how we decarbonise." Our transport emissions have dropped a little in terms of overall quantity, and that is great news. I am interested to know if that is because of our really good EV policy or if it is because people do not have the money to pay for petrol or if it is for some other reason. I am looking forward to a briefing on that. But transport as a proportion of emissions has gone up. Transport is now responsible for over 65 per cent of our

tracked emissions. Our waste emissions dropped a little, and again this is good news. I am not sure if it is because of policy changes or because in a cost-of-living crisis people are buying less.

There has been an increase in our aviation emissions. Those are a small part of our tracked emissions, but that is because we only count emissions from the plane when it taxis, takes off and lands; we are not counting the full journey. While sometimes there is no good option in Australia except to fly, sometimes there is, but those choices are not backed by ACT and federal government policy. We need faster rail connections between Canberra and Sydney and we need to encourage people to use road travel and zooming when it works. We need really, really great alternatives.

Our per person emissions are at the lowest point they have been since we started tracking them, but that only covers a fraction of the impact, because we are only tracking a fraction of our emissions. Here in the ACT we only look at scope 1 and scope 2 emissions, which come from electricity, gas, transport, waste and local agriculture. If we included the emissions from what we consume—our scope 3 emissions—our footprint skyrockets. The Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment has told us this. She found the ACT had the second-largest per person carbon footprint, if we included scope 3, but we are not even counting those emissions yet. Those emissions that we do not even count are 14 times higher than the emissions that we do count.

When I was paddling out at Rising Tide I chatted to a woman about this. Her company helps corporations track and reduce scope 3 emissions. Companies are not doing this for goodwill; they are doing it because they are required to. They work in multiple countries and they have to track and reduce scope 3 emissions to comply with overseas law or to tender for contracts in the EU. It is now a really standard thing to track and reduce. My new friend will not even work with a company that is not tracking and reducing scope 3 emissions. She says there is no point because they are so much higher than the rest and, if we do not count them, we are not really taking climate action at all. But here in the ACT we have not started. It is time. The Greens understand this, and that is why we took a policy to the election to start counting and reducing those emissions.

We also need to work harder on our circular economy. We need a proper repair and reuse strategy to avoid all the waste in the first place. We need to move faster on our food waste, our timber waste and our organic waste. We need to recycle all of the waste coming from our renewables, our EV batteries, our house and grid batteries and our solar panels. I am regularly asked about this. Mr Speaker, you and I were asked about this at a function the other night. People hear horror stories of batteries and solar panels being shipped overseas or dumped in waterways here. We have recycling factories right here in Australia, and we need to make this system easy to use, free to use, and really, really well known. The lack of that is undermining our credibility and our efforts to decarbonise and to move to renewables.

We Greens have handed over ACT climate action in good state. It is far ahead of any other state or territory in the country. The Greens set ambitious targets, and we are meeting them. We took the next steps to the election: public and active transport, a comprehensive circular economy strategy, tracking and reducing scope 3 emissions

and much more. I am hoping the new climate minister will take these seriously and continue to push for and achieve real climate action, and that she will take that message to her friends in federal Labor.

Valedictory

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.03): I want to thank my new colleagues in the Assembly and all the staff in this building for welcoming me and my staff into this place. It has been remarkable. I am very excited to be here and looking forward to coming back after a break. I feel very fortunate to be in this place and also to be able to celebrate the festive season and to have the love of a family that has grown this year. Our little girl arrived five weeks ago—a second child for my wife and I.

I also want to acknowledge that many people struggle to celebrate the festive season. For many, the festive season is not so festive and there will be people perhaps listening to this, even in this chamber and the building, who have lost family members this year and will be celebrating a holiday period without them for the first time. So I want to acknowledge those people who perhaps do not have the support that they need in their lives or that they would benefit from that many of us do benefit from. A quick acknowledgment to those people, and a thank you to everyone who is here.

ACT Young Canberra Citizen of the Year 2024 St Mary MacKillop College—Relay for Life fundraising

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.04): I rise to talk about the 2024 Young Canberra Citizen of the Year Awards, which I had the privilege of awarding last Friday night. The awards celebrate young Canberrans aged 12 to 25 who have made a significant contribution to the community across seven categories. Ms Vando Celestina Emmy Rabi won the 2024 Young Canberra Citizen of the Year Award. Ms Rabi is a young leader from South Sudan who is now living in Canberra. She is an advocate for the African-Australian youth and a dedicated community volunteer.

Despite challenges, Ms Rabi has excelled academically and is an executive youth leader with the African Australian Council ACT. She uses her platform and lived experience to promote youth issues, social cohesion and inclusivity. It was such a pleasure to meet her on Friday night and present her with the award. I know she is going to be an absolutely tremendous Young Canberra Citizen of the Year for the next 12 months. I am really looking forward to seeing what she does in the next 12 months.

