



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

6 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 **Wednesday, 19 March 2025**.

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MR SPEAKER (Mr Parton) (10.00): Members:

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

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

This is Ngunnawal country.
Today we are all meeting 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.

Economy—tourism and events

Ministerial statement

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10:02): Each year the government runs and funds a diverse range of events in Canberra, aligned with the goal of our 2030 Tourism Strategy to grow the value of the visitor economy to \$5 billion by 2030.

Already this year, Canberrans and visitors have attended, I am pleased to say in great numbers, a wide range of events, including New Year’s Eve, Summernats, Australia Day, the Festival of Speed, the National Multicultural Festival, and the Royal Canberra Show, to name a few. We are now in the middle of the very popular Enlighten Festival, so it is timely to highlight the positive impacts that events have on our community, jobs and the economy.

The government’s ongoing efforts to deliver, fund and support a quality calendar of events each year is a recognition of the economic, social and community benefits provided by a diverse events sector. Events help to shape Canberra’s identity, and they can generate tourism, which positively impacts the territory’s economy and supports local business. The best example of this, clearly, is Floriade in spring.

Our events calendar is carefully managed each year, within, obviously, a tight budget, to ensure that we have a range of major and community events that are spread throughout the year and that attract tourists, where that is feasible, and also attract visiting friends and family to our city.

The autumn Enlighten Festival continues to grow in popularity and attendance. It serves a dual purpose in bringing the local community together to mark, amongst other things, the change in seasons. It also invites visitors to see our iconic national institutions in a creative new light.

Enlighten provides a specific opportunity for local producers at the festival hub. I am sure members will have the opportunity this year, as they did in previous events, to enjoy the BentSpoke Beer Garden, alongside Bar Berra, featuring an exclusive Canberra region wine list, and a selection of speciality spirits and non-alcoholic alternatives from local producers, including Altina, Contentious Character and Underground spirits, to name a few. We have local food vendors contributing to a range of options in the food park.

I can advise the Assembly that Enlighten is indeed loved by locals. Eighty-five per cent of attendees, which are in the hundreds of thousands, are from the Canberra region. In 2024, the total expenditure generated by the festival was just under \$14 million, and about \$3.84 million of that was direct economic impact from what has been a growing number of interstate and overseas visitors who attend the festival.

To allow for further event growth, we have made some changes this year to the Canberra Balloon Spectacular. This is another hugely popular and iconic Canberra event, which will expand this year to be held at the much larger John Dunmore Lang Place. This will allow more people to enjoy the balloons and give the event more space to grow. The dates have changed in order to create that extra growth opportunity.

The success of the Balloon Spectacular is clear—attracting total attendance of around 42,000 people last year, around a quarter of whom were visitors. This generated a little over \$2 million for the ACT economy. As with Enlighten, local businesses are part of the Balloon Spectacular offering. All but one food and beverage vendor this year will be local.

The government is also enhancing Floriade. Last year, the event provided a significant boost to the territory's economy. Visitors injected just under \$49 million into the territory's economy, and this was the highest visitor economic impact recorded in the event's history. This included more than 85,000 unique visitors from interstate and overseas, who came to Canberra specifically to attend Floriade and NightFest. I can advise the Assembly that work is underway now on the government's election commitment to extend the hours of the event.

These events continue to be major drivers for tourism and economic growth in the territory. They drive an increase in accommodation, eating out at restaurants and cafes, attending other tourist attractions whilst visitors are in Canberra, and increasing consumption in our town centres.

The government has taken steps to broaden the footprint of our major events to spread the economic impact of these occasions. For example, Floriade About Town provides an added incentive for people to get out into Canberra's town centres to experience Floriade and to support local businesses that would otherwise not be associated with the festival in Commonwealth Park. This year, the Enlighten Festival will offer a range of experiences extending across the city beyond the national triangle.

The government is also actively supporting a number of other events through the territory's Major Event Fund. Since I established that fund in 2011, around \$15 million has been approved to support major events and exhibitions. This fund generates significant economic impact for Canberra through event-based tourism, filling our

annual events calendar.

Fifty-nine events and exhibitions have been supported through the Major Event Fund to date. Combined, they have attracted almost 6.2 million attendees, delivering \$1.16 billion in economic return for the territory. This includes almost \$80 million in direct impact from events funded in 2024 alone.

A highlight last year was *Chicago the Musical*, which saw huge success through the box office, attracting 30,000 attendees, a quarter of whom were from interstate. Private events like Summernats also drive significant economic impact in Canberra during the summer period. It delivered \$43.6 million to our local economy in 2024. Interestingly, around three-quarters of the 130,000 attendees of Summernats were from interstate.

The government also supports the growing value of meetings, business events and conferences, and we do so in partnership with the government-funded Canberra Convention Bureau. Under the Business Events Fund, \$350,000 has been invested to enable the hosting of 31 different conferences in Canberra. These events, combined, have brought more than 16,000 delegates to the territory and generated an estimated delegate expenditure in our city of just under \$29 million.

A good example was the success of the 2022 Early Childhood Australia Conference, which, through a modest investment of \$20,000, brought over 2,000 delegates to Canberra and generated \$3.8 million in delegate expenditure.

Outside these funding programs, the government also supports major participatory events, such as the 2024 UniSport Nationals, this year the 2025 Australian Masters Games, and an event I am sure most members are familiar with, the Kanga Cup, which occurs each year in winter. These events all drive participatory attendance, with those who are participating in the events travelling to Canberra—not just spectators watching someone else play sport.

It is worth acknowledging that not every event that the government supports is of a large scale, and nor does it have a tourism outcome. Through the ACT Event Fund, the government also provides vital financial assistance for a diverse range of community events. Events like the Belco Bowl Jam, SouthFest, the Stromlo Running Festival, the National Folk Festival, and the Canberra Comedy Festival—which starts next week—have received funding through the ACT Event Fund.

These events build positive local sentiment and create social connections across the territory. Combined, all of the events funded through the 2024 ACT Event Fund made an estimated economic impact of just over \$20 million. It is not significant in the context of a \$50 billion economy; nevertheless, it is important for the community development role that these events play.

In conclusion, we remain focused on attracting quality events that support the economy and the community directly and indirectly. Importantly, events are about giving Canberrans and visitors a diverse range of experiences throughout the year. We look forward to adding to the annual events program through a range of new and returning events. I am pleased to advise the Assembly that I will have some further announcements to make on these in the coming months and years.

We enjoy a terrific lifestyle in this city—unparalleled in the world, I will go so far as to say. We will continue to invest in the events that Canberrans know and love, and we will work to identify new opportunities for organisations and businesses to bring their events to Canberra.

I present the following paper:

Supporting community, local jobs and economic growth through tourism and events—Ministerial statement, 6 March 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

National Multicultural Festival 2025 Ministerial statement

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (10.13): Mr Speaker, I am delighted to share with you today the success of the 2025 National Multicultural Festival. From 7 to 9 February, the festival unfolded right here in our city centre, offering a jam-packed program of local, national and international performing artists, including dancers, singers, entertainers and bands. In 2024 we had record-breaking crowds, with over 400,000 people attending. I look forward to announcing this year's attendance figures after we complete our post-event evaluations.

The festival, which began as a nod to the capital's expanding cityscape populated by young families with links across the globe, blossomed throughout the 1990s and early 2000s to an event that now reflects the incredible cultural diversity of our capital. In the space of a decade, the festival has grown to incorporate key showcases and elements we still love today, including Greek Glendi, Latin Carnivale, Chinese New Year, the Pacific Islander Showcase, and the European Village. Over the past two festivals, new showcases were added to the program, including the Hazara, Hazaragi and Nepalese showcases. These showcases are a fabulous opportunity to more deeply explore the customs and highlights of individual cultures across the world.

Despite the ominous and somewhat nerve-wracking summer storms, the 2025 event was a roaring success and an amazing celebration of cultures. It started with a powerful Welcome to Country by Richie Allen, a Ngunnawal and Kamilaroi custodian. This was a reminder that we live and host the festival on Ngunnawal land and was an important way to start the festival through representation of the oldest living culture in the world.

There was a diverse entertainment program of more than 300 performances across eight stages from community groups, professional performers and cultural workshops. The headline performers for the 2025 festival were chart-topping Gamilaraay singer and songwriter Thelma Plum and Soul and R&B sensation Thndo. Thelma Plum attracted

a significant crowd, filling up south Glebe Park on Sunday afternoon.

Attendees were also spoiled for choice, with more than 280 stalls across the weekend offering dishes from around the globe, market treasures and wares, and cultural information booths. From Slovakian potato pancakes to the delicious German sausages, warming curries and even succulent Chinese meals, there was something for everyone. I can personally attest to the high quality of several dishes.

I would like to take this opportunity to share my appreciation for all those involved in helping to bring the 2025 festival to life, particularly our community showcase coordinators, the Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism, the Community Panel Reference Group, the National Multicultural Festival team, the Office for Multicultural Affairs, and volunteers.

The showcase coordinators dedicated countless hours to program community performances, supporting inclusion and participation to represent their culture, as well as facilitating professional performances from interstate and overseas. I thank them.

The Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism provided valuable strategic advice on multicultural community engagement strategies and cultural sensitivities. Council members participated in the festival, connecting with attendees to promote multiculturalism in the ACT and raise awareness of resources and services available to the multicultural community. I thank them.

Community Panel Reference Group members helped to facilitate discussions with the communities they represent and made suggestions on event operations. I say a massive thank you to them. The National Multicultural Festival team and the wider Office for Multicultural Affairs put in countless hours and effort across the year to make sure this event is a success. They work incredibly hard to ensure the event is safe and inclusive for everyone. It is a pleasure to work with them all. I thank them.

The festival relies on community volunteers to help deliver nearly every element of the festival. This includes stage management volunteers and MCs, information booth volunteers and general assistance volunteers. I thank them. In 2025, the event had 245 registered volunteers supporting up to 450 volunteer shifts over the festival weekend, representing an incredible 1,800 hours of volunteer labour over the course of the event. In an era when, unfortunately, national volunteering rates are decreasing, we see the opposite at the festival. We are grateful to the Canberra community to see large numbers of people volunteering to be part of this vibrant and important event.

This year, as members would have noticed, the festival footprint extended further into the south of Glebe Park. The additional Glebe Park space provided more shade and space to accommodate a family-friendly environment. We also saw an even greater focus on ensuring the festival was accessible for everyone. There were quiet spaces, multifaith prayer rooms, breastfeeding rooms, yoga and meditation, and greater infrastructure to help people to move around safely.

We also saw the benefits of the 2025 festival grant program, which helped to support broader community participation in the festival activities. This year, \$220,000 was allocated to the program and the funding was divided across multiple categories.

All I can say is that this festival continues to grow and remains a reflection of the growing diversity of the Canberra community. It is an important event that celebrates culture and social cohesion, despite global conflict, and represents the inclusive and connected Canberra community. The festival remains a visible statement of the multicultural communities' importance to our city's identity and remains an important part of Canberra's collective history—and, of course, it remains an important part of Canberra's future.

It is also a testament to our commitment to welcome and celebrate diversity in Canberra, which assists us as we continue to build on the elimination of discrimination, as outlined in the Discrimination Act. From next month, we will see a positive duty applied to the ACT government to take reasonable and proportionate steps to eliminate discrimination. However, for now, all eyes are clearly focused towards 2026 and how we may continue to evolve, improve and deliver next year's festival for our community. I am very proud to share that I am already looking forward to it.

I present the following paper:

National Multicultural Festival—2025—Ministerial statement, 6 March 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legislative Assembly—ministerial staff

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.19): I move:

That, in accordance with standing order 213A, the Assembly orders the Chief Minister to provide the Assembly with a breakdown of ministerial staffing expenditure for the current and last five financial years, including staffing expenditure per ministerial office (including his own), staffing expenditure per shared resourcing arrangement, and any other staffing expenditure.

I have to say that the government's response to the December motion was a surprise, particularly given that it was agreed with the support of the government. Partly, it was a surprise because the response seems to be completely non-compliant with the provisions of standing order 213A. That order does not allow the government simply to ignore and wave away a request for information which has been agreed by the Assembly. And partly it was a surprise because the staffing entitlements of every non-executive member are public knowledge. Indeed, it was front-page news in the *Canberra Times*. So it is a little unusual that the government believes it should keep its entitlements secret, and a little unusual that, given the composition of the Assembly, it believed that it could keep these entitlements secret.

The fact is that the executive accounts for eight seats out of 25. The rest of us, including two Labor backbenchers, live up to a standard of transparency that should apply to the executive, just as it does to everyone else.

Labor ministers could have embraced this transparency at any point in the last 24 years, but at no point did they believe they should have to live by the same standards as the rest of us. They could have embraced this transparency in December, when they were asked to do so by the Assembly, and when the Chief Minister accepted that they would. But they chose not to. They chose to keep their secrets hidden from the public.

It is reasonable that the Assembly ask why this is the case. What exactly are they hiding? What are they afraid of us knowing? Why can't they be honest with us and with the community that ultimately funds those staffing entitlements? We are determined to find out. The motion I have moved today no longer calls on the government to comply. It orders the government to do so.

Mr Speaker, orders of the Assembly, as you would know, are no small thing. They are law. There is a reason that standing order 277 says that no person may disobey a lawful order of the Assembly, and that doing so would be a contempt of the Assembly. A refusal to comply can invite the most serious consequences for a member.

Chief Minister, I have no desire to go down that path, but if you refuse to provide the information which has been sought, which you personally agreed to provide, I can assure you that we will not walk away. We will not give up on transparency and accountability. We will not step back from trying to ensure that you and your ministers meet the same basic standards that every non-executive member meets.

I encourage you to support the motion, to comply with the motion and to deliver the transparency that the Assembly and the community are seeking from you.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.22): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing this matter forward again. This is a question on notice, Mr Speaker. There is no need for the use of standing order 213A. Mr Braddock asked a similar question in the annual report hearings and has already received an answer.

The Leader of the Opposition knows full well, from when I responded in December, that, in a strict legal sense, all executive employment contracts are with the Chief Minister; but, in a practical sense, obviously, staff work across the executive. Some work exclusively for a minister; others, as was the case in the last parliament—amongst the Greens ministers, for example—had shared responsibilities across three ministers.

The government operates a centralised media area where not every minister has a press secretary that works directly and exclusively to them. Most staff work across the entire executive. I do appreciate that, in this request, this question on notice using standing order 213A from the Leader of the Opposition, she has at least recognised that reality, by asking for information about staffing expenditure per shared resourcing arrangement.

The answer here is that that will be the majority of executive expenditure, because the majority of staff work across multiple ministerial responsibilities. To be clear, the government will not commit resources to analyse the timesheets of every single employee as to how many seconds and minutes they spend in each ministerial office.

But what we can do is provide a further breakdown as to whether a staff member worked exclusively for one minister or within a shared staffing arrangement.

That is reasonable, and I believe the available data will be able to support that. I will need the assistance of the Greens leader's office to get an understanding, within their executive staff in the last parliament, of who worked exclusively for Minister Vassarotti and Minister Davidson, and which of their staff worked across all three ministers' offices. I am personally aware of a number of staff within the Greens structure that undertook roles across their entire ministerial allocation, just as I am aware, with the Labor ministers, of similar arrangements.

There is also a misunderstanding in relation to the members' salary cap, which is a notifiable instrument—a disallowable instrument—and it sets a staffing allocation, but that does not include a range of on-costs. This was the question that Mr Braddock raised in the annual report hearings.

For example, individual members' salaries, MLA salaries, are not included in a member's staffing cap, but ministers' salaries, their superannuation and their entitlements are all included in the executive budget. So, too, are all of the allowances that are provided under the Legislative Assembly (Members' Staff) Act. If you trawl through the 150 pages of that agreement, there are numerous allowances. They all sit outside the members' salary cap. Things like backfill, when a member of staff is, say, on maternity leave, sit outside members' salary caps.

If the transparency that Ms Castley is claiming is there in the determination for members of the Assembly staff is not there, the only way to find that information above and beyond, in terms of all of the allowances, superannuation payments, work from home arrangements, motor vehicle allowances, overtime meal allowances, sick leave allowances, personal leave or bereavement—all of those things that would potentially see backfill—they would be available through the Office of the Legislative Assembly annual report and financial statements, in the same way as the executive budget is outlined, both in the appropriation bills and in the annual reports and financial statements.

The assertion that Ms Castley is making through this question on notice, in which she is seeking to abuse this standing order yet again, is not reasonable. I will undertake to provide a further level of detail; but, to be clear, one answer to this question would be that all executive staff have an employment contract with the Chief Minister. The reality of the situation is that they have management arrangements with their minister. That would vary over the course of a financial year, and it certainly did in relation to how the Greens political party ran their ministerial arrangements.

I will need to approach the Greens to get some further information, staff member by staff member now, over the past five years, to be able to accurately answer this question. It should have been a question on notice. I reiterate the point that I made on Tuesday, when this standing order was abused again by the Leader of the Opposition: there are multiple other mechanisms, and the intent of this standing order when it was established by the Assembly was not for it to be used for this purpose. If we continue down this path, admin and procedure will certainly need to look at the application of this standing order, because it is meant to be a last resort, and there are many other ways to seek

information.

Ms Castley: We're at that point where we can't get the information.

MR BARR: You did not even ask a question during the annual report hearings. Mr Braddock did. I have to say, Mr Speaker, that we may as well do away with questions on notice and FOI if, with respect to 213A, we are going to have a debate in the Assembly every time in relation to matters that the Leader of the Opposition wilfully refuses to put as a question on notice, or even ask in the available hours of annual report hearings.

I will not labour that point anymore. I think I have made it. I think the Assembly understands, and I hope it will respond accordingly, if this standing order continues to be abused in this way.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (10.31): The Greens will be supporting this motion. When Ms Castley brought a similar motion late last year, it spoke to some of our own frustrations in getting information out of the government, including with regard to staffing budgets for the Greens ministers during the Tenth Assembly. I am happy to confirm I have also just spoken with the Greens leader, Mr Rattenbury, and we are very happy to offer our cooperation in identifying shared staff in order to be able to meet the requirements of this motion—partly because we still had to ask clarifying questions, as Mr Barr mentioned, during annual reports hearings and yet still do not have a fully clear picture as to what is happening.

We know the government knows how much, by way of resources, is put into each office and we similarly know that the office of the Chief Minister has the largest share. What we do not know is if the recordkeeping in the Chief Minister's office is deliberately structured in a way to obscure this information being able to be provided to the Canberra public. Therefore, I am happy to give Ms Castley a second go on this motion. I will be very interested in the result.

I would also like to take this opportunity to draw the Assembly's attention to the Legislative Assembly (Members' Staff) Act 1989, section 5, concerning how officeholders, meaning ministers, may employ staff. This section of the act appears to operate on the assumption that each minister would employ their own staff under arrangements approved by the Chief Minister. This assumption would be consistent with how the non-executive offices operate. It would also mean that the obligations under workplace health and safety legislation are placed on the most appropriate person to be able to fulfill those obligations. However, as the Chief Minister has indicated, only one member of the executive actually employs staff, that being the Chief Minister himself, and that staff are then directed to work under the ministers.

I acknowledge the Chief Minister's response to questions in the annual reports hearings—and I appreciate that. But where he was talking about the challenges for reporting by office, given how staff are shared about the office, I have to disagree. The Chief Minister may not be aware of this, but we in the non-executive also share staff, and we still manage to accurately report on this on an annual basis. I am sure the Office of the Legislative Assembly can help educate the executive on how to do this if they are in need of assistance. To me, it does not seem right that there exists a different level

of transparency based on whether the staff works for the executive or the non-executive. You would think the executive, with a larger budget and more responsibilities, would have a requirement to be more transparent, not less.

Depending on what response we get to Ms Castley's motion, we may need to also look at amending the Lands Act. So I would like to encourage the Chief Minister to be as transparent as possible in the provision of answers.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.23), in reply: In closing, I thank the Greens for their support. I would note just a few things from the Chief Minister's response and the drama of going through timesheets. That is just a furphy. When I employ people—and we do across the floor—we have to state what days they are working in each office and all of that sort of stuff. So this information is definitely available and not as hard and difficult to get to as the Chief Minister would like us to believe. As Mr Braddock has just said, they are very happy to provide this information from their offices. So it can be done.

I disagree with the Chief Minister characterising this motion as a “use and abuse of the standing orders”. I would like to remind the Chief Minister, through you, Mr Speaker, that we are bound by the intent of the standing orders at the time that they were made. We are bound by the rules as they exist. I welcome the Chief Minister agreeing to provide the data which we have asked for, and I thank the Assembly for their time today.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Better Regulation (Repeal of Legislation) 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) (10.34): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Today I am pleased to present the Better Regulation (Repeal of Legislation) Bill 2025. This bill will repeal a number of acts, subordinate legislation and declarations which have been identified as obsolete and therefore unnecessary to have on the statute book in the ACT.

Last term, the ACT government published *Better regulation: a report on how we are improving business regulation in the ACT*. The report highlighted the burden of some existing and outdated regulatory frameworks and noted that the continually evolving landscape of COVID-19 had highlighted the need for more flexible and fit-for-purpose government responses.

As I outlined in the presentation speech for the Better Regulation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 yesterday, regulatory reform is not necessarily about reducing regulation; it is about strengthening the integrity of our legislation. Indeed, a key principle used by effective governments nationally and internationally is ensuring the statute book remains current. Legislation should be monitored and evaluated periodically to simplify, reform, modernise consolidate and, where necessary, repeal.

This bill will repeal both the COVID-19 Emergency Response Legislation Amendment Act 2020 and the COVID-19 Emergency Response Legislation Amendment Act 2021. As the Assembly would be aware, the COVID-19 emergency period ended on 29 September 2022 and, while the acts were critical at the time in supporting Canberrans through the worst health emergency in a century, the acts, thankfully, no longer have any effect. As I flagged in some informal remarks this morning, I expect the repeal of those has perhaps a cathartic effect for some of us in this place.

The bill will repeal the Drugs in Sport Act 1999, as this act has been superseded by commonwealth legislation and is no longer required. The bill will also repeal the Hemp Fibre Industry Facilitation Act 2004. You may be shocked that this act exists. We are repealing it because we know that there is no viable hemp fibre industry in the ACT, as there is a lack of interest from rural lessees in cultivating industrial hemp. That is due, quite frankly, to Canberra's climate. This repeal will therefore reduce the cost of processing any applications that are necessarily rejected.

This bill will also repeal the Magistrates Court (Fair Trading Motor Vehicle Repair Industry Infringement Notices) Regulation 2012. Once again, this regulation has been identified as obsolete, as all of the infringement notice offences were repealed in 2016. Finally, this bill will repeal 24 declarations under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2012. This is a result of amendment legislation in 2020 that removed the requirement for declarations to be notifiable instruments. Therefore, those declarations are no longer necessary.

The repeal of this range of legislation reaffirms the ACT government's commitment to ensuring the ACT's legislation is fit for purpose. The statute book is not static. So, not only is this part of better regulation; it is simply good housekeeping. Under our leadership, the statute book will continue to be reviewed to ensure its efficiency and effectiveness.

