



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

**DAILY HANSARD**

Edited proof transcript

4 March 2025

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 **Monday, 17 March 2025**.

## Tuesday, 4 March 2025

Legislative Assembly—parliamentary privilege in litigation (statement by Speaker) .....	269
Petitions:	
Macquarie—swimming pool—petitions 49-24 and 10-25 .....	270
Ministerial response .....	270
Motion to take note of petitions .....	271
Macquarie—swimming pool—petitions 49-24 and 10-25 .....	271
Visitors .....	274
Mr Howard Wren—retirement (Ministerial statement) .....	274
Planning—Hawker shops—update (Ministerial statement) .....	279
Government—ICT outage (Ministerial statement) .....	285
World Wildlife Day 2025 (Ministerial statement) .....	286
Legislative Assembly—ministerial records .....	294
Standing committees .....	303
Legal Affairs—Standing Committee .....	303
Administration and Procedure—Standing Committee .....	304
Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 .....	305
Questions without notice .....	307
Ministerial records—caretaker period .....	307
Ministerial records—caretaker period .....	308
Canberra Health Services—Canberra Hospital operations centre .....	309
Canberra Health Services—performance .....	310
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—Yeddung Mura .....	311
Waste—recycling facility .....	312
Public transport—investment .....	313
Light rail stage 2—completion date .....	314
Woden—proposed urgent care clinic .....	316
Light rail stage 2—construction impacts .....	317
Light rail stage 2—construction impacts .....	318
Australian Football League—corporate sponsorship .....	320
Schools—teachers .....	321
Economy—employment .....	322
Roads—Molonglo River Bridge .....	323
Roads—Monaro Highway .....	324
Papers .....	325
Schools—corporate sponsorships .....	327
Leave of absence .....	342
Knife crime—police powers .....	343
Motion to take note of papers:	
Planning and the missing middle housing reforms—government response ...	362
Statements by members .....	363
Clean Up Australia Day—Lake Tuggeranong .....	363
Clean Up Australia Day—Evatt .....	364
Lakes and waterways—Jerrabomberra wetlands .....	364
Adjournment .....	364
Crime—women’s safety .....	365
Ukraine-Russia war—third anniversary .....	366
Clean Up Australia Day 2025 .....	367

Canberra Day Appeal Fun Run .....	367
Marilyn and Peter Ralston—tribute.....	368
The Assembly adjourned at 5.25 pm. ....	368

**Tuesday, 4 March 2025**

**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 they translate to:

This is Ngunnawal country.  
Today we are all meeting on Ngunnawal country.  
We always pay respect to 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.

## **Legislative Assembly—parliamentary privilege in litigation Statement by Speaker**

**MR SPEAKER:** Members, before we move on to other things, I wish to advise the Assembly that yesterday the ACT Supreme Court granted leave for me to appear as *amicus curiae*—a friend of the court—in order to assist the court in considering the law of parliamentary privilege as it arises in the matter of *Cover v Integrity Commission*.

It is on the public record that the plaintiff in this matter seeks judicial review in relation to a special report prepared by the Integrity Commission. Whether or not such a report or other material prepared by the commission in connection with such a report is to be regarded as a proceeding in parliament is ultimately a matter for the courts to decide.

The Integrity Commission Act of 2018 provides that a special report is prepared for the Legislative Assembly and that such reports must be provided to the Speaker, who must table them in the Assembly. As a result, there is a question as to whether the report and related documents may be regarded as proceedings in parliament, as defined in article 9 of the Bill of Rights, and section 16 of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Privileges Act 1987, to which we are linked through section 24 of the Self-Government Act.

It is important to note that neither I nor any member of this place may waive parliamentary privilege. That can only be done through express words in statute. My interest as Speaker is to ensure, on behalf of this place, that the court receives necessary information about the constitutional importance of parliamentary privilege and to draw the court's attention to the relevant legal authorities and principles. I will be represented in this task by the ACT Government Solicitor. I will provide an update to the Assembly when I have one, as these matters progress.

## **Petitions**

*The following petitions and e-petition have been lodged for presentation:*

**Macquarie—swimming pool—petitions 49-24 and 10-25**

By Ms Clay, from 442 and 74 residents, respectively:

**To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the apparent closure of the Big Splash water park in Macquarie.

The Macquarie water park is an important community facility and refuge from the summer heat, which will become increasingly important due to climate change. Big Splash has not yet opened for the summer season with no explanation as to why. At the end of November, Big Splash announced that they would not be opening the slides for the summer, but the pools will be open for the school holidays, but now the school holidays are here, and the pools are still empty, and the phone has been disconnected.

Everyone in the ACT should have access to community facilities that help keep people and families safe from the heat in summer. Canberrans are feeling the effects of climate change with our summers becoming unbearably hot and a lot of our waterways closed due to increased bacteria from the hot weather. The ACT Labor Government has a responsibility to ensure that community facilities remain available and accessible to everyone.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to:

- Investigate all possible avenues to keep this important community facility open for use this summer and for future generations of Canberrans, including buying the facility and operating it as a public pool.
- Guarantee that the zoning of the land as Parks and Recreation PRZ2 Restricted Assess Recreation is retained to ensure this valuable community facility remains a community facility.

*Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petitions, having at least 500 signatories, were referred to the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services.*

*The Clerk having announced that the terms of the petitions would be recorded in Hansard and referred to the appropriate ministers for response pursuant to standing order 100, the petitions were received.*

**Ministerial response**

The following response to a petition has been lodged:

**Roads—Mawson—petitions 44-24 and 45-24**

By Ms Cheyne, Minister for City and Government Services, dated 28 February 2025, in response to petitions lodged by Mr Steel and Ms Davidson (former Member) respectively concerning the installation of a pedestrian crossing at Mawson Place.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letters concerning petitions E-PET 044-24 lodged by Mr Chris Steel MLA and E-PET 045-24 lodged by former member of the Legislative Assembly, Ms Emma Davidson, regarding the installation of a pedestrian crossing at Mawson Place.

We acknowledge the concerns of the community. ACT Labor made an election commitment in 2024 to “...make further upgrades at Mawson shops, including improvements to pedestrian and public space at Mawson Place”. A pedestrian crossing along Mawson Place in front of the Italian Continental Bakery and Café will be given further consideration in the course of planning and delivery of this commitment.

Thank you for raising this matter.

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

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

That the petitions and response so lodged be noted.

### **Macquarie—swimming pool—petitions 49-24 and 10-25**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (10:05): I would like to speak briefly about the Big Splash petition, which has received over 500 signatures from community members. The call is quite simple. This has come forward via community member Dani Hunterford, who brought this issue to us. It is to investigate all possible avenues to keep the pool open for public access and, if that does not work, to look at the zoning of the land. It is currently zoned for parks and recreational use.

We have quite a lot of development in this area. This is a really good example of where, I think, we have had some great missing middle development go in around the Jamison shops. But, of course, people need something to do. When we put lots of housing in, people actually need somewhere to go that is not simply a commercial space. They need something to do and places to go to mingle with one another.

This is also really important in a time of climate change. This summer, we saw quite a lot of our waterways closed due to bacteria. I think that is going to happen as our summers become hotter and hotter. We need to make sure that we have places where people can safely swim. Pools that are publicly accessible are one of those really, really important services that we need to provide. I think it is increasingly clear in Canberra at the moment that simply asking the private sector to do this without any government involvement or assistance is not giving us particularly good outcomes.

For those who do not know Belconnen well, or maybe have not grown up there, the role that Big Splash plays might not be clearly obvious. I grew up in Belconnen. Big Splash was the place you went to for a birthday party if you were the coolest kid in town.

Everybody would want to go there. We do not have anything like those slides anywhere around Canberra. Also, a lot of the schools use that pool for their swimming carnivals. I know that my daughter's school and a lot of the schools around have cancelled, delayed or postponed their swimming carnivals because they used to walk, ride or catch the bus to that pool. That is actually where they had their swimming carnivals. So it was playing a lot of different roles in our community that maybe is not readily obvious from the outside.

It is clearly difficult for the private operators. I understand this and, again, I am sympathetic. I can see that providing public access pools from the private sector alone is obviously becoming increasingly difficult here. But we are in a climate crisis. We know that summers are getting hotter. Every summer has record-breaking temperatures. We need to provide safe community spaces where people can cool down, where they can gather on grass, where they can swim and where they can mingle, and we need to make sure that we are providing these to the community in a way that everybody can access.

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (10.08): I want to thank Ms Clay for bringing this petition before the Assembly and the over 500 signatories who have supported the calls-on. Obviously, as a Belconnen member, I am very keen to see facilities such as this not be abandoned without proper consultation and proper examination, to keep it viable and to ensure that our Belconnen community have the community facilities that they deserve.

I am very proud of being a Belconnen resident and have had the privilege of taking my children and grandchildren to Big Splash. I certainly would be interested in what the government's reaction is to this petition. Hopefully, we can get a proper examination of what is going on there and what the potential is to ensure that community facilities like this are not lost unnecessarily to our community.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (10:09): I also thank Ms Clay for bringing this petition to the Assembly today. I note that the petition was formed after I received a letter back from Big Splash, after communicating with them to find out what was going on with the Big Splash pool.

It is a rite of passage for many people in our community. Certainly, I spent some time there as a teenager, as did my kids. I know young people who were working there during this uncertain period, so it has been a concerning time for them as well. Obviously, thoughts are with the people who are working there and the uncertainty that this whole situation has brought them.

However, the organisation did write back to us and say that it is their intention to continue to run the aqua park but that currently they are working through some significant rectification and maintenance works. People will have views on whether their response is sincere, but we have to take them at their word. I thought it was a mature approach to contact the owner of the pool to find out exactly what is going on, rather than start making comments from the outside without understanding fully what the situation is with the pool. I received a letter, posted it online on my Facebook page and I also received an email from them.

It is my intention to engage with them in that way to understand what their plans are, going forward, and to update the community when I can, if I can, based on what their communications are. But, at this stage, they have communicated that it is their intention to continue to operate the pool. So I will take them at their word until or if the situation changes and advise the community in that respect.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (10:11): I would like to support Ms Clay's statement about the importance of pools. I would also like to acknowledge that around Woden we have lost the 50-metre Oasis pool and we look like losing the 50-metre pool at Phillip. This is really difficult because it leaves no 50-metre pool in the area. So I would like to emphasise the importance of 50-metre pools located equitably across Canberra.

**Roads—Mawson—petitions 44-24 and 45-24**

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (10:12): I want to speak for a moment on the minister's response to the petition around a crossing at Mawson Place and to note that the one-paragraph response we have here amounts to saying, "Thank you; we will take a look at it down the track." I was very pleased last year, I have to say, when Labor started playing catch-up around the issues in Mawson, nearly a year after the Canberra Liberals launched our campaign for a new vision for Mawson.

The importance of making sure our local shops and our group centres are accessible and useful and able to provide the types of facilities and services that our local residents depend on is really important. I thank the minister for saying that this crossing is going to be considered in the context of broader upgrades to Mawson, but I would encourage the government to get out there ahead of the game and start telling us what exactly it is that they are planning to do. The Canberra Liberals brought a very strong vision for Mawson to the last election, and I look forward to hearing exactly what Labor is proposing to do on that front.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (10:13): I was not planning on speaking to the petitions, including one that I sponsored on upgrades to Mawson Place, but I will, just to respond to Mr Cocks's comments. The response that the government has provided through Minister Cheyne acknowledges the fact that ACT Labor actually did have a commitment to upgrading, specifically, Mawson Place to improve the pedestrian access across the street as part of a broader commitment to upgrades at Mawson group centre.

Contrary to what Mr Cocks has claimed, we actually have been out there—in fact, ahead of him. I undertook a survey around two years ago of Mawson residents around what upgrades they would like to see at the shopping centre—noting that it has not been upgraded in around 17 years—and I passed on that feedback to the Minister for City Services. Labor made a commitment—in fact, ahead of the Liberal Party—during the election campaign to upgrade the public spaces around the shops. In addition to that, we made some commitments around releasing land for another supermarket as well as a specific commitment, which I will be responsible for delivering as planning minister.

I was really delighted to meet with Year 8 students from Melrose High School, together with other members of the Assembly, when they came in to visit last year ahead of the



election campaign. They raised at that time their desire to see a pedestrian crossing across Mawson Place further down, closer to Mawson Drive. That will certainly be considered as part of future upgrades.

We have not had a budget yet in this Assembly since the election. There will be an opportunity, of course, through the budget process, to consider delivery on our election commitments. We would expect that, as part of any upgrades to the public realm, there would be a design process that would engage with the community in consultation. We have already done a lot of that consultation through the survey that I undertook. But, of course, Transport Canberra and City Services will need to undertake further consultation as well to get the design right and to support the fantastic local businesses on Mawson Place, which, of course, include Under Bakery, the Italian bakery and Tutto cafe, all of which are drawing in crowds from well beyond the Woden Valley and from right across Canberra. It is a busy place. We need better pedestrian crossings, and that was acknowledged in Labor's commitment.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## Visitors

**MR SPEAKER:** I would like to acknowledge the presence in the gallery of former minister, and good bloke, Mick Gentleman. On behalf of all members, I welcome back Mr Gentleman. I would note, Mr Gentleman, that that coffee date of ours still has not proceeded, and I will be in touch. It is wonderful to have you back in this place, and I hope there is not too much PTSD.

## Mr Howard Wren—retirement Ministerial statement

**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) (10.16): I rise today to acknowledge the retirement of Mr Howard Wren PSM ASM, Chief Officer of the Australian Capital Territory's Ambulance Service. I would also like to acknowledge everyone in the room today. It is great to see everyone here to acknowledge Howard's service.

Firstly, I would like to begin by highlighting Chief Officer Wren's level of surprise and utmost appreciation when he discovered I had every intention of ensuring we recognise his outstanding career of 51 years, with fellow members and special guests of the Legislative Assembly joining us today. While we do not typically send off our chief officers and executives in this type of forum when they retire, I would like to make this an exception and pay tribute to the lifelong dedication Chief Officer Wren has offered in service of our community through his exemplary work in the public service, particularly in the healthcare and ambulance industries.

It is no secret that our busy paramedics are well known for keeping their focus on the task at hand, never seeking recognition or praise for the essential medical care they offer and support that they provide to our community when they most need it. Chief Officer Wren is no different and truly exhibits that humble mantra at its best. People who have

worked with or encountered Chief Officer Wren would know that he is an approachable, kind and inclusive leader. No matter your background, age, gender, position, rank or experience, he is always willing to share knowledge, to listen, to learn and to understand those around him in a respectful, professional and light-hearted manner. These values were instilled early in Chief Officer Wren's career.

In the spirit of reflection, let us go back to 11 February 1974. This was Mr Wren's first day as an unpaid junior volunteer in the role of ambulance officer with the New South Wales Ambulance Service. His first shift took place at the local Tumut ambulance station in the Murrumbidgee district. Mr Wren's interest in frontline health care developed rapidly, and he was particularly fascinated by the variety and dynamic nature of working in an ambulance service.

Back then, the only qualifications required, other than being at least 18 years old, were an unrestricted driver's licence and completion of several first aid certificates. Never did he envisage, at that point in time, that paramedics would go on to be registered health professionals with a tertiary level entry qualification. Nonetheless, it was this type of work that sparked a profound interest which would see Mr Wren commit his life's work to caring for members of the community at the most vulnerable time in their lives.

Between 1974 and 2017, Mr Wren held many diverse roles across New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, which enabled him to implement his passion for assisting people and teaching others along the way. This was where the next core leadership value came into fruition: empowering and encouraging others through education. In 1976, he commenced general nursing training at the old Canberra Hospital, graduating in early 1978. After graduating, he worked within the Canberra Hospital's orthopaedic unit and eyes and plastic surgery units before transferring to the intensive care unit.

At the end of 1981, Mr Wren formally applied to join the ACT Ambulance Service, but was not offered a position due to being overqualified. So he continued his journey as an intensive care course coordinator at the School of Nursing until he was later approached to conduct some teaching with the ACT Ambulance Service. At this time, the hospital and ambulance service were all part of ACT Health Services. This arrangement continued as an increasing part of Mr Wren's hospital work until he was transferred to the ACT Ambulance Service full-time in October 1989.

Since that time, Mr Wren has held many leadership positions within the ACT Ambulance Service, including general manager of clinical services and general manager of educational services. These roles allowed Mr Wren to help shape, inspire and influence many of our gifted paramedics and critical care nurses serving in the community today.

In July 2017, Mr Wren was appointed chief officer of the ACT Ambulance Service. It is also important to note that Chief Officer Wren has been an active member of the Council of Ambulance Authorities, the peak ambulance body of Australia, since 1994. Through his work, he has participated in national improvements in clinical care, paramedic and first responder education and enhanced professionalism of the paramedic profession, which have collectively improved the quality and scope of care

delivered by ambulance services across Australia and New Zealand.

More recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the chair of the board became ill and had to take extended leave and absence from the council. Chief Officer Wren, without hesitation, took up the role as chair to allow stability and leadership through that very challenging time. This work allowed all ambulance authorities around Australia to remain consulted on COVID-19 practices and their workforce challenges. Mr Wren relinquished his role as chair of the CAA in November 2023, but has continued as a board member.

In November 2015, the Council of Australian Government's Health Council decided to progress the inclusion of paramedics under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme. This was a major step for paramedics, providing a consistent national framework for the provision and regulation of paramedic services across Australia. In October 2017, Chief Officer Wren was appointed to the inaugural Paramedicine Board of Australia, working with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency to prepare the profession for registration. Chief Officer Wren served on the Paramedicine Registration Board until March 2024.

Across his career, Mr Wren has been exposed to many unforgettable moments—milestones such as the first out-of-hospital delivery, the first patient saved from cardiac arrest, and the first patient intubated—as well as the more challenging cases and moments. The first patient who passed away and the first child cardiac arrest stay with him until this day. These experiences form part of the core foundation of understanding what frontline healthcare professionals face when trying to save lives.

Chief Officer Wren's career progression is an outstanding representation of what it means to build from the ground up through continuous and unwavering dedication to achieve a common goal alongside his peers. This is why Chief Officer Wren is so highly regarded, trusted and respected amongst his workforce, executives and counterparts within and across local and commonwealth government organisations, especially during difficult times. In recognition of his outstanding work, he has been awarded the Public Service Medal, the Ambulance Service Medal, National Medal, ACT Emergency Medal and ACT Ambulance Long Service Medal.

Although Chief Officer Wren always attributes his individual success to those who support him, I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank him for always going above and beyond, and beyond the call of duty in carrying out this role. Thank you for genuinely embracing our ACT public service key values of respect, integrity, collaboration and innovation and for bringing those concepts to life in your day-to-day interactions.

For many of us, the goal is simple: to leave our organisation and community better than when we started. Over the past five decades, Mr Wren, you have unquestionably created positive and lasting change. While the list of achievements are many within the realms of technology, training, equipment and vehicles, I would like to specifically mention three considerable legacies you leave behind for our current, upcoming and future paramedics.

The first is the evolution of education and training through the Intensive Care

Paramedic Program. This program has diversified our ambulance workforce's skillset to ensure the best possible outcome for patients who require the most critical, timely, and specialised medical interventions while being treated and transferred to hospital. The second is defibrillation available on every frontline ambulance service, which is now part of most first responder capability. This has been an absolute gamechanger and truly a lifesaving intervention for countless patients since it was first implemented. The third is effective pain relief available to patients. Patients in pain and discomfort are seen by most paramedics every single day. Compared to 51 years ago, the pain relief options available now are truly remarkable. Mr Wren, your experience and expertise have been instrumental in ensuring these changes have been incorporated into business as usual in our ACT Ambulance Service. We know all the progress and reform is a collaborative process with many involved, but today we celebrate your contribution.

Thank you for your reliable participation in countless meetings, early morning starts and late nights, interstate travel, emergency briefings, media and public events, and all other privileges and sacrifices that come with the job of keeping our community safe and well informed. Needless to say, the next permanent chief officer for the ACT Ambulance Service has very big shoes to fill—size 13, I am told. I would also like to extend my sincerest gratitude to your family and friends who have supported you throughout your career, especially your wonderful children, who I am sure are incredibly proud of what you have accomplished.

It is an exciting time to pursue a career as a paramedic. The opportunities within the jurisdictional ambulance services, the private sector and academia are unparalleled and will only continue to evolve. Thank you, Chief Officer Wren, for your continuous efforts of you and your team on a local and national scale. As a result of your impeccable leadership and your mission of bringing out the best in those around you, the ACT Ambulance Service continues to be one of the best performing ambulance services in Australia.

There is no doubt that Chief Officer Wren is going to be greatly missed, and I am told that everyone at the ACT Emergency Services Agency will particularly miss his radio-quality voice and his hearty laugh booming down the corridors of the building.

In closing, on behalf of all members of the Legislative Assembly, the ACT Ambulance Service, the ACT Emergency Services Agency, the Justice and Communities Safety Directorate, the broader ACT government, ambulance colleagues nationally and internationally, and the wider Canberra community, I would like to wish Chief Officer Wren all the very best as he embarks on his next adventure of retirement. Chief Officer Wren has dedicated his career to ensuring others can enjoy their lives. Now he gets the opportunity to truly enjoy the next chapter of what life has to offer. Thank you for your service.

I present the following paper:

Retirement of Howard Wren, Chief Officer ACT Ambulance Service—Ministerial statement, 4 March 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**MS MORRIS** (Brindabella) (10.29): Mr Speaker, I too rise to acknowledge the significant contribution that Mr Howard Wren PSM ASM, our outgoing Chief Officer of the ACT Ambulance Service, has made to Canberra. There is nothing more worthy of honour than a life that has been dedicated to service and to the betterment of the community, and after a remarkable 51 years of service, Chief Officer Wren can proudly know that, as a result of his life's efforts, working in some of the most challenging and traumatic circumstances, the lives of countless Canberrans have been saved.

While I regret that we never had the opportunity to work together, acknowledging your leadership of our ACT ambulance services is in some ways quite personal for me. My family recently had the great misfortune of requiring urgent medical attention when my husband sustained significant injuries from a gas explosion. The paramedics who attended the scene, Ariel and Tanya, demonstrated the highest levels of calm, care and professionalism. As I suspect would be the case for most frontline responders, I do not believe Ariel and Tanya knew exactly what they were about to walk into when they arrived onsite, but their ability to assess the trauma and respond accordingly, administering not just critical care but even a healthy dose of humour while he was being transferred to the hospital, was exemplary.

The role of leadership in fostering a highly skilled and professional workforce, who are trained and able to help Canberrans in their darkest hour, cannot be understated. On behalf of my family, and on behalf of every Canberra family who has relied on our emergency services, I want to thank Chief Officer Wren for his exemplary leadership of an outstanding workforce.

On behalf of the Canberra Liberals, I want to fully endorse the comments and reflections made by Minister Paterson on Chief Officer Wren's contribution to Canberra. It is entirely appropriate to honour your legacy. While your successor does indeed have very big shoes to fill, in your work, they also have a model of service and leadership to aspire to. Thank you to you and to your family for every personal sacrifice you have made over your 51 years of service to our community.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (10.31): I would also like to rise on behalf of the ACT Greens to thank Mr Wren for his long and dedicated service. Fifty-one years is an incredible achievement in any field, but particularly in a profession that is as mentally and emotionally challenging as the Ambulance Service. It takes true commitment and dedication to your fellow humanity, and Mr Wren is to be applauded for demonstrating these traits in spades. I can only imagine the experiences he has endured and the stories he could tell. His humble service and leadership of the ACT Ambulance Service, driving ever-improving service delivery, leaves that service a vastly more professional and qualified service for the ACT.

Whilst my interactions with Mr Wren have usually been on the other side of a committee public hearing, his calm confidence and professionalism has always come through clearly. Mr Wren, thank you for everything you have done on behalf of the people of the ACT.

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (10.32): While I am not speaking in my capacity as chair of

the legal affairs committee, I do recall, while in that capacity, on Tuesday, 18 February, I was chairing the last annual report hearing at which Mr Wren was present, along with the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services and a room full of officials. There was some discussion that this was Mr Wren's last opportunity to make some bold statements, and I do believe, somehow, he managed to get himself to the front table to take questions! I am not quite sure if that was his willing choice or whether he was given that role to play as a farewell gesture. I will let Mr Wren himself evaluate whether his colleagues were either giving him an opportunity or seeing how he would handle that moment!

I do want to echo all of the comments made by the minister and shadow minister, and I am sure with all the members' support, we do wish you all the very best. It is wonderful to see your family and friends here joining you. We wish you all the very best in your retirement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Planning—Hawker shops—update**

### **Ministerial statement**

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (10.34): With our population growing to around 700,000 people by 2050, there is a critical need to continue reform to ensure that there is a long-term pipeline of more homes. Housing is a priority for me as the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. We need more of it where people want to live, no matter if they are building, buying or renting.

The ACT government has signed up to the National Housing Accord, including reforms to increase the density of homes in our city in well-located areas close to services and transport. Work is already underway on the next stage of planning reforms, starting with major zoning changes to support more low-rise medium density in existing suburbs; however, I have already flagged that further stages of reform will also be developed to allow larger-scale medium density housing in certain well-located areas close to services, shops and transport. Similar to European cities, this is intended to support human-scale housing that will promote access to public transport, renew all the shopping centres and the public spaces around them. This is about bringing land-use planning and transport planning together to ensure that the existing and new residents are well-connected with transport, jobs and services.

Throughout this term, I will have a particular focus on ensuring that these sites are well-planned and deliver better outcomes for the communities in those areas. The most obvious locations for this type of renewal are in our town and group centres. At the election, we made it clear that, as part of our plan to enable the delivery of 30,000 new homes by 2030, we will be fostering more shop-top housing. Our local shops and group centres are the heart of our suburbs and regions. We have heard from many Canberrans that they want to see renewal at their local shops, including the existing privately owned buildings. Enabling more housing at shopping centres is an opportunity to incentivise renewal of these ageing community hubs, whilst retaining the retail services that are enjoyed by the community.

As I foreshadowed during the last sitting, we are currently reviewing planning controls around local shops and group centres to encourage more mixed-use developments and shop-top housing, with a particular focus on the use of underutilised land at group centres. As the government encourages more housing at shopping centres, we will also be looking for shop owners and developers to do their bit and invest in modern, well-designed shopping precincts for Canberrans. We are also looking at requiring new mixed-use housing and commercial projects to make improvements to adjacent public areas.

More opportunities for housing will act as an incentive for the revitalisation of local shops and group centres, including those that have currently vacant, underutilised or ageing shops. This will be a proactive response led by government, but the government will also consider industry-led proposals. When we are approached for the development of these sites, careful consideration must be given to how any improvements meet these policy objectives and the broader community interest.

One of the proponent-initiated proposals to be examined at the start of this term has been the Woolworths direct sale application at the Hawker shopping centre. The Planning Act 2023 sets out the circumstances in which the government could approve a direct sale of land. It is important for group and local centres to grow and change to provide opportunities for employment, housing and recreational facilities for the local community.

The Belconnen District Strategy also identified that the Hawker Group Centre has the potential to provide 500 jobs by 2050. The district strategy identifies the Hawker Group Centre as one of several centres that the ACT government might consider for possible centre initiatives, which may involve future planning and investigations to support the ongoing viability and role of centres as a central community meeting place. For these reasons, careful consideration has been given to the direct sale application at the Hawker shopping centre.

I wanted to update the Assembly that the government believes that the current proposal is not considered to have met the strategic objectives, policy setting or community benefit that we expect for key mixed-use commercial group centres. It also does not meet the outcomes outlined in my Statement of Planning Priorities, the district strategies and the government's 2024 election commitment related to an additional 30,000 dwellings by 2030, including more shop-top housing as part of centre revitalisation. The proposal is only for a two-storey retail/office development with basement parking and no associated residential development.