I also want to give a shout-out to St Mary MacKillop College, which was awarded the Group Achievement Award. St Mary MacKillop College is in my electorate of Brindabella. It is a wonderful school. Their year 12 cohort this year designed the Relay Your Way event. Rather than doing the Relay for Life, they did their own event on the school grounds over 12 hours. It poured with rain all night. The staff and students were out in the early hours of the morning setting up a tarp to make a safe path for them to do their relay on. Despite the horrendous weather, they still went out and raised over \$75,000 for Relay for Life this year, which is an absolutely tremendous effort by the group. Relay for Life supports cancer research, prevention and support programs.

It was a real pleasure to meet the two leaders from the year 12 cohort at the event last Friday night. I wish them and their cohort well in the future, now that they have finished school. I hope to see them go on to bigger and better and wonderful things, and I hope they have a safe holiday period.

I am also looking forward to the YOGIE Awards tomorrow, which is another youth awards event here in Canberra. It is wonderful to see us celebrating our young people here in Canberra and acknowledging the work they do.

Transgender Day of Remembrance

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.06): I would like to take this opportunity to mark Transgender Day of Remembrance. Although it is marked officially on 20 November, it is important that, in the first week of this Assembly, we make clear our solidarity with the trans community here and around the world. Any trans and gender-diverse folk watching will be better aware than anyone that this is a sombre day and the reasons behind it. I advise ahead of time that I will be covering some confronting matter in this speech.

The day was founded in 1999, after the murders of Rita Hester, Monique Thomas and Chanelle Pickett, all young black trans women killed in the US state of Massachusetts in fewer than three years. For the trans community in the state, this was made all the more traumatising when they found that many around them seemed to quickly forget these women and their all-too-similar murders. For the trans community themselves, it would be very hard to forget the sheer scale of violence, hate and discrimination that the community still faces daily.

Every Transgender Day of Remembrance, Transgender Europe publishes the *Trans murder monitoring* report. This report is always bleak, having reported over 5,000 deaths in its 17-year existence. This year was particularly shocking, reporting a significant increase from previous years, with 350 trans people killed in the last 12 months. The report notes that one in four of those killed were under the age of 25, and, perhaps most shockingly, 15 were children. It also shows the impact on trans women of colour, who made up 93 per cent of those murdered. None of these numbers paint the whole picture. Every number represents a hole left in a family, a hole left in their local community and a hole left in the trans community around the world. As we did on 20 November, as we do now and as we must do every day, we mourn and remember each trans person who has been killed.

As these horrific crimes occur, and continue to occur, we must acknowledge that this does not happen in a vacuum. Trans people's very existence is delegitimised constantly by many legal systems, many medical systems, many prominent politicians and many in the media. It is all too normal for public debates to question the very existence of trans people. This is unacceptable. Whether trans women can take part in basic aspects of society, like playing sports or even using the bathroom, is somehow legitimised as a topic for debate. The despicable efforts to force trans people out of these aspects of public life make trans people less safe and hurt us all.

The moral panic over Algerian Olympic gold medal boxer, Imane Khelif, a cisgender woman of colour, was not about fairness in sport or any attempt to help women. All it

did was the opposite. It was about questioning the way in which a woman of colour presented herself, and it used transphobic rhetoric to do so.

Let's be very clear: everyone is entitled to present their gender identity however they choose. Trans women are women; trans men are men. Non-binary people and those of any other gender identity are equally valid in these identities. The sooner everyone accepts this and proudly stands up for and with the trans community the sooner we can actually end the horrific violence that trans people are faced with.

On Transgender Day of Remembrance, and indeed every day, we remember the trans people we have lost and commit ourselves to doing everything we can to bring this scourge of violence and tragedy to an end for good.

Valedictory

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) (5.10): It is a privilege to be here and to be back. Election, let alone re-election, is far from guaranteed. If a first election is a very public job interview, seeking re-election might be something of a very public performance review, one where everyone finds out the outcome at the same time as you.

I sincerely thank the many candidates who joined the festival of democracy as part of the ACT Labor team, supported by Ash, Toby, Sandra and Lara in the party office. Our candidates were of a high calibre and worked their guts out. It has been such a pleasure to welcome Ms Tough and Mr Werner-Gibbings, two friends whom I have known for a long time. Both so deserve to be here and are going to make such an impact through long careers in this place, if the last few weeks, and especially this week, are anything to go by.

I pay tribute to Mick Gentleman. The make-up of this chamber has changed in every term without exception—I have checked—and changes every election, but it impossible to predict how. The shock of eight new members in the 2020 election is still something I am coming to terms with. I prepared much better this time, but the loss is still keenly felt. This week has made me realise just how much I took for granted Mick's management of government business. I have tried—I am not quite there yet—to channel his measured nature and good humour.

I also pay tribute to Ms Vassarotti. We became an unlikely pair, but the two of us and our offices did great things together. Her genuine, constructive, organised and kind approach is something I already miss.

To my Labor team in Ginninderra, thank you so much. Very few of us—except you, Mr Parton, the Chief Minister and some others—get here on first preferences alone. The hard work of Shaun Sadimoen, Tim Bavinton and Heidi Prowse is something I remain inspired by and know that I directly benefitted from. Each of them would be great members, and I look forward to seeing them in this chamber in due course.