Again, I sincerely thank PCO for providing exemplary support during the start of this term. I was having a look earlier, and I am not sure that we have done a repeal bill for some time. It certainly has been undertaken, but I am not sure it has in the 2020s. I would need to double check that. But, certainly, I hope this sets a bit of a standard. I expect and hope that Mr Cocks has welcomed this approach from this government. We do need to be sending a signal, I think, that, yes, regulation exists and absolutely has a purpose, but it needs to be fit for purpose as well. Having a statute book that might be littered with outdated legislation or notifiable instruments really does not serve a purpose for anyone, and repealing them is a good thing to do. With that, I commend the bill to the Assembly

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

Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Vaping Goods) Amendment Bill 2025

Ms Stephen-Smith, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.42): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I rise today to present the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Vaping Goods) Amendment Bill 2025. The bill seeks to make amendments to the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act 1927, or the tobacco act, to align with the commonwealth vaping reforms introduced in 2024. The bill includes changes that are necessary to clarify the regulation of vaping goods in the ACT. This will result in reduced regulatory burden for pharmacists and enable individuals aged under 18 years of age to legally access therapeutic vaping goods for smoking cessation.

Vapes or e-cigarettes are battery operated devices that heat chemicals to produce an aerosol that users inhale. This is commonly known as vaping. The use and availability of e-cigarettes among young people in Australia has become a serious public health challenge. Vaping has been linked to lung damage and nicotine addiction and acts as a predictor of future tobacco smoking behaviour.

In December 2020, the Therapeutic Goods Administration announced that nicotine would be rescheduled within the Poisons Standard under section 52D(2) of the Therapeutic Goods Act 1989. The Poisons Standard is automatically adopted in the ACT by the Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act 2008. The rescheduling meant nicotine in vaping products automatically became a scheduled medicine in the ACT from this time. The commonwealth vaping reforms that were passed by the Australian parliament in June 2024 made amendments to the Commonwealth Therapeutic Goods Act 1989 and related commonwealth acts to create a national framework for the regulation of vaping goods.

The commonwealth vaping reforms regulate the importation, domestic manufacture, supply, commercial possession and advertisement of all vaping devices, accessories and substances. Since 1 July 2024, the commercial possession and supply of vaping goods has been prohibited outside of authorised therapeutic pathways. Legitimate patient access is available through registered pharmacists, medical practitioners or nurse practitioners for smoking cessation and the management of nicotine dependence.

Given some of the commentary surrounding the commonwealth vaping reforms last year, it is important to note that they provide for controls on commercial activities relating to vaping goods and do not pursue or prohibit the possession of vaping goods for personal use. The commonwealth vaping reforms align with the Australian government's objective to significantly reduce the use of tobacco and nicotine products in Australia by 2030, as outlined in the National Tobacco Strategy 2023-2030.

Recent data suggests that vaping rates amongst young Australians are already reducing following the introduction of the reforms. In 2024, vaping rates amongst 15- to 29-year-olds in South Australia were shown to have reduced by around a third compared to 2023. Research from the Cancer Council’s Generation Vape study—an ongoing national study into adolescent and young adult vaping and smoking—shows the number of people aged 14 to 17 who vape is in decline. It also showed a significant increase in the proportion of “never-vapers” in the same age group in November 2024 compared to July 2024.

This bill addresses inconsistencies between the regulatory requirements for vaping goods under the ACT Tobacco Act and the commonwealth vaping reforms. The aim is to address the legal requirements that apply to the sale of vaping goods in the ACT. The bill seeks to address these inconsistencies by amending existing terms used in the Tobacco Act and includes new terms. Amendments will define “vaping good” and “therapeutic vaping good”, regulating non-therapeutic vaping goods as “prohibited smoking products”, as well as making consequential amendments to ensure vaping goods are still within the scope of smoke-free controls.

The proposed amendments at clauses 1 to 4 of the bill are technical provisions that provide for the naming of the Tobacco Act, its commencement date, the legislation it is amending and repeals a declaration due to changes in the way a prohibited smoking product may be prescribed. Clause 5 makes an amendment to the definition of “smoking product”, which underpins the operation of the tobacco act and gives effect to the definition of “vaping good” by distinguishing this from “therapeutic vaping good” so that the substantive provisions of the tobacco act do not apply to therapeutic vaping goods. This allows for the regulation of therapeutic vaping goods to occur under the framework for regulation of therapeutic goods more broadly—the Commonwealth Therapeutic Goods Act 1989, as adopted in the ACT by the Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act 2008—rather than the regulatory framework for smoking products. Clause 6 then sets out meanings of key terms used throughout the tobacco act.

Currently, the tobacco act regulates vaping goods as a smoking product within the collective term of “personal vaporiser”. This means that, currently, all vaping goods supplied in the ACT are subject to the same controls as conventional tobacco products. The new section 3B retains the definition of “personal vaporiser” but modifies the definition to ensure the new terms of “vaping good” or “therapeutic vaping good” are distinguished as separate concepts. This ensures that personal vaporisers which are not vaping goods, such as shisha and waterpipes, remain regulated within existing requirements under the tobacco act but are not inadvertently captured by the prohibition on the sale of vaping goods.

The new section 3C then introduces the terms “vaping good” and “therapeutic vaping good” and distinguishes these terms from the definition of “personal vaporiser”. By adopting the commonwealth’s definition of “vaping good”, the bill ensures consistency of language between the ACT, commonwealth and other state and territory legislation. Differentiating a “vaping good” and a “therapeutic vaping good” clarifies that vaping goods supplied for therapeutic purposes are not considered smoking products for the purpose of the Tobacco Act.

The new section 3D amends the way in which “prohibited smoking products” are defined and may be prescribed. The bill improves transparency and accountability of the process to define and regulate “prohibited smoking products” by requiring prohibited smoking products to be prescribed by legislation, rather than by a notifiable instrument, as is currently required by section 21. This ensures the ACT can continue to respond to regulating the rapidly evolving market of vaping goods, which often seeks to evade regulation through novel product development, whilst also improving the oversight of this Assembly as to these decisions. Clauses 7 and 8 are consequential amendments due to the modified definition of “prohibited smoking product” to remove redundant references.

As a consequence of the change made under clause 5, therapeutic vaping goods will not be a smoking product, removing the requirement for community pharmacies that supply therapeutic vaping goods to hold a retail tobacco licence and display these details. This will both reduce unnecessary regulatory burden and more accurately reflect the role of pharmacies as healthcare providers. To reflect this change, clause 9 removes the redundant defence and associated definitions to the offences relating to pharmacists selling vaping products. Clause 10 is a consequential amendment to update the dictionary definitions used within the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act to account for the definitional changes that have already been described.

To ensure vaping goods are still within scope of ACT smoke-free controls, the bill makes technical amendments to ACT drug and smoking acts to update and align with the amended terminology of “vaping good” and to ensure that cannabis smoked in vaping goods remains regulated under these acts. This is achieved in schedule 1 of the bill, which includes technical amendments to the Drugs of Dependence Act 1989, the Smoke-Free Public Places Act 2003 and the Smoking in Cars with Children (Prohibition) Act 2011.

Schedule 2 makes other minor technical amendments to the Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act and the Tobacco Act. These include amendments to the Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act to remove the meaning of “regulated therapeutic vaping good” as this terminology is no longer used within the commonwealth legislation; update the explanation of how the commonwealth’s Poisons Standard takes effect in the ACT; and clarify references to medicines and poisons inspectors. The technical amendments at schedule 2 also include amendments to modernise language to align with contemporary legislative drafting practice by adopting appropriate gender pronouns.

Aligning ACT legislation with the commonwealth vaping reforms is a necessary step in realising the intended benefits of the reforms and aligning with nationally coordinated efforts to protect the community and, in particular, young people from the harms of vaping. These efforts are supported by ACT government preventive health initiatives, including work to enhance the capacity and capability of the ACT Quitline and establish free drop-in services for young people seeking vaping cessation or nicotine dependence support. This work is being supported through a Federation Funding Agreement with the Australian government which provides the ACT with \$1.065 million over three years to respond to increased demand for cessation services arising from the commonwealth vaping reforms. The ACT government has also awarded four Healthy Canberra Grants, totalling \$972,582, to non-government

organisations for programs focusing on reducing vaping-related harms in the ACT community, with these programs funded from June 2024 through to December 2026.

Alignment of the territory's smoking legislation with the commonwealth vaping reforms is a vital step in achieving local vaping harm reduction and ensuring the regulatory controls that apply to vaping goods in the ACT are modern and effective. The bill will provide clarity to ACT businesses—particularly community pharmacies—health practitioners and consumers on the controls of e-cigarettes and vaping goods in the ACT.

I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Castley**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Amendment Bill 2025

Debate resumed from 6 February 2025 on motion by **Ms Cheyne** together with **Dr Paterson**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (10.53): Should a convicted child sex offender ever have the right to work with children? That is the question that is central to this debate. I encourage all members to keep that question front of mind as we decide the law today, because, at the end of the debate, once everyone's vote is cast and the law is decided, each of us who holds a seat in this chamber will be accountable to the children of Canberra. Did we decide to do everything that we could to keep them safe, to protect their innocence and to protect their lives, or did our courage concede defeat to the party line? Did we kick the can down the road because it is just too difficult to get the balance right today? Did we waver in order to be the least restrictive on someone's right to work? To me, the answer could not be clearer. I know which side of history street I want to be on. Without exception, a convicted child sex offender should never, under any circumstances, have the right to work with children.

At the outset, I thank Minister Paterson and the Attorney-General for bringing forward the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Amendment Bill. To reflect the urgency of the issue the bill seeks to address, it was introduced in a February sitting and has been brought forward for debate at the earliest opportunity. It has come in response, of course, to the catastrophic breakdown in the process that allowed Bradley John Burch, a convicted child sex offender, to gain employment as a paralegal at Legal Aid ACT. Legal Aid ACT is a taxpayer-funded organisation that provides a broad range of legal services related to children, including representing children in legal matters, child protection proceedings, running the Youth Law Centre and providing independent children's lawyers in family matters.

Burch was convicted in 2020 of child sex crimes that he committed, as the Supreme Court found, in full knowledge that they were wrong. Despite the gravity of his crimes, he was let off without a single day in jail. He later changed his name, and, without breaching any obligations of the Child Sex Offenders Register, he sought and commenced employment at Legal Aid ACT in July 2003.

Section 124 of the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act established the Child Sex Offenders Register in the ACT, and it requires convicted offenders, just like Burch, to be registered. A registrable offender is subject to a number of requirements under the act, including reporting obligations and a prohibition on engaging in child related employment. But, as the law currently stands, there is no offence in a registrable offender seeking employment at legal services that relate to children.

This convicted child sex offender, Bradley John Burch, exploited a legal loophole to gain employment in a workplace that routinely works with children, and usually very vulnerable children. The intent of the Child Sex Offender's Register is to keep children safe by reducing the risk of contact between a child and a child predator like Burch. Clearly, it has failed in this instance. While the intent of the register is to reduce the risk of contact between a child and a convicted predator, it instead has given a convicted child sex offender the lawful right to work with children. This is a perverse and dangerous loophole that a predator has exploited. We need to urgently strengthen the letter and spirit of the law, as the shadow attorney-general has said, to ensure that this can never happen again. This unintended oversight is what the government's amendment bill seeks to address. Urgently correcting this perverse shortcoming in the law is absolutely critical, and that is why the Canberra Liberals will not be opposing the government's amendment bill.

Even though the bill was tabled and brought on for debate in an unconventionally short time frame—a time frame which did not afford us the time or opportunity we would otherwise have to engage with a range of relevant stakeholders, including the government, to consolidate our position—we accept that it could not have been any other way, because we must act urgently to close this dangerous loophole that a predator has exploited. That is why we will be supporting the government's amendment bill to expand the definition of child related employment.

We do, however, have some concerns with the bill—primarily, that it does not go far enough to protect children and also the broader legal profession from sex predators. We are concerned that the limited scope of the amendment leaves vulnerable children at risk, because it leaves the gate open for a child sex offender like Burch to gain employment at any other professional legal service that works with children. I do not believe that a convicted child sex offender should ever have the right to work with children. The current law and the government's amendment bill gives them that right. By only expanding the definition of child related employment to Legal Aid ACT, the government is giving a convicted child sex offender the right to work with children. My amendments seek to fix that, and I will have more to say on my amendments later in the debate.

For now, I thank the police minister and the Attorney-General for bringing forward this amendment bill today. The opposition is pleased to support it.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.59): The ACT Greens support the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Amendment Bill 2025 that will expand the definition of child related employment in section 124 of the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act 2005 so that the provision of legal services related to a child provided by Legal Aid is included and Canberra's most vulnerable children will be safer. The legislation will make clear that

the provision of legal services by Legal Aid ACT is child related employment and will mean that offenders convicted of particular sexual offences against children cannot be employed in roles that involve contact with a child. The intention of the legislation is to capture circumstances such as where Legal Aid ACT represents a child in a legal manner, provides advice to a child or where a child is a witness in a proceeding.

The current legislation does not include child related legal services more broadly, but I appreciate the context in which it was drafted. It was prepared swiftly to respond to a particular issue, and I believe it does so well. We will have amendments by Ms Morris that will be moved and discussed later in the debate. Certainly, when the bill was introduced, the Attorney-General and the minister both made comments about the need to consider issues more broadly and undertook, in that process, to do so. There will be more detailed discussion when we get to the amendment stage, but I welcome the undertakings from both the minister and the Attorney-General. We recognise—and this situation in Legal Aid has revealed it—that there are further matters to consider. That is an important piece of work, but we need to do that work carefully and in a considered way. That goes to my concerns with both the process and the drafting of Ms Morris’s proposed amendment. I will speak to that later.

Certainly, our intent is to support this amendment. The government has been right to move quickly to address the matters that have been identified through the incident in Legal Aid. Obviously, it is a very concerning matter. I welcome the relatively speedy response, by this Assembly’s standards, that has been delivered to address that particular question.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (11.01): I acknowledge that Legal Aid have been quite forthright in acknowledging the deficiencies in their processes, but it is a good move of the government to ensure that someone will be on notice that they are not entitled to apply for such a position when they are not an appropriate worker in an environment where children are involved. That is a good move. I welcome the debate on Ms Morris’s amendments to broaden the scope so that those who seek employment in an area where children are involved are justifiably put on notice that it is not appropriate for them to do so.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (11.02): As a co-sponsor, I am pleased to speak in support of the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Bill 2025 today. This is an important piece of legislation that will improve the safety of children and members of the ACT community. It will continue the ACT government’s commitment to ensure that children and young people are protected and supported to stay safe as they go about their daily lives in the territory.

Child sexual assault can have a lasting and tragic impact on victims. Evidence shows that child sexual abuse can result in serious mental health and adjustment problems which have long-term effects for victims. The Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act 2005 established a register of child sex offenders who are placed on the register following conviction of a registrable offence or through a registration order made by the court. Individuals convicted of specific child sex offences are referred to as registrable offenders and must adhere to certain requirements under the act. The primary purpose

of the legislation is to reduce the likelihood that an offender will re-offend and to assist law enforcement authorities to facilitate investigation and prosecution of any further alleged offences committed by a person on the register. The act established offences to achieve this purpose where a registrable offender fails to comply with their obligations.

One of the key mechanisms in the act to reduce the likelihood of re-offending is to prevent a person on the register from undertaking child related employment or attempting to undertake child related employment. A significant aspect of the act is the prohibition on registrable offenders from engaging in or applying for child related employment. Individuals involved in or seeking child related employment must disclose any pending charges for a registrable offence to their current or prospective employer.

Child related employment includes employment, training or volunteer work which involves contact with a child in a prescribed list of employment areas which are likely to involve contact with a child—for example, at daycare centres, educational or religious institutions, clubs, associations and overnight camps. The contact may be physical, oral or involve any form of written communication, including via electronic means. The purpose of this prohibition is to limit the opportunities for registrable offenders to re-offend. This is due to the increased risk to the safety of a child and re-offending where a registrable offender has contact with a child.

The bill before the Assembly today expands the prohibition on child related employment for registrable offenders. The definition of child related employment in section 124 is amended by this bill to add the provision of legal services related to a child provided by Legal Aid ACT, whether through its officers or funded private practitioners. This amendment makes it a criminal offence if a person who applies for or is employed in a position at Legal Aid that provides child related legal services is charged with a registrable child sex offence and does not notify Legal Aid within seven days of the charges being laid.

The bill before the Assembly today will prevent convicted offenders from working in this environment. It will also mean that people accused of a registrable offence will be required to notify their employer. While the bill may limit human rights such as privacy, security and work, I am satisfied that these limitations are reasonable and justifiable. For the purpose of promoting the right to protection of family and children, the bill has been drafted to ensure there are proportionate limits on human rights.

I understand the concerns that Ms Morris has raised about this being not broad enough, and both Minister Paterson and I did touch on this in our presentation speech—that it does not encompass child related legal services more generally. As we noted, this amendment is intended to be the first stage of a broader focus on child related legal services, and that requires broader consultation and policy development. In this matter, the bill was about addressing a discrete issue and a clear recommendation from the CEO of Legal Aid ACT. We have acted swiftly to support this, and I thank Ms Morris for recognising this in her remarks today.

The bill will not commence for three months to ensure that any individuals who may be impacted are informed about this change and the specific expansion of criminal offences under the act. The ongoing effectiveness of the Child Sex Offenders Register

scheme is ensured through removing this ambiguity and protecting the ACT community.

Legal Aid ACT provides services to our community, including child centred services, such as representing children in legal matters, running the Youth Law Centre, which is a dedicated legal advice service for people aged 12 to 25, and providing independent children's lawyers in family law matters. Legal Aid ACT also provides representation services in other areas, where children may be witnesses or the subject of proceedings such as child protection matters. This amendment goes beyond direct employment with Legal Aid ACT and ensures that employment in child related services funded by grants of Legal Aid but provided by private solicitors is also prohibited.

As previously mentioned, this bill will impose limitations on some rights under the Human Rights Act, given a registrable offender may be limited to the types of employment they can undertake. The bill limits the right to work, as it expands the list of prescribed child related employment areas in which a registrable offender may not undertake employment. The provision only relates to child related legal services provided by Legal Aid ACT, whether through its offices or funded private practitioners. It does not yet capture where legal services are provided by other organisations or businesses. The narrow scope of this amendment ensures that the limitation on the right to work is proportionate to the purpose of protecting the safety of children.

The bill limits the right to privacy and the right to liberty and security of a person. These limitations arise because the act criminalises a registrable offender to apply for or engage in child related employment and requires a person charged with child sex offences to disclose the charges to their current or prospective employer. As these offences are punished by imprisonment or fines, a person's right to work and liberty may be limited. The requirement to inform an employer of charges limits the right to privacy. However, these limitations are narrow, and they are justified as the bill aims to enhance the safety of children in the ACT.

The bill promotes the right to the protection of the family and child, recognising the inherent vulnerability of children. It gives effect to the requirement to give primary consideration to the best interests of the child. The promotion of this right and the reduction of risk to children and the re-offending of registrable offenders justifies the imposition of this further restriction on them.

I will expand on this further in the detail stage, but I want to acknowledge at this moment, particularly when we talk about the best interests of the child, the intent with which Ms Morris has circulated her amendments. On the face of it, I expect many members' initial reaction would be a strong sense to support them. Of course, we want to ensure that we have the right protections in place across the legal profession as a whole. However—and Mr Rattenbury touched on this—the rashness with which they have been brought has conversely provided us with the need to take pause. These amendments have not been subject to any consultation. They were circulated just over 24 hours ago. They were a surprise to me, even though I expect drafting instructions would have been provided last week. There is no accompanying human rights analysis or reflection of whether they are compatible with the Human Rights Act. They have not been through scrutiny. This is a concerning precedent.

Again, I really do understand the intent and how genuine that intent is, but there is a reason that these processes and checks are in place, just as there is a clear reason for us to take a little longer in the phased approach that we had already signalled last month. The narrow scope of the bill again ensures that the limitation on the right to work is proportionate to the purpose of protecting the safety of children. No such analysis has been provided, let alone has been able to be scrutinised, to the amendments that have been circulated by Ms Morris. On a closer look, Ms Morris's amendments only apply to a particular profession, which not only is not clearly defined but also potentially does not go far enough. What professions are not captured with this amendment?

Having listened to her contribution to this debate, she wants it to go further. I expect that is a position held by the Liberal Party room, and I respect that. But, by being hasty and without following proper process, Ms Morris has not gone far enough in protecting children according to her own logic. That is why consultation and process matters. I know those words can seem boring, but you can have all the best intent in the world, but intent does not necessarily translate to the best legislative reform possible.

I welcome Mr Rattenbury's circulated amendment and the engagement that we have had with his office in particular. The bill legislates what I and Minister Paterson clearly indicated in our presentation speeches and reaffirmed today, that this is a phased approach and this amendment is the first stage of a broader focus on child related legal services and other professions which will necessarily require broader consultation and policy development. I look forward to supporting Mr Rattenbury's amendment, as well as the legislation as presented.

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) (11.14), in reply: The Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Amendment Bill 2025, which we are debating today, makes one important amendment to the Crimes Act to improve its operations.

I would like to begin by strongly rebutting Ms Morris's representation that the government is not going far enough. It has been made very clear in this process that this is responding to an immediate situation, and the government is very clear that a more fulsome reform will come. I would also like to reiterate the Attorney-General's remarks about the importance of proper processes, and the processes we have in place, in terms of the scrutiny committee, and the importance of consultation so that we do not see unintended consequences, particularly in this very sensitive and very important area of reform.

The core objective of the act is to protect children from serious harm and ensure the prevention and early detection of offences by repeat child sex offenders. Sexual offending against children is shocking and a deeply harmful crime. This government is committed to preventing and deterring convicted sex offenders from reoffending once back in the community.

Every state and territory of Australia has enacted broadly similar legislation, which requires a person who is convicted of certain offences against children to be entered on a register of offenders. In the ACT, the relevant registrable child sex offences include any offence that involves sexual intercourse with a child, act of indecency against a

child and possessing child exploitation material.

Registrable offenders must keep police informed for a set period of time about details, including their address, place of employment and travel plans. Registrable offenders are also restricted from undertaking work which may bring them into contact with children. These restrictions are critical as the vast majority of sexual assaults are perpetrated by someone known to the victim. In 2021, around two-thirds of child sex offenders were known to their victims. The act is intended to help prevent reoffending, assist in investigation and prosecution of recidivist offenders, operate as a deterrent, and provide victims and the community with an increased feeling of safety.

The bill we are debating here today makes an amendment to narrowly expand the definition of child-related employment. The act prohibits a registrable offender from engaging in or applying to engage in child-related employment. In addition, a person who is engaged in or applying to engage in child-related employment is required to disclose any pending charges for a registrable offence.

The existing definition of child-related employment in section 124 includes employment, training or volunteer work which involves contact with a child in a set list of employment areas. These areas include those which would immediately come to mind when one thinks of child-related employment, such as child protection services, schools, preschools and family daycare centres.