Last week, the government advised Woolworths of the above, allowing them an opportunity to consider a revised proposal that more closely aligns with the strategic objectives, policy settings and the community benefit expectations before a formal decision is made on the direct sale. EPSDD wrote to Woolworths to clarify the position and expectations outlined and offered to meet with the proponent in good faith to provide a reasonable opportunity for a revised proposal that more closely aligns with government and community expectations for the site. The directorate has also asked Woolworths to engage meaningfully with the community on any revised proposal.

Separately, and independent from the direct sale application, EPSDD is currently

undertaking studies at the Hawker Group Centre as part of the group and local centres program to support more housing and better shops. This includes investigation report stage 2, subsurface investigations, and statement of requirements being prepared with requests for quotes from suitably qualified consultants to be released to market this quarter. This assessment will include assessment of remnant trees and potential contamination present, including from a former dry cleaner identified in earlier investigations. On preliminary financial feasibility assessment, tenders received are currently being assessed in relation to that piece of work, with a consultant expected to be engaged in the coming weeks to undertake the assessment of a number of sites within the group centres across Canberra, including at Hawker. Parking surveys will also be undertaken at Hawker and at a number of other group centres across Canberra and align with Transport, Canberra and City Services requirements.

EPSDD's assessments are expected to be completed by 30 June 2025. The information obtained through EPSDD's work at Hawker and other centres will inform the government if the land should be sold and assist in deciding if any sale should occur through a market or direct sales process. This includes consideration of any amended proposal by Woolworths for the Hawker Group Centre. Should the Woolworths direct sale eventually be supported, these studies will also help to inform the future release of any appropriate land at the group centre not accounted for within that sale.

The government is committed to supporting more housing and better shops across Canberra. We have the right policy settings in place to make sure that any proposed development meets the strategic objectives of the government, while also improving outcomes for the communities where this type of development occurs. That includes more homes, and better access to public transport and services, while contributing to a revitalised commercial precinct and public spaces that make our suburbs a better place to live.

I present a copy of the statement:

Update on Hawker Group Centre—Ministerial statement, 4 March 2025

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**MS BARRY** (Ginninderra) (10.41): I thank the minister for his statement. I brought this petition to the Assembly last sitting, and what that petition, essentially, indicates in very strong comments from residents is that they want to be involved in discussions on what happens to their centre. The community has told me that they want to be involved in what happens to a place where they shop and where they spend time with their family and friends. It is really critical to them that the government conducts proper consultation on how that development moves forward.

Constituents have said to me that what makes Hawker Village really unique—as most residents fondly call it—is the family-focused design, and it would be a shame to lose that uniqueness. It is really important that the government listens to these concerns and consults properly with the community. I am thankful that the committee has decided to conduct an inquiry into the petition, and I look forward to any outcomes of that inquiry.



Thank you.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (10.43): I thank the minister for providing an update on progress of the direct sale of land to Woolworths at Hawker shops, and I would like to thank Ms Barry for bringing forward this petition and for speaking about this.

Members will be aware that I chair the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services, and our committee has commenced an inquiry into the redevelopment of Hawker shops. I obviously do not want to pre-empt any outcomes from that committee inquiry, so I just want to reflect a little bit on some of the comments that I have made in here in the past.

I have spoken about this issue multiple times in the Assembly, and the reason I have done that is because a lot of constituents have raised this issue with me. I have had many conversations and meetings with the locals about this, and I have taken quite a few steps. I submitted an FOI request for access to documents on the redevelopment of the Hawker shops, and I have asked for an Ombudsman review of that decision when access was denied. I have written to the various ministers for planning and the Chief Minister multiple times, on a lot of occasions, raising all of the issues brought up by the community with me on the development of this land, and we are hopeful that these voices are being heard.

The local and group centres are an important part of our community. As I have said before, they are a really important place for shopping; they are a really important place for people to mingle and connect with each other; and they are also a really important place for us to consider whether we put in more housing there. Housing at local and group centres does make good planning sense. This is a place that is well-connected by public transport. It could be even better connected by public transport. It has community services. It could have more community services. We should always think hard about whether any redevelopment should have housing in it when it is this kind of group centre.

The people of Hawker have been interested in their shopping centre for a really long time. I have heard a lot of different views. This issue has been around for a really long time. I live in Belconnen. I grew up with the Hawker shopping centre. A lot of people, as I have said in the past, have really voiced a desire that something happen at this centre. It certainly needs a bit of love and a bit of an upgrade, and there is a lot of commonality in what people do want to see, and I want to run through some of those issues that we have previously raised and spoken about in here in the past.

People are really concerned that they have a good post office there, possibly a bigger one than the one they have now; great footpaths and really good connections for cycling; and really good lighting at night so that people feel safe and the traders feel safe when they open up their shops early in the morning. We should think about whether there should be some subsidised community space there. The green space and the playground are really important in this facility. There are a lot of different views on the surface car parking. Certainly in whatever happens, we need to make sure that there is well-designed car parking—if it is underground, that is okay, but it needs to be really well-designed and accessible.

There are a lot of different views on what we need there, but an awful lot of commonality from the community. As Ms Barry has said, the community really wants to be genuinely involved in what the decisions are for this centre. It makes a huge difference in their lives. The committee inquiry that has commenced will provide an opportunity for the people of Hawker to bring their views forward, and we are looking forward to having that conversation.

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (10.46): I want to thank Ms Barry for bringing this petition to the Assembly and for Ms Clay's words in support of our community having a say regarding what happens to their local centres.

As shadow housing minister, I certainly support the need for more housing within our footprint, but I am still puzzled as to why there is contemplation of a direct sale, when open tender is the usual government process. Why is there special treatment for this site? If the government is serious about refreshing the Hawker Group Centre—I think all who have spoken would agree that some refreshing of that group centre is needed—why is a sale being contemplated to just one prospective buyer?

The timing of the rejection of the DA application last week was interesting, because it was about two weeks ago that the planning committee—of which I am a part, but I am speaking in my capacity as a member—launched its inquiry into the petition that Ms Barry had lodged not too much earlier.

Why are the government contemplating a direct sale? That has not been addressed in the minister's statement, and it ought to be addressed. It is a priority for this government to explain to the community why they are forsaking the normal tender processes. Through the market processes, taxpayers get the optimum value for their money as the government sells public land—taxpayer land. Why is there this special treatment?

Of further concern—this is something I have been exploring and asking the government to do something about, through much of the last term—is this idea that we will let Woolies consult with the community. How about having the government consult with the community? Isn't that their role? Representatives of the government should be advocating for what the community wants. At least they should go and find out what the community wants, rather than leaving it to what is obviously a very significant business operation in the territory, which has its own priorities. I do not deny it the right to have that, but it is the government's role to find out what the community would like to happen to public land and to a group centre—a very popular group centre—in Belconnen.

There are some failed opportunities in this ministerial statement to address some key questions: why will there be a direct sale, and why aren't the government talking to the community? With respect to doing a couple of focused investigations, if they are going to that trouble, how about talking to the community, as well as doing these focused investigations?

It is concerning. The minister's response is concerning, and I would urge the government to reconsider the direct sale option—in fact, to justify why it is even on the table, and to initiate consultation itself with our community.

Obviously, we have a committee inquiry being run, and we will see where that takes that committee. The government has an opportunity at any time, of course, to answer the questions I am raising right now. Firstly, why is a direct sale even being contemplated; and, secondly, why isn't the government consulting with our local Belconnen community?

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (10.50): I am happy to close the debate and clarify a few things.

Mr Cain said that there was a rejection of a development application. No development application has been considered or rejected. The update that I provided was in relation to the consideration of a direct sale application from Woolworths, in relation to the Hawker Group Centre. He may wish to read the statement and understand that.

Reference was made to the Planning Act 2023. Under that act and the associated regulations, there is a process set out for the consideration of direct sale applications, and those have to be considered according to law. That is my role as planning minister, and that is what has been considered at the very earliest stage of the process. EPSDD, before it has come to government to make a decision, has gone back to the proponent at the earliest stage to ask them to provide some further detail.

I also outlined in my statement the various studies that are underway, which is a government-initiated piece of work to consider what the technical and feasibility elements are for further development and revitalisation of the shops, not just on the site on which Woolworths was potentially proposing to undertake a development, but on a range of other sites and blocks across the Hawker Group Centre.

That work is critical to enabling any future consultation with the community on what might occur at the Hawker shops. If we do not know what is possible—clearly, Mr Cain is not interested, because he is walking out of the chamber—we will not be able to bring forward something on which the community can have their say and provide meaningful engagement. Those studies are underway now to get a better understanding of what might be possible. It is about providing that information for the public to understand what might be possible in terms of the further revitalisation and regeneration of the group centre at Hawker.

I have provided that information for the Assembly so that, as they undertake their inquiry, they can consider those elements. We, of course, have heard from the community already about some of the aspirations regarding what they would like to see at the Hawker Group Centre, as well as what they do not want to see occur at the group centre, in relation to the Woolworths proposal. Those will be taken into consideration as part of any future consideration of work to revitalise the centre.

There may be opportunities for further consultation in the future, if the government proposes to undertake work. But we will do that in accordance with the planning law, and we will do it on the basis of the evidence provided through the studies that are underway.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Government—ICT outage Ministerial statement**

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.54): I dare say that this ministerial statement is unlikely to elicit as many responses as the previous ones.

At around 5 pm on Wednesday, 19 February 2025, the ACT government experienced an ICT outage that impacted several business systems. I rise today to provide the Assembly with an update on this outage and the actions taken to ensure government systems are back in operation. I will also take the opportunity to thank the Digital, Data and Technology Solutions—DDTS—Division in the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate for their hard work to achieve this.

At 4.59 pm on Wednesday, 19 February, DDTS incident management was contacted by one of its technical teams to advise that some infrastructure was not responsive at the Fyshwick Data Centre, one of the two major data centres used by the ACT government. It was soon identified that the outage was caused by a technical issue with a storage appliance. Following initial triage and investigation, a priority 1 incident was called, and DDTS proceeded into the major incident response process, including appointing a major incident manager, a major incident coordinator, and a major incident response team.

At 6.07 pm, a whole-of-government email message was distributed, advising of widespread issues with business systems. A notification was also placed on the internal services portal, the OneGov service centre, at 6.30 pm and updated at 7.30 pm on 19 February. It was quickly confirmed that this was not a cyber attack and that there had been no power loss to either the data centre or the storage appliance.

The vendor was immediately engaged, and work commenced to try to restore the appliance. After 24 hours, DDTS and the vendor determined it was unlikely that a full repair of the appliance would occur in the short term, and the vendor arranged for the build and shipment of a replacement appliance from Singapore, which arrived at approximately 12.30 pm on Monday, 24 February. DDTS and the vendor worked together to configure this new appliance, and restoration of several systems began within 24 hours.

It is important to note that most critical ACT government business systems and essential infrastructure were not impacted by this incident due to the redundancy built into server hosting arrangements. Overall, approximately 80 business systems across the ACT government were affected in some way, the majority of which were recovered and brought back online overnight with minimal business impact.

The primary extended impact was to Canberra Institute of Technology systems, with one public-facing system offline for five days, and another for seven days. The remaining impacted ACT government systems were restored by 6 pm on Thursday, 28 February.

The most significant outage for CIT staff and students has been the CIT Learning

Management System—eLearn. The eLearn system is the learning and teaching interface for students and the repository for teaching and learning resources. During the outage, DDTS identified a data gap of approximately four weeks within the eLearn system, which can only be resolved with the recovery of the faulty storage appliance.

As of 7 pm on Wednesday, 27 February, all CIT business systems had been restored, and CIT commenced a detailed testing and checking process to ensure the systems were operating correctly. Staff access to the eLearn system was restored on 24 February. Since then, CIT's educators have been working to ensure the integrity of the learning content in the eLearn system and, where necessary, are rebuilding content into the system. Student access to the eLearn system is planned to be restored on 5 March.

CIT has provided regular updates to staff and students. CIT educators are making the necessary adjustments to ensure continuity of classes and to ensure students are not disadvantaged.

While the restoration of service to business systems was the top priority, relevant teams in DDTS are now in the next phase of recovery, and DDTS is collaborating with stakeholders across government and with vendors to ensure business continuity as they realign the data centre infrastructure following the remediation of the Fyshwick facility. We will also continue to work across government to ensure any remaining system functionality issues are addressed.

While this major incident has been managed to the point of resuming our critical business systems, the actual cause of the failure in the storage appliance is not yet known. DDTS is working with the vendor of the appliance to ensure the cause of this issue is understood and that any future risk can be managed. This is particularly important given the vendor has stated that it has not seen this type of failure before, so this work may provide lessons not only for the ACT but also for the vendor and its other clients.

I will close by again thanking the staff at DDTS and in the agencies affected by this incident, as well as the vendor, for their quick and diligent work. In particular, I want to thank those staff who worked throughout the night and over the weekend to ensure business critical systems suffered minimum impact for the shortest possible time period. I present the following paper:

Recent ACT Government ICT outage—Ministerial statement, 4 March 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **World Wildlife Day 2025**

### **Ministerial statement**

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability,

Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (10.59): *I am pleased to rise today, as the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, to make a statement to the Assembly on this World Wildlife Day.*

World Wildlife Day occurs on 3 March each year and provides the opportunity to celebrate wildlife and the important conservation work being done around the world to protect it. World Wildlife Day also has special significance as the day that the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora was signed in 1973.

In discussing the importance of World Wildlife Day, I recognise that, for thousands of years, First Nations peoples have cared for country and have understood the deep connection between land, water, culture and wildlife, and their knowledge and stewardship remain vital in protecting our natural world.

All the plants, animals and fungi that surround us make up wildlife. Today, on World Wildlife Day, we take a moment to recognise and celebrate these species with which we share our planet. The theme of this year's World Wildlife Day is "Wildlife Conservation Finance: Investing in People and Planet". As humans, we invest in things we value. But why should we care about wildlife? The answer is simple: our wellbeing depends on it.

Scientific research has shown that people's wellbeing is enhanced in places with greater biodiversity. Here in the ACT, we are privileged to live amongst a wealth of natural beauty. The call of a gang-gang cockatoo, like a rusty hinge creaking through the trees; the sight of a delicate ground orchid nestled in the grass; or glimpsing the red and green flash of a king parrot in the tree canopy—these are the experiences that connect us to place, to landscape and to each other.

Beyond its intrinsic value, wildlife is fundamental to our economy and livelihoods. Many of our industries, from agriculture to tourism, depend on healthy ecosystems. Pollinators sustain our crops, forests filter our water and wetlands act as natural buffers against extreme weather events. The economic and social benefits of biodiversity cannot be overstated.

Despite its importance, our wildlife in the ACT, like elsewhere, is facing significant threats and declines. Habitat destruction and fragmentation, climate change, invasive species, pollution and new diseases are driving alarming declines in plant and animal populations. Sadly, Australia has one of the highest extinction rates in the world, and species like the Canberra grassland earless dragon, the greater glider, the striped legless lizard, the northern corroboree frog and the Canberra spider orchid are at risk.

The threats facing nature in the ACT are escalating. Invasive weeds and pest animals are some of the most serious problems, degrading our ecosystems and pushing native species towards extinction. New incursions and the rapid spread of exotic grasses are particularly serious, escalating the pressures on our natural areas and increasing fire risk. Likewise, the increase in deer, pig and rabbit populations is creating landscape-scale disruption, impacting sensitive and fragile environments. Urban development has led to the loss and fragmentation of wildlife habitat across the ACT lowlands, intensifying threats to remnant areas.

Wildlife loss is not just an environmental issue; it is a challenge that threatens the resilience of our landscapes, the productivity of our industries and the stability of our climate. Our responsibility as policymakers is clear: we must ensure that future generations inherit a world rich in wildlife, not one to be diminished by inaction.

As the minister, I am honoured to work with smart, passionate and committed people that work to conserve our natural environment. The ACT's rangers, field ecologists, conservation planners and policy developers are working hard to strategically counter these threats and protect our precious natural environment, alongside an army of community volunteers and citizen scientists.

The ACT government is committed to protecting our environment and restoring biodiversity through strategic long-term investment in habitat restoration, threatened species conservation, sustainable land management, and emergency action to recover species on the brink of extinction. I will outline some key examples of this.

With respect to the northern corroboree frog recovery, following decades of research and conservation efforts, recent surveys in Namadgi National Park have recorded calls of this endangered frog at historic monitoring sites. Captive breeding at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve has successfully supported reintroductions, and a carefully planned, science-based pioneering translocation outside its native range offers further hope.

With the Canberra grassland earless dragon, despite continuing to face an acute risk of extinction, efforts have included captive breeding at Tidbinbilla and Melbourne Zoo, the establishment of predator-proof research arenas, and successful experimental reintroductions to inform larger-scale recovery programs.

With gula conservation, the 2023 native species conservation plan for the gula, or koala, was developed in consultation with the Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee. It has guided government investment in monitoring to improve our understanding of koala populations, and a recent sighting in northern ACT reinforces the need for continued landscape management.

With the southern brush-tailed rock-wallaby recovery, since the opening of the Jedbinbilla Safe Haven in 2024, the population has grown to 14 individuals, with further reintroductions planned. The haven provides protection from fox predation, securing a genetically robust population for future recovery efforts.

With freshwater fish conservation, to support the recovery of two-spined blackfish, which suffered an 80 per cent decline post the 2020 bushfires, artificial habitats have been placed in the Cotter River. Monitoring will assess their effectiveness in 2025. Additionally, river restoration near Tharwa Bridge has substantially increased native fish populations, including Murray cod.

With native vegetation restoration, government investments in Namadgi, Urambi Hills and Mt Majura-Ainslie focus on improving habitat, connectivity and biodiversity resilience. Partnerships with Ngunnawal cultural advisers ensure the integration of traditional ecological knowledge in these efforts. Conservation efforts have also supported the expansion of the small purple pea, in collaboration with the Australian

National Botanic Gardens.

We also have sustainable land management. Grassland and woodland conservation depends on maintaining appropriate grazing levels. The government's kangaroo management program, informed by extensive research, now includes fertility control through the GonaCon vaccine, reducing the need for culling while maintaining ecosystem balance.

We also have the urban biodiversity research. The Canberra Urban Biodiversity Surveys, supported by citizen scientists, have provided vital data on native species distribution, informing conservation priorities. Findings have highlighted both successes—such as strong populations of platypus, rakali, and native bees—and ongoing challenges, including the decline of small- to medium-sized mammals and native fish.

We will continue to look at what we can do with environmental offsets, to make sure that we are using those most effectively. We will also continue to look at what we are doing to lead the way when it comes to pest and weed control programs, to make sure that we are not letting our landscape suffer from these incursions.

Despite progress, significant work remains for governments, businesses and the community to progress. Biodiversity must be integrated into decision-making at all levels. This means strengthening environmental protections, expanding conservation funding and ensuring our land and water management strategies support both ecological and economic resilience.

Furthermore, we must continue to work collaboratively with First Nations communities, scientific institutions, industry stakeholders and local volunteers. The government cannot act alone; safeguarding wildlife is a shared responsibility for everybody.

On this World Wildlife Day, we reaffirm our commitment to conservation. The decisions we make now will shape the natural heritage that we pass on to future generations. Let us work together to ensure that the landscapes of the ACT continue to be home to the gang-gang cockatoo, the corroboree frog, the brush-tailed rock-wallaby, the Canberra spider orchid, and myriad other species that make our region unique.

Wildlife is not just an environmental issue; it is a matter of economic stability, community wellbeing and intergenerational responsibility. I look forward to providing the Assembly with further updates on my work as minister to protect, conserve and enhance the ACT wildlife and natural ecosystems. I present the following paper:

World Wildlife Day 2025—Ministerial statement, 4 March 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS** (Brindabella) (11.08): I rise in support of the sentiments that Minister Orr has expressed and the work she is doing as the Minister for Climate



Change, Environment, Energy and Water.

This year's World Wildlife Day theme, "Wildlife Conservation Finance: Investing in People and the Planet", reminds us that the health of our ecosystems is intrinsically linked to our own wellbeing. In fact, I recall working in the department of the environment in 2013, and the then new Minister for the Environment, the Hon Greg Hunt, saying, in effect, that the health of Australia's environment was dependent on the strength of Australia's economy. That struck me at the time as problematic, and the intervening period has not changed my opinion. In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that the reverse is true: especially when so much of Australia's economy is based on the extraction from Australia's environment, the strength of Australia's economy is based on the health of Australia's environment.

As representatives of the electorate of Brindabella, Mr Speaker, my colleague Caitlin Tough and I are very well aware of the importance of healthy environments. I do not have the numbers, but the electorate of Brindabella is probably 80 per cent national parks. It encapsulates the mighty Murrumbidgee River, the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, Namadji National Park and many other nature reserves that are critical to the ACT's work in conserving the environment and the nature around us.

In our electorate we are fortunate to be surrounded by some of Australia's most stunning natural landscapes and, if we cannot visit them all the time, we can see them in the distance. Our region is home to a rich tapestry of flora and fauna, many of which are unique to our area: the gang-gang cockatoo, as the minister mentioned; the brush-tailed rock-wallaby, which my son may have seen on Fadden nature reserve a couple of months ago; the Tuggeranong lignum plant; and the natural temperate grassland, to name a few.

However, with this privilege of access comes the responsibility to protect and conserve these precious ecosystems now and, of course, for future generations. We must work to ensure that the public can continue to responsibly access, enjoy and support the beautiful natural areas of the Australian Capital Territory.

One of the most remarkable species in our region is the Canberra grassland earless dragon. This is a very tiny lizard, and it was once thought to be extinct, but it was rediscovered here in the ACT in 1991. Conservation efforts, such as the ongoing habitat restoration and the improvement of breeding facilities at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, are crucial to ensuring the survival of this still critically endangered species.

Tidbinbilla, an iconic space in the ACT, is also running a breeding program for another equally iconic species in our region, the northern corroboree frog. This was once a common frog. It is now critically endangered, and Tidbinbilla houses the largest captive breeding population of this frog. More than 2,000 northern corroboree frogs have been released into the wild since the breeding program was established. Mature males that were captive and released have been heard calling at release sites in the wild, which demonstrates real success in the programs.

Closer to my home, and in many parts of Tuggeranong suburbs, I would like to shout out to or raise a flag for the pobblebonk frog, which is also known as the eastern banjo frog. This species gets its name from its distinctive "bonk" call, which can be heard

after rain. I would say that walking around Fadden Pond on a summer evening, hearing the “pobble” and the “bonk” as the males do their calling thing is a very pleasant experience.

While the pobblebonk frog, thankfully, for me, is not currently endangered, it too faces threats from habitat loss and pollution. Efforts to create healthy environments and protect or improve local waterways are essential in maintaining healthy populations of this very charming amphibian.

The conservation work that I have referenced that is being done is a testament to the commitment of the ACT government in this space, and the dedication and passion of many in our community. By supporting these efforts, we are not only preserving the ACT’s natural heritage but also improving our own health and wellbeing.

We must continue working collaboratively with First Nations communities, scientific institutions, industry stakeholders and local volunteers. The ACT government cannot act alone. We cannot do this alone. Safeguarding wildlife is a shared responsibility. It is on us to reaffirm our commitment to protecting the incredible biodiversity of the ACT. Together we can make a difference. Together we are making a difference and creating a sustainable future for both people and wildlife.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (11.14): I welcome the minister’s statement on World Wildlife Day; it was really positive to hear a lot of the sentiments in that statement.

The minister set out that one of our key challenges at the moment is habitat destruction and fragmentation, and I want to speak about this briefly. Habitat destruction and fragmentation is one of the key risks to all of our wildlife at the moment, and it is not an academic concept. It is not something that just happens. It is not a natural process. It is not something that occurs without any involvement. It is something that people are actively doing.

We have a real-world example of this right now; it is occurring within the ACT. At the Canberra Airport, the Canberra Airport Group want to build a road right through the middle of Canberra grassland earless dragon habitat. This road was first proposed in 2009. The works began last week, and the community was out protesting those works because they were so concerned that we were about to make an entire species extinct from this project. This is a real-world example that is happening right now.

That project has been afoot for a long time. It is on federal land. The former environment minister sought and received an undertaking from the federal environment minister that the original decision to approve the project would be reconsidered, and the reason for that reconsideration is that the Canberra grassland earless dragon has been up-listed during this time.

It has been recognised as critically endangered. That is the last stop before extinction. The federal government has recognised that this species is about to become extinct. We have a known, very small habitat where this species lives, and we have a project that has been proposed that looks like it is about to roll out right through the middle. It will destroy and fragment the habitat, and there are a lot of people who are very concerned about this.

The ACT government is taking some action here. I was pleased to hear the minister talk about the actions that we commenced last term on captive breeding at Tidbinbilla and Melbourne Zoo for the Canberra grassland earless dragon. Of course, it is not very helpful if we are simply running breeding programs while allowing habitat to be destroyed out in the wild. We need to do both things. We need to protect them in the wild, as well as helping our breeding programs and our re-release programs. We cannot do one thing and not the other.

I was pleased to hear her talk about how important it is that we get good decision-making at all levels—from the community, from business and from government. We are certainly seeing really good decision-making from the community at the moment. We are hearing from the Conservation Council, Friends of Grasslands and many members of the community about how concerned they are about these species.

I talk over these issues regularly with my daughter. She has just turned 11, and she is pretty concerned about the number of our animals that are becoming extinct in Australia. We are seeing it at an unprecedented rate. I asked her what she would like to do, and she suggested that maybe every environment minister in Australia should watch David Attenborough because, “You can’t watch David Attenborough and not have it change your life.” Maybe we need to do a bit more reconnection.

I am very much looking forward to seeing whether the ACT environment minister can work with our federal Labor environment minister and make sure that we get a different outcome from the one that looks likely to happen with no intervention. What looks likely to happen with no intervention—let me be clear—is the extinction of the Canberra grassland earless dragon for a road that was first suggested in 2009 and that we have coped without since then.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (11.18): I thank the minister for her statement today and the reflections on World Wildlife Day. It is appropriate to mark the day and to have the discussion in this Assembly. Similarly to Ms Clay, I wanted to note that in the minister’s statement she talked about the need for native vegetation restoration, and, in her remarks, she noted government investments in Namadgi, Urambi Hills and Mount Majura and Mount Ainslie, which focus on improving habitat connectivity and biodiversity resilience. These are excellent goals, and they are welcome investments, but I draw the Assembly’s attention today to the necessity of continuing to join the dots and make sure that government investment in some places is not being undermined by projects in other places.

Ms Clay’s example of the issue at the Canberra airport is a terrific one in the sense that it makes the point very clearly—it is a terrible example of habitat fragmentation. Specifically on native vegetation restoration, members will be aware of the issue in the foothills of Mount Ainslie, where a local community group has been working to restore the grasslands around the Ainslie Volcanics. This has involved extensive work by community members to remove weeds, to remove evasive tree species, and to restore the grassland habitat to its full quality.

It is challenging work. There has been real dedication from the community, and

community members are starting to see the site improve in leaps and bounds, particularly since bollards were put up to prevent vehicles getting onto the site. We know, of course, that temperate grasslands are the most critically endangered ecosystem in Australia. This is because those grassland areas have been the most prized for urban development in particular, and for a range of other activities which have destroyed those grasslands.