I thank my many volunteers for showing up time and time again, especially my mum,

Deb, the “queen of pre-poll”, apparently. I thank the people of Ginninderra for their trust in me. I have now spent more than a fifth of my life in this place and there is nowhere else I would rather be. It continues to be the greatest privilege to represent the home I love in the city I love. I am especially humbled and surprised to have been elected first in Ginninderra and to have achieved the highest primary vote of, I think, any candidate in any electorate at the Aranda booth. I have never taken any day for granted and I take that result seriously. Eight years ago and four years ago, I promised to be committed, available and accessible, to be energetic, hardworking and get things done, and I reaffirm that here today.

It is four weeks today since ministries were announced. When I moved here in 2008, it was to be a graduate in the commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department. To be honest, I had very little understanding of what AGD did, and I am very lucky that the recruiters thought I had enough other qualities to hire me. In coming to Canberra, I found my home, and working at ADG with such a high calibre of public servants gave me opportunities which changed my life; however, not so much that I ever sought to be, and certainly did not contemplate being, Attorney-General, even in a subnational jurisdiction. That would have been a stretch for me. After all, I was in the minority of the graduate intake because I did not have a law degree, and I still do not. But I do have ideas, experience, enthusiasm, and already a bit of law reform—a good portion of it nation-leading—under my belt and I know how ably supported I am. I feel excited and ambitious for this portfolio. I am so happy to have gained the Parks and Conservation Service and am delighted to continue work I feel that I have only just started in night-time economy, Access Canberra and City Services.

I thank the ACT public service. I know that a new Assembly and ministerial changes bring uncertainty. I especially acknowledge the frontline workforce that keeps our city humming 24/7. My understanding of just how much is done and how genuine and caring our frontline workforce is has grown exponentially in the past four years. When we are complaining how hot it is, they are working in the heat. When a storm knocks out the power, crews and volunteers are out across the city, removing fallen trees and branches. When the ground is parched and the Canberra sun combines with wind, it is our exceptionally trained crews who are monitoring conditions, preparing and responding. When kids are bored in the school holidays, it is our library staff who have prepared and are delivering thoughtful, meaningful, free programming across our branches. As Canberrans venture out to enjoy our parks, playgrounds, mountains, nature parks and national parks, their beauty, their functioning and their accessibility is with thanks to the people who maintain them. There are so many more, and I hope they all know how much their efforts are appreciated. I thank them.

I thank our wonderful DLOs who have really assisted in the last few weeks, as they always do: Jenna Huggett, Ashleigh Savage, Anna Christoff, Isabelle Howse, Michelle O’Donnell and Stefanie Packard. We have also been supported by Dr Kim Hosking in the A-G portfolio. How wonderful each of them is. They bring a lot of joy and fun to the office, as well as doing a really good job.

There is some change in my office. Nick Argy and Jemma Cavanagh, who have been with me for 6½ and eight years respectively, have completed their time in the Assembly, for now at least. I am so grateful for their efforts of excellence and kindness. Jonah and James, who have been with me a shorter time, have been integral

to our team and our achievements in the past year. I have relied heavily on James with the new portfolio. He rose and keeps rising to every occasion.

I thank Tori and Mick for stepping in and stepping up repeatedly. Kaarin, Naomi and Michael make every day a pleasure. There are few people whose mere presence makes a day brighter, and each of them does that. There are also few people who can interpret me, read my handwriting or make me do things that I do not want to do. I feel honoured that they show up for me every day and that they have continued to do so.

To Michael Cook and Faheem Khan, I have been in denial for weeks. My stomach lurches every time I think about getting anything done without you. I thank you for everything you have given me, the Chief Minister and his office, and what you have given this place, this government, this city, the Labor movement and our community's future, often with huge sacrifices and through some incredibly difficult times.

Mr Speaker, something that you and I have reflected on many times over the last eight years is that, ultimately, everyone here is a person and we all have other things going on outside this place, as much as it can dominate our world. I think that is true for many of us and, as the Chief Minister acknowledged, our staff as well. The fact is that each of us in this place is so well-supported, and within ACT Labor especially, across our government offices. We have been able to be supported so consistently and ably by some incredible people, many of whom are staying, which is terrific, but, gosh, I will really miss Faheem and Michael.

I feel absolutely certain that me becoming MGB provoked a love-hate reaction from our Assembly staff, but they would never let me know, because they are exceptionally professional and also incredibly reliable. Again, as much as I find a new Assembly a real shock to the system, they show up day after day and provide such wonderful advice, often when things are flying around on the floor. I definitely could not have got through this week, or any other week or any other day in the last eight years, without many of them. And I promise I will stop moving my microphone as much.

For many of my dearest, I have been pretty absent this year. It has been particularly tough on my friends and especially my fiancée. I thank them for sticking by me and always being available when I have come up for air. This place is not everything, and at some point we will be done here. I think I will still have friends outside this place, and I feel very lucky for that. To James, I look forward to planning our wedding at some point and creating plenty more memories with you, the love of my life, and especially with Bailey and Bucky, who has almost warmed to me.

I wish all a very merry and very safe Christmas.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.20 pm until Tuesday, 4 February 2025 at 10 am.