This bill amends the definition in section 124 to include the provision of legal services related to a child provided by Legal Aid ACT, whether through its offices or funded private practitioners. This amendment will reduce any ambiguity or perception of ambiguity as to whether a role at Legal Aid involving contact with a child is child-related employment for the purposes of the act. As a result, it will extend the offences to apply in circumstances where a registrable offender applies for or engages in employment in the provision of child-related legal services within Legal Aid ACT. This amendment will ensure that the child sex offenders scheme continues to operate effectively and as originally intended.

It is intended that this amendment is, as I said at the beginning of the speech, a first stage of broader consideration of reform. That work will also consider other professions that should be included on this list.

In closing, I am pleased to see broad support for the amendments in this legislation. This bill will better protect children and young people when they engage with legal services through Legal Aid ACT.

Question resolved in the affirmative

Bill agreed to in principle.

Detail stage

Bill, by leave, taken as a whole.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (11.20): I seek leave to move an amendment to the

bill that has not been circulated pursuant to standing order 178A and has not been considered by the scrutiny committee.

Leave granted.

MR RATTENBURY: I move amendment No 1 circulated in my name [*see schedule 1 at page 549*].

It was not my intent to move my amendment before Ms Morris's amendments have been moved, but that is the way the numbering has worked out. I acknowledge that to colleagues in the chamber.

I will speak to both our amendments, as I think they come together. To some extent, the attorney has already spoken to this.

Ms Morris is proposing to move amendments that would broaden the intended scope of the bill that has been circulated by the government. I agree with the intent of what Ms Morris is seeking to do, and I think there is a good discussion to be had about what other professions should be included. As I said in my opening remarks, this was very clearly intended to respond to the matter that has arisen at Legal Aid. It has been done in a timely manner, and I welcome that.

I do, however, have concerns with the approach Ms Morris has taken around the bill. As the attorney noted, we got this about 24 hours ago. I understand there has been no Consultation with the Law Society or the Bar—key stakeholders in this space—and this provision would apply to the breadth of the legal profession, as I understand it. I do not believe there has been any discussion with the Human Rights Commission. As the attorney knows, there is not a Human Rights Act compatibility statement or explanatory statement with these amendments, as I understand it.

I have sought to undertake some consultation in the time available, which is just under 24 hours. We did make contact with the Bar. Of course, they are busy folk, and they were unable to provide us with any feedback by the time we had come to debate the matter this morning. That gives me cause for concern because this is a piece of legislation. It is not a motion; it is a piece of law. In that context, we have a responsibility to ensure that we have thought through the potential consequences. I would be concerned about unintended consequences. I support the intended consequences, but, when we are making law, we need to get it right, as best we can. We have processes around the scrutiny committee and consultation with key stakeholders for exactly these reasons.

The Greens are not able to support Ms Morris's amendments today for those procedural reasons, even though we agree with what we believe she is trying to do. Therefore, we have drafted an alternative amendment, which I have circulated. I acknowledge that it has been circulated quite late, but that is a consequence of the circumstances in which we now find ourselves, and in trying to think about a constructive way to respond to the issue that has been identified.

I do note that, as I touched on before, in their introductory remarks to this bill, both the minister and the attorney flagged a desire to do further work and to look at other areas.

In order to give the chamber confidence that that work will proceed—and I do not seek to reflect on the ministers in saying that, but to give it a firmness, perhaps, to assure particularly members of the Liberal Party—I propose a mechanism that is used in a range of bills; that is, that the attorney has responsibility for providing a legislative review by the last sitting day of this year. That will look at issues regarding child sex offenders being able to work in child-related employment, working through issues of definition, and looking comprehensively at the legal profession, because that is the focus, I think, of today’s discussion. It also looks at other professions.

This example has revealed that there are probably—Ms Morris described them as loopholes—gaps in the law where we see opportunities for people to get through the system in a way that was not anticipated previously, and that is a concern. We do not want to see people who have been convicted of a child sex offence working in environments where they have access to children or access to child-related material. We do not want them being provided with an opportunity to build trust with young people, which is so often the basis of this kind of offending.

Being in a professional position is clearly a way in which one can build trust. The very nature of being a professional invites a degree of trust, because the job, the role or the position conveys a sense of being able to be trusted.

The central point that Ms Morris is seeking to address is a very important one, so I propose this amendment in order to create a firm and legislated commitment for this work to be followed through. I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.26): I will take this opportunity to speak to the bill and the two sets of amendments that have been circulated. I would like to thank the Attorney-General and the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services for introducing this bill and for doing so in an expedited time frame.

As the father of two young children, few things are as critical in my mind as the protection of children in our community. All children deserve to be safe and free from harm. All children need to be able to access services across a range of sectors without risking their safety. I am fully supportive of this Assembly taking the necessary steps to close legislative gaps that may have enabled child sex offenders to work with children. I agree that we ought to use the lessons of what has happened at Legal Aid to reconsider the sufficiency of our laws to protect children from the absolutely devastating consequences of being exposed to people who would sooner harm them than help them.

For this reason, I thank Ms Morris for the amendments she circulated yesterday for consideration by the Assembly. I am sympathetic to the aims; however, I am not comfortable with Ms Morris’s amendments progressing without first having had the opportunity properly to consider their implications, to canvass any potential unintended consequences and to address the most appropriate way for this reform to be rolled out.

If I had received the amendments earlier, I would have taken the opportunity to engage constructively with key stakeholders to formulate an informed view ahead of voting on them. This was one of the commitments I took to the election, and one I intend to fulfill during my time here.

It is essential that we ensure we pursue the most effective and appropriate way for this reform to be implemented. I also believe, as, clearly, others do in this place, that we need to holistically review the legislation to ensure that there are no other sectors missing from this amendment, so that vulnerable children are safe at all times.

I believe that Mr Rattenbury's amendment achieves this while capturing Ms Morris's concerns, and I anticipate ensuring legislation is drafted to protect children from child sex offenders across all necessary sectors, as well as creating the opportunity to build in practical timeframes to roll out fit-for-purpose and effective reforms.

While I am not inclined to vote in support of any rushed reforms on which I have not been given the opportunity to properly consult, I agree wholeheartedly with the need to ensure that the broader legal sector and other sectors have appropriate systems in place to protect our children. For this reason, I will be voting in support of Mr Rattenbury's amendment, while opposing Ms Morris's.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (11.28): As indicated in my closing speech in the in-principle debate, I very much welcome this amendment that has been moved by Mr Rattenbury today. I appreciate his remarks that moving this amendment is not a negative reflection on the intent of either Minister Paterson or I, but that it does provide assurance.

Indeed, if you have listened to all of the remarks provided so far, Mr Assistant Speaker Werner-Gibbins, we are actually all on the same page when it comes to the intent here. But, at the very least, the Greens, the government and Mr Emerson do not believe that the mechanism to achieve that reform—on which we are otherwise in lockstep—is through a mechanism that does not have the appropriate considerations or rigour applied to it. That is the concern with the approach that Ms Morris has taken in bringing this forward today. For a range of reasons, that is regrettable.

Perhaps with some more open, candid conversations, we could have all reached a point today where we had an agreed position and with amendments not being moved at the last minute. Again, I apologise to PCO, who we have inadvertently put more pressure on today, in doing this. That was the nature with which it came about. Hopefully, it is a learning experience for all in this new parliament. There are opportunities to work together, particularly when we seek to understand the intent of everyone, but processes do exist for a reason.

I reaffirm my intent, and Minister Paterson's intent, with this legislation that there will be a review. I will come back to the Assembly before the end of the year with an update on what we are going to do. Indeed, almost certainly, there will be further legislation that reflects that review. I appreciate that my commitment to that will now be affirmed in this legislation.

Mr Rattenbury's amendment agreed to.

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (11.31): I seek leave to move amendments to the bill,

which have not been considered by the scrutiny committee, together.

Leave granted.

MS MORRIS: I move amendments Nos 1 and 2 circulated in my name together [*see schedule 2 at page 550*].

As I indicated before, the opposition is pleased to support the government's amendment bill, which seeks to expand the definition of child-related employment. Our concern with this bill is that, as I have said, it does not go far enough to protect children.

The limited scope of the government's amendment leaves children at risk because it leaves the gate open for a sex offender like Burch to gain employment at any other professional legal service that works with children. Without exception, a convicted child sex offender should never have the right to work with children, and we do need to act urgently to close that loophole. That is exactly what my amendments seek to do.

Under my amendments, legal services that work directly with children will be protected from child sex offenders. The Canberra Liberals' amendments prohibit convicted child sex offenders from seeking employment at legal services related to children, including providing advice to children, representing children in legal matters or representing a person where a child is a witness.

According to the government's explanatory and human rights statement, limiting the expansion of the definition of child-related employment only to Legal Aid is to ensure that the limitation on the right to work is proportionate to the purpose of protecting the safety of children. We on this side of the chamber take great issue with this. A convicted child sex offender should never have the right to work with children—no exceptions. The Canberra Liberals' amendments would prohibit that.

While I had hoped to work collaboratively with the minister and the Attorney-General on the amendments, I appreciate that the short timeframe between the government tabling the legislation and bringing it forward for debate did not afford us that opportunity, despite many attempts to try to get those briefings.

I thank the Attorney-General for the engagement from her office earlier in the week. I do understand, as has been canvassed here today, that there is a will within the government to expand these laws to all legal services, just as our amendments seek to do. However, it is also clear that the government is concerned that this will delay protections for Legal Aid ACT, as the broader legal sector would need more time for the transition to the changes.

I have considered these arguments very carefully, and I have concluded that they do not stand to reason. They do not warrant delaying the urgent action that is needed to protect legal services and to protect children that they represent from sex predators. My reasons for that are as follows. By expanding the definition of child-related employment to include legal services that relate to children, we are imposing an offence on the convicted perpetrator. This means that the weight of responsibility that my amendments create would fall on the registrable offender, who would face two years in prison for seeking employment at a child-related workplace—in this instance, legal services that

relate to children.

With the onus of responsibility on the offender, my amendments protect legal services rather than burdening them. If these laws were in place in 2023, a registrable offender like Burch would have committed an offence simply by seeking employment at Legal Aid, not the other way round. Instead, according to the law, as it was then, this convicted predator was perfectly entitled to exploit a legal loophole that allowed him to seek employment in a workplace that routinely works with vulnerable children. This is unacceptable, and it is exactly why we need to act now to ensure that we protect all legal services that work with children.

The other point I want to make is that, by the government's own admission, as outlined in their explanatory and human rights statement, this bill has been drafted with a delayed commencement of three months to "allow sufficient time for impacted individuals to be made aware of the expansion of the scope of the offences". The government's own bill acknowledges that three months is sufficient time to educate impacted individuals.

The opposition supports the government's decision to delay the commencement of the laws by three months, because we agree that this is sufficient time to allow impacted individuals to transition to the new laws. If three months is sufficient for Legal Aid ACT, I see no reason why it should not be sufficient for any other legal profession that relates to children.

The government's bill was tabled and brought on so that we could act urgently. Why would we not act with the same sense of urgency for all legal services and all children? If there is a risk to children at Legal Aid, surely, there is a risk to children within the entire legal profession.

The government, the Greens and Mr Emerson are now trying to take some moral high ground on process and procedure, giving this greater moral standing than the right of a child to be safe from a sex predator. They are doing this even though the government tabled this bill in the last sitting and have brought it on for debate in this sitting.

I want to address some of the concerns raised by Mr Rattenbury. We did indeed seek to consult legal stakeholders, but, as he pointed out, they are very busy people, and the short timeframe afforded to us by the government's design did not permit us to have those conversations.

We have supported the Greens amendment. We have not opposed that. It does give me some pain to do so because we have actually signed into law the right of convicted child sex offenders to work with children for another 12 months in the ACT. I commend my amendments to the Assembly.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (11.38): What Ms Morris has concluded with is inaccurate and irresponsible. I greatly regret that she has made those comments today. I appreciate there were some issues with being able to afford the briefing to Ms Morris. But, certainly, when my office approached her earlier in the week, we could have

discussed this further and why existing protections are there, what they do and what this bill does as a clarifying bill.

It is also inaccurate—in fact, it is blatantly wrong—to suggest that the government has not followed process or given a limited a time. Yes, we wanted to bring this on early, subject to whether there was a committee inquiry and whether there were any comments from scrutiny. There were neither. That meant we were absolutely within our rights to bring this on. I have not stepped outside of the process, and that is pretty standard, especially for a bill that is narrow in scope. I think something that has been missed from this debate is that, having a bill that is narrow in scope, means we can draft quickly and then means we can debate quickly, because we are trying to address an issue at hand. Then, anything to expand, that necessarily requires more time.

I value Ms Morris noting how quickly we were able to bring this on. We did have people work very hard over the Christmas break to ensure that we were able to table this in the first sitting this year, and I believe that has been broadly welcomed by everyone. But that also has necessary limitations with it on just how developed or considered any further amendments could be—and that is, that there could not be. That is why we signalled the intent that we did, and it is now legislated, that there will be a broader focus to include more child-related services.

However, we do need further consultation with legal service providers, community groups, children’s advocates and employers potentially affected by broader reforms. That needs to be undertaken to identify any unforeseen consequences before broader amendments are progressed. Further consideration also needs to be given on how broader amendments interact with the implementation of the child safe standards and the work of the Children and Young People Commissioner. It is noted that the definition of “child-related employment” and “child-related work” used in child sex offenders register legislation in other Australian jurisdictions is similar to the existing definition in our act—that is, other jurisdictions that define “child-related employment” do not currently specify legal services within their statutory definition of “child-related employment” either.

In addition—and, again, I think this has been taken quite out of context—the bill currently has a three-month delayed commencement to allow that sufficient time for impacted individuals to be made aware of the change. That is required because the onus is on the individual to comply with prohibitions under the act in relation to child-related employment. The three-month period was considered sufficient, noting, again, the narrow scope of to whom the proposed amendment applies. Any broadening of it, such as that proposed by the amendment, would arguably require a much longer commencement delay. More people would need to be aware of it. More education would need to be undertaken. The more that it is expanded, the more that we need to ensure that everyone is aware and responds appropriately. So it is not true, I would say, that three months is sufficient for it being narrow or as broad as possible. It just is not.

I am reasonably concerned about the opposition generally in their understanding of the Human Rights Act. Mr Hanson was referring yesterday to a “hierarchy of rights”. There is no hierarchy; that is the point. And, again, Ms Morris, while not saying that directly, certainly implied it today. So I am happy to organise a briefing for anyone interested on the Human Rights Act and how it works.

Regarding amendment 2, clause 5 is consequential to the amendment at clause 4, which restricts employment to provide legal services related to a child, both as an officer of Legal Aid ACT and as a private practitioner funded by Legal Aid ACT. So the same reasons for us rejecting this amendment apply. Again, I do not have any issue with the intent—in fact, I agree with the intent—but the way in which it has been gone about and, indeed, the way it has been characterised today is disappointing, and I hope that we can reset after this.

The intimation from Ms Morris was that we brought this on rashly. We introduced it four weeks ago and any interaction that she has had with officers only began last week, as far as I am aware. We go out of our way to provide briefings in almost all circumstances. I regret that there has been an issue in this case. However, I also recognise that I have had discussions with the opposition whip, and we will seek to, I suppose, reset this process. But we have not skipped any processes. We have followed the standing orders, and we have followed convention.

I am pleased that we are able to get this done today and to provide that assurance to the community, following the concerning articles last year, that further work will happen—indeed, the legislation guarantees it. We will not be supporting the opposition’s amendments.

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) (11.45): I felt compelled to speak because I did find Ms Morris’s final statement deeply offensive. It is not good enough to come in here and say that the Law Society and the Bar Association were too busy, so we did not speak to them, and there was no committee inquiry and no scrutiny consideration—and the world, according to Ms Morris, is not sufficient to pass legislation, particularly when it is in respect to protecting children. Thank you.

Question put:

That **Ms Morris’s** amendments 1 and 2 be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8	Noes 15	
Chiaka Barry	Yvette Berry	Marisa Paterson
Peter Cain	Andrew Braddock	Michael Pettersson
Leanne Castley	Fiona Carrick	Shane Rattenbury
Ed Cocks	Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel
Jeremy Hanson	Jo Clay	Rachel Stephen-Smith
James Milligan	Thomas Emerson	Caitlin Tough
Deborah Morris	Laura Nuttall	Taimus Werner-Gibbings
Mark Parton	Suzanne Orr	

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Morris’s amendments negatived.

Bill, as a whole, as amended, agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 11.52 am to 2.00 pm.

Questions without notice

Ministerial records—caretaker period

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, you have repeatedly told the Assembly the CEO of Canberra Health Services called your chief of staff in the middle of an election campaign to discuss a non-urgent matter and early stage unverified data. That turned out to be data showing the impending insolvency of Canberra's hospital network—data which you chose to keep secret. Minister, is it normal practice for portfolio executives to call your Chief of Staff about non-urgent matters and unverified data in the middle of an election campaign?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will again, as I did yesterday, refute Ms Castley's characterisation of the information that was provided. There is absolutely nothing in the information that was provided that suggests that Canberra Health Services was going to be insolvent by the end of the year. That is absolutely untrue, and Ms Castley has absolutely no basis for making that assertion. As I have repeatedly said to her, and to this place, the decisions that government made after the election were what was going to determine whether Canberra Health Services needed to reduce activity to stay within budget or whether additional funding would be provided to ensure that the elective surgery, the—

Ms Castley: Point of order, Mr Speaker, on relevance. I asked the minister if it was normal practice—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am getting there.

Ms Castley: —for portfolio executives to call the chief of staff on non-urgent and unverified data.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms Castley. The minister has assured me she is getting to the answer.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: This was my second election campaign as a minister. The Chief Minister made clear yesterday that ministers continue to be ministers through the caretaker period and they continue to have responsibilities for the day-to-day management of government. That is absolutely clear in the guidance on caretaker conventions. In the 2020 election, of course, we were managing a global pandemic. So it is the only comparator that I have to go on, and I can assure Ms Castley that during the 2020 election campaign it was absolutely standard practice for the Director-General and the CEO of Canberra Health Services to provide my chief of staff, regularly, with information about what was happening in the health system and in the COVID response.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, how much contact did you or your office have with the CEO

during the election campaign?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will clearly have to take that question on notice.

MR HANSON: Minister, do you actually expect anyone to believe that the CEO of Canberra Health Services called in the middle of an election, just to tell your office what you had already been saying publicly for months?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think what Mr Hanson has highlighted is that the data provided simply confirmed what I had been saying publicly for months—that the hospital was busy.

Ministerial records—caretaker period

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Point (4) of the Assembly's code of conduct requires that:

Members should always act in the public interest, make decisions and choices on merit, and not seek to gain financial or other benefit for themselves, their family or friends.

Minister, were you acting in the public interest by hiding information during the election which showed a surge in health demand that would eventually lead to a \$300 million budget blowout?

Ms Orr: Mr Speaker, my point of order is that the code of conduct is administered by the commissioner, who is appointed here, not by ministers. So, if Ms Castley has an issue under the code of conduct, I am not sure that this is the best place to be raising it in the first instance.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Orr, I take your point. Ms Castley, I believe that your question pertains to how the minister interprets the code of conduct, and I think the question is in order. Minister?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: We had a long conversation in this place yesterday about the fact that the *Guidance on caretaker conventions* does not provide any advice to public servants about what factual information they can or should, of their own initiative, be providing to ministers. We talked about the fact that ministers retain responsibility for the day-to-day management of government during that process and that the caretaker conventions are really about decision-making. What is required is that, if ministers or the government are going to take a decision that would bind a future government, the opposition and any other relevant party should be advised and consulted about that.

There was no request for any action to be taken as a result of this day-to-day information that was provided. The caretaker conventions are absolutely clear. I did not seek this information, but the caretaker conventions are absolutely clear that ministers may seek factual information and information relating to the day-to-day business of government from senior executive officials during the caretaker period, and it is inappropriate for this material to be incorporated into party political purposes. This wasn't incorporated into party political purposes; it was simply factual information. It was provided in

accordance with the *Guidance on caretaker conventions* as it stands. We resolved yesterday to have an inquiry into the caretaker conventions, and that is the appropriate place to be considering these matters.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, do you deny enjoying a political benefit by keeping this information secret?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I absolutely do deny that. This was not information that would have provided any—as I have said on radio, just think about what I would have said if I had made this information public: “Hey, everybody, I have received some information that has told me that the hospital is really busy, just as I told you in July, in August, in September and in October—exactly as I have been telling you as we made every single one of our health election commitments, including our first election commitment to 800 more health workers across the five years; just as we talked about when we made the commitments to additional health infrastructure, including the northside hospital that the opposition waited until the last week of the campaign to confirm its commitment to; just as we talked about the community-based health infrastructure that the Canberra Liberals never committed to implementing; just as we talked about the expansion of our nurse-led walk-in centres that the Canberra Liberals do not support; just as we talked about the expansion”—

Mr Cocks: A point of order: the minister has clearly moved into debating issues rather than answering the question.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, she probably has, but she has answered the question. We probably are in a debating mode now, Minister. If you—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have made my point.

MR COCKS: Minister, has your conduct always been consistent with your obligations under the Assembly’s code of conduct?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yes, I believe it has. If Mr Cocks has any evidence that that is not the case, I refer to Ms Orr’s point of order earlier: that any such allegation should be referred to the appropriate authority for investigation and not for slurs in this place.

Planning and development—220 Northbourne Avenue

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Planning. Recently it was reported that Geocon is now developing a site at 220 Northbourne Avenue, which was previously slated for a built-to-rent project by Evri Group. Given that Geocon appears likely to submit a new development application for this site, will the government ensure that a proportion of the new homes includes public housing?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I will take some advice in relation to that matter. I do not have that information to hand with me at the moment.

MR RATTENBURY: What percentage of public or community housing does the government believe is necessary in new developments like this?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I think he is aware that there is not a general policy on inclusion rezoning, except for the fact that during the process of delivering the ILRP, we look at identifying around 15 per cent for affordable or social—including public—housing as part of that process. There are not necessarily requirements on specific blocks or precincts. That is not to say that it could not happen in the future. I am currently looking at what are the mechanisms to potentially do that on some sites.

The government is willing and open to having discussions with particular proponents, particularly around build-to-rent models. We have been clear that we will have that conversation on a case-by-case basis about what contribution we might be able to provide to help facilitate that from a financial point of view.

MS CLAY: Minister, with the mechanisms you just described, will you set separate targets for public homes, for community homes and for affordable homes?

MR STEEL: We already do that through the Indicative Land Release Program in terms of the broad 15 per cent target, and, of course, we have separate targets in relation to the delivery of public housing. Labor has a very clear commitment that we brought to the election, which is being led by the Deputy Chief Minister, to build 1,000 public homes by 2030. We will be supporting the delivery of that target for public housing.

Planning and development—Woden town centre

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Chief Minister. As you know, the Woden town centre has lost much of its recreational facilities, including an indoor sports stadium, Pitch and Putt, bowling greens, a bowling alley, tennis courts and the YMCA, and the outcomes-based planning laws have now changed the zoning to allow the demolition of the 50-metre pool and the ice rink. They will be replaced by five Geocon residential towers and a 25-metre pool. We are experiencing antisocial behaviour, concerns about safety and a lack of maintenance in the area.