But members will also be aware of a proposal to put a significant piece of telecommunications infrastructure on an exact site at Ainslie where the community group has been working. The community group has indicated very clearly that they think there is an alternative site. It was a site identified by the developer Indara Infrastructure, which is a telecommunications infrastructure provider. This is a good example where there is a better environment outcome and a win-win scenario here. There is an alternative option and a recognition that, yes, we need improved telecommunications infrastructure, but we also need to protect things like our critical grassland habitats, which are critically threatened ecosystems.

So I draw this to the Assembly's attention today to remind members on World Wildlife Day that it is a constant project. We must be vigilant. We must think creatively about how to protect the remaining sites we have and to seek better outcomes where we can. So I look forward to working with the minister and the government to get a better outcome for the Ainslie Volcanics site; to recognise the significant community effort that has been put into restoring that; and to work on native vegetation restoration, because we have many decades of poor outcomes to undo.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (11.22): I welcome the minister's statement about World Wildlife Day. I would like to highlight the fate of Yarralumla Creek. It is a significant part of the blue-green network and part of the Woden District Strategy, but it is a concrete drain, and there has been no planning. Planning does not appear to be a priority at all. It connects the hills and ridges to the creek, which flows into the Molonglo River. I urge the government to plan for the naturalisation of the creek to bring back the biodiversity of wildlife that the creek should be providing.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (11.23): I rise to speak in support of Minister Orr's comments. While touching on recent events and evidence, during a recent committee hearing, the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment indicated that she had never encountered any examples of the ACT government, of its own accord, prioritising environmental conservation over development.

The only good-news story she had come across involved extensive voluntary community advocacy—in other words, community members standing up, usually against the government, to fight for the protection of threatened species and habitats. This helps explain why projects like the new telecommunications tower in the Ainslie Volcanics grasslands, which Mr Rattenbury touched on, have been approved. A failure of process led to the arrest last week of one volunteer who poured countless hours into preserving and restoring these grasslands. To me, her arrest was a stark symbol of the government's misplaced priorities when it comes to balancing commercial interests with environmental conservation efforts and community concerns.

In this case, community members are very supportive of a new telecommunications

tower; they just do not want it built on the grasslands they have volunteered their time to work so hard on—with the support of government funding—for the last two years. The commissioner's comments expose our government's apparent willingness to sprawl and develop regardless of the consequences. Canberrans are proud to live in the bush capital. While we face a housing crisis that warrants urgent ambitious action, is relentless urban sprawl and underinvestment in environmental conservation really the path to shaping the Canberra we want for future generations?

On the WWF 2024 threatened species scorecard, the ACT was one of only two jurisdictions in Australia to see a decrease on multiple indicators. We suffered the largest fall on both the recovery plan and protection indicators. Our community wants its government to have the courage to make wise long-term decisions. You cannot offset everything. We need to prioritise conservation efforts and tackle the housing crisis by putting first sustainable, sensible, forward-looking densification. We are smart enough to do both.

What is needed is the political will and the political leadership from those in power to make the right decisions to shape the Canberra we want. It is time for rhetoric to be matched with action. It is encouraging to hear the minister acknowledge that biodiversity must be integrated into decision-making at all levels. Recent evidence and events suggest that this might not currently be the case, but it can be, and it should be, so I am encouraged by the minister's statement today.

One way to give meaning to this statement would be to prioritise conservation opportunities over further sprawl on Canberra's western edge. The Greens, Liberals and several independents made election commitments to do so. Environmentalists across the ACT are ready and willing for the government to get on board.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Legislative Assembly—ministerial records**

**MS CASTLEY**(Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (11.26): I move:

That, in accordance with standing order 213A, the Assembly calls on the Chief Minister to table:

- (1) any material—including advice, briefings, meeting notes, messages, records of phone conversation, data, and information—provided to the Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Health, or their offices, between 1 July and 13 September 2024 regarding health demand or expenditure;
- (2) any material provided to any minister by any agency or official during the caretaker period (13 September to 6 November 2024);
- (3) any records of advice, decisions, options, or consideration of providing information to the Opposition, crossbench, or the public during the caretaker period; and
- (4) any material provided to any minister, agency, or official regarding caretaker conventions in 2024.

I did not expect or want to be moving a motion of this kind, but I am compelled to do so. The revelations of recent weeks, particularly in annual report hearings, mean that it is necessary for the Assembly and the community.

The first of the two key revelations are that the CEO of Canberra Health Services called the minister's chief of staff in the middle of the election, while the government was still in the caretaker period. I understand that this was on the Friday before pre-polling began. In the call, the official apparently revealed that CHS was seeing demand far above their forecasts for this financial year and was at risk of running out of money—in other words, that there was a risk of insolvency for our hospital and public health care system.

This is an absolutely extraordinary position to be in, and it makes sense that the official would urgently contact the minister's office in a period when there should not be any private contact between an official and a politician. But according to the minister, the potential insolvency of the hospital system was not so urgent as to require its disclosure. It was not disclosed to the Canberra Liberals as the alternative government; not disclosed to Labor's coalition partners, the Greens, who held some of the health portfolios at that time; and not disclosed to the community before the election, even though a great many Canberrans care deeply about our health system—deeply enough to be willing to vote on the basis of health policy.

Information relevant to those voters was not disclosed to them before the election, even though it has now led to a \$300 million appropriation to ensure the solvency of the health system, and the largest deficit in ACT history. The decision not to disclose this to the community before the election was wrong—morally and ethically wrong. It completely lacked integrity, and it put Labor's political interests ahead of public interest.

This decision was also undemocratic. It meant that the health policies being put forward and debated in the election were a farce. Parties could not address the most critical issue in health, because Labor hushed it up. Voters could not evaluate the options to fix the issue or express their views, because they were kept in the dark. This is simply indefensible. It is necessary, and I hope inevitable, that the Assembly takes action in this term to ensure that it can never happen again.

The other key revelation in recent weeks was the admission of health officials that they secretly provided information to Labor during the election campaign—information that was not made available to other parties; information that may have been used for electioneering; information that may have conferred a political advantage on the Labor Party over the other parties. This is deeply concerning.

We still do not know exactly what information was provided. An official described the briefings as flat, factual information, but this description is vague enough to include all manner of things. We also do not know whether this comprised confidential unpublished material; who instigated these arrangements; how the information was used; whether the information was limited to the health portfolio or spanned the government; or the legal basis for providing it in secret to one party.

Most importantly, we do not know how this arrangement is consistent with the caretaker conventions of the public service's legal obligation to remain impartial. My hope is that some transparency about this affair is enough to dispel concerns about partiality. An independent and impartial public service is absolutely essential to any parliament. In any government of the Westminster system even the perception of partiality can undermine the community's confidence in the public service. That is not an outcome any of us is seeking.

But these questions are being asked in the community, and members of the community as well as members of the Assembly have a right to know exactly what was going on here and how this was allowed to happen. And if there have been lapses, it is appropriate and necessary that the Assembly is able to consider whether the caretaker conventions and the other safeguards against partiality remain fit for purpose.

So, the motion I am moving seeks to provide the community with more transparency about both issues. It compels the Chief Minister to table four groups of documents—first, any material which could demonstrate whether Labor knew about the inaccurate health forecasts or the surge in health spending prior to the election; second, any material which was provided by the ACT public service during the caretaker period; third, any material demonstrating consideration by ministers or the ACT public service about disclosing the withheld material to the opposition, the crossbench or the public during the caretaker period; and, fourth, any advice to ministers or the ACT public service regarding the application of caretaker conventions.

To be clear, members, I do not expect this motion to be the end of the matter. We are still at the beginning of what may be a very long journey in discovering the truth. But it is essential that we go on this journey. Perhaps we will find that the actions and decisions taken in this matter were reasonable and defensible, but we may find that certain actions were completely indefensible and that serious reforms are needed to protect the public interest. Right now we cannot know, but it is essential for our democracy that we investigate and that we find out.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (11.32): I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit paragraph (2).

My amendment performs the simple task of omitting paragraph (2) of Ms Castley's motion. I do so because the scope of that request—"any material provided to any minister by any agency or official during the caretaker period"—is a very broad scope that would encompass a range of matters beyond which Ms Castley has highlighted in her remarks and would not be feasible to gather within the timeframe associated with this standing order, whereas the other requests are more specific in their application, highlighting a particular area that the Leader of the Opposition is seeking information on.

I will make a couple of broad observations. The language used within the motion is silent in a number of areas, but I will presume that it refers to government information consistent with sections 14 and 15 of the FOI Act. I think that is the only basis on which we can approach any material. The matters that are referred to and listed are beyond

what I believe would be consistent with what is considered government information. By saying “provided to the Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Health or their offices,” I presume that means by a government agency, and that is the basis on which we would respond to the information request, and that is wholly consistent with the FOI Act.

I will make a broader observation in relation to this standing order. I have been around this place long enough to remember this standing order coming in as a dispute resolution mechanism. Mr Rattenbury would perhaps also be in that position. My understanding of this standing order’s insertion was that it was not to be used as an alternative to FOI, questions on notice, questions within annual reports hearings, estimates hearings or otherwise. It was, in fact, deemed to be a last resort, as a circuit breaker, where there was a considerable issue as to whether a document’s public release was justified. Hence, the standing order has a number of further elements to it that allow for the Chief Minister of the day to claim executive privilege in relation to the document and then for an independent arbiter, who must hold certain qualifications, to be employed by the Assembly to assess each document.

The number of documents that the Leader of the Opposition is potentially requesting, particularly through paragraph (2), could be in the thousands because the scope is so broad. The material that she is requesting in relation to paragraph (1) is specific and time limited. Interpretations will need to be made in relation to paragraphs (3) and (4), particularly paragraph (4). I note the caretaker conventions provide an example of how a director-general would respond to any correspondence on behalf of a minister during the caretaker period—that the response would reference that the government is in caretaker mode and that director-general is responding in accordance with the caretaker conventions.

That would presumably be correspondence that is captured by paragraph (4), unless the opposition leader wishes to clarify further. That could potentially mean every single letter sent to anyone who corresponded with the government over the entire caretaker period. That is going to be hundreds of pieces of correspondence, many of which would be routine, saying, “Thank you for raising your issue or question about issue X or Y. The government is currently in caretaker mode. I, the director-general, am responding on behalf of X. This is what is in place. The issue will be brought to the attention of an incoming government.” That tends to be the form. If that is the correspondence that the opposition leader is after, it is an interesting request and an interesting use of this standing order. I do not think it is within the spirit of it.

My presumption, having heard the opposition leader’s speech, is that it is perhaps not the information that she is looking for, but, through this process, we do not have the opportunity to engage, other than in this form, to narrow the scope and have an understanding of exactly what information the opposition leader is looking for. I note Mr Braddock has another item of Assembly business that covers many similar areas and would potentially provide a more nuanced mechanism to home in on particular information requests and perhaps is a more preferable pathway to manage these issues.

I note that the caretaker conventions are quite clear in relation to decisions that the government should avoid making, saying:



The Cabinet does not normally meet during the Caretaker period.

The Government should avoid making and implementing new major policy decisions likely to commit an incoming government or limit its freedom to act.

It goes on to say:

What constitutes a major decision is a matter of judgement, but relevant considerations include the significance of the decision in terms of policy and resources, and whether the decision is a matter of contention in the election campaign.

The implementation of policy decisions made before the caretaker period comes into effect and ongoing service delivery efforts are not impacted by the restrictions. It is entirely appropriate that work continue on the implementation of initiatives announced and funded by the government of the day.

Obviously, this reference is the point of judgement which goes to the heart of the opposition leader's information requests and allegations that are made both through this motion and through the annual reports hearings and other processes. They will be what they will be. I do not expect the opposition leader to do anything but what she is doing, and that is perhaps no surprise to anyone. But I note the irony of this particular issue in the context of the government's answer to a question on notice by former member Mrs Kikkert in relation to the costs of stadium infrastructure, which was seen as government providing information that would potentially undermine an opposition policy commitment. In fact, the provision of that information was criticised. As you go through an election campaign and a caretaker period, you will see and hear nearly every allegation made about the provision of information or otherwise.

I will not pre-empt too much of my contribution to Mr Braddock's motion tomorrow, other than to observe a couple of points. We have an extraordinarily long caretaker period—longer than, I think, any other jurisdiction—and that is something that does need to be examined in the context of these issues. So too does the timing of the pre-election budget update, and potentially even the timing of our election date. If the Assembly is of the view that having September quarter information in the PEBU ahead of the election is important, which would appear to be the relevant issue in the context of the health debate, that would necessitate either the PEBU being released very late in the election campaign or the election date being pushed back in order to allow the PEBU to accommodate first quarter information in relation to that financial year.

They are all matters that the Assembly committee, if it is formed tomorrow, can examine, but, otherwise, there is potential for this situation, where information may or may not emerge post the PEBU but before polling day, to come into contention in the context of who knew what and when and said what and when in relation to particular matters. There may be a systemic solution to ensure that the risk of this allegation is less likely to happen in the future. They are obviously matters that would be considered in another debate, but I think they are worthy of raising in the context of what we are discussing today.

In conclusion, the government is happy to accept the provision of information in relation to paragraphs (1), (3) and (4). Noting the scope that I have outlined, I will

interpret material provided regarding caretaker conventions to not include every single piece of correspondence that mentions that we are in caretaker mode but, more specifically, matters that might relate to paragraph (3) of Ms Castley's motion. If she has a concern with that interpretation, she could outline that in her response. That is the problem with using this standing order. The process that Mr Braddock will outline both in his remarks shortly and, indeed, in his motion tomorrow might provide a more sophisticated and timely way of addressing the issues that the opposition leader is seeking more information on.

I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (11.44): I would like to thank Ms Castley for bringing forward this motion. I one hundred per cent agree with the statement that this motion today will not be the last word on this topic. As Mr Barr has already alluded to, my motion will be debated tomorrow. I have a great deal of interest in this particular topic.

A recent episode involved the ACT public service, in the middle of the caretaker period, taking it upon itself to provide information to a minister's office without demonstrating any consideration of the perception of bias such a provision of information could create or the imbalance of information across the political parties during the caretaker period. If no decision was required by the minister or their office, then the questions have to be asked: on what basis was that information provided, and why was it provided to only one party during the caretaker period?

It must also be remembered that the caretaker period continues after the election, until the Assembly elects a Chief Minister. Therefore, I would be interested if any information or briefing was provided during the post-election period to the Chief Minister—or any other minister, in fact. If Minister Barr received an incoming briefing during that caretaker period, it would have created an asymmetry of information available to political parties as we attempted to form government here in the Assembly.

In order to protect the public service from any possible perception of bias, they should not presuppose what the outcome of those negotiations would be. Otherwise, the ACT public service risks prejudicing the outcome of those very negotiations. This issue also undermines the purpose of the pre-election budget undertaking—that is, to ensure that the electorate and political candidates are working off the latest, best and correct information on the state of the budget.

I take on board the comments that the Chief Minister just provided in terms of the timing of the PEBU and whether we wish to include that additional information from the September quarter. That is a debate that I think will need to be examined in greater detail, which is the purpose of the motion that I will move tomorrow.

The issue we have from this recent episode is that the relevant minister did not request or seek the information, but, as their office came into possession of the knowledge that the pre-election budget update was no longer accurate, it raises questions as to what the appropriate course of action should have been to ensure the public and the electorate were fully informed when casting its votes.

The Greens will be supporting this motion. We will also be supporting the amendment

that has been circulated by Mr Barr, noting that I do not regard this as the end of the matter. To gain clarity on who knew what and when and whether there were any other examples where information was provided to ministers and their officers in a way that threatens or undermines the trust of political impartiality of the ACT public service, I will be looking at submitting a series of freedom of information requests examining that question on a constrained scope. We do not necessarily need to know the details of constituent based information or highly private information that might be related to family and community services or mental health or housing, but we need to get to the bottom in terms of what information or policy information was provided to the government.

I will talk further to the Labor amendment. One of the limitations of standing order 213A is that the time limit may not be practical or realistic given the scope of the information. It was a tool designed to be used for specific documents where other avenues have failed. This is why I will be supporting Labor's amendment to reduce the scope of this particular motion to what is achievable. Can I also move the amendment circulated in my name?

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Cain):** No; we are debating one amendment at this stage, Mr Braddock. We are only debating Mr Barr's amendment at this stage.

**MR BRADDOCK:** I will finish and then I will move that later. Going back to the freedom of information requests, given the legislative timeframe has been expanded to 30 days, this will give the government the additional time required to complete the tasks. Also, I specify that, in future, the Greens wish to see standing order 213A motions to be targeted and specific and not in lieu of tools more suited to the task. That being said, I still want to this information to see the light of day.

I do not wish to steal too much thunder from debate on my motion tomorrow, but it is important to highlight that I think these motions complement each other. Today's motion is about providing a valuable source of information for consideration and my motion, which I hope will pass, will be a pathway to improve the caretaker conventions going forward, based on the information that has come to light, to ensure that the ACT public service is free from any perceived or actual bias. My motion, which I hope will pass, will be a pathway to improve those caretaking conditions going forward.

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

**MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.49):** I move the amendment circulated in my name:

After paragraph (4), add new paragraph:

“(5) not withstanding provisions of standing order 213A, material is to be provided within 30 business days.”.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.49):** I rise very quickly to clarify something in response to Mr Braddock's earlier comments. In discussing the information that was provided to my office, Mr Braddock stated that the information provided to my office necessarily led to the conclusion that the assumptions underpinning the pre-election budget update were inaccurate. I just want to clarify for the Assembly that that is not the case; that the information provided to my office could

not have been interpreted as being necessarily that the pre-election budget update assumptions were inaccurate.

As I have previously stated, and as is on the record with the tabling of that document with the committee, it was activity data for the months of July and August. I have also stated on multiple occasions that further information would have been required to reach any such conclusion and that there were choices that were available to the incoming government around whether and how much additional funding would be made available to Canberra Health Services in response to the additional demand for particularly emergency department and hospital presentations that had been seen.

I just wanted to place on the record that the way that Mr Braddock has presented that information, let alone the way that the Leader of the Opposition has presented that information, is factually incorrect presentation of the data that I and my office received and the interpretation that could be placed on that data.

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

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (11.51), by leave: I move the amendment circulated in my name:

In paragraph (1), omit "13 September 2024", substitute "6 November 2024".

This is a very straightforward amendment just to tidy up an oversight in the process of amendments we have had so far, which is simply to extend the timeframe under paragraph 1 so that it encompasses the entire caretaker period. By losing point 2, there was a change from the intent. This will rectify that change

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

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Mr Cain): The question is that the thrice amended motion be agreed to.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (11.53): I am supportive of his motion as far as it serves to increase government transparency and accountability. The election of two Independents last year was indicative of a clear mandate from Canberrans for those in this place to prioritise transparency in the way we conduct our business.

I share Ms Castley's concerns that critical information regarding health demands and expenditure in Canberra may have been withheld from the crossbench, the opposition and, most importantly, the public during the 2024 caretaker period. Even information that tells a worrying story should be shared in good faith. How can we solve our problems by remaining secretive about their existence? We need to be able to make evidence-based and informed decisions in this Assembly that are responsive to the needs of our community. It is vital the caretaker conventions are honoured with impartiality.

That said, I am also conscious that the original motion was very broad and risked imposing an excessive burden on public resources, including, I would note, on the staff of opposition members in reviewing the material included in paragraph 2. I am

committed to the pursuit of transparency and accountability in this Assembly. Notwithstanding recent convention, the drafting of 213A in the standing orders gives rise to a privilege capacity for members to seek information from the government on behalf of our community. I support the Assembly's use of this mechanism today. However, I am keen to ensure that a practical approach is taken. As such, I support Mr Barr's amended amendment. I also support Mr Braddock's amendment on the same grounds as well as the amendment moved by Mr Cocks.

I wish to thank members for their collaborative engagement on this matter, especially given my somewhat late notice contributions and finding a reasonable middle ground here. Unintended amendments have now been captured by those already circulated—so thank you very much. My view is that voting in the affirmative on this amended motion will uphold the principles of transparency that accord to a democratic and effective Assembly while curtailing any unnecessary imposition of public resources.

**MS CASTLEY** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (11.55): I would like to note the Chief Minister's office did reach out to mine yesterday afternoon to discuss their concerns and potential amendments. While we appreciate the interaction—and I believe the Assembly works best when there is regular interaction between the leaders' offices—we were not able to find common ground here until this morning, and we have gotten to a point where we can all agree.

For the record, I would like to note that we did engage in that discussion in good faith and heard Labor's concerns. So, as I say we have gotten to a point where we have removed calls-on (2). Call-in point (2) said: "Any material provided to any minister by any agency or official during the caretaker period." If that was considered too broad, then no-one came to our office to say, "Let's reduce it to this for these particular reasons". My understanding is they wanted to remove everything except health. That would have been a good way to go. But this does go to the heart of the concerns which prompted the motion, and that is transparency. I am glad that we will be talking about the proposed inquiry, which we are considering tomorrow.

But, to put it simply: there is a perception that Labor may have received information from the public service during the election campaign which has provided them with a political advantage. The only way to resolve that concern is to have full transparency over information that was provided. I am surprised that Labor are seeking to limit the scope and remove this area, as it will only intensify the concerns which exist in the community, whether they like it or not. I acknowledge that their position is set.

I believe that there will be an FOI—and I believe Mr Cocks may have already lodged that—to get the ball rolling to understand what has gone on here. But, if there are concerns about the application of caretaker conventions or the safeguards which already exist, they can be addressed through the inquiry that we will be chatting about tomorrow. But we cannot address those issues without a full understanding of what has gone on here, and that is what this motion sought to achieve. I commend my motion and all the amendments to the Assembly.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Members, before I put the question, I would just like to acknowledge that we have now seen three successive amendments without contest in this Assembly to amend an original motion—

**Mr Barr:** I am a peacemaker, Mr Assistant Speaker Cain!

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** and over which I have presided. Perhaps it will hold a record for the rest of this term.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Standing committees Membership**

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Ms Barry): Pursuant to standing order 223, the opposition whip wrote to the Speaker advising of proposed changes to the membership of a number of standing committees and agreed to the following changes on 12 February 2025:

Ms Lee be discharged from the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services, the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation and the Standing Committee on Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders.

Mr Cain be appointed to the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services.

Mr Hanson be appointed to the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation.

Mr Cocks be appointed to the Standing Committee on Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders.

I present the following document:

Standing Committees—Membership—Proposed changes—Copy of email correspondence between the Opposition Whip and the Speaker, dated 12 February 2025.

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

That the changes to the membership of the Standing Committees, as proposed, and agreed to by the Speaker, pursuant to standing order 223, be adopted.

## **Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 2**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (12.00): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 2, dated 25 February 2025, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

**MR CAIN:** Scrutiny report 2 contains the committee's comments on seven bills, 25 pieces of subordinate legislation, four government responses and one proposed amendment. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

## **Administration and Procedure—Standing Committee Report 1**

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (12.01): I present the following report:

*Administration and Procedure—Standing Committee—Report 2—Report on the conduct of Mr Mark Parton MLA, dated 18 February 2025, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.*

This report was circulated to members pursuant to standing order 254C.

**MS TOUGH** (Brindabella) (12.01): I move:

That the report be adopted.

For everyone's awareness, the investigation was conducted into the conduct of Mr Parton by the Commissioner of Standards. The commissioner recommended that the complaint against Mr Parton be dismissed, and the Admin and Procedure Committee, following that, recommends to the Assembly that no further action be taken in relation to this matter.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (12.02): I just want to speak briefly to this, if I could. I think it is really important that a complaint of this nature was considered by the standards commissioner—and I am happy to have been the guinea pig. The reality is that, as elected members of this jurisdiction, we engage with our communities in many different ways. We knock on doors. We hold mobile offices. Some of us phone canvass. We also participate in our local economies. It is just a part of what we do in this jurisdiction and it goes on in every other jurisdiction in Australia.

Certainly, when I was responding to the complaint, I supplied a massive document for the standards commissioner which had 87 screenshots of various MLAs and their mentions of local businesses in the last 12 months. I think it is absolutely considered as a standard practice. I would certainly be dismayed if we were, through an adverse ruling on this matter, discouraged from participating in local businesses and local economies in the way that we do. So I was more than happy to be the guinea pig on this one.

It is never a good thing to have a document that says "Report on the conduct of Mr Parton MLA", is it? It is like picking up the paper today and reading any story that has in it: "Lawyers for Mr Parton said this"! But we are done and dusted, and I commend Dr Crispin for his efficiency in dealing with these matters, because he is very, very quick. Thank you.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

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

Title read by Clerk.

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (12.05): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present to the Assembly the Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This bill supports the ACT government's commitment to raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility and is part of the legislative and administrative reforms which began with the enactment of the Justice (Age of Criminal Responsibility) Legislation Amendment Act 2023. As members will recall, in simple terms, the minimum age of criminal responsibility rose from 10 years old to 12 years old in November 2023, and it will rise to 14 years old on 1 July 2025.

One of the primary goals in raising the minimum age is to reduce the level of contact between the criminal justice system and young people. Instead, we seek to encourage diversionary strategies for young people, including referrals to the Therapeutic Support Panel, which commenced operation last year. We know that children who engage in criminal, risky, or harmful behaviour are disproportionately likely to have experienced trauma, violence, precarious housing or homelessness, and unmet disability or health needs. Young people encountering the justice system are also at higher risk of long-term chronic offending.

I am proud that the ACT is taking action to address this cycle of criminalisation through raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility, and I present this bill as part of those reforms. This bill clarifies how existing police powers apply to a young person under the minimum age of criminal responsibility and ensures the availability of those powers is adapted to the purposes of community safety and safety of the individual young person.

Because people under the minimum age of criminal responsibility cannot be charged with most offences, it is inappropriate to subject them to ordinary police investigative powers which seek to lay charges against an accused. However, the broader community also has the reasonable expectation that police officers are appropriately empowered to address community safety needs and to ensure the safety of children and young people themselves, even when charges cannot be laid.

To be clear: this bill does not provide police officers with new powers. It makes clearer the legal authority for engaging people under the minimum age of criminal responsibility. The law does need to be clear. Legal practitioners need clarity about the law so that they can support clients to seek redress where police are alleged not to have used their powers lawfully.



In addition to clarifying the application of existing law, this bill introduces new limits on the availability of those powers for persons under the minimum age of criminal responsibility. The most significant of these limitations is a new seriousness threshold on the availability of police powers to stop, search or detain a young person without a warrant. It is based on section 501Q of the Children and Young People Act 2008 and operates in addition to existing statutory, common law, and human rights limitations on the use of police powers. This reform will not automatically prevent police from intervening when children and young people are engaging in harmful behaviour that puts themselves or the community at risk.

The bill aligns with the government's work to implement raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility by ensuring police powers are only exercised where necessary to address serious behaviour or required for the safety of the child or community. Under these amendments, whenever a police officer is considering exercising an existing power to stop, search, or detain without a warrant, they must firstly turn their minds to the age of the person. If the police officer does not believe on reasonable grounds that the person is at least 14 years old or, if at some point they cease to hold that view, then the police officer may only exercise their powers if they believe on reasonable grounds that the child is at risk of engaging in or has engaged in harm to themselves or someone else, serious damage to property or the environment, cruelty to an animal or any other serious or destructive behaviour, or if they believe on reasonable grounds that the exercise of the power is required to ensure the safety of the child.

Reflecting the goals of raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility, the seriousness threshold provides police officers with mandatory considerations when establishing that the use of the police power is necessary. As generally people under the minimum age of criminal responsibility cannot be charged with offences, the seriousness threshold directs police officers to consider the safety of the community and the safety of the individual young person.