On 19 February, in the annual report hearings, I asked you if it was possible to work with the Suburban Land Agency to leverage the CIT to facilitate social and economic development and to do place plans around the core of the Woden town centre. You said:

It would be. Whether it would be SLA or another area of government would depend on available staff, workload priorities and the like. Certainly, both the CIT opening and the public transport interchange will present opportunities for activation and community events. Let me consider what might be the best part of government to lead that work.

Will you support a cross-directorate task force to plan the social and economic development of the Woden town centre?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Carrick for the question. I will be consistent with the answer I gave in annual reports just a week or so ago and give consideration to the matter. I will not announce government policy in question time, as that is against the standing orders.

MS CARRICK: When will you advise me about the best part of government to lead this work?

MR BARR: We are currently considering significant changes to machinery of government matters and the amalgamation of certain government agencies, so it will not be before then. I suspect that the budget round and the new financial year would be an appropriate time to consider such arrangements.

MR COCKS: Chief Minister, when will you consult with Woden residents on improved recreational facilities, as you promised at the election?

MR BARR: I will not be doing that consultation personally, but the area of government will make an announcement in due course.

Law and justice—bail

MS MORRIS: My question is to the minister for police. This morning ACT Policing confirmed they have charged seven teenagers with various offences, including driving stolen motor vehicles, failing to stop for police, aggravated burglary and driving offences. These teenagers have been apprehended by police more than 190 times, with one boy being charged with more than 70 offences.

Minister, do you accept that the ACTs bail system is broken and is putting the community at risk?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question.

Yes, the ACT Policing established Operation Minlaton in February this year to address a spike in residential burglaries and vehicle thefts believed to be conducted by a small cohort of teenage offenders. So, as Ms Morris pointed out, those seven teenagers have been arrested in relation to the vehicle thefts.

In relation to the bail laws, as the Attorney-General has said previously in the Assembly, there will be work done to review the bail laws in this term of government. Further to that, the Chief Police Officer answered questions on the radio this week around his views on the bail laws. As he said then, ACT Policing's views on the bail laws are written in the submission that they provided to the bail inquiry of the Justice and Community Safety Standing Committee last term.

MS MORRIS: Minister, how can you be confident that the teenager who was released on bail will not reoffend this time, given two of the teens that have been rearrested for breaching bail conditions eleven times before?

DR PATERSON: As I said, there is going to be work done on bail reform this term. We also had the election commitment and commitment last term to pursue electronic monitoring.

So electronic monitoring is going to provide an opportunity to explore monitoring of people who are on parole, who are potentially in home detention and who are potentially on bail. Victoria, I think, or Tasmania, has just recently, in the last week, looked at electronic monitoring for young offenders. So that is something that we will be watching. As we progress to implement electronic monitoring in the ACT, we will look

to see how other jurisdictions are doing it.

MS BARRY: Minister, do you regret axing the bail review?

DR PATERSON: That is a question for the Attorney-General.

Law and justice—bail

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services and it also relates to the seven repeat youth offenders re-arrested and charged by police this morning. What do you say to the hundreds of families who have personally experienced these crimes and the thousands of Canberrans who no longer feel safe in their homes because your government is soft on crime?

DR PATERSON: I strongly refute Ms Morris's assertions. I say to the families who are impacted by that crime, I am really sorry for what you have experienced. We know that property crime has a serious impact on the community. What I will say is that, in the last year, property crime has reduced by about seven per cent in the ACT, so we are seeing a reduction in property crime. ACT Policing have their Outsmart the Offender campaign, which is a campaign run to encourage the community to protect their assets—their house and their bikes—by using lock systems, using cameras for houses, and that type of thing. ACT police, as well as doing the hard yards out there and keeping the community safe, are also about prevention of these types of crimes.

MS MORRIS: Minister, will you apologise to the hundreds of families who were unnecessarily subjected to home invasions by repeat offenders because the bail system is broken and the community is suffering from crime?

DR PATERSON: I strongly reject the assertion of Ms Morris's question. As I said, I feel deeply sorry for the families that are impacted by property crime. It is a terrible crime. As I said, property crime has been reducing in the ACT, thanks to the good work of ACT Policing.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, it is clear that the police are doing their job. When will you do yours?

DR PATERSON: I am doing my job by recruiting more police numbers. The ACT government has a significant investment in ACT police. That is an investment to see 150 new police over the next five years. We are also pursuing investment in police infrastructure—looking at a new city police station, city headquarters, and a Molonglo police station. I am passionate about investing in our ACT police, to see them supported to be able to do the job that they do.

Waste—recycling facility

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, can you please update the Assembly on how the government is ensuring Canberra has state-of-the-art recycling infrastructure to meet the needs of our growing population?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. The ACT government is committed to providing modern, efficient recycling infrastructure that supports our growing population and evolving waste management needs. Following a competitive procurement process, Veolia has been selected to design, build and operate a state-of-the-art materials recovery facility in Hume. This facility will process up to 115,000 tonnes of mixed recyclables annually, reducing our reliance on interstate processing, notwithstanding that interstate processing is certainly preferable to dumping all of our recycling in landfill.

The facility will feature world-leading sorting and recovery technology, improving resource recovery rates and ensuring higher quality recycled materials. This investment will future proof Canberra's recycling capacity, enhanced environmental sustainability and support new local jobs in the burgeoning circular economy.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, what benefits will this new facility bring to the Canberra region?

MS CHEYNE: It will deliver significant environmental, economic and social benefits. It will improve recycling rates, reducing waste sent to landfill and ensuring more materials are repurposed locally. By eliminating the need to transport recyclables interstate, it will lower emissions and enhance sustainability. It will also create 130 local jobs during construction and 24 permanent positions, strengthening the workforce in our circular economy. Additionally, it will include an education space for schools and the community, raising awareness about recycling and waste reduction. This investment reflects our commitment to a cleaner, greener and more sustainable future.

MS TOUGH: Minister, what advanced technologies will be used in the new facility to improve recycling and sorting?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary It will incorporate cutting edge recycling technology to maximise resource recovery. Advanced optical sorting systems will use laser identification and air jets to separate plastics, while high powered magnets will extract metals. A glass purification plant will crush and wash glass, ensuring higher quality recycled materials like those we use in some of our road and line marking efforts. The facility will also feature enhanced baling processes for container deposit scheme materials. With real time data collection and monitoring systems, operations will be continually optimised for efficiency. These innovations will significantly reduce contamination, increase the purity of recyclables and support our transition to a more sustainable circular economy.

Domestic and family violence—support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence. There is a letter in my inbox that is also in yours, Minister. The letter is from former chair of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, Tanya Keed—who joins us in the gallery today. It reads:

In my role I am constantly receiving calls from women or their families about

serious issues and incidents of domestic and family violence within the homes of our community members in the ACT. This morning another came in—a woman bashed so badly that she requires hospitalisation. She has been told that she needs to go on a waitlist for assessment to receive support.

Minister, Ms Keed's question and mine today is: who exactly is currently funded to provide specialised DV service supports to Aboriginal women in the ACT?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question and thank Ms Keed for her email, which we will respond to. I would also like to thank Ms Keed for the work that she does—incredibly important work in the ACT working with victims of domestic, family and sexual violence.

The ACT government seeks to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people in the work that it does and acknowledges the very high rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence. This work started last term, and I would like to thank Ms Berry for her prioritisation of funding Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in the previous budget. The ACT funds five Aboriginal community-controlled organisations for domestic, family and sexual violence responses, with over \$4 million provided directly to Aboriginal-led organisations. These organisations are Yurwan Bullan, Yerrabi Yurwang, Yeddung Mura, Sisters in Spirit Aboriginal Corporation and WhISPers. Yurwan Bullan received \$1.3 million from May 2023 to 2026, Yerrabi Yurwang received \$530,000 from July 2023 to January 2026, Yeddung Mura received \$952,000 from April 2023 to 2026, Sisters in Spirit Aboriginal Corporation received \$1.016 million from April 2023 to June 2026 and WhISPers Community Healing Our Way received \$180,000 from April 2023 to June 2026.

MR EMERSON: Minister, when it comes to crisis support, if an Aboriginal woman is beaten in her home here in the ACT this afternoon, who can she call to get immediate culturally safe support without being waitlisted or triaged out and to be guaranteed a safe place to sleep tonight for herself and her children?

DR PATERSON: I would recommend that someone call ACT Policing to begin with. I would also recommend the Domestic Violence Crisis Service as an immediate point of call and also the Canberra Rape Crisis Service. They are 24 hours a day and are there to support people experiencing violence.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, is the government committed to investing a significant portion of the \$6.1 million in federal funding announced yesterday for gender-based violence in the ACT into Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to provide specialised, culturally safe family and domestic violence support services for First Nations people?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. That will be a matter for the budget. The money comes to the ACT midyear, so that will be a budget process. What I can say is that the ACT does and will strongly support Aboriginal community-controlled responses to domestic, family and sexual violence.

Environment—earless dragon

MS CLAY: My question is to the minister for the environment. Minister, on Tuesday you spoke passionately about the need to protect the earless dragon and ACT government efforts to save it. Canberra Airport Group has planned a road, since 2009, that will run through and fragment key habitat of the earless dragon. In 2022, the earless dragon was uplifted to “critically endangered”—the last stop before extinction.

After the former Greens environment minister raised serious community concerns, federal Labor environment minister Plibersek sent the airport back to the drawing board until Canberra Airport Group could show the road would not increase the risk of extinction. But last month work on the road commenced. It is now paused due to community protest.

Minister, when did you last contact your Labor colleague, federal environment minister Plibersek, on the project, and what was the outcome?

MS ORR: I would like to thank Ms Clay for the question. I think it is quite a topical matter, given events that are underway. I would note that Ms Clay and I have actually had a number of discussions about this, and it goes to those as well. We do have a briefing set up tomorrow, once the sitting week is over, for Ms Clay to put a series of questions to officials and so forth.

The airport is not under the jurisdiction of the ACT government, and the federal minister does not report to me. Going to the point of Ms Clay’s question of when the last time was I was in contact with the minister, there have been a number of discussions regarding the Canberra grassland earless dragon and what the impact could be based on the action that the airport is currently undertaking and how we move forward from there. Those discussions will continue to be ongoing. They are not with one particular group or one particular person. They are with a range of people and advisers and organisations that can help to put together what is quite a complex puzzle in hoping to get to a good outcome. So rather than heading into a political storm of “Labor should do this” and “someone else should do this” or “this should happen” or “you should talk to this person”, what I can assure Ms Clay I will keep doing is working with everyone with an interest in this to hopefully find a good, nature-positive way forward.

Miss Nuttall: A point of order on relevance. I think it was specifically about when the last time was that the minister contacted the federal Minister for the Environment. Is that information you are able to provide?

MR SPEAKER: I think that the minister answered the question. Ms Clay?

MS CLAY: Minister, are you able to explain to the Canberra community what the road is for?

MS ORR: I would note that the road is being developed by the Canberra Airport, which does not report to me and I do not have oversight of. Rather than speak for the airport—I think Ms Clay, would like to know the answer to that question—I would direct Ms Clay to them.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, when were you last in contact with the Canberra

Airport Group about this project and what was the outcome of that conversation?

MS ORR: I refer the member to my original answer: I have been in contact with a range of stakeholders and will continue to work through the issues at hand.

Hospitals—waiting lists

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. According to your own data, on 11 October 2024, the percentage of overdue ready-for-surgery category 1 patients was 21 per cent. Four months later, as published on 27 February, this had increased to 24 per cent, even as demand for surgery fell. Minister, why has the percentage of category 1 patients overdue for elective surgery increased in this period?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take that question on notice. I am aware that there are two different types of data in relation to overdue elective surgery. One is around people who are on the waitlist and the other is around the proportion of people who received their surgery who were overdue at the time of receiving their surgery. Given that I have not had a look at the source of data that Ms Castley is using, I will have to take the question on notice and check which of those types of information it is and respond to the rest of the question on that basis.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, is it acceptable for one-quarter of these patients, who are supposed to get surgery within 30 days, to be overdue?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Obviously, we vastly prefer that no patients are overdue when they receive their surgery. We do have a specific focus on ensuring that category 1 patients receive their surgery on time. I am pleased to say that after some period of increase in elective surgery waiting lists, in part due to COVID-19 and in part due to the theatre fire at the former Calvary Public Hospital Bruce, we have started to see a turnaround in elective surgery waiting lists, and that is really heartening. Of course, we will continue to work on this.

MR HANSON: Minister, despite claiming for the past two days in question time that everything was hunky-dory in the health system, why is the percentage of Canberrans waiting for cat 1 elective surgery getting worse?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think that is fundamentally exactly the same question as Ms Castley's first question, so I will take that on notice. I have never said that everything in the health system is really fantastic and going super well. No health system could ever claim that everything is super fantastic, everything is going well and that nobody is ever waiting for care. That is simply not how health systems work, and every health system in the country is experiencing it.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: What I just said to Mr Hanson is that we have started to see a turnaround in our elective surgery waitlist because—

Mr Hanson: Not cat 1s.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: This is a different set of data. Mr Hanson, I have already said that I will need to take the question on notice and understand what data the opposition is referring to. It may well be lag data that is already out of date.

Hospitals—waiting lists

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. I again refer to elective surgery waiting times. On 11 October 2024, the percentage of overdue ready for surgery category 2 patients, was 45 per cent. As with category 1 patients, this percentage also increased after the last four months, to 51 per cent. Could the minister explain why the percentage of category 2 patients has also increased?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again, I will take that question on notice, but it would be super helpful, in order to be able to answer the question, if Ms Castley in asking questions, would provide the source of the data to which she is referring, so that we can check what type of data it is—

Ms Castley interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: If she is referring to the Canberra Health Services fortnightly update on waiting lists, that is published fortnightly—

Ms Castley interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: So why she would be referring to October 2024, is beyond me. So—

Ms Castley interjecting—

THE SPEAKER: Ms Castley, you have had your chance. Ms Stephen-Smith, you are done?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am done.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, don't Canberrans deserve better than a fifty-fifty chance that they will get the surgery they need, in the timeframe their doctor says they need it? It is CHS data, Minister.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Well if you could point me to the actual CHS data, rather than just saying that, Ms Castley—

Ms Castley interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: —it would be helpful. Sorry, through you, Mr Speaker.

Of course, as Ms Castley has said, we want to see everybody getting their surgery on time. Of course, we absolutely do. But we know that we have seen significant impacts, through the COVID-19 pandemic, which those opposite seem to have completely forgotten about, and through the Calvary Public Hospital theatre fire, which knocked out five public hospital theatres for 10 months. We are now doing an incredible amount

of elective surgery to meet our elective surgery target this year. Canberra Health Services is publishing fortnightly what those waiting lists look like, by specialty, and that is providing transparency to the community. Of course this is operational data. So, again, it will be helpful if Ms Castley would try different—

Ms Castley: It is on your website.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: So then why do—

Ms Castley: You asked for the source.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: But you are talking about October.

MS MORRIS: Minister, if you needed elective surgery, would you opt for the public system?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am perfectly happy to answer this question. If I needed elective surgery, no I would not, because I do not need to. I have private health insurance and I would use my private health insurance. I could self-insure if I did not have private health insurance. I would encourage everyone in Canberra, if they need elective surgery, and they have private health insurance, and they can afford to, to use their private health insurance. It is one of the ways that people can help take pressure off the public health system.

One of the challenges we face in the ACT is that we have the highest proportion of people who hold private health insurance and about the lowest proportion of people who use their private health insurance. That places additional pressure on the public hospital system. Now part of the reason for that, I absolutely recognise, is that people also face high gaps. I am in a very fortunate position of being able to use the private system. It is a very fortunate position that I am in, and so therefore, I would do that.

Sport and recreation—Stromlo to Cotter bike trail

MISS NUTTALL: My question is hopefully to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development regarding Stromlo mountain bike trails. Minister, the time line for construction of the Stromlo to Cotter link trail is meant to begin this year. Can you give us an update on specifically when we will see progress?

MR STEEL: I am happy to take the question on notice and will come back to you with some further information. I do not believe that it is within my portfolio responsibilities at the present time as minister for planning, but I will come back to you on that.

MISS NUTTALL: Is the government going to provide any additional funding or staffing to improve maintenance on these trails, given that mountain bikers are super keen about it?

MR STEEL: I will come back on that. I think you are referring to the Cotter flow trail, which is not part of the Stromlo Forest Park precinct, where there has obviously been a significant amount of extra investment in maintenance through the insourcing contract for maintenance. I can certainly come back to you with some further information about

the maintenance of that and what is being proposed once the flow trail has been built, which it has not been at this point.

MS CLAY: Given how divided responsibility is amongst many ministers, as was just demonstrated, who is taking the lead to communicate with the mountain biking community to let them know there is transparency and leadership on this?

MR STEEL: Stromlo Forest Park has offered to provide that connection. We have discussed that in the Assembly in the past through various pieces of private members' business. They can contact Stromlo Forest Park management. There is also a stakeholder reference group as part of Stromlo Forest Park that has a range of user groups represented. That is a really good place to talk about a range of issues—those that relate to not just mountain biking but also the broader recreational precinct. The Cotter flow trail will connect with Stromlo Forest Park, so it would be a relevant item of discussion.

Canberra Health Services—surgeons

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. As the figures demonstrate, the percentage of Canberrans who are now overdue for their elective surgery has increased under your watch since you were re-elected. Minister, can you explain how this situation will change following the resignation of most of Canberra's orthopaedic surgeons in recent weeks?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: It is not true that of most Canberra's orthopaedic surgeons have resigned in recent weeks.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, do you deny the resignations of orthopaedic surgeons are ultimately because of your appointments, your decisions and your mismanagement?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I cannot speak on behalf of the individuals. I believe I took a question on notice earlier in the week to provide some information about the resignations for each person. What I can say, is that Canberra Health Services and I have ensured that additional locum cover has been brought in, in case it is required to cover orthopaedic lists. There have been some other challenges in relation to orthopaedics that do not relate to resignations. One of the really promising things in relation to the decisions that we have made about visiting medical officers is that other craft groups are coming to the table and having conversations about how we can make it work. As I have said yesterday or the day before, we have said to everyone who has a contract that is expiring within the next six months that we will extend that contract for six months, have a conversation about the arrangements for those visiting medical officers. But the pathway that we are on around patient-centred care, organising our services around patients, will continue, and what we want to do is have a conversation and share information.

In the meeting I had last week with orthopaedic surgeons, there was a recognition that, I think in their words, mistakes have been made on both sides, and there was an agreement that we would work together to try to have a constructive conversation about how people could share information so there was transparency from the side of the operations centre and the side of the surgeons, around who was a priority for surgery

and around how those orthopaedic surgical lists would be managed. So I would really discourage Ms Castley from scaremongering about this issue. There is no evidence to support that this has had an impact on elective surgery waiting lists for orthopaedics.

MS BARRY: Minister, isn't it time that you admit that you are the problem with the Canberra health system?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am sorry Mr Speaker; I am going to need Ms Barry to repeat the question.

MS BARRY: Minister, isn't it time that you admit that you are the problem with the healthcare system?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I would certainly say to Ms Barry that she should maybe look at some of the data about the improvements in performance of the health system. I note that Ms Castley has completely stopped talking about emergency department performance because we have become one of the best performing jurisdictions in the country. Our hospitals are among the best performing against their peers in emergency departments because of the changes we have implemented to improve flow through our hospitals, because of the investments that we have made to open the new Critical Services Building at Canberra Hospital that has had incredible feedback from patients, carers and clinicians about the flow through that hospital, the way that the hospital is supporting people. We have brought together an integrated public hospital system to enable our hospital system to become more efficient and we are seeing those elective surgery waitlists now turning around as part of those planned care initiatives. Like every jurisdiction in the country, we have been affected by the impacts of COVID-19 and, in our case also by the impacts of a theatre fire at Calvary Public Hospital, which are now being recovered from. So no, Ms Barry, I absolutely reject that assertion.

Children and young people—Next Steps for Our Kids strategy

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Youth and Families. Minister, I understand there has been considerable progress with the Next Steps for Our Kids strategy, particularly in relation to setting up the new contract arrangements through the Children, Young People and Families Panel. Can you provide us with an update?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Ms Tough for her keen interest in and advocacy for children, young people and families in the ACT. There has, of course, been a substantial amount of work to progress the next Steps for Our Kids strategy. I would like to acknowledge my predecessor, Minister Stephen-Smith, for the work she did to commence and drive this strategy from the beginning.

One of the biggest successes has been the forming of the Children, Young People and Families Panel. This is a new group of non-government organisations that support children, young people, families and carers by providing them with a range of different supports. The panel will deliver therapeutic and cultural services across several service packages. These range from sustaining families, which include intensive family support, preservation and restoration services, kinship and foster care, extended aftercare support, contact and transport services and functional family therapy for youth justice.

There are currently 12 providers on the panel and they will start delivering services in a phased way. Services commenced in late 2024 and will be rolled out over the next 12 months. The panel sees the government commit more and more to the provision of early intervention and prevention services for some of our most vulnerable Canberrans and always work to keep children safely at home with family.

MS TOUGH: Minister, what work is being done to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families through the panel arrangements?

MR PETTERSSON: The panel includes an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation, Yerrabi Yurwang. This service was established in 2019 and came from an idea of like-minded Aboriginal community members who wanted Aboriginal people to deliver services for Aboriginal families. This embodies the Closing the Gap and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement principles of self-determination for Aboriginal communities.

I had the absolute pleasure of visiting with Yerrabi and their board just a few weeks ago at the beautiful Yarramundi Reach. It is clear to me that they are committed to making long-term changes for families engaged with their service. Under the new panel, Yerrabi started delivering services in late 2024 under the Sustaining Families Program directly to Aboriginal children, young people and their families. They are supporting Aboriginal families early and taking a whole-of-family approach. This is where the needs of all family members are considered in recognition that children grow and thrive in healthy families.

They have also partnered with OzChild to deliver a successful pilot of the Functional Family Therapy program, focused on supporting young people at risk of involvement with the justice system. This program was recently funded long-term due to its success and is one way we are preparing for the system to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility in July 2025.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, what impact is the new panel and Next Steps for Our Kids having on trends in kids in care?

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you, Mr Werner-Gibbings. I am pleased to say that we are seeing an impact on the system through the Next Steps initiatives. The Productivity Commissioner's *Report on government services* reported that, in the ACT on 30 June 2024, 608 children and young people were living in out-of-home care, down from 723 in 2022-23. This is 115 less children than the previous year and a great result, as we have more options to keep children at home with families. The *Family matters* report for 2024 also noted the rate of overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care decreased from 14 per thousand in 2023 to 11.7 per thousand in 2024. This is an important step in the right direction and a demonstration that some of the measures in place for Aboriginal children and families are taking effect.

We know there is a lot more work that is needed, and that is why we invested in the 2024-25 budget an additional \$9.9 million for four years to implement Next Steps and make lasting change.

Budget—reporting methods

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, the ACT government uses non-standard budgeting measures: specifically, the Headline Net Operating Balance, or HNOB. Meanwhile, every other jurisdiction in Australia uses the Uniform Presentation Framework, or UPF. Since becoming Treasurer, have you reviewed the use of HNOB, and will you move the budget process to UPF to align with the standard approach used by every other state and territory?

MR STEEL: I thank the shadow treasurer for his question. This has been a long discussed matter that has come up on regular occasions at the Assembly in various sittings. We do utilise the Headline Net Operating Balance measure because it provides the greatest level of transparency about the current budget position so that the government can make decisions and other members of the Assembly can understand the position of the ACT's finances, particularly when taking into account the superannuation liability that the ACT has, which is different to other states that do not use the net operating balance measure.

We present the finances according to Australian Accounting Standards. We present as much information as is useful to provide that transparency for people to see the state of our finances. It is because of that superannuation adjustment that we do present it through the Headline Net Operating Balance.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, what are the trade-offs, from your perspective, of sticking with this non-standard approach and what are the drawbacks?

MR STEEL: The Headline Net Operating Balance is the ACT government's key fiscal measure of public finances. It is calculated as the difference between revenue and expenses from transactions, as defined by the ABS Government Finance Statistics framework, to arrive at the net operating balance plus the superannuation return adjustment.

The SRA is not defined by the GFS or Australian Accounting Standards; the SRA is included in the HNOB to account for the unique nature of public sector defined benefit superannuation arrangements in the ACT. The net operating balance includes interest and dividend revenue derived from financial assets but excludes gains and losses on investments, which are treated as other economic flows. The HNOB also includes all expenses associated with the defined benefit public sector superannuation arrangements. So, this SRA, effectively, adds back the net gains and losses on the investment component to ensure that the fiscal position is not understated, as these gains provide a source of funding for the long-term superannuation liability. Our goal here is to provide the most transparent set of accounts as we can—

Mr Cocks: A point of order. I have given the Treasurer some time. The question was not about what the different measures are. I am specifically interested in the trade-offs when adopting this particular measure and what the drawbacks of that are. The Treasurer has gone largely to a defence of the current arrangements.

MR SPEAKER: I think the Treasurer has to some extent answered the question, broadly speaking, on the pros and cons. He has got 40 seconds left if he wishes to

continue.

MR STEEL: I have finished, thank you.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you. Is there a supplementary? Mr Milligan.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, does your government's use of non-standard budgeting reflect your own prioritisation of spin over acknowledging and dealing with the true extent of the ACT's budget problem?

MR STEEL: No, quite the opposite. It provides a transparent statement of our accounts so that we can make the right decisions in the budget process based on a true measure of the accounts because of our unique circumstances in accounting for that superannuation liability. If we did not do that, we would also be criticised by the rest of the parliament for not doing that and not properly treating that in the way that it should be. We present the accounts in a range of different ways to provide the full set of information about where the accounts are up to.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

Mr Barr interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Barr!

MR STEEL: We will continue to do that into the future.

MR SPEAKER: Members! We have one to get through; that is all!

Sport and recreation—Taylor district playing fields

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. I visited the Gungahlin Bulls Rugby League Football Club “come and try” day—and I believe you did as well—at the Taylor playing fields. They operate out of a number of shipping containers there, and have done so for a while. A very clear question they are seeking an answer to is: what is the government's plan to provide permanent facilities, and in roughly what time frame will that happen, so that they can start to plan for their future?

MS BERRY: Yes, I did have a great conversation with the sports club out there about their aspirations for the future and indicated to them that any kind of changes to that area would be part of budget processes, as Mr Braddock would well know. I think that they took on board my thoughts, with respect to making sure that I work with them about what their needs are in the future, having regard to new sports fields that would be built there, as well as future pavilions and change rooms. I am happy to keep working with them on their aspirations going forward.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, why isn't this type of infrastructure planned out beyond the budget cycle so that clubs know and can prepare in advance?

MS BERRY: They are definitely committed to, as far as election commitments are concerned, and the needs within our community. Each year budgets are made; ministers put in their applications to budgets, to make sure that they have a good way of going forward, particularly with spending like this, at the sports field at Gungahlin. Whilst you can make a commitment, the budget cycle is yearly.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, does the government have a time line on when the Sport and Active Recreation Infrastructure Survey will be turned into a more structured delivery road map, which might aid clarity on this, beyond just the listening report?

MS BERRY: That was not the commitment that we made, when we did that survey, but we are certainly happy to talk with sports clubs about their aspirations, which was what the survey was designed to do, to give us some idea of what their aspirations were, going forward, to inform the government's future sport and recreation commitments.

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

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Domestic and family violence—strategy

DR PATERSON: I have two arising from yesterday. My clarification yesterday was incorrect. In answer to Miss Nuttall's question, the funding comes from consolidated revenue, not from the CECA families package offset by the levy. So it does not come from the levy.

Domestic and family violence—grants and funding

DR PATERSON: There was another question from Mr Emerson asked around when I was advised that the Safer Families Assistance Grants had exhausted. I was advised on 30 January.

Sport and recreation—Stromlo to Cotter bike trail

MS CHEYNE: I want to apologise to Minister Steel and for mishearing Miss Nuttall's question. The Stromlo to Cotter Mountain Bike Trail is me, Stromlo Forest Park is the Chief Minister, and DA approvals and so on do sit within the Planning Directorate but obviously are subject to independent advice and decision. I also did not process everything you asked; I am sorry, Miss Nuttall. But I will give you as much information as I have to hand in this moment—through you, Mr Speaker—and that is that Capital Ecology and the trail designer have recently, just last month, walked the trail alignment together to identify areas to avoid and mitigation strategies to inform the detailed design for this long-awaited experience linking Stromlo to the Cotter. We now have all of the necessary ecological and heritage data to complete detailed design and commence the approvals process.

The trail experience will include a shared-use trail, offering walkers, runners and cyclists—single direction only—an opportunity to appreciate Stony Creek Nature Reserve and enjoy spectacular views over the Murrumbidgee River. This will be subject to a development approval that will need an environmental significance opinion and, at

the commonwealth level, it will need to be assessed for potential impact on matters of national environmental significance. But we are heading into that direction now where those approvals can be sought.

Just last week or the week before, I sought advice on whether a physical sign can be installed at Stromlo Forest Park that explains what stage this project is up to and some of the key points that are currently on the website—notwithstanding that not everyone thinks to look at the website in the first instance and given that there has been some significant progress so far. Anything I have not answered that you asked, I will take on notice.

Roads—Monaro Highway

MS CHEYNE: Following questions about the Monaro Highway on Tuesday, I have a further update which goes to some of the questions that I answered at the time. Regarding the implementation of the traffic management arrangements to accommodate the demolition of Dog Trap Creek Bridge, as part of the Monaro Highway upgrades, these are now expected to be in place in late April.

The communications plan and collateral are in a mature stage, and communication will occur well ahead of the implementation of these arrangements. The project page has been updated and confirms that the start date for the traffic lights and the lane closure of the intersection will be provided this month, and a map with alternative routes is provided on the webpage. Further updates, including travel impact maps, will be made available on the page shortly. Much of this information is also included in the March edition of *Our Canberra*.

Regarding encouraging the use of public transport, consideration will be given to supports and communicated to the public ahead of the implementation of those arrangements for traffic. Tuggeranong residents are certainly encouraged to take advantage of the six local park-and-rides and to connect with nearby bus services, with the R4 to the city taking about 35 minutes and the R5 from Lanyon to the city via Woden about 50 minutes.

Papers

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

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 13—Annual Reports—2023-2024—Justice and Community Safety Directorate—Corrigendum, undated.

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to section 21—Auditor-General's Reports—Government response to Reports No 9/2024—2023-24 Financial Audits Overview and No 12/2024—2023-24 Financial Audits Financial Results and Audit Findings—Correspondence from the ACT Treasurer to the ACT Auditor-General, dated 3 March 2025.

Children and Young People Act, pursuant to section 501T(4)—Therapeutic Support Panel for Children and Young People—Reports—2024, dated 17 December 2024.

Freedom of Information Act, pursuant to section 39—Copy of notice provided to

the Ombudsman—Community Services Directorate—Freedom of Information request—Decision not made in time (FOI-CYF-22/41), dated 27 September 2023.

Roads—Molonglo Valley

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.01): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) the Molonglo Valley is the ACT's fastest-growing region, with its population projected to increase from approximately 15,000 residents today to more than 70,000 by 2050;
 - (b) Federal Government infrastructure modelling in 2019 predicted significant traffic congestion in the Molonglo Valley, a forecast that has now materialised as a daily reality for residents;
 - (c) the 2010 ACT Government Infrastructure Plan identified the need for a new bridge over the Molonglo River at John Gorton Drive and an East-West Arterial road to support Molonglo Valley residents;
 - (d) federal funding for the Molonglo River Bridge was announced in 2020 by then ACT Senator Zed Seselja, with ACT Government funding allocated in the 2022-2023 budget with a promised completion date of December 2025;
 - (e) planning for future Molonglo Valley suburbs of Bandler and Sulman cannot progress prior to the design of the Bindubi Street Extension being finalised; and
 - (f) the 2024-2025 budget committed to progressing the Molonglo Parkway Connector, however, no funding has been allocated for its construction and included no funding for the design work of the Bindubi Street Extension;
- (2) further notes that:
 - (a) the Cotter Road and John Gorton Drive serve as the Molonglo Valley's only arterial road connections to the rest of the ACT, currently carrying 35,000 vehicles per day and experiencing severe congestion;
 - (b) traffic congestion on these roads is now affecting surrounding areas, leading to delays on key routes such as Streeton Drive and William Hovell Drive; and
 - (c) increased congestion is diverting traffic through school zones and residential streets, raising safety concerns for children and other community members;
- (3) acknowledges that:
 - (a) dividing the Molonglo Parkway Connector into multiple stages risks creating Canberra's largest cul-de-sac, failing to provide meaningful congestion relief; and
 - (b) without the necessary road infrastructure, Molonglo Valley residents will continue to experience worsening congestion, longer commutes, and increased safety risks; and
- (4) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) provide an update on the timeline and cost of the Molonglo River Bridge construction;
- (b) develop a costed plan and timeline for the delivery of the full East-West Arterial Road with connections to the Tuggeranong Parkway;
- (c) develop a costed plan and timeframe for the delivery of the Bindubi Street Extension;
- (d) develop a comprehensive roads and traffic infrastructure plan to address congestion in and around the Molonglo Valley, including:
 - (i) consideration of expanding the Cotter Road to improve traffic flow;
 - (ii) strategies to manage congestion while major road projects are underway; and
 - (iii) identification of short, medium and long-term infrastructure solutions to alleviate traffic congestion in the region; and
- (e) table the East-West Arterial Road plan, Bindubi Street Extension plan and the roads and traffic infrastructure plan by the end of the first sitting day in September.

Let me say at the outset how impressed I have been at the amount of engagement that I have had around this motion, both within this chamber and outside. No-one likes being stuck in traffic. I have said it before, but it really bears repeating: no-one likes being stuck in traffic. Being stuck in traffic congestion and gridlock leaves people less patient with other people. It is frustrating; it is unproductive; and, frankly, it feels pointless.

To paraphrase those far wiser than me: time is the least renewable resource we have in life. Time stuck in traffic is time that could be invested in your family, loved ones and friends. Time stuck in traffic is time that could be invested in doing the things you love and are passionate about. Time stuck in traffic is time that you could invest in learning new skills, in improving your health or enjoying all that our city and our environment has to offer.

But spending time in traffic is not necessarily a choice, and traffic congestion and gridlock has become an everyday reality for many people in Canberra. The Molonglo Valley, as I have pointed out many times, has some of the worst traffic congestion in Canberra. You only have to look at a Google map in the morning to see that that is the case. The red lines go on and on.

The Molonglo Valley is our newest major region. It is the place more and more people are choosing to make their own because it is where the homes are being built. But the traffic is making thousands of people's lives worse every day. From the people I speak with in the electorate, time sitting in traffic congestion is now contributing up to 50 per cent or more of their daily commute, depending on where they live. People are trying to work around the congestion problems by using residential streets, but this is simply creating more problems and safety risks in surrounding residential areas, around schools and around shops.

The congestion problems are impacting surrounding areas, including Tuggeranong, Weston Creek, Woden, West Belconnen and even the inner south—and it was all not only predictable but predicted. The ACT government's own infrastructure plan

acknowledged way back in 2010 that new infrastructure would be required to support Molonglo Valley's growing population. Federal modelling indicated there would be significant traffic and congestion coming from Molonglo Valley. All the way back in 2008 there were some pretty clear signs in this Assembly's inquiry into variation 281 to the Territory Plan that new infrastructure would be needed or we were going to run into exactly the problems we see today.

I remember attending one of the earliest consultation sessions on the development of the Molonglo Valley as my wife and I considered where to make our home. At that session in Weston Creek, resident after resident predicted exactly the problems that we are facing today.

All the way through, the government has known that it would need to build the Molonglo River Bridge. The government knew it would need to build an east-west arterial road, and the government knew it would need to build the Bindubi Street extension. The need for each of these projects has been known and understood for well over a decade. Many people who bought into the Molonglo Valley thought that at least two of them would have been delivered and operational by now. But the infrastructure simply was not delivered before the problems emerged.

The first community campaign I embarked on after I was elected was the campaign to finally get the Molonglo River Bridge built, a project that had been on the cards for years. The federal government, following advocacy from former Senator Seselja, committed significant funding in 2020 for the bridge to be delivered. But it took years before the contract was signed. Those opposite may laugh, but the former Liberal government was investing in this project years before the ACT government finally committed funding in the budget to deliver that critical piece of infrastructure.

Last year, the government finally committed funding to start designing the east-west arterial road. But there was no funding for construction, and the commitment only included design works for essentially half of the project—a decision which could literally result in the government delivering Canberra's biggest cul-de-sac if that decision is allowed to stand. That is why last year I led the campaign to get Molonglo moving and why the Canberra Liberals committed at the election to prioritising the full east-west arterial project and delivering tangible improvements at key intersections and roads to alleviate the daily impact of congestion in and around the Molonglo Valley.

The first and top priority and objective of this motion is to get the government to take up that cause and deliver some relief to Canberrans living in Molonglo Valley and surrounds. The second objective is to secure the necessary roads and infrastructure to enable delivery of the homes we need to restore hope of home ownership to Canberrans.

The extension of Bindubi Street is not only critical to alleviate traffic congestion but is also a key project to enable planning for and construction of the future Molonglo Valley suburbs of Bandler and Sulman. I would like to extend my gratitude to Mr Hemsley of the Molonglo Valley Community Forum for the suggestion that we take this opportunity to emphasise the importance of this road project for the future of Molonglo Valley. Mr Hemsley and I have been speaking with each other for a long time about the barriers to sensible development in Molonglo, and it was he who first alerted me to the fact that, without the planning for the Bindubi Street extension, the planning for these new

suburbs simply cannot progress. Without more homes, the price of housing will stay out of reach for far too many Canberrans. We cannot afford to have even more delays baked into the process of releasing more land for more homes.

It is time for the government to catch up with the reality of the traffic that people in Molonglo Valley, Weston Creek and across Canberra face every day. It is time to face up to the need for more roads and more and better infrastructure in our developing areas because if they do not, the problems will only get worse.

I would like to again acknowledge the positive engagement on this motion from all parties and the Assembly—and I mean “all parties”. I am convinced that every member here genuinely understands the impact of congestions on people’s lives because I am pretty sure no-one in this place likes being stuck in traffic either. So I am very hopeful that, notwithstanding the amendments that we will debate, all parties can get on board and finally get Molonglo moving.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.09): I rise to speak on the growing concerns regarding the rapidly developing Molonglo Valley region, and I support Mr Cocks’s motion. The current traffic congestion and the urgent need for improved transport infrastructure, including public and active transport options, is a live consideration that needs to be undertaken. In 2010, the ACT government’s Infrastructure Plan identified the need for a bridge and the east-west arterial road. While the bridge is underway and the 2024-25 budget committed to progressing the Parkway-Drive Connection, the government has yet to allocate funds for its construction.

It is clear that prioritising primary arterial road connections and cyclepaths is essential. These improvements are crucial in order to relieve pressure on existing roads and enable the development of new public transport connections. A pressing need exists for better direct public transport options for the Molonglo Valley to major employment hubs. Providing residents with fast and direct routes to work is a key strategy to reduce peak-time congestion. For example, a direct rapid connection from the Molonglo Valley to Parkes and Barton can be implemented without delay, as can a direct route to West Deakin. Additionally, once the Molonglo River Bridge is operational, a rapid transport link between Belconnen, the Molonglo Valley, Weston and Woden should be established. We must also prioritise the construction of the Mint Interchange, which will offer an alternative route for journeys between districts, including access to the Canberra Hospital. This will help alleviate pressure on the already congested Cotter Road and Dudley Street route.

It is critical that transport planning for Molonglo is fully integrated into the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework, to ensure a cohesive and forward-thinking approach to development in the region. The government has had years to plan for this growing population. As development continues, it is essential that timely and well-considered decisions are made now to address these challenges and lay the foundation for future growth.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (3.12): I certainly welcome the opportunity to have a discussion about transport connections, and particularly multimodal transport connections through the growing Molonglo Valley.

I had the opportunity to speak with many hundreds of people during the election campaign and thousands through my broader campaign in the Molonglo Valley. I certainly heard from constituents that there are currently some challenges and bottlenecks, particularly on the Cotter Road, which is currently the major entry and exit point out of the Molonglo Valley. It has seen a consistent increase in traffic volumes over the years as suburbs in the Molonglo Valley continue to develop and become populated. We know that Cotter Road is a crucial link for the Molonglo Valley residents to access the city and southern parts of Canberra via a vehicle or public transport—particularly on the R10 route and route 66—but also through active travel.

Recent traffic surveys were undertaken in December 2024 which identified that weekday vehicle trips for the busiest section of the Cotter Road, between Streeton Drive and the Tuggeranong Parkway, are comparable to other busy sections along Belconnen Way and Athllon Drive. But, based on road users and Roads ACT feedback, the primary cause of the congestion on the Cotter Road is around the Kilpatrick Street and Dargie Street signalised intersection, which creates a bottleneck that leads to long queues, with flow-on delays on key routes such as Streeton Drive—which connects with Cotter Road—and then, further on, on William Hovell Drive.

We know that the section between Streeton Drive on the Cotter Road and right through to the Parkway is the most congested part of the road. If you are travelling beyond the Tuggeranong Parkway, on the Cotter Road, there is still some congestion, but there is not as much because vehicles have turned off onto the Tuggeranong Parkway. That is the focus of some future work, which I will comment on in a moment.

At the election, ACT Labor committed to explore options to improve public transport and traffic flow on the Cotter Road, from Streeton Drive to the Tuggeranong Parkway, recognising feedback from the community about that being the major pinch point. This has been progressed with funding for corridor planning. We are looking forward to seeing that work getting underway so that we can understand and investigate potential treatments for this particular section of the Cotter Road. It will consider options like signal optimisation but also options around increasing throughput; capacity on the road; what infrastructure may be required; what bus priority or transit lanes might make a difference; or whether a bypass lane could be a potential option, particularly at the Streeton Drive intersection, which is only a three-way intersection.

It is anticipated that, once the John Gorton Drive bridge over the Molonglo River is completed, the northern route will be viewed as more convenient by some residents, particularly those who live closer to William Hovell Drive, and that would provide some traffic relief to the Cotter Road in the medium term. The Cotter Road, the John Gorton Drive bridge and the extension of John Gorton Drive are just one part of the planning that the ACT government has been doing for the future of Molonglo and its transport connections. New transport connections will be added to the district as the Molonglo Valley develops, and that is in accordance with the original planning that was done for Molonglo.

The sequencing of major transport infrastructure projects to meet population projections, particularly of the Molonglo Valley, need to be carefully considered, and a re-balance is required to make sure that, as we undertake road projects more generally, we focus on a multimodal approach that looks at different types of movement through

this key arterial corridor. That includes public transport, walking and cycling. It also includes private motor vehicles, to make sure that we have a range of ways to move people around as efficiently as possible.

The detailed design and construction of major components of the Molonglo Valley road network will provide connectivity to the Molonglo town centre and, of course, areas of new housing in Molonglo 3, including the new suburbs of Sulman and Bandler, which I recently announced have been named.

A future rapid bus link from Molonglo to Belconnen in the north is already identified in the ACT Transport Strategy, expanding on the existing route that terminates at Denman Prospect. Further detailed analysis and planning for public transport will be progressed alongside master planning for the district, with potential stops considered in relation to proximity to the future group and local centres, to make sure that growth is delivered in the most accessible locations. Plan for active travel in the district is also being prepared, with input from key user groups and government agencies, and additional initiatives for the district may be identified through the implementation of our Transport Strategy.

The Suburban Land Agency is the responsible agency for delivering new greenfields estates in the Molonglo Valley, except where we have partnered through the Englobo release, like we have in Denman Prospect. The Suburban Land Agency is currently undertaking master planning work for the recently announced suburbs of Bandler and Sulman, and this includes the road being planned through Bandler and Sulman, which will provide another future connection through to William Hovell Drive at the Bindubi Street intersection. The road at this point, before it is named by the Place Names Advisory Committee, is known as the Bindubi Street extension. The Suburban Land Agency is responsible for the Bindubi Street extension, and Transport Canberra and City Services are leading the work on future planning around the connection with William Hovell Drive. Work on this road has been planned to align with the development of Sulman.

The ACT government has recently also committed to further developing plans for the Molonglo Parkway-Drive Connector, which in further stages will provide another connection in and out of the Molonglo Valley. Dividing the Molonglo Parkway-Drive Connector in multiple stages is essential to support the Suburban Land Agency's projected timeframe for construction of the Molonglo town centre and surrounds south of the Molonglo River. The staging of large projects is typical in the ACT and elsewhere. The Suburban Land Agency is working to develop the Molonglo commercial estate as quickly as possible, so it will deliver stage 1 of the extension from John Gorton Drive to the eastern edge of the Molonglo town centre. It is part of stage 1 of the Molonglo Parkway-Drive Connector. The north-south arterial road connection will include a signalised intersection to provide access to the future Molonglo town centre and the remaining stages of the Molonglo Valley. It also includes protected pedestrian and cyclepaths, with an underpass on the southern side to support active travel.

The government is also undertaking planning and design from the boundary of the SLA works through to the Tuggeranong Parkway, which makes up stage 2 of the Molonglo Parkway-Drive Connector. This stage will include a future bridge over the Molonglo

River and a new grade-separated interchange on the Tuggeranong Parkway. Early design is being jointly funded with the Australian government. In the budget review that I just handed down, I was delighted to see that there was further funding to continue this important design work, which was an election commitment of the ACT Labor government. A design and construct contract was awarded in early 2023, with detailed design underway. The second stage of the Molonglo Parkway-Drive Connector will continue as well. The project will also incorporate improvements to public transport and active travel infrastructure. We are really looking forward to this work being planned to align with the development of the Molonglo town centre subdivision.