Where police officers are investigating an offence by a third party and the police officer reasonably believes that the person under 14 years old possesses evidence relevant to the investigation, the threshold returns to an ordinary necessity analysis. This supports police officers to investigate criminal activity with a view to laying charges, and it reduces the incentive for adults to hide evidentiary material or unlawfully obtained items on children.

The bill proposes an adjusted framework for the issuing of search warrants. The bill proposes that the issuing officer must expressly take into consideration the best interests of a person under 14 years old who might be affected by a search warrant. The best interests of the child is already a required consideration in ACT law, but now this will be expressly stated in the relevant legislation to guide decision-makers.

The bill further supports young people by introducing a discretionary power for the issuing officer to require the person applying for the warrant to contact the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner or the Public Advocate prior to executing the warrant. This notification is to help ensure that the young person has additional supports, if required.

The bill codifies an existing discretionary power of police officers to ensure the safety of a person by transporting them to a safe location. The police officer may take the person under 14 years old to their parent, someone who has daily or long-term care responsibility for them or another appropriate person or agency. If the police officer takes the person to another appropriate person or agency, the police officer must notify the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner or the Public Advocate.

Finally, the bill makes a number of minor and technical changes in relation to incidental issues which have arisen since the minimum age was raised to 12 years. Proposed amendments ensure that youth offence particulars relating to conduct in the ACT are treated the same way as youth offence particulars relating to conduct outside of the territory. This ensures greater equality in the application of the law, especially to those who live in border communities, and it consistently applies the policy purpose of raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility.

The bill corrects an error in the Spent Convictions Act 2000 that was introduced by the Justice (Age of Criminal Responsibility) Legislation Act 2023, and it ensures that the option to apply for a spent conviction for a youth sexual offence only applies to those who were not dealt with as an adult when convicted. Another technical amendment ensures the correct information about extinguished convictions is available when a Working with Vulnerable People assessment is undertaken, regardless of whether the applicant lives in the ACT or outside of the ACT. Finally, the bill amends the preventative action powers so that they align with the reasons for a police officer to enter a premises.

Raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 years old is a nation-leading reform which will make a real difference for children and young people at risk. I am indebted to the ministers before me who had carriage of this. I would particularly like to single out Minister Stephen-Smith for her incredible work in progressing this and also her continued engagement in it. I am now, together with my colleagues, committed to continuing our work to implement these reforms and to ensure that they operate as intended. I am confident this bill is an important part that will contribute to this.

I thank all the stakeholders who have contributed to the development of this bill for their considered input and their ongoing commitment to improving our legislative framework to achieve better outcomes for children and young people.

I commend this bill to the Assembly.

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

**Sitting suspended from 12.15 pm to 2.00 pm.**

## **Questions without notice**

### **Ministerial records—caretaker period**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Two weeks ago health officials admitted in an annual reports hearing that they provided information to the health minister's office during last year's election, even though the government was in

caretaker mode. This information was not provided to opposition or crossbench members. Chief Minister, did you or your office also receive information from the ACT public service during the caretaker period which was not disclosed to other parties or the public?

**MR BARR:** I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. Information, yes; yes, you do receive information. I have to make a judgement call as to whether that information would warrant sharing. I am satisfied that I did not receive any information that warranted sharing. I did receive information in relation to the operation of government services in the caretaker period but I did not have any briefings with officials or hold any cabinet meetings during that time.

**MS CASTLEY:** Chief Minister, how many Labor offices received information from the ACT public service during the caretaker period?

**MR BARR:** I cannot be definitive in that.

**Ms Castley:** Can you take it on notice?

**MR BARR:** Again, it depends on how information is defined; that is a very broad term.

**Ms Castley:** Anything to do with the budget blowout?

**MR BARR:** Specifically in relation to budgetary matters, the answer will be no.

**MR CAIN:** Chief Minister, did Labor offices receive information from the ACT public service during the caretaker periods for the 2020 election, and even earlier, for the 2016 and 2012 elections?

**MR BARR:** Again, that is such a broad question. To give an example of information I received: Floriade commenced, and I was advised that Floriade commenced and the hours of operation would be—

**Mr Cain:** You know what we're talking about, Chief Minister!

**MR BARR:** In relation to the specific questions around budgetary information, the pre-election budget update is the last financial update that is provided, and that is made public.

### **Ministerial records—caretaker period**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Chief Minister and again relates to information provided to Labor by the ACT public service during last year's election. Chief Minister, can you rule out that any of the information provided to Labor in the caretaker period informed or influenced Labor candidates or their campaigns in any way?

**MR BARR:** Yes, I can.

**MS CASTLEY:** Chief Minister, do you deny that Labor received any political advantage from any information that was received?

**MR BARR:** There was no political advantage to the Labor Party from any information received.

**MR COCKS:** Chief Minister, was any of this information provided to, or accessible by, ACT Labor employees or volunteers?

**MR BARR:** No.

### **Canberra Health Services—Canberra Hospital operations centre**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Health.

In the past several weeks, I have heard from a number of health professionals about the current management of the health and hospital system, including the operations centre set up by the Chief Operating Officer. This includes numerous complaints about poorly-thought-out cost reductions, a lack of respect to medical professionals and, in particular, negative references to the operations centre that you are on the record supporting.

Minster, are there any instances of bureaucrats in the operations centre overriding the recommendations of clinicians and medical professionals?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. I must say, I have heard some of those comments as well. One of the things that I have been saying for some time is that some challenging decisions need to be made to deliver a more efficient and effective health system for the people of the ACT. One of the values of Canberra Health Services is being reliable, and we have made a commitment to Canberrans that we will be a reliable provider of health services.

In that context, I did have a meeting with some surgeons last week who raised with me one instance of a decision that, apparently, according to them, was made by the operations centre at Canberra Hospital that a particular surgery was going to go ahead instead of the surgery that the surgeon thought should have been a higher priority. We discussed that matter and the visibility of information in both directions, both from that surgical craft group to the operations centre and from the operations centre to the surgical craft group, to ensure that everyone was on the same page about how decisions are being made in relation to ensuring that those people who have been waiting some time for a surgery actually have access to that surgery, but also that those people who are considered to be high priority by the surgeons themselves are receiving the surgery that they need.

So, yes, to Ms Castley's question: I have heard those concerns. I have discussed concerns directly, both with some of the surgeons involved, or at least their representatives—because I am not sure which surgeon that was—but also with the senior leadership of Canberra Health Services.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, is the resignation of the Chief Operating Officer of CHS due to his management of the operations centre that has come under criticism from medical professionals?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** No.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, is the Chief Operating Officer's resignation linked in any way to the contract for the "operations centre coordination and embedment", which expires in 10 days?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** No, certainly not to my knowledge, but I am not going to speak on behalf of the Chief Operating Officer who tendered his resignation. The reasons for his resignation are a matter for him, but to my knowledge it is not related to either of these things that the opposition has raised.

### **Canberra Health Services—performance**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Recently, I have heard complaints about the health and hospital system that you are supposed to run that include administrative interference in clinical care that has led to the cancellation of surgeries, a lack of respectful interactions between medical and administrative staff, and interference in clinical decisions, with a goal of boosting waitlist statistics. Given that you have overseen a \$300 million health budget blowout and the resignation of your COO, what do you say to Canberrans who experience some of the longest wait times at emergency departments and for elective surgery?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I would point Canberrans to the very significant improvement in the Canberra Hospital's and North Canberra Hospital's performance in relation to emergency department wait times and in relation to bed block. The CEO of Canberra Health Services, Mr Pepper, sent an all-staff email yesterday that included the information about the Chief Operating Officer's resignation and another executive staff change. In it, he also advised staff right across Canberra Health Services that Canberra Hospital has become, according to 2023-24 data, the fifth busiest emergency department in the country. But even in that context, we have consistently improved emergency department performance, and the team has managed to reduce ACT bed block minutes from 140 minutes on average in August 2023 down to just over one hour in February 2025.

That is a remarkable improvement, and it is due in no small part to the work that Dr Howard has led to establish an integrated operations centre for Canberra Hospital to get better visibility across the system, supported by the implementation of the Digital Health Record, a system that Ms Castley has constantly criticised and never supported, but that has changed clinical service delivery right across our health system, the efficiency of our health system and the visibility of records not only to our staff but to patients themselves through MyDHR. These changes have delivered a significant increase in performance of the hospital, and we would not have seen that without those efforts. And, given the significant increase in presentations, we would be in a pretty bad way if we had not seen those improvements in performance.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, can you confirm how many professional and highly qualified medical staff have resigned so far this year—surgeons?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I note the clarification at the end of Ms Castley's question,

in saying “surgeons”, and I will take on notice the question that she clarified towards the end, regarding how many surgeons have resigned from Canberra Health Services this year.

**Ms Castley:** How many qualified medical staff?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Ms Castley clarified towards the end that she was talking about surgeons. If she wants to ask another question, she can ask another question. I will also include in that response the number of surgeons that have been recruited. Because what Ms Castley is ignoring is the fact that Canberra Health Services, through improving its brand, through targeted recruitment strategies, has been successful in recruiting highly qualified surgeons and other medical practitioners, including, I understand, the first staff specialist ENT surgeon ever to be recruited to Canberra Hospital, the first staff specialist cardiothoracic surgeon ever to be recruited to Canberra Hospital, and a highly qualified staff specialist anaesthetist, which is a change in the way that anaesthetists are recruited by Canberra Hospital as well. We are very happy to provide that record to those opposite.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, can you provide a breakdown of how many qualified medical staff have resigned so far this year, broken down by categories? Also, can you provide information about how many complaints have been made about the operations centre by other staff or patients?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I will take that question on notice and see what information we can provide.

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—Yeddung Mura**

**MR RATTENBURY:** My question is for the Attorney-General. The independent review into the over-representation of First Nations people in the ACT criminal justice system, conducted by the Jumbunna institute, found that despite having the lowest general imprisonment rate in Australia, overall, the ACT has the greatest level of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 2.1 per cent of the ACT population, yet comprise 27.2 per cent of the ACT prison population. In light of this, can you confirm if funding has been ceased to Yeddung Mura’s intensive case management and new beginnings program, known as the I-Can program.

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Mr Rattenbury for the question, and I appreciate Mr Rattenbury’s engagement and, indeed, previous leadership in this space regarding reducing over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system. I am not familiar with a decision of that nature, and I will take it on notice.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I note that you are taking that on notice. Perhaps you could also indicate, if that is the case, given the success of the program in assisting at least four clients, why you have decided to cease funding before the budget has even been settled?

**MS CHEYNE:** I will take it on notice.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Attorney, are there other programs run by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations for First Nations people in the justice sector that may also not receive continued funding?

**MS CHEYNE:** I think that is a hypothetical question. We are in the middle of the budget process right now, but I would acknowledge that the ACT government has a proud history of supporting Aboriginal-controlled community organisations and their programs. We understand that it is our First Nation's community who understands its community best and is best placed to assist it. There has been a considerable amount of focus on justice reinvestment, including in the Galambany Circle Sentencing Court, and associated supports around that, and I look forward to updating the Assembly with responses to the first question.

### **Waste—recycling facility**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. The ACT recycling facility burned down in 2022 in a battery fire. Media reports in 2023 quoting Minister Steel said the new facility would be operating in 2025 and insurance might cover our interstate recycling costs in the meantime. The government now says the facility will not be operating until 2028. The ACT government is paying an extra \$10 million each year to ship our recycling interstate. The new facility will only cost the ACT government \$15.5 million to build, with the rest of the investment met by the Commonwealth and a build-own-operate contract. So we are paying an extra \$60 million over six years for interstate recycling for the sake of a \$15.5 million investment that has been delayed for three years. What costings or cost-benefit analyses were provided to the government in taking these decisions?

**MS CHEYNE:** There is a lot in that. I would acknowledge that, for the ACT government, committing to continuing to provide a recycling service is not just about budgetary considerations but also about basic community expectations that we would continue with the arrangement of recycling in the ACT. It is unfortunate that there is no facility within our region that has been able to take the recycling that we were previously processing, and that is why it has been transported to Melbourne and—more recently and in an ongoing way until the new facility is built—Sydney.

We have been working very quickly on this facility and the procurement. It is one of the reasons that the FOGO facility has been delayed. We are very pleased that we have been able to make that announcement and provide detail to the community in February about what it is going to be able to do. I know that the community is looking forward to having a recycling facility in our jurisdiction and all of the benefits that provides.

In terms of funding analysis and what I can provide, I will see if there is anything further. But, in this context and in approaching budgetary considerations, the issues and the options available to us certainly were presented to the government and the government made a decision to continue with recycling through a transported solution.

**MR SPEAKER:** Minister, did you take that funding aspect of the question on notice?

**MS CHEYNE:** If I have anything else.

**MS CLAY:** Is insurance from the fire at the old recycling facility covering our additional costs for recycling interstate?

**MS CHEYNE:** The insurance claim and process, as I understand it, remains ongoing.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, what has changed since 2023 that means the new facility will not be ready in 2025 as planned?

**MS CHEYNE:** I think I have covered this so many times. We have been through a very thorough procurement, understanding all of the relevant technologies that we have available to us and ensuring that we have worked within the procurement guidelines to get a facility to a point where we are able to sign a contract and have it delivered. It is not as simple as just building a brand new facility on the site where the previous facility burned down. I believe that this has been covered multiple times over several years.

**Ms Clay:** Point of order, Mr Speaker. The question was: “What has changed since 2023?”

**MR SPEAKER:** I think it is a relevant point of order. I think Mr Braddock’s question went to: the government stated that this facility was going to be delivered in 2025 and now it is going to be 2028; what has changed?

**MS CHEYNE:** Nothing has changed. There was a procurement process. I have, and the previous minister has, regularly kept the community and this Assembly updated.

### **Public transport—investment**

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, can you provide the Assembly an update on how the Barr Labor government and the Albanese Labor government are working together to invest in Canberra’s public transport future?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. It was fantastic to join the Chief Minister and also federal minister Catherine King and our local federal Labor team on 17 February to officially get light rail to Commonwealth Park started. Together the Barr Labor government and the Albanese Labor government are co-funding this important stage of light rail that will deliver light rail to one of our most underutilised parts of the city, which will change our city for the better.

This is an important project that begins the goal of building a modern and transformative mass transport system that links the south and north of our city as we bring light rail to Woden. Our partnership with the Albanese Labor government represents what Canberrans see when they have two responsible and ambitious governments in Canberra and delivers real progress for our city.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** There are risks to this continued partnership between the ACT and the Australian government. What are they?

**MR STEEL:** The biggest risk to the continued investment and partnership between the ACT and Australian governments is the election of a Dutton Liberal government. Peter



Dutton and the Canberra Liberals have made it clear to the community their ambition for our city—

**Mr Cocks:** Point of order.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Steel, on a point of order. Mr Cocks?

**Mr Cocks:** The minister has begun to debate policy issues around the federal election rather than—

**MR SPEAKER:** No, I do not think there is a point of order. I think he was actually answering the question.

**MR STEEL:** They have made it very clear to the community their ambition for our city—cutting tens of thousands of public service jobs and under-investing in Canberra’s infrastructure. And they have form, because in putting the ACT last, and with their ideological opposition to delivering light rail, particularly the Canberra Liberals, Canberrans should be warned about what the election of the coalition will mean for Canberra and will mean for investment in our infrastructure like light rail, but other projects as well. Only two Labor governments—the Barr and Albanese Labor governments, working together for Canberra—will continue to prioritise and invest in the national capital.

**MS TOUGH:** Minister, why is it so important that Canberra has two Labor governments that invest in public transport?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Tough for her question. It is critically important that we have two strong Labor governments that not only can deliver for Canberrans but invest in public transport. Investing in public transport through light rail is about setting up our city for the future, supporting more people to get on to public transport, activating key parts of our city and linking the south of our city, which Ms Tough represents, to the north, so that we can share in the benefits of mass transit.

Our city is not going to stop growing, and that is why we cannot stop investing in the mass transit that our growing city needs. The contribution that the Albanese Labor government has been making in light rail to Commonwealth Park, in partnership with our government, shows a joint ambition for a vibrant city that is supported by better public transport, the right public transport system that takes us into the decades ahead and not into the past. When those opposite and their federal counterparts were in office, the ACT government was short-changed, the ACT was short-changed, on our share of federal infrastructure investment. It was 10 years of neglect of the ACT. Our two governments working in partnership have turned that around and we are building the public transport infrastructure that our city needs.

*Members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Members! Mr Hanson, enough.

**Light rail stage 2—completion date**

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is also to the Minister for Transport. Minister, you have mentioned that the government aims to deliver one stage of light rail per decade. The first budget appropriation for stage 2 occurred in 2018. In your response to questions on notice during annual reports you referred to a website for the stage 2B construction timeline, which sets out 2028 to 2033. Minister, is the government overachieving on its objective of one stage per decade by treating 2A and 2B as two separate stages, or is the government running behind on that objective by taking a projected 15 years to deliver light rail stage 2?

**MR STEEL:** No, our commitment is to bring light rail down to Woden. That is what we are getting on with, and we are doing that in the most efficient way possible, which is, noting the different approvals processes, to split the project into two stages. We announced many years ago that we would get on with stage 2A, because of the less complex environmental approval requirements, and we have gone through a procurement process. That is what you do with infrastructure projects—you go through a procurement process. It is through that procurement that you get the final timeline once you have actually gone to the market and found out exactly what they can deliver based on the scope of the project being put forward. We have got that with stage 2A. We are in contract for that, and construction is now underway.

We are going through the planning and design process for stage 2B. We will then be able to consider a business case and then move through the next stages of that project as well. We set out that timeline on the website, and through the Assembly. Indeed, tomorrow, I will provide an update on the light rail stage 2B program, where I will again table the exact same timeline that I provided to the Assembly, so that the timeline that we expect is absolutely clear to the Assembly. But it is still subject to those procurement processes in the future and, indeed, the decision-making of third parties.

We are going through a planning process now through the federal environment department as part of the EPBC assessment process, and we are looking forward to going out to consultation soon with the community. But these are third-party assessment processes not directly managed by the ACT government. So there are planning risks associated with the project. We are seeking to reduce those planning risks up-front by going through this process now, before we then go through and determine the scope, develop a business case and then look at making an investment decision.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, does the government consider the impact on ACT emissions reductions when it delays these light rail projects?

**MR STEEL:** Sorry; I will have to get the member to repeat his question. I did not quite catch that.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Does the government consider the impact on emissions reductions for the ACT when it delays these light rail projects?

**MR STEEL:** We have not delayed stage 2B; we are getting on with the work. We do consider the climate impacts, particularly for major projects. We are continuing to work with other jurisdictions, particularly New South Wales, as they develop standardised guidelines around the consideration particularly of scope 3 emissions in infrastructure projects, so that there is a consistent approach nationally that Infrastructure Australia

can look at when assessing proposals. We know that it is important to provide a sustainable alternative for people to use, and we are getting on with the job, together with the investment from the commonwealth.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, are you planning for light rail stage 3 to Kippax to be delivered in one decade, or are you planning for that project to be broken into multiple one-decade stages?

**MR STEEL:** I have been really clear that our focus is on bringing light rail stage 2 down to Woden this term, by starting the planning and designing this term and going through the development of a business case and then undertaking the stages after that, which will fall into the next term of the Assembly. We are going to continue to work through each of those processes required to get stage 2 down to Woden.

There is a broader network plan for the light rail that we have already outlined. But, at the moment, the priority is to deliver stage 2. We cannot deliver two stages at once. We do not have the fiscal capacity to do that, even with commonwealth investment paying for 50 per cent. So we are getting on with the stage that we are focused on now. Stage 2A is under construction and stage 2B is in design and planning.

### **Woden—proposed urgent care clinic**

**MS CARRICK:** My question is to the Minister for Planning. The federal Labor Party has committed to a healthcare clinic in Woden, should it win the upcoming election; however, we do not have a town plan that identifies the location of services and community facilities, so the new walk-in centre is at risk of piecemeal planning and being in the wrong spot. Therefore opportunities for synergies with other community facilities could be missed.

Will you commit to undertake town planning for the Woden town centre that puts the community first and considers where a new walk-in centre would be best placed to be accessible and form part of a community hub?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Carrick for the question. Of course, the ACT government welcomes the investment from the Albanese Labor government in urgent care clinics and in our healthcare system. It is important they continue to invest in primary health care. We will continue to work with my colleague Minister Stephen-Smith and ACT Health to identify what land use requirements there may be for future healthcare facilities in the Woden Valley district. There are a range of government-owned blocks there. Many of those existing land uses enable health facilities to be built on them without any need for zoning change. There may be the opportunity to utilise privately or leased land and privately owned buildings to potentially deliver these services as well. We do have an existing healthcare clinic in Phillip as well, and there are also a range of community-facility zoned blocks in the Woden town centre and, indeed, more broadly across Woden Valley district that could be utilised.

We will, of course, rely on the advice from ACT Health and the minister responsible for Health to work through how we can facilitate a potential development or accommodation of any new facilities that may be funded by the federal government to support the healthcare needs of the community.

**MS CARRICK:** Will you consider where the mental health Safe Haven for Woden could be located in the town centre—potentially co-located in a precinct with the nurse walk-in centre, the new building for Woden Community Service and the youth centre—in a non-clinical community environment?

**MR STEEL:** As the planning minister, I am not the tsar for everything that happens in ACT government. My remit is limited to town planning matters and healthcare matters fall into the remit of the health minister, so I am not going to comment. I do not make a habit of commenting on other people's portfolios. But of course we will work closely with her and ACT Health.

### **Light rail stage 2—construction impacts**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is to the minister for business. Stage 2A of light rail has begun construction and is expected to be completed in January 2028, with more than three years of construction. Multiple businesses are under pressure due to all the construction work around and in front of their businesses, putting off potential and returning customers. What consultation has occurred with businesses who have been impacted by the light rail construction on London Circuit?

**MR STEEL:** Mr Speaker, I will take the question as the minister responsible for the light rail project and raising London Circuit.

There has been extensive engagement with businesses and other stakeholders, including community stakeholders, along the stage 2A alignment and, indeed, previously along the raising of London Circuit alignment.

This engagement has been going on for a period of years, in anticipation of major disruption caused by these projects, to enable them to prepare and plan for that disruption. We have taken the learnings from stage 1 of light rail and the disruption that was caused through that project, particularly in the Gungahlin area, and applied it through a business partnership plan for stage 2A of light rail. We have clearly set out the range of supports available, which are non-financial, to be able to support businesses through this period of construction, which will differ, depending on where the construction program is up to. Part of that is to have very clear communication with the businesses.

We have been meeting with the businesses through Infrastructure Canberra. We have been listening to issues raised by them in relation to the construction program. We will continue to do that right through the construction program and respond to those, regarding issues that relate to their specific business and what we can do to provide access, particularly for deliveries and those sorts of things—those practical issues that they may raise in relation to the closure of public spaces near them and which may impact on their operations.

We do want to make it clear that those businesses are still open for business, and we will have the opportunity to do that through a range of different means—signage and so forth. We are open to that discussion. We are having that discussion with them. But this was always going to be disruptive—*(Time expired.)*

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, what issues have been raised by businesses through these consultations?

**MR STEEL:** I will take the opportunity to address that in the debate tomorrow, and perhaps provide a summary which goes beyond the time available in answering the question today. There have been a range of different issues. One example has been around signage. We will look at what we can do there—whether it is put through hoarding and so forth. We want to provide clear communication so that they know when different parts of the footprint are switched on again or taken away, depending on where the construction program is up to.

We will continue to engage with them through the mechanisms that have been established through Infrastructure Canberra, where we have those stakeholder reference groups, where they are engaging and where we have established relationship managers to engage with businesses to hear directly from them and respond to them. We want to be responsive. But this will provide a long-term benefit for the city. It will be disruptive.

I know that the opposition, despite saying previously that they supported this stage of light rail, do not support it. We want to get on with the job of delivering this. This is important for the future of our city and the future of businesses in our city. We are talking here about delivering an extension for the southern side of our CBD. We want to support business growth. We want to support more jobs. This project, in its own right, is delivering hundreds of jobs.

**MS CASTLEY:** The original question was to the minister for business, so my supplementary is to the minister for business. What have you done to address the issues raised during consultation?

**MR STEEL:** I will take the question again, Mr Speaker, because it is my responsibility, as the Minister for Transport who is responsible for this project. Infrastructure Canberra, under the AAs, sits with me and it is in relation to this project.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Members, can you allow the minister to speak.

**MR STEEL:** Infrastructure Canberra has been taking the lead on engaging with business through the last few years on this matter and, now that the construction has started, the continued engagement that will be needed with business. We will continue to engage with them. It will be a difficult period while this disruption is occurring, and we will do everything that we can, through the business partnership plan that we have clearly articulated, to support them through this process to deliver this significant, city-shaping project.

## **Light rail stage 2—construction impacts**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is for the minister responsible for business, transport or Treasury—take your pick! Multiple businesses are under financial pressure due to all the construction on stage 2A of light rail on London Circuit, which is driving away

potential and returning customers. With more than three years of expected construction and closures on the road and nearby areas, these businesses need support. Is the ACT government providing any financial assistance to those businesses in the vicinity that are continuing to be adversely affected by the light rail construction on London Circuit?

**MR STEEL:** The range of supports that we will provide to businesses has been outlined through the business partnership plan, and they are of a non-financial nature. We will continue to work with the businesses to listen to specific issues that they are raising, and respond to them as appropriate. We are also working with the City Renewal Authority, who have responsibility for this precinct, to look at what they can do to support this area, which is within their remit, in terms of activating the public spaces to make sure that Canberrans know that these businesses are still open and operating. We will be looking at working with them to make sure that this remains a vibrant precinct even during construction.

But, also during this time, with the employment of hundreds of construction workers, there will still be people in this precinct. It will be alive. There will be construction workers who will need to go and buy a coffee from the local cafe, and who will need to undertake other activities and access services in the precinct as well.

We have seen that in projects like CIT Woden, for example. We will also see it in the stage 2A construction zone. But the ultimate goal is to provide a better place to do business, and a more activated space, and we need to undertake this city-shaping infrastructure and investment now. That is going to mean a period of construction, but it will be worthwhile in the long run.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Has the government considered any reduction in government rates, fees and charges for those businesses affected by the light rail construction?

**MR STEEL:** I am not going to pre-empt the debate tomorrow, but I think you were quoting from the motion that you have put forward on the notice paper. We are considering that motion at the moment, but the range of supports that we have outlined in broad terms are in the business partnership plan. We will hear from businesses specifically about what their issues are and respond to them—and that may be non-financial.

**MR COCKS:** Has there been any reduction in these fees or licences for businesses that are not able to use the provisions associated with those licences—for example, having tables and chairs on out-door walkways?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. The government, over recent years, has made some announcements about licence fees more broadly to try and support activation in the city area, but we will continue to listen to businesses about their specific needs, and they will obviously have to make their own decisions about what licences they want to continue with during this period. Some of them have already pivoted, based on the fact that we have provided information over a period of years that this construction would be occurring near them. In fact, businesses that have set up since that time have now decided that they want to move in a different direction.

This has been known for some time, and we hope that businesses will take on this

opportunity to look at how they can deliver their businesses perhaps in a different way during the period. It is going to be a difficult time and a period of change for them, and we will continue to work closely with them through Infrastructure Canberra to see what supports we can provide to respond to local needs, which are practical and are consistent with the business partnership plan.

### **Australian Football League—corporate sponsorship**

**MR EMERSON:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Capital Brewing Co was recently forced to cancel its sponsorship of the GWS Giants as a consequence of the ACT government's decision to put Manuka Oval's beverage contracts out to tender. Capital Brewing, an iconic local business, had exclusive pourage rights at Manuka Oval's GWS games as part of the sponsorship arrangement and invested a significant amount of money in branding assets to enhance the local aspect of the visitor experience. Why did the government sideline a local business by removing its exclusive pouring rights? And was the Chief Minister aware that doing so would compromise Capital Brewing's sponsorship deal with GWS?