It is important to note that the Molonglo Valley is quite different to other districts. It is one of our most recent districts, together with the Ginninderry district, and that means that it has incorporated a modern vision for multimodal transport from the beginning. In terms of the early transport plan that went into the Molonglo structure plan, early design of the arterial roads incorporated public transport planning as a key component of developing the future estates, and that is now being delivered by the Suburban Land Agency and Transport Canberra and City Services. It has been only slightly updated based on what we have done in the best practice design guide for intersections and the development of the new Urban Design Guide under the new planning system, which has most recently been used to inform the great work that the Suburban Land Agency has been doing on the extension of John Gorton Drive to make sure it incorporates safe active travel infrastructure, with good pedestrian access to future public transport connections—buses in the first instance and then future light rail.

I want to go back to the early planning work to quote from the bible of public transport, which I have previously talked about: *Human Transit* by Jarrett Walker. Jarrett Walker was employed by the ACT government to undertake a piece of consultancy work to design what the future public transport connections should be and the arterial roads to support them in the Molonglo Valley, which has led to the current design that we are rolling out. I will quote from a chapter of the book. It is in its first edition. I am not sure whether it is in the second edition, which is now out. He said:

But Canberra’s planning authority has still achieved something important. They now have a planned structure for Molonglo that takes transit seriously, understands transit’s intrinsic geography, and works with it to yield solutions that make sense for the whole sustainable urbanism project. Molonglo will not be one of Canberra’s top-performing transit markets, but it will yield more ridership, and support better service, because its planners thought about transit when they made the big decisions about urban structure. To the extent possible, they’ve ensured that all of the main transit destinations will “be on the way”.

That differs to the planning that has been done around some of the other districts in Canberra.

So, from the very beginning, public transport was thought about in addition to private transport connections. In the Transport Strategy, which I released back in 2020 and still remains the current policy of the ACT government, we outlined those arterial road connections and where the future rapid routes would actually run, which are consistent with Jarrett Walker’s guidance in relation to what we wanted to do with encouraging public transport use in the Molonglo Valley. You will see in that document, on page 27, that the future rapid network extends along the Bindubi Street extension, which is being

delivered by the SLA. They are doing the planning work now to support all the work that is required for the subdivision design and plan associated with that, and then the road connection will be built which will support public transport in the future.

We are confident that we have the right plan in place. It has taken a multimodal approach. As the specific projects come forward, there have been improvements to the design through the guidance that we have provided through Transport Canberra's best practice design guide for streets and intersections and the Urban Design Guide from EPSDD—improvements to the way that we deliver these to take a multimodal approach. We will continue the planning work that has been funded to look at the various options to support better throughput of public transport on the existing arterials, like the Cotter Road, and will look at options to make sure that buses are not caught up in traffic.

We see this motion and the calls-on as an expression of existing government policy and that we are getting on with the job of delivering what we said we would do through the very early planning of Molonglo and through the election commitments that we outlined in Labor's plan for Molonglo and Labor's plan for transport, where we identified the important transport planning work that has been funded already and will be continued.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (3.26): I thank Mr Cocks for bringing this important motion before us this afternoon. Traffic congestion is currently affecting my electorate of Ginninderra. The Bindubi Street extension is vital. Bindubi Street runs between Macquarie and Cook on the west and Aranda on the east. That extension is vital for easing traffic into the Molonglo Valley. The current problem along William Hovell Drive is so obvious. I was driving home after work last week and there was a massive back-up in the left-hand lane turning into the Molonglo Valley. So there are problems.

Mr Steel keeps saying he is getting on with the job. It would be nice if he were doing a good job. That is the only thing that really matters. It is not about getting on with the job; it is about doing a good job. This government is failing in so many areas, including the planning for a bridge. Planning for a bridge was identified as a need right at the beginning of the development, and yet where is it? It is not there, is it? That is not getting on with the job, Mr Steel.

I thank Mr Cocks for this important motion and I urge members to support it.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.28): by leave, I move the amendments circulated in my name together:

1. In paragraph (3)(b), after “without the necessary road”, insert “, public transport and active travel”.
2. In paragraph (4)(d)(iii), after “in the region”, add “, including through public and active transport infrastructure improvements”.

I will be supporting the motion. The underlying purpose, on my read, is to require greater accountability from the government in delivering existing plans and supporting the development of longer term plans to address congestion issues in and around the Molonglo Valley. The minor amendments reflect what I see as a need to reframe how we think about longer term transport infrastructure planning. I note Mr Braddock's

amendments serve a similar function, while putting some more flesh on the bones specific to the Molonglo Valley. With the substance of this motion pertaining to matters outside of my electorate, I will focus some brief remarks on the intent of my amendments.

We know road duplications temporarily decrease traffic congestion, but they incentivise private vehicle usage, which ultimately increases traffic congestion. Other parts of the world are thinking in a more progressive way about how to tackle congestion on streets. They are asking whether perpetuating the negative economic, health and climate related consequences of car dependency is really the best path forward. I hope we can also ask, and perhaps even answer, that question in this place. When we talk about long-term transport infrastructure planning, we really need to start framing the conversations around modal shift. How can we get more people out of their cars and onto public transport, onto bikes and onto their feet?

To offer one example, the Welsh are serious about asking themselves this question. Wales has had self-government for a decade less than the ACT. A decade ago, they legislated the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. Having done so, the next step they took was to come together as a country and ask themselves: what decisions do we need to make now to create the Wales we want for future generations? Part of their response to that question was deciding that they would only invest in transport infrastructure projects that would help reduce climate emissions and encourage modal shift. Having done so, the Welsh government went through the 51 major transport projects they had in their infrastructure pipeline and scrapped all but 15 of them. Most of the scrapped projects were road duplications. Now their entire transport system is geared toward public and active transport and away from private car usage.

We could choose to show a similar level of ambition here at the ACT. Doing so would not be easy, as it was not in Wales. Canberrans are very used to car-dependent lives. There would be pushback, but I do call on my colleagues to have the courage and foresight to do so, nonetheless. We need to start thinking about transport infrastructure through the lens of how to best serve the needs of current and future generations, through the lens of health, climate, reducing waste, and tackling transport poverty for those who live at a distance from essential services and employment hubs. If there is one place we could do this in Australia it is here in Canberra.

I commend my amendments and the motion to the Assembly.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (3.31): I support Ms Cocks's motion today. It is important that governments plan for proper infrastructure investment in our regions. Particularly when the government knows what the projected population growth is for a region, it is important that they put in the infrastructure to properly support that region. We have seen that happen in many locations across the territory. To talk about a local area, Gungahlin, we saw single-lane arterial roads leading people out of the suburbs for many years until the government decided to duplicate the roads to cater for the 70,000-odd people living in that region. The same is being experienced in another neck of the woods, in the south of the ACT. We have roads there that are congested, like the Cotter Road and Bindubi Street. There are many people travelling through those areas. A *Canberra Times* article recently stated that 35,000 vehicles use the Cotter Road on a daily basis and that the number one road in the ACT that has the most traffic is the

Tuggeranong Parkway, at 40,000 vehicles, and that is a dual lane road. Then we have the Cotter Road and Bindubi Street.

Investment needs to happen to duplicate these roads. Mr Cocks is campaigning very heavily to ensure that the right investment happens. As well, his calls-on go to undertaking a comprehensive road and traffic infrastructure plan to address the congestion in the Molonglo Valley, and that this plan should include consideration of expanding Cotter Road to improve traffic flow, strategies to manage congestion while major road projects are underway, and identification of a long-term infrastructure solution to alleviate congestion within these regions. This is the second motion that Mr Cocks has brought forward in this Assembly recently that speaks to commonsense. It speaks to delivering what this government should be delivering, taking responsibility and using the taxpayers' money wisely to deliver the services and the infrastructure that is needed.

I am very proud to stand here again to support one of Mr Cocks's motions for commonsense delivery of proper services and infrastructure that the community supports. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

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) (3.33): Certainly, I acknowledge the concerns raised in this motion, and I thank Mr Cocks and his office for their very constructive engagement. I do acknowledge that there is a growing frustration of Molonglo Valley residents dealing with traffic congestion. It is one of the fastest-growing regions in the ACT, and its transport infrastructure must keep pace.

Mr Milligan made some curious comments just then about population projections, and I need to make clear that population projections are not static. They change. Data changes, people's behaviour changes, and so the scope and scale of projects, and indeed whether we need more or less infrastructure, can change as a result.

The government has already committed significant funding to improve transport connections in the Molonglo Valley, and we are delivering on those commitments. We also recognise more is needed. We agree to undertake what this motion calls for and to provide the plans sought in as complete a form as possible. As Minister Steel made clear, it is essentially existing government policy. I do need to provide a caveat that this work as a whole is at various stages of development, and so we will provide what we can, in as complete a form as possible. However, there certainly will be further work that needs to be undertaken on some of these asks beyond what we will be able to provide in September, especially given the numbers of entities involved, the timelines of these projects and that some works enable others.

We will be able to share a roads and infrastructure plan which takes into account the work that has been underway for Parkes Way and Tuggeranong Parkway, including Drakeford Drive, the Glenloch Interchange and the intersection of William Hovell Drive and Bindubi Street. A key—in fact, I would say the key—component of the Bindubi Street intersection will be the interchange with William Hovell Drive. Feasibility level design is required for that interchange, and that in turn informs the

delivery timeframes and costs of the extension overall. So again, we will provide the information sought in as complete a form as possible.

The Molonglo Parkway-Drive Connector stages 1 and 2 projects, previously referred to as the East-West Arterial Road, is a necessary connection for the region's future and planning for its delivery is underway. At the ACT election, we committed to start work on stage 1 of that connector, linking the future town centre from John Gorton Drive to the Tuggeranong Parkway. I do reject the claim that the project is at risk of creating Canberra's largest cul-de-sac. I have not sought to amend that in Mr Cocks's motion because I imagine whoever thought that up thinks it was quite clever and, frankly, we have too many amendments to this motion as it is. But I can assure the Assembly, and the author of that term, that we will ensure this road is designed to provide meaningful congestion relief rather than creating incomplete connections that do little to ease pressure on existing roads. Dividing the connector into multiple stages is essential to support the SLA's projected timeframe for construction of the Molonglo town centre and surrounds south of the Molonglo River by 2031. This includes construction of stage 1 of the connector from Holborow Avenue to the eastern extent of the development area.

Madam Assistant Speaker, I am able to directly address 4(a) right now, in providing a high-level update to the Assembly on the timeline and the cost of the Molonglo River Bridge. The project is jointly funded by the ACT and commonwealth governments for a total project budget of \$249,355,084, excluding GST. Half of this amount is commonwealth funding. The design and construction contract for the delivery of the bridge is expected to be completed at a total cost of \$233,155,084, excluding GST, well within the allocated project budget amount.

I am also now in a position to provide an update on the completion date. It is not unusual for projects of this size, scale and complexity to require refinement, and there are many variables which can bring forward or, regrettably more often, delay a completion date. I have been working towards providing a fulsome update to the community about the completion date and the reasons for the change. With the notice of this motion, I have been working towards providing that today. Notwithstanding that it would not necessarily have been appropriate to make an announcement in response to a question without notice, I also was quite simply not in a position to provide that fulsome update when asked on Tuesday, but I am today.

Effectively, there have been a number of changes to scope and required approval since the design and construct contract was first awarded, beyond what was originally agreed and understood. This has changed some of the design criteria and required additional changes. With designs now having reached completion, the time impacts, the design changes and the resulting delay to the commencement of construction are now able to be quantified, and this means an update to the completion date can be provided. Again, I do so with the necessary caveat that variables like rainfall or entity approval delays can have further impacts. The Molonglo River Bridge, associated civil works and opening of it to the public, is now expected before the fourth quarter of 2026, essentially late in the third quarter of 2026. The project will continue through the first quarter of 2027, with landscaping and planting work during this period. We know the community wants certainty and they should also expect a product of the highest quality. Yet, a project of this complexity requires flexibility to address evolving challenges while

maintaining the highest standards of safety and quality, and so we have adjusted this timeline to ensure we do have a robust and enduring result.

Again, it is not usual for infrastructure projects of this scale to require refinements along the way. I certainly want to use this experience with the bridge and the Gundaroo Drive duplication to consider how we can better balance community expectations and the certainty they seek with the flexibility that is needed to deliver the highest quality project, when it comes to infrastructure projects of this scale. We appreciate the community's patience as we continue working towards completion, and indeed the community will have recognised that there is plenty of work underway and major next steps are imminent.

On Coppins Crossing Road, the second section of road improvements on the north side of the river are complete. Soon, traffic will switch to the east of the existing Coppins Crossing Road, near the Hazel Hawke Avenue intersection. This will allow for the construction of the Sculthorpe Avenue intersection. To allow for this next stage, a 205 metre-tall crane will come on site: the largest ever in the ACT and one of only two in Australia. The crane will arrive in parts. There will be changed traffic arrangements in place once it begins to arrive this month. In addition, there has been plenty of work underway, including concreting for the Molonglo River Bridge abutments and piers; preparation of crane pads for the girder lifts; concreting and footings for the pedestrian underpass bridge; and earthworks, stormwater and utility conduit installation north and south of the river. What will come next is going to be a sight to behold, and we are working with Infrastructure Canberra on how we can make it as accessible as possible to the community, who I expect are going to have great interest in seeing how this work is undertaken through this period of major construction.

Finally, I do want to stress that the concerns of Molonglo Valley residents are well understood, and the work underway will provide relief. We also recognise the need for further planning and investment. I look forward to ongoing work and to sharing this work to improve transport outcomes for the Molonglo Valley. The government will be supporting Mr Emerson's amendments. We will also be supporting Greens amendments 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6, and not supporting 5 and 7. The reason we are not supporting the Greens amendments 5 and 7, regarding a broader transport plan, is because this will dilute what the motion currently asks for. Broadening the scope but not increasing the timeframe available would compromise the level of detail we can provide, and I say that with a genuine appreciation that roads and infrastructure alone will not solve congestion.

Expanding public transport and improving active travel opportunities are critical to ensuring that Molonglo Valley residents have real choices in how they move around the city. However, I have already provided a lot of information about what this will look like and what the government's plans are. Indeed, as I understand it, through my conversations with Mr Cocks and his office, this motion is about providing advice for a sector of the population that relies on a vehicle for transport for the many genuine reasons that people do. I greatly appreciate the engagement across offices on this motion and look forward to hearing the rest of the debate.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (3.43): Firstly, at the outset, can I thank Mr Cocks for bringing this forward today. You have been a relentless and tireless advocate for the police and people of Molonglo. I know they thank you for it. The reality is that people

are stuck in traffic because of this government's failure to plan for the future. That is what has happened here.

This reminds me, and Mr Rattenbury will recall this, of the debate we had back in 2008 about the GDE, the Gungahlin Drive Extension. A new development was made, it being Gungahlin, and the ACT government did not build the necessary infrastructure required to actually get people in and out of that suburb. So the call was, "We have got to duplicate that road." There was a big barney at the 2000 election, and in the end both major parties agreed that we would duplicate it, and it happened. But everybody at the time said: "Let's never let this happen again. This is dumb. If you are going to have a new suburb or suburbs, a new area, with lots of people commuting in and out of the city, let us make sure they have the road infrastructure necessary so that we do not have to retrospectively come back and build it while they are log jammed in traffic for years." And here we are, nearly 20 years later, with exactly the same problem because this government did not adhere to those lessons.

As Mr Cocks pointed out and as Mr Cain pointed out, this does not just affect the people of Molonglo. I have some skin in the game here because I live in Holder. Now to get to work, I go down Dixon Drive, onto Streeton Drive and onto Cotter Road. So the road impact that we are talking about here directly affects me. Every single day I experience it. In the time that I have lived in Weston Creek, over 20 years, I have found—particularly since this government cancelled school buses a few years ago, so I had to drive the kids to school—that my commute, either when it was taking the kids to school or as it is to go to work, has doubled. Thanks very much, ACT Labor! My quality of life has been degraded by your failure to plan. I am an example of many thousands of Canberrans who experience this. Our quality of life has degraded because of your failure to plan. We spend our lives now, kids in the back of the car, sitting in traffic, when we could otherwise be doing many other things. This is exactly what has happened, and it is hurting Canberra families.

We have seen this debate before, and I look forward to seeing what the Greens have got to say because they have been part of this cabal slowing the Labor Party down. I am glad to hear that the Labor Party will not be supporting some of their proposed amendments, because they have some form on this. I remember back in 2015—you will remember this, Mr Rattenbury—when the Canberra Liberals came out and said, "Hey, let us duplicate the Cotter Road," Mr Rattenbury did not want that to happen and objected to it. In actual fact, the Weston Creek Community Council came out very strongly criticising the Greens for that.

The Greens basically had this utopian view that everybody should be on a pushbike or engaging in active travel or on a bus. They do not understand that for a lot of Canberra families the car is a necessity. We want to deliver that choice. If you want to get on a bus, that is great. But if you want to, for very good reason, be driving a car because that suits you best, we should not be punitive and punish those people. But that is what the Greens have been doing, sadly, since—well, since they formed, but to be frank in this case, on that piece of road—since 2015, when Mr Rattenbury said that he did not want to duplicate Cotter Road. It was good that the Weston Creek Community Council actually came out very strongly criticising him, and I am glad that that road did get duplicated.

I think that Mr Steel is saying: “We are doing this. This basically reflects what the government policy is.” Well, whether you are planning to do this or not, you need to get on with it, to be frank. You are already too late on many of these enhancements. We know that the Molonglo Bridge would not have been built if it were not for the Canberra Liberals—sorry, the Liberal Party, and the advocacy of the former senator Zed Seselja, because he is the one that called for this to be duplicated. It probably would not have even started if that had not happened! So you might say, “This is all in the planning.” Well, that does not provide much comfort, let me say, to the thousands of Canberrans stuck on Streeton Drive, on Cotter Road, on John Gorton, all trying to get out of those suburbs every morning.

I think you in government need to start to understand the urgency required to fix these problems, because you were very keen to flog off land there and build big apartments in Molonglo, but you are less keen to give those people the infrastructure they need to actually get out of that suburb every morning!

It seems that Mr Emerson has drunk the Kool Aid and been hanging out with the Greens too much, I think, in the inner city, sipping lattes with Mr Rattenbury and catching their trams! For him it is not about struggling families out there in the suburbs trying to get to work and trying to get kids to school; for him it is all about climate emissions and modal shift. That is all very good, but we have to live in the real world as well. Now the real world of the inner south and the inner north sometimes is a little bit different, I have to say, from what it is in the outer suburbs, where people are trying to raise their families. The sort of anti-car, inner-city ideology does not play very well out in the creek, Weston Creek, nor in Molonglo, Woden and other places affected by this.

You might try and bring in the model of Wales. I am not sure that it is directly relevant, but I did a bit of a Google and let me tell you, not everyone is happy in Wales. No, no, they are not. The Chepstow & Sedbury Bypass Action Group are bitterly disappointed that the modal shift and climate action there is degrading their quality of life. So before you come in here quoting the utopia of Wales, maybe you should listen to some of those debates and listen to Natasha Ashgar, the Shadow Minister for Transport in the Welsh Parliament and what she has to say about what is happening with that degraded road infrastructure. It is a bit similar to this debate, I must say.

Mr Rattenbury: You and her are both in opposition.

MR HANSON: Indeed, we are both in opposition, but we are both making a lot of sense. What you have there is a very similar situation with the inner city latte sippers there pontificating about modal shift and an anti-car agenda, where out in the suburbs are people struggling, trying to get to work, and saying, “Build this infrastructure that we need.” Some of this is a bit light-hearted, but if you are going to draw any examples from Wales, I think you need to make sure there is a balanced debate when we do so.

Mr Cocks, thank you for bringing this forward. It is good to see that this is going to get up with support, but I would ask that we do address these issues with a matter of urgency. We cannot allow the families of Molonglo Valley and the families of Weston Creek to have their quality of life degraded further because of this government dragging its heels.

Mr Emerson's amendment agreed to.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.52): Firstly, I would like to thank Mr Cocks for bringing forward this motion and also for the engagement between our offices, as well as other offices in this place, as numerous amendments and ideas have bounced back and forth in what has been quite a dynamic motion. To forecast, I will be seeking leave to move two separate batches of amendments: the first batch, which I understand will be supported by the majority of the Assembly here today; and the second batch, which I understand will not be supported.

The ACT Greens believe that all residents, regardless of which part of Canberra you live in, deserve convenience and choice—yes, even choice, Mr Hanson—when it comes to getting around our city. The Greens have been consistently calling for better investment in public transport and active transport across Canberra. There is a great opportunity here to get that right as Molonglo Valley is developed. The Greens entirely appreciate the inconvenience that residents of the Molonglo Valley are currently experiencing in commuting out of the valley each and every day for their work. The Greens would like to see more employment located near where people live so they do not have to commute across the city in order to work. This would save incredible amounts of time for commuters, save the ACT government money that could be spent on better things than just roads plus also save considerable emissions through the reduction of transport emissions.

I have been arguing for a similar approach in the district of Gungahlin for quite a while now, but unfortunately the government's employment targets are solely focused at a territory level. They do not break down to ensuring locally based employment is a realistic option for most of the residents of Canberra. So it is in this absence of locally based employment we support the motion brought forward by Mr Cocks and its identification of the need for early planning and enabling works to avoid transport challenges that are plaguing this new part of Canberra as it grows.

In particular, I am glad to see the inclusion of the Bindubi Street extension in this motion. This is a critical piece of public transport infrastructure where future rapid bus routes will connect Molonglo town centre with the suburbs of Belconnen and the city. I also wish to acknowledge the important advocacy of expert stakeholders, such as the Public Transport Association of Canberra, over the years, to ensure public and active transport are an integral part of the planning for the Molonglo Valley.

I seek leave to move together amendments circulated in my name as Nos 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6.

Leave granted.

MR BRADDOCK: I move:

1. Insert new paragraph after paragraph (1)(d):
“(e) the Molonglo Valley District Strategy identifies several major transport projects for the district, including the Bindubi Street Extension, the Molonglo Parkway Connector/East-West Arterial Road, future rapid public transport connections to Belconnen, Woden and the City Centre,

and three new active travel bridges across the Molonglo River;”.

2. In paragraph (1)(f), after “Bindubi Street Extension”, add “the latter of which will serve as a critical public transport corridor connecting the Molonglo Valley to Belconnen; and”.
3. In paragraph (2)(b), after “William Hovell Drive”, add “and impacts to the speed and reliability of rapid bus services in the Molonglo Valley and Weston Creek”.
4. Add new paragraph after paragraph (3)(b):

“(c) the Molonglo Valley’s long-term needs will be best addressed by delivering a multi-modal transport network, including arterial roads, dedicated bus lanes, rapid public transport and active travel connections to the surrounding districts”.
5. Omit all text in paragraph (4)(d)(i), substitute:

“(i) options for augmenting the Cotter Road to improve traffic flow and bus reliability”.

The amendments I am moving today serve to ensure transport needs in Molonglo are met not just through more road space for private motor vehicle use but, rather, a multimodal transport network in which dedicated bus priority, rapid public transport and active travel are integral parts of that. It is critically important that the road plans include real options for active travel such as separated bike paths and safe and appropriately spaced intersections for cyclists and pedestrians. It is always encouraging to see agreement across parties in this place when it comes to improving public transport. My amendment to explicitly call for improved bus reliability by augmenting Cotter Road reflects consistency across the 2024 election commitments of the Canberra Liberals, the ACT Greens and ACT Labor.

A dedicated bus lane to Molonglo Valley would have a capacity of approximately 8,000 passengers per hour, far in excess of the 2,000 you will get in a lane dedicated to private motor vehicle use. As previous experience in Canberra and across the world has shown, more road lanes simply create induced demand, requiring yet more lanes at great expense. Therefore, the Greens recommend that the ACT government prioritise putting in that dedicated bus lane, rather than simply adding more lanes for motor vehicle use, as this is the most efficient and effective means of enabling mobility across Canberra.

I also want to respond to Mr Hanson’s description of the Greens’ utopian views. He might be surprised that I am all for choice, meaningful choice, for transport options, and that means ensuring that basic infrastructure is also in place for public and active transport. That is because at its most cost-effective, it is better for those struggling families out in those suburbs because private motor vehicle use is the most expensive option for those struggling families. Private motor vehicle use is also the most expensive option when it comes to the ACT government’s bottom line. Therefore, I commend these amendments to the Assembly.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.57): On this batch of amendments: the Canberra Liberals will not be opposing these amendments. To some extent, I guess the Greens are going to green. This is the thing that they want to be speaking about, and I understand that it is very important to them to get to put a point of view out there that says that this has to take into account public transport and active travel. Very simply,

there is nothing in the original motion that excluded that. I am very happy to include it because, frankly, the infrastructure that we need to build for roads that is going to alleviate congestion in Molonglo Valley is exactly the same infrastructure that public transport depends on. Without those roads there, there is nothing for a bus to drive on. Without the footpaths running along the sides of it, there is nowhere for people to walk. So absolutely, I am very comfortable with the expansion that these amendments bring because it goes to the heart of the infrastructure that people in Molonglo Valley need.

Mr Braddock's amendments agreed to.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.59): I seek leave to move amendments circulated in my name as 5 and 7 together.

Leave granted.

MR BRADDOCK: I move:

1. In paragraph (4)(d), omit “comprehensive roads and infrastructure plan”, substitute “comprehensive transport plan”.
2. In paragraph (4)(e), omit “the roads and infrastructure plan”, substitute: “a Molonglo Valley Transport Plan”.

The purpose of these amendments is to expand the scope of the plan that the original motion calls on the government to table. My amendments would include all forms of transport planning—beyond roads—with the aim of ensuring Molonglo’s residents have a genuine transport choice. Beyond being a roads and infrastructure plan, it would be a comprehensive Molonglo Valley transport plan. It is disappointing to hear that both Liberal and Labor will not be supporting these calls, which would ultimately ensure the Molonglo’s current and future residents are not relegated to private motor vehicle use. The Greens will continue to push for comprehensive transport planning in Molonglo, across all modes of transport, in accordance with the ACT government’s road user hierarchy, because there is no more efficient or effective way to move people around our city.

I appreciate Minister Cheyne’s comments earlier in terms of how the achievement of these studies within the timeframe required was not practical. I am disappointed that government did not seek to amend the timeframe in order to accommodate what is essential work but, given the number of amendments we already have on this motion, and the late notice, I will not try to litigate that point in this motion today. I would also like to recognise that consultants have been engaged by the ACT government to develop a Molonglo bus network plan and a Molonglo Valley active travel master plan, and I look forward to the public release of those documents by the government in due course. I commend my amendments to the Assembly.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.01): I just want to explain for a moment to Mr Braddock that opposing this particular batch of amendments is not anti-public transport. What these amendments would effectively do is change the focus so that the focus on delivering the infrastructure that Molonglo Valley residents need, the infrastructure as I have pointed out is critical for public transport to be able to use—if we lose that emphasis and we dilute the “calls on” in this motion, then we lose a lot of

the effectiveness of the motion itself. We need to know how, when and for how much, these pieces of infrastructure are going to be delivered. My concern is that if we went down the path that Mr Braddock is suggesting we would lose that focus; it would take longer again to actually deliver on this plan—a plan that we have already been waiting for well over a decade to see. Another year or 18 months to deliver a comprehensive transport strategy, taking in all of the range of factors that the Greens would like to see, again simply delays dealing with the issue that people are facing now. So, the Canberra Liberals will not be able to support these amendments.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (4.02): The government will not be supporting this particular batch of amendments, because there is already a multimodal infrastructure plan for the Molonglo Valley that has identified the infrastructure for motor vehicles, for public transport and for active travel. We have work underway on those key arterial roads to deliver that multimodal infrastructure. We are doing that on the Cotter Road, through funding that has already been allocated to improve the flow of traffic, both for public transport and for private motor vehicles on the Cotter Road.

We have work underway on the John Gorton Drive bridge, which as I mentioned had already incorporated updated design guidance around safe active travel infrastructure in accordance with best practice. We already have the work underway for planning design, which has been funded with the commonwealth, on the Molonglo Parkway-Drive connector, which is going to deliver that multimodal approach. We also have the work underway by the Suburban Land Agency to plan and design the subdivision Molonglo 3 suburbs of Sulman and Bandler, including the design and delivery of the Bindubi Street connector for John Gorton Drive. So all of that infrastructure has been identified, and the government is getting on and delivering that. It is in various stages. We set that out at the election, and we were clear to the people in the Molonglo Valley about what those priorities were, and we are getting on with the work.

The general principle around multimodal network planning and making sure there is more than one way to move around our suburbs, and around our city, is a good one. It is one that we have adopted. We have adopted it in Gungahlin, with the development of a specific plan there, that I think you got this idea from. The difference between Gungahlin and Molonglo Valley is Molonglo was designed with this specific purpose in mind, Gungahlin was not; it reflects another time. We have done the work to make sure that Molonglo's arterial roads were designed in a way that would support all modes of travel. It is recognised as best practice by people like Jarett Walker, who are experts on public transport and making sure that we meet with active travel as well. So I am confident we have got the right plan, and now we are getting on and delivering that plan.

Mr Braddock's amendments negatived.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.05): In closing, Madam Assistant Speaker, it is somewhat bittersweet in a lot of ways to see the outcome of this motion. There are very important calls-on within this motion. I really am glad that we are going to see progress. People in Molonglo Valley, people in Weston Creek, people in Woden and people in Belconnen deserve to know what is coming and when. And they deserve to know how

much it is going to cost. As a lot of us have seen from this government over a long period of time—and Mr Steel’s comments really highlighted this to me—the government is very good at talking about all of its plans for the future, the things it would like to get done one day, when it gets around to it, but until it is in hardcopy, in the budget, funding committed, it is somewhere off in the never-never.

Frankly, the most disappointing thing, though, is to see—what I wish I was surprised to see—another delay to the delivery of the Molonglo Valley Bridge, a project that had so much planning and good intentions invested in it that the government has repeatedly told us would absolutely be delivered on time. To see another delay and a blow-out of a fairly significant margin is deeply disappointing. I can tell you that the people in Molonglo, and Weston Creek in particular, are going to be the most disappointed about this.

I guess it goes to highlight exactly how important it is to get planning right in the first place. We just cannot afford to keep putting off good planning that actually gets to timelines and when things are going to be delivered. We cannot afford to leave things off in the never-never. We cannot afford to leave people sitting in traffic every day: sitting there while your kids are bickering in the back of the car because you have not moved for a kilometre, people who are sitting there who desperately need to get to their loved ones, need to get home, or at the end of a long day at work. I guarantee people would much rather be home than sitting in their car. We have got to get these things right. We need to stop repeating the mistakes of the past, as Mr Hanson quite ably highlighted, and we have to get things working for the people who have put their trust in us to do so.

It would be remiss of me to not acknowledge one of Mr Braddock’s favourite references, which is that of induced demand. For those who are not familiar, the idea of induced demand is the idea that if you build roads, it is only going to make more people want to drive on them. I would probably contend that that is the entire point. People need roads to drive on and get to the places they need to go. But what I will say is that at some point Mr Braddock and the Greens are going to have to explain how exactly induced demand—this astounding theory that creating something creates its own demand—applies to a road and not to a bus and not to a tram. How is it that making a road capable of carrying more cars and more buses simply creates its own demand, while building a tram somehow means that no one else is going to want to drive on that route either. It does not stack up. The roads and the infrastructure that we are talking about in this motion are critical to enable all modes of transport. We have to get it done and we have to get it right, and it is about time that this government caught up on it. That is why I am so glad that, even with some reservations, we have managed to get to this place today.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Dickson—shops

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.10): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) community members from Dickson, including the area's residents' association, have raised significant concerns about the current physical state of the Dickson shops and issues of anti-social behaviour and community safety;
 - (b) issues highlighted by residents include general safety concerns and a lack of maintenance in the shopping precinct's amenities, from footpaths to graffiti;
 - (c) the local community is concerned that the high cost of living is playing a significant role in causing the issues in the area, from homelessness to struggling businesses; and
 - (d) these issues have been compounded by high commercial rents leading to a significant increase in vacant shops around the original Dickson shopping precinct;
- (2) further notes that:
- (a) government has a responsibility to ensure local shops are hubs for the community, providing services and amenity for the residents;
 - (b) there is a need for improved homelessness support services to ensure people can thrive in our community;
 - (c) there is also a need for better planning and business support to ensure a sustainable business environment;
 - (d) local community members are against a "law and order" approach to homelessness and similarly do not want a "band-aid" solution for the business issues in the area;
 - (e) the challenges faced by Canberrans at Dickson shops are systemic and are a result of increasing social and economic inequality, which the Government must address;
 - (f) the ACT Government has committed to and has run consultation on delivering a new Dickson Place Plan which seeks to revitalise much of the shopping area; and
 - (g) following advocacy from community groups, the ACT Government has agreed to establish a much needed cross-directorate task force to create meaningful and lasting improvements in the Dickson shops precinct; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) report back to the Assembly and the Dickson community by August 2025 on the progress of the taskforce and what meaningful steps have been taken to make lasting improvements for people and businesses at Dickson shopping precinct;
 - (b) ensure the taskforce engages directly with affected communities and operationalises feedback directly into work undertaken at Dickson shops;
 - (c) enhance targeted homelessness, drug and alcohol, and mental health services in the Dickson precinct to ensure a place-based approach to support services;
 - (d) meet with the landlords of the shopping centre to discuss mechanisms to lower commercial rent in the shopping precinct and lower shopfront vacancies;
 - (e) enter discussions directly with shop owners in the Dickson shopping

precinct to ensure any future works in the area do not compound these current issues; and

- (f) use experience gained in this approach at Dickson to assist with problems at other shopping precincts across Canberra.

Across our city, we are seeing the profound impacts of the rising cost of living on our community. From young students and first-time parents to people in retail, government workers and grandparents, so many in our community are affected. Cost of living affects everyone differently, but its impact is systemic and far reaching. For some it means working multiple part-time jobs just to make ends meet, and for others it brings the very real threat of homelessness. For those running family businesses, rising costs can put their livelihoods at risk. While the scale of these experiences are different, they reflect the larger reality facing our community and they deserve the government's immediate attention. They represent challenges that need to be addressed with compassion and thoughtful action.

In recent months, I have heard directly from the Dickson community, including members of the Dickson Residents Association, individual residents and local businesses, about the toll the cost of living is taking on Dickson's local shopping centre. Concerns about safety, rising homelessness and vacant shops are growing. These issues threaten to undermine the very heart of the shopping precinct, which should be a viable hub for community life, a place where people can shop, meet and connect. A healthy community thrives when its spaces reflect the diverse backgrounds of its people, shop owners, renters, public servants, refugees and more, but at the moment each sector of these groups is struggling and it is having an impact on our community. These people are what makes a community, and it is vital that we understand the challenges facing these hubs and address them with targeted solutions to ensure these communities are sustained.

I am pleased to share that community members in Dickson have voiced a common sentiment regarding this—that is, that traditional tough-on-crime approaches do not work. In fact, they often perpetuate a cycle of disadvantage that only exacerbates the issues we are seeing in places like Dickson. Rather than relying on punitive measures, we need a compassionate, community-driven approach that addresses the root cause of these problems. In February, I wrote to the Chief Minister urging for a coordinated cross-directorate approach to the issues at Dickson. This would bring together the relevant directorates to address the full range of issues facing the area, from planning and shopfront amenities to business sustainability, homelessness and mental health concerns. I am pleased to report that the Chief Minister has responded positively, agreeing to such an approach, and I thank him for that.

This collaborative model is one that we have seen work before. Just last year, the community in Watson raised concerns about safety and antisocial behaviour. In response, then Greens Minister Rebecca Vassarotti worked closely with the community and other ministers to tackle the interconnected challenges of struggling businesses, homelessness and mental health issues. Directorates engaged with the area, investigated the specific problems and began to address them directly. Even more importantly, the community came together to take collective and mutual action. Local residents hosted events such as a community barbeque, where residents, government officials, ministers and community organisations gathered to discuss solutions and worked together to

improve their area. This is what real community action looks like. It is not about creating an “us versus them” mentality, nor is it about simply relying on more policing. It is about taking a compassionate policy approach to meet the needs of the community, one that combines government action with grassroots initiatives.

The motion before the Assembly today builds upon the Chief Minister’s commitment to establish a cross-directorate taskforce to address the issues at Dickson. It outlines three key areas I want to highlight.

Firstly, it establishes a clear accountability mechanism, ensuring the government reports not only to the Assembly but, more importantly, to the community. Too often communities hear about government commitments but never see the follow-through. The community has a right to know what steps are being taken to address the issues they face. This motion calls for an update by August of this year on the government’s progress, particularly in addressing homelessness, social services and business support before any infrastructure upgrades take place.

Secondly, the motion seeks to ensure that the task force engages directly with the affected communities in Dickson, particularly businesses and landlords, to understand and address the growing problem of shop vacancies. Businesses have expressed concern about the financial impact of infrastructure upgrades on their operations, particularly given that these improvements may reduce foot traffic in the short term. Clearly, it is designed to improve the amenity of the shops in the medium to long term and that is welcome, but the government must reassure businesses that they will not bear an undue burden from these changes.

Finally, the motion calls for a place-based approach to homelessness and mental health services in the Dickson shopping precinct. This means that the government must understand the unique needs of people in this area and respond with tailored outreach services. While some services already exist, there is a need for more comprehensive and proactive engagement to ensure people are aware of and can access the help they need.

Taken together, I hope that these three elements of the motion represent a model that can be applied across other communities in Canberra facing similar challenges. I have heard from colleagues in the Greens, like Ms Clay, and from other colleagues, like Ms Carrick, who are grappling with similar issues in their own neighbourhoods. This is an opportunity for the government to draw from its success in places like Watson and replicate those efforts in other areas to create a more compassionate and effective response to these challenges. Ultimately, our goal is to see a more compassionate and functional approach to addressing the interconnected issues of business sustainability, public amenities and homelessness at local shopping centres across Canberra. I commend my motion to the Assembly as it seeks to bring this approach to the Assembly’s attention and seeks the Assembly’s support for moving forward in this way.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (4.17): I thank Mr Rattenbury for bringing the motion forward this afternoon. Perhaps from the outset I ought to declare I am a resident of Dickson. My husband works in the Dickson shopping centre so is there every single day, and so I do receive reasonably consistent feedback in relation to the comings and

goings of certain individuals in the Dickson shopping precinct. From the outset, I will acknowledge a number of important points that Mr Rattenbury has touched on in his presentation. We have been working back and forth between our respective offices on some amendments that I propose, which I think have been circulated, so I will take the opportunity to formally seek leave now, Mr Deputy Speaker, to move them together.

I seek leave to move the amendments together.

Leave granted.

MR BARR: I move:

1. Omit all text in paragraph (1)(d), substitute:

- “(d) these challenges have been exacerbated by businesses grappling with the cost of commercial rent, which may be contributing to the growing number of vacant shops in the original Dickson precinct;
- (e) the departure of a number of financial institutions have resulted in increased tenancy vacancies”.

2. Omit all text in paragraph (2)(g), substitute:

- “(g) through consultation and following advocacy from community groups, the ACT Government has agreed to establish a much-needed cross directorate working group to create meaningful and lasting improvements in the Dickson shops precinct”.

3. Omit all text after “(3) calls on the ACT Government to:”, substitute:

- “(a) report back to the Assembly and the Dickson community by October 2025 on the progress of the working group and what meaningful steps have been taken to make lasting improvements for people and businesses at Dickson shopping precinct; including any available government data;
 - (b) ensure the working group engages directly with affected communities and operationalises feedback directly into work undertaken at Dickson shops;
 - (c) enhance targeted homelessness, drug and alcohol, and mental health services in the Dickson precinct to ensure a place-based approach to support services;
 - (d) meet with the landlords of the shopping centre to discuss how they could better assist business owners to deal with cost pressures;
 - (e) enter discussions directly with shop owners in the Dickson shopping precinct to ensure any future works in the area do not compound these current issues; and
 - (f) use experience gained in this approach at Dickson to assist with problems at other shopping precincts across Canberra; and
- (4) calls on Dickson commercial landlords to consider how to better assist small business to deal with cost pressures, lower shopfront vacancies and increase stability of tenure for business.”.

The amendments I have put forward have been circulated and discussed with other members of the Assembly in advance. In some instances they just provide a further level of detail, and in others they just clarify possible reporting dates and information

that may be available.

The cross-directorate working group that I have established includes representation across a number of agencies and service delivery providers in areas where the government is currently providing services, for example Canberra Health Services and TCCS, through Dickson Library and other city services. There is, of course, an ACT government shopfront in the broader Dickson centre. ACT Policing are involved in the working group, as are JACS, Community Services, CMTEDD and the City Renewal Authority. As Mr Rattenbury touched on, it is a similar approach to the approach that was undertaken at Watson last year and I think may well serve as a useful model for other parts of Canberra. I do acknowledge and anticipate that there will be other examples that are brought forward in this debate this afternoon.

There are also a number of non-government agencies and service providers who have provided both information, support and advice and wraparound services to those who particularly need it. I want to be clear that there are particularly four known individuals for whom there is the greatest amount of concern, particularly as we come into the winter period. Through the cross-directorate working group, common understanding of the four particular individuals—together with further linkage with ACT Policing, Reclink and other organisations—has been established, which I think is a useful first step.

Mr Rattenbury's motion and my amendments then go on to touch on a range of broader issues than some rough sleepers and some individuals with some mental health challenges, and to talk more broadly about the economic viability of some business activities and, indeed, some property owners within the Dickson precinct. This is why I thought it was important in my first amendment to be clear about one of the major drivers for vacancies in what we will describe as the core of the Dickson group centre, so the original buildings from the 1960s. That has been the departure of most of the major banks from very large tenancies; Commonwealth Bank, NAB, and St George, I understand, amongst others. ANZ, at one point also had a branch. That has left quite a considerable gap, both in terms of a driver for people to come into that part of the centre, together also with a very significant gross floor area vacancy.

The City Renewal Authority is undertaking a program of consultation and engagement around a scheduled piece of infrastructure upgrade that goes to address some stormwater and flooding challenges, as well as improving the public realm—some of the paving has been damaged by stormwater. They are also seeking an opportunity in undertaking this work to declutter some areas of the public realm where, with the best of intent over five decades, new bits of public infrastructure or public art have been added, not necessarily with any particular consistent theme. In some circumstances, these are now seen as getting in the way of people's access and egress, or it is believed they could be better located in ways that might support business activity. So I think this is an opportunity to declutter. It will also be an opportunity to improve lighting and to improve sightlines, which I think will be an important physical element to people's safety and perceptions of safety in the precinct.

The City Renewal Authority has undertaken an extensive engagement process. There have been a number of consultations, sketch plans, designs and opportunities for community input into this particular element of the program. I am happy in the context

of the actions that the government undertake that we continue that work, that we do enter into discussions directly with shop owners in relation to future works in the area, and I think that is really the standard operating practice of the CRA.

I turn now to a question which Mr Rattenbury touched upon in his opening remarks around the broader economic outlook and some of the challenges that are certainly there and have been over the last couple of years. Data at a suburban level is difficult to obtain. The ABS will provide some information at a statistical local area level that tends to cover particular postcodes or groups of houses. The most reliable data I think we can get in terms of economic activity actually comes from the banks. They are able to drill down to a reasonable level of detail to get a sense of the volume of consumer transactions and the like in a particular precinct.

Just to set a bit of a benchmark here, the data I have been provided with shows that between November 2019 and November 2024 there has been a 40 per cent increase in spending in Dickson. That has been particularly driven by spending in what the banks would describe as a tourism and entertainment category; namely, restaurants, pubs, bars and cafes, which I think would surprise no one, given the business mix within Dickson. They also report a 12 per cent increase in customers, 119,000, but that 84 per cent of spending is from residents, which tells you that the area does attract people from outside its immediate precinct and a number of the events and activations that have been held are generating some additional activity. It does indicate that a way to further grow economic activity in the Dickson precinct will be an increase in local residents, and there are a number of projects underway now that will see additional housing supply and additional residents in the group centre itself.

This then raises the question of the original commercial buildings. Another factor that has increased vacancy rates in some of those buildings has been that some tenants have moved from those buildings to new facilities that have opened in recent times, including the Coles development, as well as the DKS development that is closer to the light rail stop on Northbourne Avenue. Assembly members would be aware that there are anticipated to be further development projects in the Dickson group centre, including a project where the former ACT Planning and Land Authority was headquartered on Challis Street, and in and along Cape Street, where the Tradies Club is currently located. I raise this because not only will there be increased residential population but, I imagine, some further mixed-use development in the precinct, which will potentially add to the commercial supply in this area. This, I suspect, is going to place even greater pressure on the vacancy rate of the core Dickson precinct.

This is why I think it is important that there is engagement with the landlords of those particular original buildings, and it is why my amendment particularly hones in on that element; unless there is a reinvestment in some of those facilities or a lowering of rent, then I do not think landlords are going to be able to compete effectively with a range of new offerings that have entered the market or are soon to enter the market.

Now, the government cannot force commercial landlords to reinvest in their properties, and nor should the government seek to deny others who have commercial land holdings within the precinct to redevelop on the basis of another commercial owner having vacant tenancies, but we are going to have a period, unless the residential population increases, where there may be excess supply of commercial real estate opportunities in

the precinct. I draw that to the Assembly's attention. I think it is an inevitable outcome in the short-term.

There is also a reality that a number of retail offerings that may well have been viable last century are now no longer viable. One of the reasons the banks have withdrawn their branches is that there just is not the volume of custom anymore and that, increasingly, more people do their banking online. There is also a reality around certain retail experiences that more people will shop online, but then there are a whole range of other retail and service delivery options that are not available online and that must be enjoyed in person. This would appear to be a possible direction for new opportunity in the Dickson precinct, and one that, when we look to new and reinvested commercial opportunities from commercial landlords, might be the pathway forward.