**MR BARR:** I thank Mr Emerson for the question. The trail of events in the question may not, in fact, be exactly what has occurred. The advice I have is that the matter in question relates to commercial suites within the Manuka Oval venue rather than general pourage rights. There is a complex set of interactions in place between the hirers, corporate sponsorships and pourage rights that the government, as the venue operator, may seek to procure. Sometimes they come into commercial conflict when particular brewers seek exclusive rights. Across our venues, we have football teams that have different alcohol sponsors. The Brumbies have a sponsorship with BentSpoke, the Raiders have a sponsorship with VB, and the Giants—perhaps reflecting the orange theme of their jersey—have an Aperol sponsorship.

**Mr Hanson:** That says it all!

**MR BARR:** I will declare I am a big fan of Capital Brewing. I enjoy their Coast Ale and Trail Pale Ale, so I acknowledge a potential conflict of interest in this matter. I also note that we have been previously successful with an Australian first, where we did not offer exclusive rights to one brewer at Manuka Oval; we had three: the Lion Nathan group, BentSpoke and Capital Brewing, all offering their beers at the venue.

Obviously these matters are complex, in terms of commercial negotiations, and must also adhere to the Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Act and the Constitution, noting that trade and commerce is to be free and must be consistent with our Local Industry Participation Policy procurement guidelines, the Australian Industry Participation Framework, and the Australia and New Zealand Government Procurement Agreement—*(Time expired.)*

**MR EMERSON:** Why isn't the government doing more to support local businesses through strategic procurement, given the quality of their products and that, even with 80 to 90 per cent of the facing product at Canberra Stadium being supplied by multinational companies, local breweries still sell 35 per cent of beverages?

**MR BARR:** I started to address that before time ran out. We must adhere to both the

Australian Constitution's section 92 and the Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Act's section 69 which relate to free trade between jurisdictions, which means that our local industry participation policies must be consistent with the Australian Constitution and with our international free trade agreements. That puts a set of parameters around any government procurement process. We are also a signatory to the Australia and New Zealand Government Procurement Agreement, and the Australian Industry Participation Framework. So, whilst we, through our Local Industry Participation Policy, have a weighting in favour of local industry, that must be consistent with the Constitution and our free trade agreements.

I make the observation that, whilst the ACT government procurement market is of a size, it is relatively small. If other jurisdictions were to respond and to seek to allow no participation from ACT businesses in their procurement, then we would find ourselves in a very difficult position with limited opportunity for our businesses to win contracts interstate or overseas. These are all factors we have to take into account, but we do have positive weighting in favour of local business, and we will work through this issue. I have received correspondence from Mr Laurence Kain of Capital Brewing in relation to this matter. I will approach that in good faith.

**MS CARRICK:** Is the government doing anything new to support local food and beverage businesses, particularly as we see other states, such as Western Australia and Victoria, taking steps to actively increase the presence of local businesses at major sporting venues?

**MR BARR:** We do, and we have already actively done that, including some Australian-first outcomes that involve particular brewing companies at Manuka Oval. I point to events that we hold that have somewhere between 75 and 100 per cent of vendor participation being local businesses. But I stress: we must operate within the Constitution and within Australia's free trade agreements. Step outside of that and we are subject to legal challenge. Think more broadly about the market opportunities that we would deny ourselves if all the states and territories, and indeed nations, went down a path of tariffs and protectionism. And we might be seeing some of this unfolding at an international level, led unfortunately by the United States.

### **Schools—teachers**

**MISS NUTTALL:** My question is for the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Minister, does the Education Directorate collect data on what discipline teachers teach in each school? For example, if I asked you to provide me with how many maths teachers there are in the ACT, is that the sort of number you could give me?

**MS BERRY:** I would have to take that question on notice if it were asking for detail on the numbers of specialised teachers. I think we might have that information available and if Miss Nuttall was wanting to access that, she can ask for it.

**Miss Nuttall:** Can you confirm whether that one is being taken on notice?

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Berry, Miss Nuttall is just seeking clarification as to whether you have taken that first question on notice?



**MS BERRY:** I am not sure which part I am taking on notice. Does she want to know how many maths teachers there are?

**MR SPEAKER:** Miss Nuttall, for clarification, can you go through that first question again, just so we are all on the same page?

**Miss Nuttall:** The main bit of the question—the last bit was an example—the main bit is: does the Education Directorate collect data on what disciplines teachers teach in?

**MS BERRY:** I can take that on notice.

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you Minister.

**MISS NUTTALL:** As a supplementary, I want to check then, is the government confident that as part of their near full staffing of schools, that wherever possible, teachers are working in the disciplines they were trained in?

**MS BERRY:** That is my understanding.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, would you be able to take on notice which teaching disciplines are currently the most sought after by the ACT education system?

**MS BERRY:** I can take that on notice.

### **Economy—employment**

**MS TOUGH:** Chief Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the current state of the ACT economy following the release of the latest labour force data figures?

**MR BARR:** I thank Ms Tough for the question. I am pleased to advise the Assembly that the latest figures show that the labour market in the ACT remains the strongest in Australia. Unemployment for January was at 3.2 per cent, which is the lowest in the country; employment grew by 3.5 per cent through the year to January 2025; and total employment in the territory now sits at 273,600 jobs. I am also pleased to advise the Assembly that the ACT has a significantly higher participation rate, at 72.4 per cent, when compared to the national labour force participation rate of only 67 per cent. Over the past decade, the ACT has, on average, outperformed the nation by five percentage points.

Our economy performed strongly through 2023-24. Gross state product increased by four per cent, which is above its long-run average, and the ACT state final demand increased by 1.5 per cent in the September quarter, to be five per cent higher through the year. The ACT was the fastest-growing jurisdiction for state final demand in terms of quarterly growth, driven largely by strong growth in public investment and consumption.

**MS TOUGH:** Chief Minister, what is the government doing to ensure this positive growth continues?

**MR BARR:** The government is pursuing growth in the territory's total workforce, to

grow that workforce from the 273,600 jobs that I mentioned in the previous answer to 300,000 jobs by 2030. This year we will establish the Active Capital Fund, a new mechanism to support start-up businesses and our city's innovation ecosystem—enhancing the commercialisation of ideas generated by the ACT-based tertiary education, research and business sectors. We also intend to continue our work with the tertiary education sector to stabilise and then resume a path of growth for that sector. We are set to grow our visitor economy towards a new target of \$4 billion of expenditure in economic value by 2026 and \$5 billion by 2030.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Chief Minister, the recent reduction in inflation and the resulting drop in the RBA's cash rate was welcome news across the country. What impact has that had on Canberra's economy?

**MR BARR:** I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary. Inflation in Canberra has, of course, fallen considerably. It is lower than the Australian average and has been through the inflation increase cycle and on the way back down. This is important for household and businesses in our city.

The interest rate cut will see approximately 80,000 Canberra households better off. Savings will generally range between \$50 and \$150 a month for households with mortgages, depending, obviously, on the size of that mortgage. We are anticipating that the benefits in terms of consumer confidence, which are already being reported in various national surveys, will begin to take effect locally. It has been a difficult period of suppressed consumer demand. But, in 2025, the economic outlook looks more optimistic both for the consumer economy and, particularly, for those households—which are around 40 per cent of Canberra households—who have a mortgage.

### **Roads—Molonglo River Bridge**

**MR COCKS:** My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. The Cotter Road and John Gorton Drive form one of the busiest road networks in the ACT, and until the new east-west arterial is completed for Molonglo, it is the only way in and out of the Molonglo Valley. After years and promises and delays, the government finally signed the contracts for the Molonglo River Bridge in 2022. The bridge is supposed to be delivered and completed by December this year, but I have heard repeated concerns about further delays.

Minister, will the Molonglo River Bridge be fully completed and open by December this year?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Mr Cocks for the question, notwithstanding that it is pre-empting exactly a point in his motion that I need to respond to on Thursday. I am confused about what he wants me to do here, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Hanson:** Answer the question!

**MS CHEYNE:** Thanks! Yes, Molonglo River bridge is well underway. There is a major milestone coming with the installation of the girders, I think is the correct term, as well as a further—

**Mr Hanson** A point of order on relevance. The question was quite clear, and it is will it be fully completed and open by December this year?

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson, I am of the belief that the minister is getting to the answer of the question.

**Mr Hanson:** I hope so.

**MS CHEYNE:** I thought, given that Mr Hanson is the local member, he might find that relevant, but okay! The intention is certainly December 2025 for the majority of the works. I think we all understand that, in terms of civil contracting works, that is what we term the “completion date”, and then there can be further ancillary works there, but I look forward to updating the Assembly in due course.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, what measures have you taken to reduce congestion on the Cotter Road and surrounding roads?

**MS CHEYNE:** I am not sure what Mr Cocks is implying—whether I need to be there with a stop/go sign or installing my own traffic lights! What actions I have taken? Certainly, listening to the community. We are planning for some major road changes and upgrades in that area, and we also need to make sure that we are not compromising other government objectives and environmental objectives.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, on what date will the promised Molonglo Valley east-west arterial road be open?

**MS CHEYNE:** We are barely in the term and already copying and pasting from a motion! We have been very clear that this is a big project that is going to take us well into what I expect will be the end of this decade and into the next decade, as we use this project to unlock more land and complete the rest of the Molonglo Valley and connect through to the Tuggeranong Parkway. For that reason, I do not have an exact date, and I think it is quite foolish to suggest I would.

### **Roads—Monaro Highway**

**MS MORRIS:** My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, members of the Assembly were recently told to prepare for 15 months of traffic chaos and disruption to accommodate the demolition of the Dog Trap Creek bridge as part of the Monaro Highway upgrades. Minister, given the works are planned to commence this month, when will the community be updated that they are in for 15 months of traffic chaos and disruptions?

**MS CHEYNE:** One of the reasons that I was proactive in writing to all of the local members in this place was in the hope that they are undertaking the work in speaking with the community and supporting what is going to be a broad disruption. We are looking forward to releasing quite a lot of content in the coming days; that is my understanding. I have certainly seen some material, and I have just asked for some further tweaks on. Once that is cleared and ready to go, we will get it out there.

**MS MORRIS:** Minister, has public communication of alternative routes and predicted

delays been advertised early enough to help commuters facing 15 months of traffic disruption and chaos?

**MS CHEYNE:** I think that is hypothetical. We are doing our very best to explain to the community what the impact will be. We will also be providing suggestions of alternative routes. We do not necessarily have all of the data about predicting people's behaviour into the future and what this might result in, but we will be monitoring this, and we will be making adjustments as needed, especially as we understand the broader traffic flows across the community.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, will there be any measures such as fare reductions, extra bus services or free parking near the bus interchanges to encourage Tuggeranong residents to make use of public transport during the construction period?

**MS CHEYNE:** No.

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

## Papers

**Mr Speaker** presented the following papers:

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 15—Annual Reports—2023-24—ACT Auditor-General's Report No 8/2024—Corrigendum, undated.

Bills, referred to Committees, pursuant to standing order 174—Correspondence—  
Bills—Inquiry—

Appropriation Bill 2024-2025 (No 2)—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration, dated 12 February 2025.

Planning (Territory Priority Project) Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services, dated 19 February 2025.

Bills—Not inquired into—

Assisted Reproductive Technology Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Social Policy, dated 25 February 2025.

Building and Construction Legislation Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services, dated 19 February 2025.

Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, dated 26 February 2025.

Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Social Policy, dated 25 February 2025.

Justice and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Legal Affairs,

dated 26 February 2025.

Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Act, pursuant to section 20—Independent Reviewer—Report for the period 5 November to 31 December 2024, dated 21 February 2025, prepared by Bill Campbell AO KC.

Standing orders—

99B—Petition—Referral advice—Correspondence—Petition 002-25—Hawker Village shops redevelopment—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services, dated 26 February 2025.

191—Amendments to:

COAG Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, dated 12 February 2025.

Justice and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 (No 2), dated 12 February 2025.

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

Education and Care Services National Law as applied by the law of the States and Territories—Education and Care Services National Amendment (Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2024 (2024 No 658), dated 12 December 2024 together with an explanatory statement.

Financial Management Act—

Pursuant to section 26—Consolidated Financial Report for the financial quarter ending—December 2024.

Pursuant to subsection 30F(3)—Capital Works Program—Progress report—2024-25—Year-to-date performance as at 31 December 2024.

Planning and the missing middle housing reforms—Assembly resolution of 5 February 2025—Government response, undated.

Public Sector Management Standards 2016, pursuant to section 56—Engagements of Long-term ACT Public Service Senior Executives—1 September 2024 to 28 February 2025.

**Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)**

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Cemeteries and Crematoria Act—Cemeteries and Crematoria (Fees) Determination 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-3 (LR, 17 January 2025).

Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act—

Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction (Council Member) Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-6 (LR, 3 February 2025).

Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction (Council Member) Appointment 2025 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-7 (LR, 3 February 2025).

Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction (Council Member) Appointment 2025 (No 3)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-8 (LR, 3 February 2025).

Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction (Council Member) Appointment 2025 (No 4)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-9 (LR, 3 February 2025).

Gaming Machine Act—Gaming Machine (Determination of Surrender Obligations) Guidelines 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-2 (LR, 16 January 2025).

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Act and Financial Management Act—Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Governing Board Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-5 (LR, 28 January 2025).

Major Events Act—Major Events (Winter Sports Season Events) Notice 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-11 (LR, 5 February 2025).

Road Transport (General) Act—Road Transport (General) Application of Road Transport Legislation (National Multicultural Festival) Declaration 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-4 (LR, 23 January 2025).

Variation in Sex Characteristics (Restricted Medical Treatment) Act—Variation in Sex Characteristics (Restricted Medical Treatment) Assessment Board Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-10 (LR, 6 February 2025).

Veterinary Practice Act—Veterinary Practice (Board) Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-1 (LR, 9 January 2025).

## **Schools—corporate sponsorships**

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (3.02): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) students should have the right to an education free from advertising and the influence of corporations;
- (b) burning fossil fuels hurts children’s health and their environment. Gambling is doing irrevocable damage to our society;
- (c) there is a legitimate space for small, local businesses to provide sponsorships for schools, but these sponsorships should not be with companies that are known to cause harm;
- (d) public school leadership should not be put in a position where they have to decide between accepting money from a company that does not align with the values of their school, or missing out on additional opportunities for their students;
- (e) by reviewing public school sponsorship policy, public schools will have clarity on accepting funding from a company or organisation that aligns with the values of the ACT public education system. Through this work more guidance can be provided to school leaders, reducing workload, on where and from whom they will be able to seek out additional opportunities for their students;
- (f) in a CommsDeclare poll, 56 percent of Australian parents surveyed expressed a desire for a ban of fossil fuel sponsorships in schools;
- (g) some companies and organisations whose values do not align with the

public education system are already banned from school sponsorships. The ACT Education Directorate’s Corporate Sponsorship Procedure document section 3.2 states that “Direct sponsorship agreements will only be negotiated with organisations whose public image, products and services are consistent with the values, corporate purpose and specific policies of schools, the Directorate and the ACT Government. Any company or organisation whose name is associated with the manufacture, distribution or sale of tobacco products, alcoholic beverages, pornography or armaments is not regarded as an appropriate sponsor”;

- (h) the Government’s responsible investment policy already excludes companies involved in fossil fuels or deriving more than 10 percent of their revenue from gambling; and
  - (i) the Education Directorate has committed to a review of their Corporate Sponsorship Procedure beginning later this year; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) by the beginning of the 2026 school year, update Education Directorate policy to prevent fossil fuel and gambling companies from public school sponsorships;
  - (b) assist schools currently receiving money or sponsorship from any fossil fuel or gambling companies to transition to alternate funding as required; and
  - (c) by the last sitting week of 2025, ensure the Education Directorate:
    - (i) identifies which policy changes have been implemented, and provide timelines for policy changes which have not yet taken place; and
    - (ii) articulates all assistance provided to schools which have transitioned away from fossil fuel or gambling company funding.

It should not be controversial at all to say that money from fossil fuels and gambling does not belong in schools. This motion is designed to say exactly that. Money from companies that do business with alcohol, tobacco, armaments and pornography are clearly already prevented due to existing school corporate sponsorship policy. This motion simply extends that policy to include gambling and fossil fuels.

I will speak to gambling first. Gambling is of course a serious issue in society, which we are not doing nearly enough to address. It was deeply disappointing that the Labor government did not get on board with us to more seriously address the gambling harm caused by poker machines in this city last term, but we hope that a minority government and a vocal Greens crossbench in the balance of power might help them understand that the issue of gambling is one that will require working with the crossbench.

As for gambling companies in schools—Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland already have restrictions on their financial involvement in schools. Though following in their footsteps in the ACT will by no means eliminate the fact that young people are bombarded with advertising and messaging normalising gambling, it is a small change that will bring the ACT in line with our neighbours. To reassure members and listeners, I am cautiously optimistic from our investigations so far, as they have not turned up any gambling sponsorships in ACT public schools. This is great. Let us keep it that way.

I am hoping my motion will future proof the system, because experience is showing that gambling companies will go pretty low to access new markets, young people included. So, by adding gambling to our list of inappropriate sponsors, we will be drawing a clear line that school is never an acceptable place to expose kids to gambling.

The argument seems clear cut enough, doesn't it? Now let us apply it to fossil fuel sponsorships. A fossil fuel sponsorship ban would put the ACT ahead of the rest of Australia in taking a stand against fossil fuel money in schools. As a progressive forward-thinking territory with fantastic public schools, I think that is exactly where we belong. The intersection of climate and young people is a grim one, and I know it because I am living it. Young Canberrans have only known a world with rising temperatures, serious and escalating climate driven natural disasters, an inexorable loss of endangered species and biodiversity, and the general malaise from being let down again and again by politicians who lack the ambition to tackle the climate crisis properly.

Last year, young people, your children and grandchildren, watched the world hit 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels for a full year. I genuinely think this should make us a little mad! When people ask us to stop talking about climate change it often comes from a place of concern about climate anxiety. Yes, climate anxiety is absolutely a problem. In fact, when Origin surveyed young people back in 2023, they found that 65 per cent of young people they surveyed were anxious about climate change; 60.6 per cent felt powerless; and you know what, 57.4 per cent felt angry, myself included!

Do you know how you fix climate anxiety? Not by not talking about it. Because climate change is clearly still happening and young people are not stupid. We fix climate anxiety by fixing climate change! And in order to fix climate change we need everyone to understand that fossil fuel corporations are the biggest contributors and that these contributors have a massive vested interest in sanitising the harm that they are doing. Time and time again, what I struggle to do is express the stats in a way that will actually resonate with people. So in the interests of variety, I have picked maybe three select samples that made me baulk recently.

Number 1, University of New South Wales Australian Human Rights Institute found that:

Australia's projected fossil fuel exports from 2024 to 2035 alone would consume around 7.5% of the remaining 'global carbon budget' from 2024 for keeping to 1.5°C warming. This would rise to 9.1% based on Australia's total carbon footprint.

That is fun.

Number 2, Woodside's North West Shelf expansion, the one that has just been greenlit unfortunately by federal Labor, will by its own estimates emit 4.3 billion, that is 4,300 thousand million tonnes—maybe I got that number wrong—that is all right—over its 46-year lifespan. I hope we are all planning to stick around until then, but far out it is grim!



Number 3, even closer to home, and actually thanks to some digging by Parents for Climate Action, we found that in February 2024, over 220 schools and early childhood centres nationwide were forced to close for a day or more with a cumulative total of 310 days where services were closed. Two thirds of closures were due to the Victorian bushfires alone. Already in February 2025, by February 2025, there have been 297 school closure days across 121 schools, mostly in north Queensland this time where floods have shut down 106 schools. Ninety-five of those same schools closed in February last year due to extreme heat.

Fossil fuel driven climate change has genuine tangible impacts on young people in classrooms right now. In fact, it has gotten to the point where Zurich, an insurer, and Mandala Partners, an economics and policy consultancy firm, have partnered together to develop a climate risk index for schools. Want to know what it found? Ninety per cent of schools in the ACT face at least significant environment risk. In particular, the worst climate risks in ACT schools are bushfire and hail. Ms Clay and members for Ginninderra may be concerned to hear that most of the at-risk schools were in the hail-belt in Ginninderra. The same study found that exposure to extreme heat could reduce our young people's academic attainment by an average of 2.5 per cent across standard NAPLAN scores by 2060. We are spending a whole lot of time looking into improvements to literacy and numeracy, we fought for an independent inquiry—I think we got tri-partisan support for it in fact—and funding for all the recommendations that came out of it. That is—

**Mr Hanson:** Whose motion, was it?

**MISS NUTTALL:** I believe it was yours, Mr Hanson. Absolutely.

**Mr Hanson:** Yes that is the one. We did it, did we? We did it? Righto! Credit where it is due, Miss Nuttall.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Order!

**MISS NUTTALL:** There we go. I think we are on a unity ticket here. Anyway, so let us give credit where it is due, Mr Hanson. Let us look at the whole picture.

Climate change is a genuine problem in ACT schools. What do we do about it? Stop letting fossil fuels buy social license from our youngest constituents without giving them the full story, for a start.

You might be wondering what fossil fuels sponsorships we actually do have in the ACT? I was curious. A lot of it boils down to sponsored awards, competitions and alarmingly, curriculum resources. Ampol runs a national competition for students and is a serial sponsor of all-rounder awards. I feel like all-rounder is something that we would probably recognise without Ampol's name attached. Maybe it is just me. ActewAGL sponsors a few organisations, which in turn provide teacher training and school workshops. BHP run a national science competition. In fact, I know this one because I have personally competed in it back in high school and a big Rio Tinto science competition too. Can I tell you, had I known these were the guys ruining our planet, I would have been far less enthusiastic about my academic endeavours, and that is troubling in its own right. Often these corporations will sponsor awards to build a

positive association with their brand, while at the same time completely glossing over the fact that they have successfully monetised the systematic destruction of our climate and our future.

Then we have curriculum resources. Teachers work bloody hard and without enough system support so you cannot really blame them for using the free resources to pull together a great lesson. The trouble is, you then have programs like Oresome Resources—that is O-r-e, Oresome—Energy4Me and STEM Together, which are at least partially sponsored by fossil fuel companies making their stuff available. To borrow a Zoomerism, we had a bit of a “brah” moment looking through some of the Oresome Resources. This is one of the ones sponsored by the Minerals Council of Australia and various mining bodies, so you know it is good. What really gets to me is when they refer to solar, wind and hydro as low emissions in the same breath that they refer to things like biomass. Low emissions! Low emissions? Pretending renewables are just fossil fuel lite is deeply disingenuous and quite misleading—put some respect on their name too!

The fundamental thing to remember is that no matter how much fossil fuel companies sell this as a terribly selfless gift, these sponsorships are an investment. On the more generous side, it is an investment in order to whitewash or greenwash their brand. They want to make themselves appear like they are investing in our future, when in reality they are very much destroying it. But the other investment is in the actual education of Australian students. As we have seen, the materials they produce are designed to obscure the actual nature of the products they produce and to ensure that students are less accurately informed about the nature of climate change and fossil fuels. In many ways, their ultimate goal is to make education for Australian students worse.

So all this being the case, the simplest solution is to include fossil fuels and gambling in the ACT Education Directorate’s corporate sponsorship procedure, alongside tobacco products, alcoholic beverages, pornography and armaments. The policy literally already exists. It is due for review this year anyway. It is not a duplication of work and in fact, I would say it is a strong direction from the Assembly that fossil fuels and the existential threat they pose are not in alignment with the values of this parliament.

I hear your lingering genuinely altruistic concerns that if we add fossil fuels to the list, young people might miss out on an opportunity that, particularly if they are from a low income household, they would otherwise enjoy a benefit from. I think this is a genuine concern offered in good faith. What reassures me, and the reason that I am so comfortable moving forward with this motion, is that there are plenty of opportunities that do not rely on fossil fuel sponsorship. There are science awards, there are community sponsorships and there are curriculum resources and I would contend that the vast majority of these are not fossil fuel sponsored opportunities. Just in case, we are also putting a safeguard in the calls of this motion, which is that the ACT government should assist schools currently receiving money or sponsorship from any fossil fuel or gambling companies to transition to alternate funding as required.

You should be able to get a world class education here in the ACT. I think everyone is pretty proud of our education system, and that education should not rely on the malevolent charity of fossil fuel corps. If we have previously been relying on fossil fuel

companies to offer opportunities that make our public schools good, then maybe this is the time for the ACT government to take on that mantle. Even if the specific projects that fossil fuel companies back are beneficial to students, remember that no matter how intelligent and critical we feel our students are, advertising does work. In fact, they would not do it if it did not. Having fossil fuel companies associated with education does change how students and their families perceive them. Alcohol and tobacco companies are banned from school sponsorships for exactly this reason. It is the same reason tobacco ads are banned in general.

I could be here all day and I do have some separate closing remarks, so I will conclude by urging members in this place to reaffirm this territory's place as the nation-leading jurisdiction and do the right thing by students, by parents, by teachers and by the community.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (3.15): Thank you, Miss Nuttall, for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. Miss Nuttall will know that the Labor government is committed to ensuring every child in the ACT has access to a great public school education and that what happens behind the school gate is free from corporate influence. I am proud that the ACT Labor government continues to fund our public schools at, or above, 100 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard, ensuring all students have access to an inclusive and equitable education no matter what their circumstances. The ACT Labor government has been a leader in public education for a long time; in fact, the ACT is second only to the Northern Territory in total expenditure per student in public education.

The Education Directorate's corporate sponsorship policy was put in place to govern sponsorship agreements entered into by public schools and the directorate. The current policy provides for a range of sponsorships of events or activities in schools, as well as sponsorship of events coordinated by the education support office. This can mean providing funds or in-kind support through the provision of goods and services in exchange for advertising, publicity or other benefits. Most often these sponsorships are very local. A donation from a local shop in exchange for recognition at a school event, or prizes to acknowledge students' academic excellence. These arrangements are intended to build important connections between schools and their communities, to the benefit of students and families. It is important that any sponsorship activity is consistent with the values and purpose of individual schools, the directorate and the ACT government, and that this is written into the procedures which support the policy.

At a broader scale, we have seen multinational companies develop or sponsor learning programs, competitions and events for students. The Education Directorate and our schools carefully weigh these opportunities against the guidance set out in our policies. It is clear, however, that the directorate's corporate sponsorship policy was not designed with these kinds of offerings in mind and it is why, when I was asked the question around this issue, I informed the committee that I would be, and the Education Directorate would be and has committed to, doing a review into the policy. So we were already doing that work, as Miss Nuttall says, and have used that opportunity to bring this motion to the Assembly to bring it to the attention of others.

This review, however, will ensure that the corporate sponsorship policy remains in line with the values of the ACT public education system. It will strive to promote greater consistency and values which are aligned with decisions. It will also provide guidance to school leaders on where and from whom they will be able to seek out additional opportunities for students. Importantly, the policy review will include engagement with stakeholders and the community, schools and students, so we can hear and reflect their views in future policy design. Once the review is completed, I will carefully consider the review outcomes before making any decisions going forward. I am proud of our public schools, that they have a strong connection to their communities, and this refreshed policy will support them to make good decisions about ways to enrich student learning that is aligned to our strong public education values.

I am so proud of the ACT government's strong commitment to investment in public education. This commitment and investment ensures that all children and young people in the ACT are entitled and have access to high quality education that sets them up for lifelong learning and success.

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (3.19): I will not be supporting this motion, and nor will the Canberra Liberals. At the end of the day, it is the children in our schools who will miss out because of what Miss Nuttall has proposed here. Indeed, Miss Nuttall said it in her speech. It was a prize that got her enthused about science; she was so enthused about it that she now wants to deny the opportunity to the children that come after her. That is really disappointing.

The arguments are flawed. I will go through two different parts, because this motion is in two parts. Firstly, I will talk about gaming. There is a review, as the minister said, and Miss Nuttall knows this. This is a grandstanding exercise because she knows this review is happening. This is a grandstanding process.

Some other states do impose bans on gaming. I am not a big fan of gaming; let me say that at the outset. But we have a very particular model here in the ACT that is somewhat unique; that is, the community club model, and gaming is permitted in certain establishments with the intention of supporting local community-based programs.

That is very different from Sportsbet and what might be occurring in other states. We do not have a big Star Casino here in the ACT. We are talking about clubs like the Raiders Club. The Southern Cross Club, which includes the Yacht Club, does a lot of great charity work. We are talking about the Tuggeranong Vikings and the Labor clubs. Those on the other side of the chamber would be well aware of the Labor clubs.

What is being said in this motion that Miss Nuttall has brought forward is that they should be banned from supporting local schools and local school groups because they derive the amount of income that she is talking about, as part of what they do in the community, from their pokie operations. In fact, through law, they are obliged to provide a portion of that revenue to support local community services.

Passing this motion would mean that the Southern Cross Club, the Hellenic Club, the Raiders Club and the Labor clubs would no longer be allowed to offer any assistance to school groups, some of which, I contend, and I am sure we would agree, are some of the most in need in our community.

Let me give Miss Nuttall some examples. The Canberra Southern Cross Club provide over \$1.5 million, and this includes support for the Inner North Playschool. We would be taking that way. It supports the Weetangera Primary School; that would be gone. The Koala Playschool—finished; the Galilee School—no more funding, based on Miss Nuttall's motion. The Woden Youth Centre—that support will be gone, too.

Others include Arawang Primary School P&C, the Belconnen High School P&C, Calwell High School P&C, Canberra High School P&C, Chapman Primary School and Evatt Primary School. I could go on. There is a long list of school P&Cs, worthy organisations. With a good organisation like the Canberra Southern Cross Club, because they derive that money from gaming access, it will be gone.

That is the intent of this motion. That is what members will be voting on here today—voting against the Labor Club. Remember that: voting against the support provided by the Labor Club, because, based on what Miss Nuttall is saying, it is some sort of evil organisation. Be wary of how you vote today, because, if it applies to schools, it should apply to everything. What about community disability groups and other vulnerable groups? Where does this end?

The Canberra Raiders primary school events program hosts 12 different events in 2025. There are another 10 events in the high school programs. The Raiders also host school holiday programs. The next one is occurring in April. That will be cancelled. If you vote for this motion today, that event gets cancelled. You can go along there and tell those kids that the event will be cancelled. The Raiders are also involved in the NRL School to Work program. I quote:

... an education and employment program that utilises the positive profile of the game of Rugby League to support and encourage young Indigenous Australians to graduate from school, find employment and be a role model for themselves, their families and their communities.

Gone; that is what we are voting on here today. I quote:

A combined initiative of the Canberra Raiders, along with other NRL clubs, the Australian Federal Government and the National Rugby League ...

Why on earth, Mr Assistant Speaker, would you or any other member in this place vote against that sort of support? It is beyond me. That is just some of the community support that is provided by the community club model, including, one would hope, by the Labor clubs. I am sure the Labor clubs would want to support some of the local schools in their areas. Some of the areas that they work in have some of the most disadvantaged students.

Would I say no to that? No, I would not. Why would I? I hope people will not go so far, to that end of the spectrum, as to say that the Labor Club is so evil that it could not possibly provide support to young kids. Let us hope that that is not what you will be voting on today.

They also want to ban fossil fuel, Mr Assistant Speaker, in this ideological motion. They will deny the kids coming forward the same opportunities that were given to

Miss Nuttall. That is what she is saying. She is saying, “It’s okay; I’ll go and do this science prize. I’ll get the benefit from it. The kids coming behind me do not get that support.”

There are a whole bunch of scholarships that are available for kids in the ACT. These are national programs: AFL SportsReady, Ampol Best All Rounder, the Australian Science Teachers Association Award, the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation, Books in Homes, Country Education Foundation Australia, Energy4me, Engineering Australia, and the Indigenous Literacy Foundation.

All these awards, all these support programs that are provided, would be gone, if you vote for this motion today. What about the Stars Foundation, STEM Together and the STEM Education Project? We know they are good programs. Miss Nuttall told us that. It is what provided her enthusiasm for science. They are good programs. They will be gone. She said it; she is now backtracking from it. I think we can all agree about Young Change Agents or Youth Without Borders.

The reality is that if we vote for Miss Nuttall’s motion, there will be some harm done here. There will be a lot of harm for P&Cs across our communities. There are a whole bunch of kids out there who are involved in these programs. There are Indigenous youth in the Raiders programs. There are a whole bunch of people doing some really good programs out there, getting involved in and enthused about science, who will be denied that opportunity.

I am all for making sure that we have responsible provision of services in the ACT school system, and all the rest of it. We do not want our kids being influenced unduly, but you have to be pragmatic and realistic. I think that, with respect to community clubs providing that sort of support for our kids, the benefit far outweighs any problem. When you look at some of the prizes and awards being provided by companies—Woodside or a company like that—I do not think that the great support being provided by these companies is somehow such a corrupting influence on kids. The benefit far outweighs the detriment.

At the end of the day, the school does not have to adopt that program. The headmasters and headmistresses—these great principals who are out there—can make that decision. They do not have to have it in their school if they do not want to. With the kids, their parents can make that choice. It is about responsible parenting. They can make the choice about whether or not their kids apply for a program. If Miss Nuttall would not want her kids, down the track, to get involved in a particular program, they do not have to put their hand up for it. But why deny the opportunity to all those other kids that might want to apply for it, and that do not want to have this blanket ban placed on them that Miss Nuttall wants?

There is a lot of grandstanding here. If you actually unpick the reality of what is happening, at the end of the day, is there much harm being done by these programs by the fact that it is labelled “Chevron” or “Woodside”? I really do not think so. If you look at the good that is being done in our school system, is it realistic to rip out the millions of dollars across not just the ACT but Australia that is being provided for our school systems, and think that the government and the taxpayer will pick all of it up?

I do not think it will happen. I do not think it is realistic. We know that the budget is under pressure. We know that, across the ACT and other jurisdictions, school systems are under enormous pressure. If we say today, "Let's get rid of it all; let's get rid of all these great programs, these great prizes, these great initiatives," because somehow we expect that the ACT government will step in and do it all with taxpayers' dollars, that is not going to happen.

The reality is that if you vote yes today, you will cause harm to disadvantaged kids, and take away a whole bunch of enthusiasm for science and other things that we want people to participate in. In good conscience, the Canberra Liberals and I will not be supporting Miss Nuttall's motion.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (3.29): I want to start by addressing some of the issues that were just raised. I was pleased that Mr Hanson mentioned a whole list of schools, including Weetangera Primary School. I went to Weetangera Primary School, and it is interesting to reflect back on how social standards, social norms and laws change over time.

Back when I was at Weetangera primary, I used to walk across the school oval and go to the shop. I would buy my chocolate cigarettes. I bought cigars for my uncle, because, back then, if you were a kid and you said, "They're for my dad," or "They're for my uncle," they would sell them to you. I saw tobacco advertising everywhere, on television, on sports; that was just the water that we swam in.

Somewhere between the death of my second and third friend's parent from lung cancer, something in our social standards shifted; and somewhere, as a society, we decided that allowing mass advertising and sponsorship of tobacco and tobacco products was not a great idea, when these products killed people. And we knew that they killed people; we absolutely knew that they killed people.

It was a particularly insidious idea to actively market these products to children and to use children and schools as sponsorship outlets and ways to whitewash the products. We decided it was no longer acceptable. I am pleased that we made that decision. My daughter is in primary school now. I have never once looked at her and regretted the fact that she no longer gets the joy of a chocolate cigarette or watching tobacco sponsoring ads during all of her activities and on all of her shows.

I think that was progress. That is one of the reasons that it is really good to see Miss Nuttall's motion today. We are seeing that standards are shifting. Actually, we are probably playing catch-up on those shifting standards. I think a lot of people in society have already moved ahead on whether or not we think gambling ads are a great thing in our schools and for our children to see, and whether or not we think fossil fuel corporate sponsorship is acceptable for our children.

I am really happy to see that this motion will pass today. I am sad that the Canberra Liberals feel the way they do, but that is why we have a democracy. Everybody is entitled to their view. I am glad that Miss Nuttall has brought this issue to the Assembly today. It is an urgent issue. We are in a climate crisis. She has brought it forward in a calm, measured way. This is to feed into an existing government review, to direct that review and to make sure that we can phase out these harmful sponsorships in a sensible

way, which is possibly not the framing we heard of what this motion will do, but that is in fact what the motion is doing.

Up north at the moment, they are expecting destruction from Cyclone Alfred. One of the regular climate updates that I receive from Rising Tide has pivoted from the usual info that they share about the climate crisis to disaster preparation, to help their people survive. Fill a bucket for your toilet. Prepare to lose power. I will quote here: “Noises will be very scary, but it’s just the geography shifting,” as if the geography shifting is not a truly terrifying thing to contemplate.

Meanwhile, many in the Northern Rivers have not yet been rehomed since the 2022 floods. We no longer have enough time to recover from one disaster before the next disaster is coming. Here in the ACT, we were lucky this summer, but the California fires are a stark reminder that there is no fire season anymore. We can get fires all year round anywhere in the world, and that is the reality of global heating.

Last term I put up a bill to phase out fossil fuel companies advertising in some of our ACT government venues—not in private venues, just in ACT government ones. It was part of a national grassroots climate movement intended to move us away from fossil fuels and towards a safer future. There was overwhelming support from the community. The committee received submissions in support from the People’s Climate Assembly, the Conservation Council, FrontRunners, Climate Council of Australia, the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Parents for Climate, Master Electricians Australia, Comms Declare and many more. It looked very straightforward to me.

Unfortunately, we got early and repeated statements from our Labor colleagues that they would not back that bill, so that bill did not go ahead. Santos, BHP, Woodside and others quite soon will not be able to sponsor our children’s prizes. I think that is really good, but they can still advertise in our government venues, and we have no end in sight for that.

I was at the time surprised locally because the ACT is quite progressive in this space; but, nationally, federal Labor has approved over 25 new coal and gas projects in the last three years. The federal Liberals have given us the nuclear plan that would, quite apart from what nuclear does, produce an extra 1.7 billion tonnes of carbon emissions by 2050, in a climate crisis.

Both major parties are taking millions in donations from coal and gas corporations to fund their election campaigns. That is one of the reasons that the climate movement is increasingly looking at the money. We are looking at it for sponsorships; we are looking at it across the board. It is insidious.

We need to stop new coal and gas. We need to transition to a green economy, and we need to help everybody along on this transition and make sure that it is there for all. We need to make sure that everybody has a home that is cool enough for them to live in, and that they can afford the food that they are going to buy, with prices going up as a result of all of the changes from climate. We need to stop subsidising fossil fuels, and we need to stop allowing fossil fuel corporations buying social licence from our children.



I am so pleased that Miss Nuttall has brought forward this excellent motion. It calls for some simple, powerful steps in a sensible, phased and measured way. I am glad that it will pass, for the sake of our climate.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (3.35): I am supporting this motion, and I echo Miss Nuttall's sentiment that public education should be free of harmful sponsorships, including from fossil fuel companies and the gambling industry.

Gambling addiction does not come out of nowhere. It begins with a culture that normalises gambling through pervasive advertising, a culture that teaches children, our children, that there is nothing wrong with having a punt, that doing so is a normal part of watching sport and even that sport and gambling necessarily go together.

The ACT is considered the most progressive jurisdiction in Australia. How can we reconcile this with our permissive gambling advertising laws? The federal government's abysmal inaction on gambling advertising, despite a strong mandate for a full ban, has created a vacuum. State and territory governments need to step into the void, which South Australia did some time ago. It is time to follow suit and ban gambling advertising here in the ACT.

The government's recent listening report on child and youth exposure to gambling advertising found there is strong support among Canberrans for a broad ban on gambling ads. 108 out of 111 survey contributors preferred a more hardline stance on gambling advertising that includes restrictions on both radio and TV. Community and research organisations also preferred the more restrictive option proposed by the government but considered that it does not go far enough.

That might be because the too limited bans put forward by the government are clearly deficient, as they include exemptions for dedicated sporting channels. It seems a little bit like banning alcohol everywhere except pubs, bars and liquor stores—an obvious recipe for failure. We need to find ways to implement a gambling advertising ban that reaches into every place that the gambling industry reaches, especially where its advertisements are most likely to come into contact with children.

I consider this motion to be a small step in that direction and I am supportive of moving much more quickly to rid children's spaces of the gambling industry's influence. I also question the fossil fuel industry's motivations for school sponsorships. Fossil fuel companies do not sell consumer goods, so why are they promoting themselves to the youngest and most impressionable members of our community? What could possibly be their aim, other than to perpetuate their social licence in the face of the existential threat presented by the renewable energy transition?

It is important that we ask these questions in this place, and that we take control of what we do and do not normalise in our community, especially when it comes to our children. For that reason I applaud Miss Nuttall for bringing this motion before the Assembly today.

**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) (3.38): I rise to support Miss Nuttall's concern regarding the prevalence of gambling advertising and its potential harmful effects on school-aged children. I also support the Minister for Education and Early Childhood and the work that she is doing to review the sponsorship policy of the Education Directorate.

Multinational gambling companies that are based in the Northern Territory continue to proliferate advertising on TV, social media and through sport, which children in our community are exposed to. The legal age for participating in conventional gambling in Australia is, of course, 18. However, based on findings of recent New South Wales and Victorian studies conducted with students aged 12 to 17, it is likely that around 30 per cent of ACT secondary students have gambled in the past year.

Concerning is young people's exposure to gambling and the broader nature of it, particularly in games and gaming content, like loot boxes that proliferate on popular video games. Gamification is very insidious. It probably goes broader than Miss Nuttall's motion. A couple of years ago, I was responding to some correspondence from concerned residents about a primary school with a P&C fundraiser activity that was occurring. The booklet that was given to kids was *Fundraise with Monty the Monstar*. You could collect monster golden coins, upsize your prize and share in \$200,000 of free prize credit. It said, "Claim yours today and register online." The pictures in this book for kids for their funrun included golden chests of coins and money. We need to look at how kids are exposed to language around gambling more broadly.

That is why I am really pleased to talk today about the new high school education program for students in the ACT called Getting Played. It is an initiative of the Gambling and Racing Commission. The program responds to concerns raised to the commission by the ACT Gambling Support Service about the increasing access, promotion and normalisation of gambling for young people, particularly online. The community also voiced support for gambling harm education for young people through various forums. Education programs are a key prevention and early intervention strategy to build community knowledge and understanding, and they align with the commission's public health approach to gambling harm prevention.

Now available to all ACT high schools, the Getting Played program will help our young people understand the risks associated with gambling and gambling-like content on video games, empowering them to make healthy and safe choices and to speak up should they need help. The program encourages our young people to think critically about the marketing and the technology landscape that is making gambling increasingly visible and accessible to them. The program includes two-hour teacher e-learning to ensure our local educators have the confidence and skills to deliver the program. I am pleased to hear this professional learning has been accredited by the Teacher Quality Institute.

The program provides evidence-based and curriculum aligned classroom resources for years 7 to 10, allowing schools flexibility in implementing the program across a range of curriculum areas. The program supports a whole-of-school approach, with information available for school leaders, school wellbeing teams, parents and carers. The program was developed through a co-design process that heard from our local

teachers and students. I congratulate the commission for its close engagement with the education sector on this. I understand this co-design emphasised the need for this program, with students reporting that they are frequently exposed to gambling advertising and gambling-like features on online games. The co-design also demonstrates a strong support for school-based gambling harm education from teachers of all ACT school sectors.

In addition to hearing from local educators and students, the program's development was guided by a working group consisting of representatives from all ACT school sectors, local researchers, youth organisations, support services and people with lived experience of gambling harm.

The Getting Played Program draws on the latest research into young people's participation in and attitudes towards gambling and gaming. The convergence of these will continue to be an issue, both in Australia and internationally. The ACT government is committed to reducing the harm from gambling through a range of reforms throughout this term.

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (3.43), in reply: Wow! That was spicy. I thank members of the Assembly for their input to this debate. I know that not everyone here agrees with every part of the motion, but, after hearing everyone, I sincerely believe it is a good thing to pass. It will move schools a meaningful step away from the influence of harmful industries. Limiting the ability of gambling and fossil fuel industries to advertise to children, especially in what should be a neutral educational environment, is a positive move.

I want to use this motion, and hopefully the success of this motion, to open the wider conversation about the role of fossil fuel industries in gambling advertising in society. There are, especially in the sports space, some teams who are dependent on sponsorship to function. We need to look at the way that we, as an Assembly, can support them in moving away from that reliance so that we can enjoy sports without needing to have dozens of references to various interchangeable sports betting companies every few minutes. There is a reason that gambling corporations are harmful to us, and we cannot pretend that the inescapable presence of their advertising is not having an impact on how acceptable gambling now is in society.

We also need to look seriously at the way corporate sponsorship functions in schools. I would never want to make additional work for schools or directorate staff. I reckon the creation or procurement of high-quality resources that could be distributed centrally might, in fact, avoid putting teachers in the position of needing to use these resources that have an agenda beyond simply educating children.

Schools need to be a space where young people can have an escape from the heavy advertising they are exposed to in every other part of society. Reducing the ability of the most harmful industries from having that access is a good start. I appreciate that things like tobacco and alcohol are already banned from that access, but we should start to consider exactly where that line should be drawn. At the end of the day, do we believe that schools are an appropriate place for advertisements to be presented to young people? If you think the answer is no, and I would hope that everyone here might, we may all need to agree that further work is required.

However, with climate anxiety being increasingly common among young people and Australia doing very little to reduce our role in climate change, it is important that young people are educated on the reality of climate. Money and resources designed to muddy the waters and confuse the issue serve nobody but the companies profiting from destroying the planet. The best way for young people to address climate anxiety is to be engaged and participate in the political system to advocate for change and to advocate for action. That is exactly why I am here today—not because I did not, in fact, win the Rio Tinto Big Science Competition, nor would I have wanted to, in hindsight, but because I was able to access an education that actually taught me the truth about what was happening to our planet. I am proud to enable many more young people to access what I was lucky enough to have, which was an education that was not paid for by big polluters.

The ACT has amazing public schools and I am extremely proud to have been taught and shaped by those schools. We would like to make those schools just a little bit better and be a little bit more able to teach without needing to worry about money from sources that want to undermine genuine education having a place in the classroom. There will still be extra curricula support and opportunities for students. The government has committed to schools still being fully funded. The changes this motion will bring about are not about to fundamentally alter education. I would be genuinely surprised if there were any notable difference felt on the ground. The change, and it is an important difference, is that fossil fuel companies will know they are not welcome in ACT public schools and neither are gambling companies. Fossil fuel industries, as industries destroying the planet and forcing young Canberrans to prepare for a deeply worrying future, should know that well educated and politically engaged young people are not going to accept their lines and lies about the necessity of their work.

I want to touch on a couple of points raised in the debate. I thank Minister Berry for mentioning the annual reports questioning. I was proud to be the one to ask the question about directorate sponsorship policy. Until that point, we certainly had not heard mention of fossil fuels, which is why we brought it up. We were really excited to hear that the review is coming up and thought it was absolutely the best opportunity to make the change happen without putting additional load on hardworking directorate staff.

To Mr Hanson's point and his concerns about students and particularly low-income students missing out on these issues, there are a few things I could say. One of them is: what have we come to if we cannot give our kids opportunities without accepting or greenwashing or whitewashing the genuine harm that these corporations are causing? Are we really going to let fossil fuel and gambling companies hold our young people's education and experience hostage? Is that who we are as a parliament? That kind of social licensing is something that we can do without. Until we break the cycle somewhere, we are going to be stuck in the same loop—absolutely. I do get the concern. Young people deserve opportunities, which is why there is an explicit call in our motion that the ACT government would work with schools to assist them in transitioning to alternative sponsors.

There are in fact, some awesome opportunities out there that are not sponsored by fossil fuel or gambling companies. A couple, off the top of my head, are the Australian Training Awards, the National History Challenge and the CMAG Secondary School

Art Prize, all of which have monetary components to them. Again, this is the kind of thing that we need to expand and encourage. We have a lower class education system. There is no reason that, between government and genuinely benevolent charities, if we need to, we cannot offer those kinds of opportunities. It is my strong hope and trust that the government will support schools to do it.

I was looking through the Education Directorate policy for school sponsorships. I believe it only mentions Education Directorate staff and public school staff as the ones to whom this policy applies. In terms of talk about grandstanding and wider implications, I would encourage Mr Hanson to read the policy. The change in the grand scheme of things is fairly minor, but it is symbolic and it shows where we stand as a parliament.

Just before I conclude, I would like to thank all who came today. I really appreciate you. Thank you for your tireless advocacy. I particularly thank the folks who have been very generous with their time in the development of this motion. I thank Comms Declare, the Conservation Council, Canberra Parents for Climate Action, the Australian Youth Climate Coalition, 350.org, and dedicated constituents who have really brought this issue to our attention in a meaningful way. I thank my team for backing me on it, and I thank members around this chamber for being so open to it, or, at the very least, for critically engaging with the subject matter. Even if we do not find agreement, I thank you for being here today.

In closing, we should not accept that fossil fuel or gambling interests sponsoring Canberran schools is necessary or at all beneficial. This motion passing is an important step to establishing boundaries and telling two industries that do tangible harm to all Australians that there are now many more places that they are simply not welcome. I do not accept that this is the end of the fight. Personally, I would rather not see gambling or fossil fuel ads anywhere in my daily life. That is my preference.

For the many Canberrans who share the view and are sceptical of corporate interests, and also because it is just the right thing to do, the ACT Greens will continue driving climate action and action on gambling harm in parliament to ensure that we live in a territory that is not drowning in gambling and fossil fuel ads. Schools are an incredibly important place to start this conversation. I do not think for a second that this will be where the conversation ends. There is more work to be done. With a strong Greens crossbench in the balance of power this term, there are a whole lot of allies in the field. With a Greens crossbench that listens to climate science and the community, we are going to continue this fight.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Mr Werner-Gibbings): Just quickly, friends in the public gallery, welcome. I am delighted that you are here today. Thank you very much for coming. We have heard your support for this motion, but this is not an arena where members' contributions are applauded or otherwise. I would encourage a "hear, hear" of affirmation, but, otherwise, let us get on with the voting.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Leave of absence**

Motion (by **Mr Cocks**) agreed to:

That leave of absence be granted to Ms Lee from 4 March to 30 April 2025 due to personal reasons.

## **Knife crime—police powers**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (3.54): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) knife-related violence represents one of the most significant and devastating threats to community safety in Australia;
- (b) in 2023, Queensland passed legislation granting police additional powers to use metal detection wands on people without reasonable suspicion in designated areas, including shopping centres, night precincts and transit hubs;
- (c) the reforms, referred to as Jack’s Law, were introduced following the death of teenager Jack Beasley, in December 2019;
- (d) in the first year of the introduction of Jack’s Law, more than 500 weapons were seized by Queensland Police; and
- (e) in June 2024, New South Wales passed similar Jack’s Law reforms with bipartisan support following the tragic 2024 Bondi Junction stabbings;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) incidents of knife-related violence occur in the ACT, including a fatal stabbing in a Civic nightclub in July 2020, and the non-fatal Australian National University stabbing incident in September 2023;
- (b) between December 2024 and January 2025, 48 knives have been seized during knife-related incidents, including carjackings, assaults and burglaries, according to ACT Policing, some of which were reported to involve children as young as 13 years old;
- (c) on 27 February 2025, several shops inside the Canberra Outlet Centre undertook emergency lockdown protocols during an alleged knife-related incident when two people, including one armed with a machete, threatened workers and shoppers;
- (d) section 382 of the Crimes Act 1900 (ACT) establishes that a person cannot without a reasonable excuse carry a knife on them in a public place, but ACT Policing officers do not currently have the capacity to conduct searches on people without reasonable suspicion using metal detection wands;
- (e) sections 193 and 207 of the Crimes Act 1900 (ACT) grant ACT Policing officers powers, if they suspect on reasonable grounds, to search a person for possession of a knife and stopping, searching and detaining people for possession of a thing relevant to a serious offence, but there is nothing that allows ACT Policing officers to use an “authorised device” such as a metal detection wand to search without reasonable suspicion;
- (f) in August 2024, the Attorney-General presented a statement on knife-related crime legislative reforms, Jack’s Law, following the Assembly

resolution of 16 May 2024;

- (g) the ACT Government resolved not to introduce these reforms due to insufficient evidence for the need for these powers in the ACT, lack of support by justice stakeholders, and significant concerns about the impact on human rights under the Human Rights Act 2004; and
  - (h) the statement noted that the ACT Government will continue to keep a watch on knife-related violence and explore options as appropriate; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) introduce legislation to grant increased powers for ACT Policing consistent with Jack's Law within this calendar year;
  - (b) ensure that knife-related violence in the ACT is halted and prevented; and
  - (c) protect frontline workers seeking to prevent knife-related violence in the ACT, particularly ACT Policing officers, as they seek to protect Canberrans.

I rise to speak to the motion circulated in my name and commend it to the Assembly. This motion calls on the government to introduce legislation to grant increased powers for ACT Policing consistent with Jack's Law within this calendar year.

As many of you may remember, I brought a similar motion to the last Assembly, in May last year, calling on the previous government to consider introducing these expanded powers. Unfortunately, Jack's Law was not introduced by the previous government, yet problems of knife-related crime seem to continue to worsen in the ACT. Sadly, as evidenced by last week's shocking incident at the Canberra Outlet Centre in Fyshwick, knife crime remains a serious community safety issue.

It is important that this Assembly has this debate and decides what, if anything, we will do to address incidents like the one in Fyshwick last week. As members would be aware, several shops inside the Canberra Outlet Centre went into emergency lockdown as two people, a man and a woman, allegedly threatened and intimidated shoppers and workers. The man was alleged to be armed with a machete, and a very large one at that.

The CCTV footage that has been released of the incident has been truly shocking and has inspired a number of important questions. For how long was that man carrying around that machete in public? Why was he able to conceal this weapon in public for so long, and only reveal it when he wanted to? Why do we insist on restricting our brave and honourable ACT police officers from being able to take appropriate action to protect community safety? Finally, surely, wouldn't we all have been glad if that machete had been discovered before he started waving it around in a shopping centre?

As technology evolves and police forces around the nation look to use new tools and technologies to enhance the quality of law enforcement, the ACT must remain vigilant in following the pace of change.

In 2019, Queensland passed legislation granting police additional powers to use metal detection wands on people without reasonable suspicion in designated areas, including shopping centres, nightlife venues, entertainment precincts and transit hubs. These reforms, referred to as Jack's Law, were introduced following the tragic death of a

teenage boy, Jack Beasley, in December 2019.

Clearly, the ACT is not immune from these types of incidents. In a Civic nightclub in July 2020, a man was stabbed to death in the middle of the premises. In September 2023, a non-fatal mass stabbing incident occurred at the Australian National University. We now have last Thursday's incident at the Canberra Outlet Centre—what could easily have been our city's version of the tragic Westfield Bondi Junction stabbings which occurred in June last year—to add to the list. These incidents demonstrate that there is more we can do from a legislative perspective to support our officers, and to ensure the safety of our community.

The trial of the new laws in Queensland and New South Wales have proved effective and have enhanced the enforcement of human rights. A review by the Griffith Criminology Institute on the Gold Coast trial found 68 bladed articles were seized in 12 months, resulting in 53 weapons offences and 101 other offences being laid. In the first year alone, police seized over 500 weapons using the authorised detection device in Queensland, and this figure has now grown to approximately 1,000 weapons since April 2023.

The new Queensland LNP government announced on 23 February this year that they have made Jack's Law permanent. It marked the milestone of 100,000 wand scans in Queensland. These knives were in the possession of people in public or entering enclosed public spaces such as nightclubs, bars, trains or buses. These knives could have been used in the most horrific of circumstances, the likes of which we have seen recently far too much.

On 28 January 2025, ACT Policing published a media release informing Canberrans that there had been a recent spike in knife-related incidents in the ACT. Forty-eight knives had been seized by police in the weeks between December 2024 and January 2025—a very short period indeed.

On 23 December last year, two men sitting in a car parked in Macgregor were threatened at knife point by a group who demanded that they get out, before stealing the vehicle. In another incident, on 31 December last year, a man was found to be in possession of an 18-centimetre knife after having an argument with his partner at Gungahlin Marketplace. On 3 January this year, a 10-centimetre folding knife was found in the bag of a Summernats attendee, who told police she had it for protection.

These knives were confiscated in response to carjackings, assaults and burglaries, and were being used by children as young as 13 years old. This information is seriously concerning and clearly affects all areas of Canberra. It also prompts action by this government. Knife crime has devastating consequences, and we must consider necessary measures to prevent it.

Australians rightly applauded former Prime Minister John Howard for his tireless work to establish the National Firearms Agreement, ensuring that the unreasonable possession of firearms should be kept out of Australian communities. There is no justifiable reason that anyone should possess a knife in public. The existing scheme under which ACT Policing search for illegal weapons or other unlawful items is informed by outdated laws that do not fully satisfy intended outcomes.



Under stop, search and detain powers of the Crimes Act 1900, section 207 and section 193, police only have powers to conduct an ordinary or frisk search if they suspect the person has a thing in their possession relevant to a serious offence. Officers cannot use an authorised device, such as a metal detection wand, to discharge this function.

It was raised during consultation on this motion that carrying out an ordinary frisk search carries greater risk for the officer in sustaining a needle stick or similar injury. In fact, it has been reported to me that police officers are often more afraid of the risk of a knife or similar weapon than the risk of a firearm. At least brandishing a firearm provides police officers with a moment's opportunity to respond and does require the user to have some operational knowledge. However, a knife can be brandished quicker, be used by just about anyone, and be as deadly as a firearm to someone in close proximity.

Frisk searches are also considered more intrusive and invasive compared to the proposed reform. While frisking is a necessary element of ensuring community safety, searches often carry greater risk and discomfort for both officers and the person being searched.

Introducing the wand option for police will serve a net benefit for police operations and it is a less intrusive way to conduct a search. Also, metal detection wands are more effective in detecting metal objects than humans are. In this respect, the reform enhances human rights by providing a new power for police, while simultaneously removing the need for the officer to physically frisk the person being searched.

A safer working environment for our police means there is a better way for all of us to work together for a safer community in the ACT. Notably, the law works by enabling police to search without "reasonable suspicion". This ensures that no-one can hide, conceal or carry in public without the chance of a nearby officer conducting a discrete and immediate search. A wand search without reasonable suspicion should be viewed as similar to traffic stops and random roadside tests conducted by police, which have been conducted and generally accepted by civil libertarians for many years.

Traffic stops ensure community safety on the road; wand searches will ensure community safety on the streets and at the shops. Traffic stops are made with officer discretion, and there is no reason why a wand search should be considered differently. Jack's Law is not a destructive new idea; it is a smart, simple reform. I dismiss the arguments that this will enable discriminatory policing practices, as I have faith in the training and operational capacity of ACT Policing to act with integrity and to use their discretion appropriately.

It is disrespectful to our wonderful police officers here in Canberra to compare their actions to the actions of those in other jurisdictions. As demonstrated in Queensland and New South Wales, if you have nothing to hide then you would not have a problem with the search. If the search for a knife reveals some other criminal activity or possession, then that is also a good thing. These additional powers will help police officers to ensure that criminal behaviour is addressed, not swept under the rug.

It has been reported to me that knife crime is severely under-reported and under-represented in crime statistics. It should be beyond reasonable doubt to assert that expanding powers to properly and appropriately combat knife crime is a good thing. As New South Wales Labor Premier Chris Minns has sensibly advised, the law will take effect in designated areas such as “shopping centres, sporting precincts, train stations or areas where there are crowds that gather”. It is my hope that Jack’s Law in the ACT would produce similar designated areas.

Ask any business owner at Kippax Fair if they think this is necessary, as an example. Ask the workers in the businesses at Canberra Outlet Centre if they think this is necessary. Ask any reveller having a night out in Civic if they think this is necessary. It is absolutely necessary to legislate Jack’s Law in the ACT. This reform has received support from the Queensland Police Union and the New South Wales police union, as well as the Australian Federal Police Association, who represent the ACT police.

The Canberra Liberals will always back our police, and we will always ensure that they have the resources and capability to effectively discharge their duties. This reform is sensible, minimally expansive in scope, backed by evidence and a previous case example, and has the likelihood dramatically to improve community safety. I urge fellow members to support this motion, and for the government to act decisively and urgently in considering its introduction.

I will touch briefly on the amendment proposed by the Attorney-General. The Canberra Liberals will not be supporting the amendment. We need action more immediately than doing another study. I note that Mr Emerson has provided what I consider to be a sensible addition to my motion, and the Canberra Liberals will support that amendment. I commend the motion that has been circulated in my name, as it is. I note that we will support Mr Emerson’s amendment, and I urge the government to act accordingly.

**MR DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Members, we have two amendments; one which amends paragraph (3)(a) and the other which amends (3)(d). For the ease of conduct of this debate, I request that we address the amendment to paragraph (3)(a) first.

**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) (4.07): I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit paragraph (3)(a), substitute:

“(a) revisit the evidence base in consultation with relevant stakeholders, consider whether there is a need to introduce legislation which increases powers for ACT Policing to respond to knife-related violence, and report back to the Assembly within this calendar year;”.

I thank Mr Cain for this motion calling on the government to introduce legislation for ACT Policing to respond with increased powers to knife-related violence. I want to acknowledge the very open and fruitful engagement that we had with Mr Cain and his office. It is of regret—I hope that might be more widely shared—that we have not been able to come to tripartite plus Independent agreement on the amendments, but there are reasons for us putting forward the ones that we have. In saying that, I very much welcome the Greens engagement on the proposed amendment that I am speaking to.

I will touch on why it is important to have put that today. It is not another study; it is about reviewing the evidence base.

Like other Australian jurisdictions, the ACT, of course, is not immune from knife-related violence. The ACT government recognised the profound and the enduring effects that knife crime has on both individuals and our broader community. Knives are, of course, dangerous and they pose a risk to the wider public and to the persons who are in possession of them.

Frightening incidents like the one that occurred at the Canberra Outlet Centre last Thursday are deeply concerning. I can only imagine the shock and fear experienced by the individuals involved in this distressing incident. No-one should ever feel unsafe in their workplace or their community. Anyone who has seen the CCTV footage would, I expect, have a visceral reaction. I want to take a moment to commend the very swift action by ACT Policing in response to this incident and, indeed, their ongoing efforts to maintain the security and wellbeing of our community.

As Mr Cain has flagged, legislation known as Jack's Law has been introduced in Queensland and has since been introduced in New South Wales. These laws allow police to use metal detection wands in designated areas without any requirement to reasonably suspect that the person being searched has a knife or other weapon. In considering the call for legislation in the ACT, it is important to reflect the full context that there are already offences for carrying or possessing a knife in a public place or school without reasonable excuse and for selling a knife to a person under 16 years old. It is not a reasonable excuse for a person to have a knife in his or her possession in a public place or school solely for the purpose of self-defence or defence of another person. Further, police have existing powers to search a person without warrant if the police officer forms a suspicion on reasonable grounds that a person who is in a public place or school has a knife in their possession. Knives located during such a search can be seized.

While I acknowledge that we can learn from the experience and law reform of other jurisdictions, the introduction of any new laws increasing police powers to address knife-related violence should be appropriately adapted to the ACT and what it means to be a human rights jurisdiction.

The ACT government's response to Mr Cain's motion in the last Assembly concluded that there was insufficient evidence supporting the need for these powers in the ACT; that the proposed expansion of police powers was not supported by justice stakeholders; and there were significant concerns about the impact that these powers would have on human rights under the ACT's Human Rights Act. The ACT government did, however, commit to continuing to keep a watch on knife-related violence and explore options to address it as appropriate.

It is in the spirit of this commitment and in light of recent events that I have moved the amendment circulated in my name. The amendment is in keeping with community expectations and ensuring we are approaching any change from an evidence base, first and foremost. ACT Policing is right to have brought the community's attention to the spike in knife-related arrests and incidents in the period that Mr Cain referred to, but one period of data does not necessarily present a pattern. That said, I also very much

value the points Mr Cain and other stakeholders have raised, including the risks about frisking for ACT Policing and what might be a less intrusive way of providing the community with a semblance of safety, if not increasing awareness that police may have particular powers.

With that in mind, we commit to reviewing the evidence with valued input from all relevant stakeholders, including and especially the AFPA, to inform consideration of whether to introduce legislation that would increase police powers, perhaps not necessarily in the way that Jack's Law is crafted—but not necessarily not either—but leaving that open for the consideration of the evidence and whether it is appropriate, and then what is the most appropriate legislation for a jurisdiction like the ACT.

But it starts with the evidence. That is why it is important for us to move this amendment today, which I understand has the support of the Greens and other members—but, regrettably, not the opposition. Again, I recognise that there has been a lot of constructive conversation in the last 16 hours since the motion was placed on the notice paper. It is a regret that we are not able to come to an exact agreement today, but I think there is certainly agreement regarding the broader intent.

This means that the issue remains on the agenda for this government and this Assembly. We will continue, at the very least, a watching brief. But, with this motion and this amendment, it also means that we are continuing to look very closely at the human rights, recognising that human rights do not have a hierarchy. In reviewing that evidence, we look forward to considering it through that lens and reporting back to the Assembly within this calendar year, again, in the spirit with which Mr Cain has brought this motion. I commend the amendment to the chamber.

**MS MORRIS** (Brindabella) (4.15): It is important that we are clear about what it is we are actually debating today. This debate is all about saving lives. We are talking about giving our police the tools that they need to keep our children, young adults, families and vulnerable community groups safe from knife crime. Tragically, a young 17-year-old Queensland man, Jack, had to lose his life from a senseless knife attack for governments around Australia to consider better ways to combat knife crime.

Knife crime is at risk of spiralling out of control in Canberra. In just five weeks, ACT Policing seized 48 knives at carjackings, assaults, burglaries and in public places. Children as young as 13 have been found carrying knives. Just last week, as we all know, Canberra Outlet Centre was placed into lockdown after an individual threatened innocent shoppers and staff with a machete.

Jack's parents, Brett and Belinda, have now dedicated their lives to honour the legacy of their son by pioneering the way for more effective preventative laws to combat knife crime in their son's name. While our police already have the power to stop and search a person if they reasonably suspect they are in possession of a knife, Jack's Law will give our police the tools that they need to conduct that search in a safe and dignified manner—dignified because, by introducing metal detection wands, police will be better able to preserve the dignity of a suspected person by conducting a search without needing to physically apprehend or touch them up and down; and safe, because it reduces the risk of assault against police officers.

Currently, the close proximity required to conduct searches leaves our frontline officers vulnerable to needlestick injuries. Our police put themselves in harm's way every day to keep our community safe. The very least that we can do as lawmakers is to give them the tools that they need to do their job so they can return home safely to their families at the end of each day.

We have previously heard from the ACT government and the former ACT Attorney-General, Shane Rattenbury, about why we could not possibly introduce lifesaving Jack's Law. They said there is insufficient evidence, a lack of support and human rights concerns. So let us just unpack some of those for a brief moment.

First to the evidence. The evidence is that knife crime can cause significant injury and death. At the end of January this year, ACT Policing issued an official warning about increasing knife crime following a surge in knife incidents. Since Jack's Law was introduced in Queensland in April 2023, 953 weapons have been seized through more than 10,500 wand operations carried out at Safe Night precincts, transport hubs, shopping centres and sporting and entertainment venues around the state. Across Queensland, police have now scanned more than 100,000 people, resulting in more than 4,800 offences, which were mostly weapons and drug related.

I note that Mr Rattenbury warned that Jack's Law risks minor offenders coming into contact with the criminal justice system for drug offences. But this is a baseless excuse to block lifesaving laws, given the ACT government has already decriminalised hard drugs. The reality is that every knife, every machete, every bladed instrument taken off our streets is a potential life saved.

Second is concerns from some stakeholders that wand use could lead to more intrusive searches if false positives are returned and potential racial profiling. Under sections 193 and 207 of the Crimes Act, police already have the powers to search someone suspected of carrying a knife. Jack's Law would allow them to conduct that search in a dignified and safe way without metal detection wands. In the very first instant a search is intrusive for everyone who is being searched. In contrast, a wand protects the dignity of more people by reducing the total number of people who would otherwise be subject to physically intrusive searches. There is no evidence to suggest that existing laws have been used to racially profile vulnerable groups. So it does not follow that Jack's Law will inevitably lead to racial profiling.

Our frontline police officers have an impeccable record and operate according to the highest standards of professionalism, accountability and responsibility in exercising the powers granted to them in this chamber. As legislators, we are able to draft laws in such a way that appropriate protections are put in place. We are also able to conduct a review of those laws to assess their use and effectiveness and ensure that they are not being misused. So, while those concerns may be well meaning, in the balance of things, they are no reason to prevent lifesaving laws when they can be addressed.

The final reason given by the former Attorney-General for blocking these lifesaving laws was the limitations they might pose on one's privacy, equality and freedom of movement. Allowing police to use metal detection wands affords more people the right to privacy by removing the need for physically intrusive searches. As a community, we accept that in some situations we may be required to be searched in the interest of

community safety—for example, at airports or even at roadside breath tests. We do this because we accept it is in the interests of everyone’s good to keep everyone safe and to save lives.

That is exactly what we are talking about and advocating for today—common sense; preventative laws to save lives from senseless knife crime. That is what it is all about. So I thank Mr Cain for bringing forward this very important issue to the chamber today, and I commend his motion to the Assembly.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (4.21): Like many Canberrans over the weekend and those in the chamber, I did see the footage from the Canberra Outlet centre of a man allegedly holding a knife up to another man, and I was taken aback by it. It is surprising footage. Retail workers and shoppers going about their business should not have to worry about being witness to or subject to this kind of antisocial behaviour.

My thoughts are with those people impacted by the weekend’s events and with those across our city more broadly who live with the long-term and devastating impact of knife-related offending. I also acknowledge the families of those in Queensland, including the Beasley family, and in New South Wales who have lost loved ones through knife-related crime.

In the normal visceral response to the kind of event we saw over the weekend, it is easy to let our feelings overwhelm us and for us to turn away from the evidence. However, the latest data I have seen is that Canberrans are comparatively fortunate and safe. The statistics that I have seen from ACT Policing do not show an increase in knife-related offending in the territory, such that would merit the introduction of legislation similar to Jack’s Law.

Jack’s Law was introduced in Queensland in 2021 following the tragic fatal stabbing of 17-year-old Jack Beasley. The law allows police to use metal detection wands in designated areas, without any requirement to reasonably suspect that the person being searched has a knife or other weapon.

The review out of Griffith University of Jack’s Law after 12 months of operation found there is little evidence that random knife-wanding powers are effective in reducing violence or deterring offending, as well as no evidence to suggest any significant effect on non-weapons offences, including violence offences. The only difference was an increase in detected drug offences, as Ms Morris just noted. This shows that these laws have a net widening impact that means minor offenders are more likely to come into contact with the criminal justice system. This is not the intention of the laws and, in my view, not a desirable outcome for the ACT.

It is critical that we only progress law reform where there is a solid evidence base, and the evidence I have seen here does not support the need to increase police search powers. Our police already have the power to search a person in a public place or a school where they suspect on reasonable grounds that the person has a knife in their possession. It is challenging to imagine what gap there could be in the existing suite of ACT Policing powers that could be filled by the introduction of Jack’s Law.

Let me outline what could be the reality of wandng legislation in Canberra. The police could stand at Woden bus interchange and wand everyone they feel like, without needing to have a reasonable suspicion that they are carrying a knife. This could include your 80-year-old nanna popping her head in to do a weekly shop.

**Mr Hanson:** Oh, come on, Shane!

**MR RATTENBURY:** In the morning, people going to work could be wanded at their local light rail stop, lanyard in hand.

**Mr Hanson:** Talk about a fear campaign!

**MR RATTENBURY:** Bear with me, Mr Hanson!

**Mr Hanson:** I'm bearing with you!

**MR RATTENBURY:** Police could walk up to a shopper in David Jones Canberra Centre and without a warrant, without reasonable suspicion the person has a knife, wand them. Now, I provide these examples partly with my tongue in my cheek, because the reality is that the police are unlikely to wand a nanna or a public servant bedazzled with their lanyard, or a patron of an upmarket department store. We know they are going to target whoever they think might be carrying a knife but without that thought needing to reach the level of reasonable suspicion. It is very literally the vibe of the person, which is dangerous because it leaves it to an individual officer, with all their inherent bias and prejudice, to decide who to target.

Advocates for wandng say it is less invasive than other means, like a strip search, and we heard Ms Morris make this point. But the reality is that any level of search by a police officer is invasive, and this would be occurring in public without any grounds, at the whim of an officer.

You could say the officers will be trained and act with discretion, but we know from the Queensland review that this did not happen. How do you train out inherent bias and prejudice? Queensland is trialling the legislation again, despite the worrying review from Griffith University, and I am concerned it is covering shopping centres now and not just nightclub precincts.

Shopping centres are one of the last few free public places that people can spend time. People can use the bathroom, wash up in a sink or fill their empty water bottles. Some shopping centres have sanitary products for free. People can sit indoors on lounge chairs, under air conditioning when it is hot outside and then be warmed by heating when Canberra's winter falls. There are power points and sometimes complimentary phone charges or free public telephones to use. The idea of police being able to randomly approach a person in this space based on nothing but their own whim, and no need for any reasonable suspicion or a warrant, is a significant impost on civil liberties and a grotesque step towards criminalising the young, the poor, the homeless or people who do not feel safe to be at home.

I am probably fine. I am a middle-aged white guy unlikely to draw police attention; although I am the local leader of the Greens, so you never know! I do jest, but the

situation is anything but laughable. If I did not look how I do—if I were younger, or I had darker skin, or I carried myself differently, or I dressed differently or responded when questioned by authority figures without the expected deference—I might not be met with the same disinterest from officers.

We know from the Queensland experience that police search lots of the same people multiple times, and it was mainly young people and often people they racially profiled. I would hold very genuine fears for Canberra's First Nations community and our children and young people should this kind of legislation come into effect.

When ACT Policing was consulted last year on these potential reforms, they noted that increased powers may have benefits for the community and police safety, and allow for a less invasive and faster way to search for a knife, but they also pointed out that law reform may not actually deter offending or the associated risks of knife crime. In addition, ACT Policing raised concerns about expanded powers creating increased community expectations and resourcing implications for implementation.

In May 2024, as has been noted, I made a speech in this place which responded to Mr Cain's original motion on this issue, and I echo that sentiment today. At the time, I spoke about how the government that I was part of at that point was not prepared to introduce laws which are not needed or justified in the ACT context and how we considered very closely whether to introduce increased police search powers for knives in the territory. Informed by statistics, an analysis of the approaches in other jurisdictions, as well as engagement with our justice and legal stakeholders, the then government determined not to introduce increased police search powers at that time.

This decision was for three critical reasons, which are outlined in my response to the motion. First, there was insufficient evidence supporting the need for these powers in the ACT; second, these powers were not supported by justice stakeholders; and third, there were significant concerns about the impact that these powers would have on human rights under the ACT's Human Rights Act. The government committed to keeping a watching brief on the issue, and I have no reason to suspect that this was not done in the time that has passed since we spoke about that in May 2024

I do intend on behalf of the Greens to support an amended version of Mr Cain's motion today, one which has the government revisit the available evidence and come back to the Assembly within the calendar year. This is the amendment that the Attorney has moved. This is because good policy is based on evidence. It does not react in a kneejerk fashion to particular events, nor is it based on feelings about discrete episodes.

I also support the calls that relate to supporting frontline responders, and to ending knife-related violence, that are contained in the original motion. I understand Mr Emerson is going to move an amendment, and without pre-empting his comments, I indicate the Greens will be supporting that amendment. We believe there is limited value in treating the symptom and not the cause of knife crime. We are more interested in the government investing in programs and services that provide support to people who commit knife crime, or who are heading that way.

I am more interested in why people are carrying knives. If it is more than before, is it primarily young people? What is happening in their lives that is causing them to make



the decision to carry a knife? Can we help them live more safely, giving them access to services that will help them make different choices to empower them to resolve conflict differently and to manage emotions in different, healthy ways?

I make this speech in the days, weeks and months before a federal election, a time when the major parties tend to lean increasingly towards a law-and-order rhetoric. In the context of global politics as well, I do know that Canberrans are uncertain and perhaps fearful of the overall circumstances of the world we live in. We should all feel safe to go about our lives without being scared of knives being pulled around us, but we should also be able to move through society free from unreasonable and unjustifiable police scrutiny.

I do note the observations that Ms Morris made. She focussed on dignity and the difference between being searched with a handheld wand and being frisk-searched, and I think it is a fair and reasonable point. I make this observation, though: that is not what the motion is actually asking for. If the motion simply said that we want to empower police to use handheld wands as part of searching somebody, that is a discussion we are very prepared to have, because I think the point Ms Morris makes is fair—that there is a material difference for the individual between being frisked down and being scanned with a handheld metal detecting wand. But what this motion actually is asking for is the ability for police to stop anybody in a designated place and search them without any suspicion—without any reasonable belief that they know you are about to commit a crime and any reasonable belief that you are carrying a weapon. That is the bit that I am concerned about.

As I touched on earlier, it escalates quickly for some people—up the criminal scale. If a young person is approached by police and they feel they are being a bit picked on or a bit picked out from the crowd and they give a bit of lip back and they fail the attitude test, suddenly you are into an escalating cycle. We all know this happens. The police do not like to have their authority challenged. We have seen these circumstances play out, and suddenly you are up the scale—for perhaps resisting or obstructing a public official. This is the outcome that can eventuate for minority groups who feel targeted by the police in being subjected to these kinds of powers. That is what we are concerned about. So if the opposition want to have a conversation about more dignified ways for people to be searched, we are all ears. We are on board. We will have that conversation. But we are not on board for a proposed law that invites potential targeting of profiled groups.

In the absence of any evidence that shows increases in knife-related offending in the ACT and new studies of the jurisdictions that have enacted or are trialling wand legislation that demonstrate efficiency in reducing knife-related offending, I am sceptical of any benefits of this legislation and particularly alert to its potential harms. I certainly look forward to the outcome of the government's review of the available evidence later in the year and to further discussions on areas that people do want to try and work on that have an evidence base and are genuinely fair to all members of our community.

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (4.34): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr Cain and Ms Morris for bringing this here today, and although Mr Rattenbury and others are trying to characterise this as some sort of kneejerk reaction to what happened on the

weekend, that is certainly not the case. Mr Cain has been on the case for a long time on this and, in fact, we were discussing this in anticipation of this sitting week for some time. I think the matters of the weekend have just highlight how important it is and how this is the sort of law that is needed to prevent that sort of issue happening in our community.

Community safety must be a priority. Supporting our police and giving our police the powers and the tools that they need to keep our community safe must be paramount. And it is quite clear from the debate today, and from previous debates, that it is only the Canberra Liberals who will make that a priority.

I speak in support of this law, Jack's Law, today. Mr Cain and Ms Morris have outlined the need for it very clearly. But this is not the first time that we have seen this government, the Labor Party, and then the Greens—whether they are in government or not—oppose sensible law reform aimed at giving our police officers on the ground the tools and the resources they need.

We have called for more police for years—for years! We came to this place and proved in the last term that there were fewer police on the ground than there had been a decade prior. Finally, after that pressure—after Mr Rattenbury and those opposite, Ms Cheyne, voted against that increase—the noise got too loud, and they accepted the Liberal Party position.

On tasers—the police needed tasers down at the front line; only sergeants had them. We said that was unacceptable. If police are confronting people who potentially have mental health issues, and they want a non-lethal option, the constable on the ground has to have that resource. The government said “no”. We got that introduced as well, through pressure.

Assaults on frontline staff—we introduced legislation to stop assaults on frontline police. They said “no”. It took us time and time and time again, and eventually this government, kicking and screaming through pressure—“Yes, we will have that sort of legislation.”

Random roadside drug testing—this is a government that voted against, and Mr Rattenbury will remember this—

**Mr Rattenbury:** We voted with you for that!

**MR HANSON:** You did, but you were not in the government then, were you. The Labor Party—Mr Stanhope—called it “redneck”. He called it “redneck”! And I remember you talking about—as Ms Cheyne knows—the hierarchy of rights.

I remember those laws were encouraged by Alison Ryan, a community activist whose daughter Amy had died; she was a 15-year-old girl who had been killed by a random drug driver. I remember, after Mr Stanhope talked about the hierarchy of rights and human rights, that she said to me, “What about the rights of my daughter?”

What about consorting laws? What about the need for consorting laws that we called for? This government said, “No; human rights must be a hierarchy.” We warned that

there would be problems arising from that. And what did we see? A fourfold increase in the number of bikie gangs and a decade-long bikie war in the ACT.

So, again, what we have is the Canberra Liberals coming forward, in this case Mr Cain, saying that we need Jack's Law, because more studies and more talk about the hierarchy of human rights is not going to get the job done. And what we have heard today from Ms Cheyne is that she thinks we have got to have an evidence-based look at this. Mr Cain has been talking about this for a long time! What have you been doing? Sitting on your hands not doing anything.

It is quite clear when we hear about the evidence—the previous Attorney-General of this government outlined what he thinks about these laws. We know what is going to happen. This will not be evidence-based; this is ideologically based. Mr Rattenbury thinks that the police will impose some racist sort of view to it. He said, “It's going to be about skin colour; it's going to be about prejudice.” He does not trust our police. He does not like our police. He does not trust our police. He quite clearly believes that if they are given these powers, they will apply them unfairly in a prejudiced way and in a racist way. I do not support that.

What I want to see is our police have the powers and the tools they need to keep our community safe. Surely, that has to be our priority. That has to be our priority, and we are seeing the evidence. You saw it play out. The statistics that Ms Morris talked about—48 knives in five weeks. Do you need more evidence than that? Did you not watch what happened at the Canberra Outlet centre on the weekend? The suggestion that these laws are going to somehow lead to groups in society being persecuted is an excuse.

We know, with the evidence from this review—I can almost guarantee what is going to happen. The evidence base will come back—because we know the position of this mob opposite, the Greens party and the Labor Party—and they will say “No, no, we've looked at this; we don't need it.” That is just what they did with the consorting laws, and that led to a 10-year bikie war—just as they dragged their heels with tasers; just as they did with police numbers; just as they with random roadside drug testing, every step of the way.

We need to send a very clear message to our community about community safety and about knife crime and about carrying knives being an unacceptable thing. We will let people know that carrying a machete or a knife in a public place, potentially with the intent to use it, is unacceptable. But if you listen to what Mr Rattenbury said, he said that he is interested in, and this is a quote, “finding out why people are carrying more knives”.

He wants to do some sort of study to ask, “Why are people carrying more knives? What are the underlying reasons?” Well, yes—that might be interesting. That might be of interest to an academic sitting here or a politician sitting in their nice shiny suit in the Assembly; yes, it probably is of interest. But of much more interest to our community and to our police is to make sure that we are safe. That is what we are about. It is a very different world view. The hierarchy of rights that they talk about opposite, and the interest in wondering why people are carrying more knives—that is their world view. Making sure our police have the tools, making sure our police are safe and making sure

that we are safe is what we are about.

I do not think there is anything particularly wrong with doing a review. Do a review as much as you like. You have been waiting a long time to do it. Mr Cain has been talking about this for a long time. And if this motion today has prompted a review, that is a good thing—that is a good thing. But let me be very clear: I have no faith in this lot opposite to do a review that will come back with a reasonable outcome, because we have seen it. We have seen it from the Labor Party on random roadside drug testing; we have seen it on police numbers; we have seen it on consorting laws; we have seen it on many other things. Their so-called “evidence based” is ideology based. We have heard it. We have heard the view from the former Attorney-General. He has laid out what the government thinks and what the position is within that organisation.

I commend Mr Cain for his advocacy. He has given a lot of thought to this. The Liberal Party is not against ever looking at a problem, but we have reached a point where we have seen the evidence. We have spoken to the experts on the ground. We have seen what has played out in other jurisdictions. What we want to do is make sure that we keep our police safe and our community safe, and we want to reduce the number of people carrying knives and potential knife crime in the ACT.

Let me be very clear: if we see all these incidents increase and further incidents of knife crime and we then have to come back at a later stage to introduce Jack’s Law because someone has been injured or killed—for goodness sake, let’s hope not—then you will have to reflect on this moment. We have got an opportunity here. We have got an opportunity here to keep our community safe, and let’s take it.

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (4.43): Community safety and supporting our police to keep our community safe are a priority for ACT Labor. I reiterate colleagues’ concerns regarding the incident on the weekend at the Canberra Outlet Centre, which was truly shocking.

I will begin by setting the record straight for the Assembly: knife crime has remained constant over the past five years. There is not an increase in knife crime in the ACT. To reiterate, from ACT Policing’s figures, on average, in the past five years, there have been 114 apprehensions of a possession of a knife without reasonable excuse reported to ACT Policing. This has remained incredibly constant over the last five years and, this year, it is shaping up to be exactly the same number.

I also support Attorney-General Cheyne’s amendment calling for an evidence-based response to understanding knife crime and the drivers behind it. There are already existing laws which make carrying a knife an offence and give police powers to search people for knives.

The possession of a knife in a public place or school without a reasonable excuse is an offence under section 382 of the Crimes Act. For these purposes, self-defence and self-protection are not a reasonable excuse to carry a knife in a public place. The Crimes Act also provides powers for police to search a person for a knife if the officer has a suspicion on reasonable grounds. This includes conducting a frisk or ordinary search

under section 193. Sections 223 and 224 also allow for these searches to be done at the time of arrest. Section 207 allows for police to stop and search a person and seize a weapon under the circumstances of a serious offence or if it has been stolen or obtained unlawfully. As I said, there is no evidence to suggest that knife-related crimes are increasing in Canberra.

I also note in this discussion the importance of protecting frontline workers from violence in our community, and reiterate the job of ACT Policing in apprehending people and offenders who may be carrying a knife, and the risk that that poses. Section 26A of the Crimes Act provides that it is an offence to assault a frontline community service provider. For the purposes of this section, a frontline community service provider means a police officer, a protective services officer, a corrections worker and a member of an emergency service under the Emergencies Act 2004. This includes both people who are employed and those who volunteer with the ACT Emergency Services Agency, and the maximum sentence for this offence is two years.

I will continue to stand up for our emergency services personnel and police, and support the essential service they provide to every single person in the territory. I also look forward to working with Minister Cheyne on this review to see an evidence-based response to addressing knife crime in the ACT.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 15

Noes 8

Yvette Berry	Marisa Paterson	Chiaka Barry
Andrew Braddock	Michael Pettersson	Peter Cain
Fiona Carrick	Shane Rattenbury	Leanne Castley
Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel	Ed Cocks
Jo Clay	Rachel Stephen-Smith	Jeremy Hanson
Thomas Emerson	Caitlin Tough	James Milligan
Laura Nuttall	Taimus Werner-Gibbings	Deborah Morris
Suzanne Orr		Mark Parton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**Ms Cheyne's** amendment agreed to.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (4.51): I thank Mr Cain for raising this matter, for engaging with me and my office in good faith and for agreeing to support my amendment to this motion. While I have serious reservations about the prospect of introducing Jack's Law type legislation in the ACT, I will be supporting this motion, as amended by the government. I will also be moving the amendment that has been circulated in my name.

I preface this by saying that knife crime has no place in the ACT. Its presence in our community threatens the safety and social harmony on which we, as Canberrans, pride

ourselves. I do not want my family or any of our families feeling afraid of encountering knife crime in public spaces. I have also never put my life on the line to preserve my community's safety, so I can understand and respect the absolutely justifiable concern police officers may have for their own safety when it comes to concealed weapons.

However, it is vital that any response to knife crime be evidence based, targeted and balanced. I am not supportive of creating a surveillance state, one that criminalises some of the most marginalised in our society. We cannot afford short-sighted reactions to isolated incidents, however terrifying they might be and however justified such reactions might feel.

These proposed measures may be well intentioned, but enabling the police to search people without reasonable suspicion represents a gross breach of personal liberties and of due process. Is this really what we want for Canberra, where anyone can be stopped by police without reasonable suspicion?

Evidence from our interjurisdictional counterparts who have introduced such laws suggests that First Nations people, people of colour and other vulnerable cohorts will inevitably be disproportionately targeted if this legislation comes to the ACT. In the context of the devastating over-representation of First Nations people in our criminal justice system, it would be irresponsible of us to pursue this avenue without considering early intervention and prevention opportunities to address the underlying causes of knife crime.

In the ACT, we have the largest Indigenous incarceration gap in the country and Australia's highest rates of racial prejudice experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It would be delusional to pretend that, notwithstanding the best intentions of politicians and police officers, racial profiling would not be an inevitable consequence of following Queensland's lead.

Indeed, Griffith University's review of the Queensland's police service wandring trial, which was mentioned earlier, found that racial profiling was evident in police decisions to search and that only one in 100 wandings detected a weapon, meaning 99 per cent of people were unnecessarily surveilled and potentially left feeling degraded without good reason.

A prominent local First Nations woman contacted me with strong concerns about this matter earlier today. She said:

My concern is that expanding police powers will disproportionately impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, especially our vulnerable young people. We don't just live with over-policing; we relive it through our children and grandchildren. We live with that fear every day. We have seen time and again that tougher policing does not always mean safer communities. Instead, it risks increasing harassment and deepening distrust.

We have to work on better police relations first and instil this important aspect right at the beginning of a police officer's career. If we are serious about tackling knife crime, we should be focusing on real solutions like youth engagement, mental health support and community-led initiatives that address the root causes, not just the symptoms, and reflect that violent crime comes from people of all races

and cultures. Anything that allows profiling to steer actions never worked.

I stand here echoing her concerns. When governments make policies based on one variable, without giving due consideration to the complex factors at play, perverse outcomes ensue. In a jurisdiction where we often hear of limited police resourcing, surely, this cannot be the best use of our dedicated local police force.

As such, I support Ms Cheyne's amendment, which we have just passed, to consider and report on the evidence base to address the issue of knife crime in our community. I also propose a further amendment which calls on the government to explore evidence-based wraparound programs to address the underlying causes of knife crime and other violent crimes, such as poor mental health, poverty and substance use.

Voting in the affirmative on this amendment will uphold the ACT's commitment to human rights, protect Canberrans from overreach on the part of our criminal justice system and create an opportunity to provide a targeted, effective, well-considered solution to this complex community problem. I move:

Add new paragraph (3)(d):

“(d) explore opportunities to implement evidence-based wraparound programs to address the underlying causes of knife crime and other violent crime such as poor mental health, poverty and substance use.”.

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (4.55): I have already spoken briefly about Mr Emerson's amendment and indicated our support for it, but I want to thank him for bringing up something that is important. People do things for a reason, and I do not want anyone to have a good reason for carrying around a weapon in our community.

I am sure no child in our community dreams of one day growing up, perpetrating crime and harming others. I am sure that is not their life goal. Finding out why these situations arise, why people are on a life trajectory, so to speak, is a really important role that we all have to play, in our personal interactions, in our role in this Assembly, and in government, if that is the case.

Let us try and get to the root cause of any malaise in our community where others have some sort of propensity for harming others, which, ultimately, is no good for them as well. Let us support any measure in broader government policy to try and find out why problems are created in the first place. I thank Mr Emerson for drawing that to our attention.

**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) (4.57): The government will be supporting this amendment, and we appreciate Mr Emerson working with us and bringing it to our attention early.

I am absolutely baffled by the contributions from Mr Cain and Mr Hanson regarding understanding why people engage in knife-related crime. Mr Cain says anything we can learn about it would be terrific, whereas, just five minutes ago, Mr Hanson was absolutely attacking Mr Rattenbury for saying that he had an interest in understanding

why people engage in this behaviour. I do not understand what is going on over there. To be honest, I never have; hopefully, they will be able to talk to each other and come up with a unified position.

I do agree with Mr Cain and I do agree with Mr Emerson: it is important that we understand why, and that we also understand, when we know why, what more can be done to support vulnerable people and young people who are engaging in these crimes, and deter it before it happens.

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (4.58): On Mr Emerson's amendment, which Mr Cain has indicated we will be supporting, I want to address the verballing from the Attorney-General. As we have said, we support the review. But Mr Rattenbury said he is more interested in why more people are carrying knives and he is not supporting Jack's Law. The point that we are making is that you need Jack's Law; let's get on with it. We have been talking for a long time, and the evidence is there. We are of that view.

It is very clear that Mr Rattenbury has an ideological opposition to Jack's Law. He does not support Jack's Law. He does not want the police to have the power, because he thinks they will misuse it. That is a very different view to the one that we have. He said he is more interested in wondering why people carry more knives. That is the point I was making: we think you can walk and chew gum at the same time. We think that you can keep our community safe and that we can actually implement and have Jack's Law—and, then, having a look at the underlying causes is never a bad idea either. That is the point that we would make.

If you had brought in an amendment that added to what Mr Cain has said, I am sure he would have supported it. I am sure he would have said, "That is great; let's have Jack's Law and let's have a review." But you have chosen a path. We wanted to have both—we would have been supportive both—and you have chosen a path to exclude Jack's Law, to take the necessary action, because you do not like the police, you do not trust the police and you are not going to put community safety where it needs to be.

**Mr Emerson's** amendment to the motion, as amended, agreed to.

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (5.00): In closing, I would like to make a couple of comments in response to the police minister. We do not need to have an increase in knife crime to do something about knife crime. It is a problem. I hope I have not misunderstood Mr Rattenbury, but we ought to trust our police. We trust our police. We give them powers under law to do things that no other citizen can do. We even give them arms. We give them weapons. We put them in a uniform. We train them to carry out those duties responsibly for the sake of the community. They take on a risk becoming a police officer. They take on a risk. I thank our police for what they do. Where does the argument come from that we should not introduce new laws for police powers because we may not be able to trust the police? I hope I have not misread your argument, Mr Rattenbury. I hope no member in this place would say something like that.

As has been touched on by a couple of the speakers—the Attorney-General and Mr Emerson in particular—I want to say that, if the Canberra Liberals have helped this government and all to get on board with the Greens to produce better outcomes for the community, we are going to keep coming up with good ideas. That is our commitment.



That is why we are here. So I will continue to engage, as I have this very week, to persuade members in this place and to talk to the government, to talk to the Greens and to talk to the two Independents and say, “I think this is a really good idea. My colleagues support it. How about you get on board?”—because it is all about making our city a greater and better city.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Papers**

### **Motion to take note of papers**

**MR DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Pursuant to standing order 211A, I propose the question:

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

### **Planning and the missing middle housing reforms—government response**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (5.02): I want to speak briefly about one of the papers tabled, and I thank the minister for tabling this paper in response to my motion of 5 February about studies undertaken to support the development of our missing middle. Two years ago, I moved a motion in this Assembly to conduct an inquiry into the various models of density and zoning that were needed to deliver missing-middle housing. The Assembly failed to support that motion.

Since that time, the planning agency has engaged a number of consultants to support the government to make informed decisions, and this is really, really good. SGS Economics, Urbis, Stewart Architecture and Purdon Planning all bring a mix of local, national and international experience to the tricky question of how we make change to the make-up of our city while maintaining the character of our city for the people who live here and for people who will live here in future.

I am really pleased to see that some two years after I thought we needed to start making changes to our planning system, the Minister for Planning has announced that he intends to bring forward this work. The missing-middle work will see a draft design guide by the middle of the year. That draft design guide will aim to enhance housing diversity and density, and it will be accompanied by a report prepared by Purdon Planning. We are really pleased that this will be published too.

The development of the draft design guide has been informed by input from design and building professionals. But it is also really important that people who will be directly affected by the missing middle are also provided the option for input, and I am pleased to see that in the statement as well. The people who live there and the people who might want to live there know the local character of the area they live in or want to live in and they know things that the planning professionals do not always know. So it is really important that we make that space and get those views in. I am sure there will be a lot of different views expressed through the community engagement on these design guides. I am encouraged that the minister is committed to making these documents available. I understand the need for cabinet to have all of the evidence available to it,

but the people of Canberra also need to see this evidence.

The ACT Greens are really pleased to see the government moving on this matter at last. We are in the middle of a housing crisis and we need to take action. We are also experiencing a climate and extinction crisis. Those crises are interlinked and our most environmentally sensitive areas are impacted more harshly than other areas. It is really, really important that we do this work, that we do it quickly and that we do it well.

The Minister for the Environment this morning highlighted in her statement how people's wellbeing is enhanced in places that have greater biodiversity and healthy ecosystems. That is why the Greens took to the last election an overarching initiative that we need to establish an urban growth boundary. We need to work out how to do missing middle really well in Canberra and we need to set an urban growth boundary, so we are not endlessly sprawling into habitat areas and constantly putting more and more of our species at risk of extinction.

So I thank the Minister for Planning for his statement. I look forward to participating in the ongoing development of the planning policies, as do many in our community, and I am looking forward to seeing how this will increase our housing within our footprint.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Statements by members**

### **Clean Up Australia Day—Lake Tuggeranong**

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (5.06): I spent my Sunday at Clean Up Australia Day, Lake Tuggeranong edition, which was impeccably run by the Tuggeranong Community Council, the Tuggeranong Lake Carers, the Southern ACT Catchment Group and the Lake Tuggeranong Sea Scouts. I and a few members of the Brindie Greens team along with other volunteers headed out to the Sea Scouts Hall bright and early to give Lake Tuggers a well-needed clean.

Equipped with litter pickers and lake sifters from Didi and Jeff from the TCC, we meticulously scoured the bank of the lake. I did have an unfortunate run-in with a huge piece of fishing line, giving me the bird experience firsthand. I saw many purple swamp hens and I believe it was a tailed emperor butterfly—very exciting. Maybe it was a placebo, but I noticed more and more wildlife the more rubbish we cleaned up.

It was great to see the community participating in the clean-up event and several people coming up to us to show their support for a cleaner environment. We had families and members of the community asking questions and telling us they were keen to do the next one. We had some help from the iconic Lady of the Lake herself, Ms Nicole Lawder, who paddled over with her boat, took some mercy on us and grabbed some pieces that were out of our reach.

You will probably hear from some of my colleagues today, demonstrating the Canberra wide support for Clean Up Australia Day—although we did start to get a bit competitive; and I would say that we won. Just to promote the Tuggeranong Community Council again, I believe they run a clean-up event twice a year. I hope to see many more people participating next year and, even better, contributing to a cleaner

environment every day.

### **Clean Up Australia Day—Evatt**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (5.08): Belconnen is a great friend to Tuggeranong—and there is no competition involved. We were really happy in the Ginninderra Greens. We joined one of our local Landcare groups over at Croke Place in Evatt, and that was a lot of fun. Unfortunately for us, I think the Lions Club, the Landcare group and Mick have done too good a job keeping the place clean and we had to really search quite hard. We did pull out some pretty unusual stuff from the waterway, and it is pretty important to get that. We found a shoe. We put the four-year-old member of the group in charge of lolly wrappers, because she had the best pattern recognition of any of us to do that work.

It was a really good opportunity to get a lot of people down to that Landcare area who did not actually know it was there. They had not seen the playground; they had not seen the wetland; and they had not seen all of the birdlife and all of the wildlife that we have there. So I think a lot more people will now be visiting that place and will probably be joining Landcare as well. It was a lot of fun.

### **Lakes and waterways—Jerrabomberra wetlands**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (5.08): I want to speak briefly about the important work underway—and my query was in my capacity as shadow planning minister—to protect one of Canberra’s greatest ecological and cultural assets, the Jerrabomberra Wetlands. Recently, I had the pleasure of meeting with Peter Taylor and Professor Peter Bridgewater, and I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank them both for their leadership and vision in championing the future of this remarkable site.

The Jerrabomberra Wetlands are so much more than a green space; they are a sanctuary for over 170 bird species, including internationally protected migratory birds, and hold deep cultural significance as part of Ngunnawal country, with a history spanning over 25,000 years. Their work to raise the profile of the wetlands and explore wetlands city accreditation is a chance for Canberra to lead globally.

But this is about more than just a title; this is about securing the future of our city. Protecting the wetlands means protecting the health of our city and affirming its biodiversity. It means thoughtful planning, balancing growth with preservation and ensuring that our natural landscapes are woven into the daily life of our community. This is how we can create a Canberra that thrives, where there is a natural blending of the manmade and the natural, which are intrinsic to our reputation as the bush capital of this wonderful country.

*Discussion concluded.*

### **Adjournment**

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

## **Crime—women’s safety**

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (5.10): On the first day of this month, I am sorry to say that my part of Canberra was the scene of an extremely regrettable, horrible moment which pretty much happened in my backyard. It happened at around sunrise on the fire trail at Tuggeranong Hill, just a few hundred metres from our home in Theodore.

The fire trails of Tuggeranong Hill are absolutely perfect for walking, for running and for just chilling. On the Saturday morning of the weekend just gone, at 7.20 am, a local woman was out running on those trails and, without warning, she was grabbed from behind by a man.

Police are still seeking witnesses and information. The woman broke free from the man. She ran away, before calling police. One of the things I am thinking is that I cannot begin to imagine how fast her heart would have been beating. I cannot begin to imagine the level of fear. This clown, according to police, was a man who was Caucasian in appearance, in his late 20s to early 30s, with brown, shoulder-length hair. He also had a black electric scooter with him at the time of the incident. The police investigation continues.

I discussed this matter with a stack of constituents over the weekend. In particular, I heard from my old friend Penny Leemhuis. Penny is a member of a women’s only outdoor group, and she is absolutely beside herself. She told me that many women would love to run. She said, “We’d love to run, hike or walk on our own, but we can’t, because we just don’t feel safe, and it’s just so unfair.”

Penny said to me, “Have you read ‘Would you rather come across a bear or a man?’” She said that it explains it all. I responded to her in part by saying that, unfortunately—and this is one of the sad aspects of this—it is virtually impossible for a man to fully understand. I run and walk a lot. I often do it at darker times of the day, and never in my life has it ever crossed my mind that I may be the victim of an assault, a sexual assault, while undertaking that pursuit. It has never, ever crossed my mind.

As much as men empathise and support, we cannot possibly have a full comprehension of this. I am absolutely crushed by it, as is my old radio friend Brent Ford, who is a trail runner from hell. He has reached out to his community. He and a group of other trail runners, male and female, will be doing a little run on the Tuggeranong Hill fire trails on Sunday morning at 7.15 am. I will be joining them, because it is important.

Brent said to me, “Over the weekend, as the shock went through our trail community, I felt the need to do something; my friends were talking about not wanting to run outside.” Brent said, “I wanted to take a stance and to say that it’s not okay in Canberra or anywhere, and that we won’t stand for it.” He said, “I’m trying to state emphatically that this type of behaviour won’t be tolerated, and to bring our running community closer together and stand or walk and run together to say this is not on.”

Please feel free to join us, if you are free, at 7.15 on Sunday morning. We will meet in the Callister Crescent car park near the electrical substation. I gather we are going to do around eight kilometres. The more the merrier.

**Ukraine-Russia war—third anniversary**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (5.15): I rise today to mark the third-year anniversary of the brutal, immoral and illegal invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. On Monday, 24 February I attended a deeply moving memorial service to commemorate this solemn day at the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canberra.

The occasion was attended by numerous ambassadors and dignitaries, and included my friend and colleague Ms Chiaka Barry, Alicia Payne MP and David Smith MP. The ceremony included a special prayer service, a wonderful speech by the Ambassador of Ukraine to Australia, His Excellency Vasyl Myroshnychenko, and a symbolic candlelit vigil to honour those who have lost their lives due to the conflict. The unveiling of the new cross the day before at the church served as a powerful symbol of hope and faith for the Australian Ukrainian community.

I want sincerely to thank His Excellency the Ukrainian Ambassador, and the Ukrainian community here in the ACT and across Australia, who gathered in Canberra and elsewhere to mark this sad anniversary. The strength, resilience and relentless commitment to fighting for freedom against authoritarianism demonstrated by the Ukrainians inspires us all.

As Australians come together in solidarity with Ukraine, it is crucial that we also reflect on our own nation's role in this terrible conflict. Recently, we witnessed deeply concerning remarks from the US President, who referred to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as a dictator. These comments were not only false but dangerously dismissive of a leader who has shown immense courage and resilience in the face of unimaginable hardship.

I echo the words of federal Liberal leader Peter Dutton MP, who has rightly stated that President Trump got it wrong, and cautioned against supporting Vladimir Putin's dictatorial regime. Furthermore, the world watched in dismay an incredible interview between the President, the Vice President and President Zelensky in front of cameras. I am sure it was one of the most watched videos of recent times. It seemed deeply disrespectful and bullying against a great friend of Australia. There was incredibly concerning news today, as we are probably all aware, of the halting of American military aid to Ukraine.

In this moment of global tension, we must stand firm with Ukraine, because to do otherwise is basically to advocate for a dictatorial regime doing whatever it likes when it likes. We should reaffirm our commitment to respectful, open and principled diplomacy.

It is through unity, shared values and unwavering support for sovereign nations under illegal attack that we will maintain global peace and security. Ukraine's fight for survival serves as a poignant reminder that peace and democracy are not a given and must be protected. Peace and democracy in Ukraine should be defended. I am proud that our nation and the two major political parties, at the very least, to my understanding, are standing with the people of Ukraine, and the people of Australia of Ukrainian heritage.

“Slava Ukraini”: glory to Ukraine.

### **Clean Up Australia Day 2025**

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (5.18): I would like to join my colleagues in calling out Clean Up Australia Day. I, like them, spent my weekend with an enthusiastic group of volunteers, including, most pleasingly, a significant number of children, to help tidy up our local neighbourhoods.

We decided to focus our attention on the heritage track in Harrison, and made a very small contribution, but, when you consider the thousands of groups across the entirety of Australia that turned out, it was a contribution to making our country a better place. In fact, 22 million Australians over the past three decades have participated in Clean Up Australia Day, and every one of them should be applauded.

I also wish it was not required. There are too many items, too many wrappers and too much plastic, ending up in our playgrounds, in our parks and in our waterways. Therefore we need to stop this at the source rather than cleaning it up at the end. We need to refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle and compost. Those are the ways to ensure that we maintain our environment, maintain our tidy cities, and ensure that we have a community we can be proud of.

### **Canberra Day Appeal Fun Run**

**MS BARRY** (Ginninderra) (5.20): I want to use this opportunity to remind us of an event that is coming to our shores next week. Next Monday, 10 March, I will be excited to join many in our community for the annual Hands Across Canberra Fun Run. This wonderful event is not just about fitness; it is about bringing people together to support our local charity and make a meaningful difference in our community.

The Hands Across Canberra Fun Run is an inclusive event where participants of all ages and abilities come together to run, walk or jog near Lake Burley Griffin. It is a fantastic opportunity to enjoy our city’s stunning scenery, get active and, most importantly, raise funds for local causes that directly support those in need.

Every year this event helps to raise essential funds for Canberra-based charities and organisations. By participating, every runner, worker or supporter is making a meaningful impact on the lives of others, whether it is by supporting those experiencing homelessness, improving mental health services or providing resources for disadvantaged youth—all things that I am really passionate about.

The fun run embodies the spirit of community and compassion, and I am looking forward to seeing many people out there—including you, Mr Speaker—and not only getting active but also contributing to this very meaningful cause.

Today, I encourage all of us in the Assembly to participate in this event next Monday. Let us lace up our running shoes, gather our family, friends and colleagues, and make this year’s Hands Across Canberra Fun Run the best one yet. It is a healthy, fun and meaningful way to kick off our Canberra Day celebrations. I encourage you all to participate. I look forward to seeing you all there.

**Marilyn and Peter Ralston—tribute**

**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) (5.22): I rise this evening, belatedly, to congratulate Marilyn Ralston and Peter Ralston OAM on being the ACT's Senior Australians of the Year.

I have known Peter and Marilyn for a little while, and I am absolutely delighted for them. It is very worthwhile to express exactly why they are such special people and why they have this honour of being the ACT Senior Australians for the next 10 or so months.

Peter is the founder of the Achilles Running Club. Back in 2013, he and Marilyn founded that, and Peter remains the president. This is an initiative that enables individuals who are blind or who may have another disability to partner with a guide who can help them to participate in community events like fun runs, park runs and other initiatives.

Peter himself, in the last three years, has guided more than 120 runners. With his efforts, and the efforts of the Achilles club at large, hundreds of runs have been completed. Several blind members have each reached hundreds of park runs. As an avid park runner, Mr Speaker, I know you will appreciate just what an achievement that is.

I also know Peter and Marilyn through their contribution to the Belconnen Lions Club, of which I am lucky enough to be an honorary member. I have spent quite a bit of time with Peter on the barbecues over the last few years. I will see him next week at the balloons, and I saw him last week at the barbecue for the Gift of Life Walk, which was terrific. Peter and Marilyn are always putting their hands up, rolling up their sleeves, getting involved and uplifting spirits. Most importantly, Lions is about raising money that is then, through volunteer efforts, contributed to quite extraordinary community efforts.

Peter has been a member of the Belconnen Lions for at least three decades, and that is probably underselling it. It is a long period of time, and he has many good friends in that club as well. In addition, Marilyn volunteers with St John's Care in Reid. Both of them are regular attendees at the Croke Place Landcare site, which we heard about earlier. It was a clean-up site for Clean Up Australia Day. I am not surprised that there was very little rubbish to be picked up, because there are a lot of people, including Marilyn and Peter, and, of course, the convener there, Mick Brice, who spend hours upon hours ensuring that it is beautiful, ensuring that the education opportunities there are realised and, most especially, ensuring that as many people as possible can enjoy the environment there.

I congratulate Marilyn and Peter. They give so much to their community and they are very worthy Senior Australians of the Year.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 5.25 pm.**