The City Renewal Authority is paying close attention to these trends and seeking to provide advice, but it is obviously not an operator of businesses itself, and the government cannot force landlords or tenants to take particular paths in terms of their entrepreneurial activity, other than to point out the obvious: that we have a high vacancy rate because the banks have vacated the centre. The greatest GFA vacancy there is all of those bank branches closing, a number of those premises have not ever been tenanted since the bank branch left. That is what it is. There is nothing that can be done about that. So it is on those commercial landlords to think creatively about how they may attract new tenants, and that is why my amendment specifically goes to that point.

In closing, I thank Mr Rattenbury for bringing the motion forward. I commend my amendments to the Assembly and indicate I have seen circulated Mr Emerson's amendments, and the government will be supporting those as well.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.32): I understand the concerns of the Dickson residents and support the taskforce to engage with them on issues around antisocial behaviour, safety and maintenance of the shops. I thank Mr Rattenbury for acknowledging that other areas across Canberra experience similar concerns about antisocial behaviour, safety and the lack of maintenance of amenities. There are many empty shops in the Woden town centre. I will take some pictures of them all and send them to you, because, while it is a good thing that the Chief Minister lives in Dickson and receives feedback from his husband who works at the Dickson shops, I am not sure that he has any feedback from the Woden town centre.

I support the calls for a comprehensive and integrated approach to be taken to other local group and town centres across Canberra, and I urge the government to put the entire Canberra community's wellbeing and social cohesion at the forefront of future planning. I note that most homeless services are located in the north of Canberra. It is therefore likely that people gather there for support. There is a compelling argument for more services on the southside so that people can stay within their community and receive support locally.

Current town planning is poor. However, better collaboration could deliver better outcomes to ensure people of all ages, abilities, backgrounds and circumstances have better access to local activity and can develop a sense of belonging and pride in their area. I am encouraged that this type of cross-directorate collaborative model is available to progress integrated planning and better outcomes and would like to see this model

applied to the social and economic development of the Woden town centre and other commercial hubs across the Murrumbidgee electorate.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (4.34): I rise to support the Chief Minister's amendments to this motion and to speak in my capacity as Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health and, of course, as a local member for Kurrajong. In that context, I also thank Mr Rattenbury for bringing forward this motion to discuss what is going on in our local community and how we can work to support the community. The establishment of this working group is a really positive sign. I am pleased that has been welcomed. I listened to Mr Rattenbury's comments on radio the other day about the importance of bringing people together to address the siloed approaches that we sometimes see, and there were the Chief Minister's comments in relation to the success of this type of approach in Watson.

As a local member, I also hear varied views from residents about Dickson and the presentation of the issues in the public domain. In particular, I hear from local residents that they are concerned about some of the depictions of Dickson being a dangerous place and a dirty place that people do not want to go. They love the Dickson shops. It is their local environment and the local shopping centre that they have been going to for 40 years. An older person who is a local resident said to me that they have never felt unsafe at Dickson shops, but I recognise that is not the experience of a number of other community members and that people have different experiences. These are very legitimate concerns. Those concerns relate to not only people's feelings of safety as they do their shopping or attend Dickson shops but also people's concern for individuals who are either sleeping rough or spending their time at the Dickson shopping centre, having complex challenges in their lives. Bringing a working group together across directorates and across teams to understand what more can be done to support those individuals is a very important step forward.

From an ACT government perspective, we are committed to improving the health and wellbeing of Canberrans by investing in programs to improve the mental health of the community and to provide alcohol and drug treatment services—treating alcohol and drug dependency as a health issue rather than a criminal one. This includes bringing together community sector and public mental health services and alcohol and other drug services. Many people with this type of complexity in their lives often engage with multiple services. The key to ensuring that they access the supports that are available to them is to build trust. We know how important our non-government partners are in that, but we also know that our government teams can do a really great job with that outreach.

Mr Deputy Speaker, as you know and as many in this place know, we have led the nation in placing harm minimisation at the centre of our alcohol and drug policy. We implemented nation-leading drug law reform, established the nation's first fixed site drug checking service and delivered a significant increase in investment for our drug and alcohol sector, but there is more work to do and we will continue to prioritise this support to address the growing mental health and alcohol and other drug service needs of the community over time.

I place on record that, between 2018-19 and 2023-24, the ACT government increased

funding for government and non-government alcohol, tobacco and other drug services by more than 30 per cent. This included significant growth in frontline community services, with new funding for residential rehabilitation services growing from around \$250,000 in 2021-22 to \$1.2 million in 2024-25. In 2024, the government committed to almost \$126 million in funding for non-government alcohol, tobacco and other drug services over the next seven years through the commissioning process.

In addition—as we discussed at the annual reports hearings, and contrary to some of the commentary that we regularly hear—ACT government investment in non-government mental health services increased by almost 120 per cent between 2019-20 and 2023-24, from \$10.4 million to almost \$22.9 million. We will continue to invest in our non-government services and in Canberra Health Services' mental health and alcohol and other drug services.

Our highly skilled nurses at our walk-in centres will also continue to provide important services to the community in Dickson and the surrounding region. That includes the standard services for walk-in centres for the treatment of minor injury and illness. I have heard directly from the staff at the Inner North Walk-in Centre that they regularly engage with some of the individuals in the area who have complex lives and that they work with those individuals in a supportive way. As you would be aware, Mr Deputy Speaker, often when people have complex lives in relation to mental health and alcohol and drug dependency, they also have physical health needs that they can neglect if they do not have access to health services that are inclusive, supportive and non-stigmatising for them. That is part of the reason that we also fund a range of primary care services, including Directions to work with this particular cohort of people.

Just today, I talked with a social worker who works with the CHS mental health team that supports people with long-lasting signs of psychosis who are homeless or in an otherwise vulnerable situation. This can be a challenging job. As I have said, people who have highly complex lives, especially those experiencing psychosis and are self-medicating with alcohol and other drugs, find it very difficult to trust the services around them. That is why this kind of engagement across services to understand who is doing what in this space, whether it is in a location or whether it is with a particular group of people, is really important.

Finally, I will touch on a few relevant election commitments that ACT Labor has made in this space. These include exploring opportunities for greater coordination and collaboration across government, non-government organisations and people with lived experience to address the needs of people with co-occurring or complex needs, including alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, and mental health, suicidal ideation, family and domestic violence, trauma, homelessness, unemployment and gambling harm. This is an ongoing challenge and something we constantly talk about. There is an alliance between the AOD sector and the mental health sector that is really driving reform in this space.

We have committed to developing and implementing a co-design consumer centred public mental health services plan by the end of 2026 which will aim to improve integration and care pathways across the service system, including pathways between alcohol and other drug services and mental health, suicide prevention and postvention primary health, and physical healthcare services going to the issue I mentioned earlier

about the connection between these things.

We have committed to providing Canberrans with more accessible mental health support, working towards introducing advanced practice mental health nurses and mental health nurse practitioners across our network of walk-in centres, including the Inner North Walk-in Centre in Dickson, which I envisage would be one of the earlier rollout spaces, given the particular complexities of some of the local residents. Specifically trained nurses in this initiative will provide treatment and a safe space that supports people with their physical and mental health needs. That means more mental health services in the community for extended hours, because our walk-in centres are open from 7.30 am to 10 pm 365 days a year—at least they are under Labor; they probably would not be under the Canberra Liberals.

In closing, I again thank Mr Rattenbury for bringing forward this motion. I thank the Chief Minister for very quickly working to pull together the working group and the directorates. The agencies that I have responsibility for will actively engage, and I look forward to seeing the outcomes.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.43): I would like to put on the record member for Kurrajong, Ms Elizabeth Lee’s support for this motion. I am very thankful that she gave me some of her words to say on her behalf this afternoon.

The Dickson shops is one of the oldest centres in Canberra and is a well-known community and shopping precinct. Ms Lee is aware of the issues that local residents and business owners have been raising for some time. She met with representatives from the Dickson Residents Group late last year and toured the precinct. She was able to chat to a number of local business owners who spoke about the deterioration of the precinct and the impact on the viability of their businesses. They spoke about the increase in the number of homeless people in the area and how the lack of police presence around the shops is causing many patrons and business owners to feel unsafe. Many of these small local shops have been operating in the precinct for years, but they are struggling to keep their doors open. Many of them feel they have been ignored and forgotten by this government for too long.

Ms Lee has raised these issues directly with the Chief Minister and the Minister for City and Government Services. While she is pleased that there has been some movement in terms of the establishment of the taskforce, she will continue to push the government to start listening to the local residents and businesses and to work with them to ensure that the Dickson shops remain a vibrant and sustainable precinct. I again thank Ms Lee for giving me those words to say on her behalf.

I will very quickly touch on the amendments from Mr Barr. Obviously, we are seeing an update of the language, from “taskforce” to “working group”, and, unsurprisingly, a request for a bit more time.

Mr Barr: That is what I always called it. It is what my letter to Mr Rattenbury called it. He called it a taskforce instead of a working group.

MR CAIN: Obviously it is “taskforce” in Mr Rattenbury’s motion. I am just making a comment about changing the language and also the unsurprising request for a couple of

extra months to report on progress. Otherwise, there are some non-controversial things.

I thank Mr Emerson again for his motion, including highlighting the need to look at issues of accessibility and mobility, and also making the very obvious statement that sometimes having more police around gives a sense of comfort and security to our community, particularly in an area where there is a loss of confidence in security.

We will not be opposing these amendments.

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (4.46): We are having this debate today because, for a long time, the ACT government has their priorities all wrong, with a series of poor spending decisions, driving up the cost of housing and living, driving up the cost of commercial rates and other fees and charges, driving up debt and deficit, unravelling police powers and underfunding our police force. They have led to the ticking time bomb that Dickson shop owners and customers now confront. It is not just the Dickson shops that are experiencing some of the issues that Mr Rattenbury's motion has raised. There are precincts across Canberra, including in my electorate in Tuggeranong, where residents and retailers are becoming increasingly concerned about antisocial behaviour, general community safety, rising homelessness and a lack of maintenance. I acknowledge there are many issues at play that contribute to the social degradation of these precincts, so I will limit my brief comments to policing, law and order.

Our local police force is doing a tremendous job at keeping our community safe. Just this morning, they released details on the successful developments of Operation Minlaton. They have arrested and charged seven teenagers for their alleged involvement in multiple home burglaries and stolen vehicles across Canberra. Shockingly, we also learnt from this operation that the alleged offenders were all in the community on bail. They have been apprehended more than 190 times, and one boy has been charged with more than 70 offences. Our police are giving their best, but I am very concerned that the government is not giving them the tools and the support that they need to do their job.

We have heard from shop owners and local residents that they want a stronger police presence, but how can the police provide the strong on-the-ground presence that the community needs when the government has deprived them of more staff? Canberra has the smallest police force per capita and they are among the worst paid in Australia, and, despite our growing population, we see that the government has failed to adequately invest in local policing. This means that our police are in the position where they must pick and choose which crimes to attend. That is one reason it may take them longer to attend a crime scene than is desirable.

Dickson shop owner, Stacey, described her fear when she and her shop were attacked by an intoxicated man. She said, "The police response time to my distress call was much longer, not just this time but also to the previous one last year. I could have been stabbed or killed before the police arrived 25 minutes later." This is a terrible situation. We need to be clear about its cause. We do not have enough active sworn police officers out on the beat, and that is a result of the government's spending commitments on police.

The government seems intent on undermining preventative measures to deter crime and antisocial behaviour. Hard drugs, like heroin, have been decriminalised and the age of

criminal responsibility is being raised. Just this week, the government—regrettably with the support of the crossbench, including the Greens—voted against lifesaving laws to help combat knife crime in Canberra. Jack’s Law would have given police the power to conduct searches for knives, machetes and bladed instruments in a dignified and safe manner. Every knife taken off our streets is a potential life saved. Earlier this year, we saw the government axe a desperately needed review into our bail system by disbanding the Law Reform Council.

As we have seen from the stunning work undertaken in the police operation in Lanyon, the ring of teenagers charged for their alleged involvement in a crime spree that targeted hundreds of Canberrans were all out in the community on bail. Clearly, the bail system is broken, and yet the government decided to axe a much needed review into bail laws. All of these decisions show that the government have their priorities wrong, and, sadly, it is usually the most vulnerable people in our community who bear the brunt of those decisions.

I thank Mr Rattenbury for bringing forward this motion today. We will be supporting it, but I fear that, without giving our police the resources and the tools that they need to get on with the job, many of the issues that have been canvassed today will persist.

Mr Barr’s amendment agreed to.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.51): by leave, I move the following amendments circulated in my name together:

1. Add at the end of paragraph (2)(d): “, although an increased police presence in Dickson may enhance feelings of community safety, including with respect to non-criminal antisocial behaviour, until such a time as the benefits of wraparound place-based support services take effect;”.
2. Insert new paragraph after paragraph (2)(e):
 - “(f) community members have also raised concerns about the inaccessibility of the Dickson shops for residents with mobility restrictions due to the area’s poorly maintained and incomplete footpath network;”.
3. Insert the following new paragraphs after paragraph (3)(e):
 - “(f) engage in sufficient forward planning to maintain and improve pedestrian access to the Dickson shops, particularly for community members with mobility restrictions;
 - (g) ensure that any construction works in the area address community concerns about pedestrian accessibility and enable foot traffic to, and throughout, the Dickson shops;
 - (h) report back to the Assembly again in the first sitting week of 2026 with available data trends demonstrating the impact of the cross-directorate working group, such as statistics showing the level of local health, mental health and homelessness service provision; police complaints about antisocial behaviour, security incidents and bicycle thefts; and commercial vacancy rates at the Dickson shops; and”.

Just to clarify, these amendments were drafted to work with the amendments that just passed. I had a premonition that they would pass. So they are intended to sit on top of

those.

I thank Mr Rattenbury for bringing the motion to the Assembly today. Canberra is a city that is renowned for its well-designed and intentionally planned layout. It is renowned for its inclusivity and accessibility. It is renowned for its dining scene and its vibrant, diverse and welcoming community spirit. Our local shopping precincts are a key part of that. They service vital community hubs, keeping Canberrans well-connected to the essential services they need and to each other.

This is particularly important at a time when the ACT is experiencing the highest rates of loneliness in the country. It is imperative that these hubs are both accessible and pleasant places to visit for everyone, vulnerable community members included. Unfortunately, this is not currently the experience of many people for whom the Dickson shops are, or should be, their local community centre. Instead of it being a place where they can get groceries, access a post office, socialise with friends and experience Canberra's dining scene, for some it has become a place they feel compelled to avoid. This is the message that I heard repeatedly during my campaign last year and have heard from dozens of community members since.

The Dickson shops are looking neglected. Growing antisocial behaviour in the area has left locals feeling unsafe, particularly elderly people and parents of young children. My own mother-in-law was verbally abused by an intoxicated person in the middle of the day at the shops on her way to Woolies with my three-year-old son. Thankfully, she is pretty thick-skinned, and so is he. But the volume of messages I receive from locals about this issue tells me that, unfortunately, they are not alone in experiencing these sorts of encounters.

Many people have started choosing to simply avoid this place, or they drive into the Coles car park, do their shopping, have their trolley geo-locked to the Coles perimeter, and then head back to the car park without visiting any local small businesses. This, combined with poor maintenance of the public area means that the Dickson shops are not currently a particularly attractive location for prospective business owners. Break-ins, property theft and antisocial behaviour deter businesses and their customers.

As a Dickson local myself—a conflict of interest—and having run a small business for seven years before becoming a member of this Assembly, I find this heartbreaking. Small businesses are not just the backbone of our economy; they are also the lifeblood of our communities. When they collapse, so do the spaces in which we gather. We cannot afford to let iconic businesses like My Rainbow-Dreams be the victims of planned works at the Dickson shops. The staging of those works and ongoing engagement with business owners, as required by this motion, can help keep that from happening.

We cannot ignore the glaring need for targeted and place based homelessness, drug and alcohol and mental health services in Dickson. I am strongly supportive of a compassionate approach to the people who are causing a level of unrest at the shops. I note that this cohort does not necessarily overlap, certainly not fully, with those who have been sleeping rough at the shops for some time. These community members, many of whom have experienced terrible things that none of us in this place will ever be so unfortunate to experience, need support, not punishment or further denigration. At the

same time, providing support and showing compassion does not mean simply ignoring poor behaviour.

Other community members visiting the shops deserve to feel safe too. As one of my amendments notes, having police in the area a little more often, not to cuff people and drag them away but to just be in the area, would help deter some of the behaviour we are seeing at the shops and will help increase feelings of community safety.

My amendments also speak to footpath issues in the area. A 90-year-old woman who volunteered to support my campaign often apologised profusely, and unnecessarily, for not being able to join me on the hustings because of the state of the footpaths, which meant she was not able to get around. Another local spoke to me in distress after the election as they had to travel on the road in their wheelchair in order to get to the Dickson shops. Reinvigorating the shops will not be much use to those with mobility restrictions who cannot get to and from them safely. Good luck with getting around Dickson, Ainslie or many other parts of the inner north and inner south if you are in a wheelchair or using a walking frame.

The Fix my Street system, while well-intentioned, goes to the heart of the problem. The government requires residents to report faulty infrastructure rather than proactively monitoring the condition of footpaths to keep them well-maintained and accessible. When reports of defects come through, we all watch on optimistically as cracks in footpaths are identified and circled with paint, only to then watch the paint fade away over the ensuing months or even years, with no work having taken place. We seem to be able to resurface roads on a schedule without relying on residents to report that they need resurfacing. It would be great to do this for footpaths too.

In December, I wrote to the Chief Minister about issues at and around the Dickson shops, and I have been encouraged to learn that Ms Lee and Mr Rattenbury have also done so, and that Mr Barr has received direct representations from community members. It has been personally encouraging to me and, I am told, locals in the area to have seen bipartisan support emerge to address the challenges we are facing in Dickson. There is so much potential at the Dickson shops. Residents are kind, compassionate and ambitious for our community. Community spirit abounds.

I am pleased that the government has established a cross-directorate working group to respond to the breadth of issues being raised in today's debate. However, like many residents, I am also worried that working groups risk becoming tick-box exercises. It would not be fair for residents for us to pass this motion today without also ensuring the government is held accountable for ensuring this working group creates real and meaningful change by addressing the issues that desperately need rectifying.

With this in mind, I thank Mr Rattenbury for this motion. It puts some more flesh on the bone of the cross-directorate working group. I am pleased that the government is supporting it and is committed to report back on the outcomes of the working group, but, having heard from community members who saw improvements at the Watson shops last year only to see things apparently deteriorate again recently, it is clear that we need to ensure this work endures well beyond the October reporting deadline and that the government reports on actual data so we can measure what specific progress has been made through its response to these issues. As such, I am moving some

additional amendments that will require the government to report a second time next year against a range of proposed metrics.

Again, I have heard from many community members who are delighted to see bipartisan support for this issue. Like them, I hope to see the trend of bipartisanship continue when it comes to tackling the issues that really matter to the people we are here to represent.

I commend the amendments circulated in my name.

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) (4.58): I was not planning to speak, but I do want to refer to some errors in what Mr Emerson said about footpaths and repairs. I will have more to say on this in the next sitting week. The reasons for there being a lack of footpaths, footpaths being closed or whatever it may be, are various. One of those, in my view, is that the Public Unleased Land Act settings are not currently in keeping with community standards—for example, when a construction site might seek to close a footpath and the fees that are associated with that. I will expand on that in the next sitting week.

There are also plenty of suburbs within Belconnen that have very few footpaths, because it reflects the planning at the time. All the footpaths are largely in the Radburn model of development, where there are plenty of cul-de-sacs and connections to the cul-de-sacs; otherwise there is an expectation that people would walk on the road or the nature strip. Of course, many Canberrans have planted out their nature strip, which is not great for people with mobility issues and where there might not be a footpath. Sometimes Canberrans have spent tens of thousands of dollars on that landscaping, or they may have, for example, put in a car parking area.

None of this is ideal, but the reason for lack of footpaths is not necessarily through lack of planning. In fact, in Cook, that was the plan—to have very few footpaths. It is the same in Macquarie. I have gone back and looked at this, to work it out, and it was part of the plan. That is worth correcting.

Separately, it is not true to say that the government is only reactive to requests when it comes to footpath maintenance. It is worth noting that we manage approximately 3,800 kilometres of community paths in Canberra, and path defects are identified by various sources, including My Street. But Fix My Street is not the only way. There are audit findings and there are team member inspections.

Defects can range from high risk through to very low-risk items. Structural defects can be horizontal displacements like a cracked panel; vertical displacements, like hazards between panels, where you see that lifting; and some minor cracking, where there is no displacement and there is only cosmetic damage, which might look ugly, but it is still fit for purpose. There are also amenity defects that TCCS identifies. They can include things such as debris on paths, and encroachment from shrubs or vegetation, such as hedges, growing onto footpaths and forcing people off the footpath, effectively.

There is a range of different activities that the teams undertake to ensure that footpaths, where they exist, are as accessible as possible. Retrofitting footpaths in a suburb is

enormously difficult, for the reasons I have outlined, including that many people have planted out or otherwise improved, in their opinion, perhaps, their nature strip. But we continue to respond to requests from the community, and I look forward to providing some further update on a fit-for-purpose Public Unleased Land Act and why it is important for footpaths in the next sitting week.

Mr Emerson's amendments agreed to.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.03): In closing the debate, I thank members for their contributions. We can take from the remarks in the chamber today, apart from—I would not call them conflicts of interest—the close neighbourhood association of some members to the suburb, that across the chamber there is a warmth for the Dickson shopping centre. I think it is a terrific centre. It is quite diverse in what it brings to the community, and lots of people go there from around the city for a range of reasons. I think there is a real desire to make it what it can be. That was reflected in the remarks by Minister Stephen-Smith, who reflected on both how much people talk positively about Dickson and, equally, the concerns we are hearing around some challenging issues, which I think we all see a need to try and address.

We were happy to support the various amendments. They reflect the spirit in which we are trying to address these issues. One issue that I would take up with respect to the Chief Minister's remarks is how we think through the commercial vacancies and how we deal with private landlords. I accept his point that there is a limit to the government's ability to force those landlords to do anything, but we do not want to be passive in resigning ourselves to a tendency to inertia by some of those landlords. I think there are opportunities.

We have seen in other places, at times when areas have become run-down, an ability to think creatively about how we open up those spaces to revitalise them. Locally, of course, one close to the Chief Minister's heart is the way Braddon was reshaped in the early years, before it became cool—the period between when it was a semi-industrial area and when it became one of the hip parts of Canberra. There was a period in between when we saw some interesting temporary tenants. We saw initiatives to open up those spaces to makers, artists and a range of interesting things that changed the dynamic of the space.

These are the sort of opportunities on which we would love to see the City Renewal Authority seek to work with some of the business owners, regarding how we change some of the dynamics in Dickson while it goes through a period of transition. I take the Chief Minister's point around the change of retail types.

I also want to look at the economic data. Data, of course, is such a fascinating thing. There is the figure for trade in Dickson having increased 40 per cent between November 2019 and November 2024. I was trying to think about what was going on in November 2019; it was probably when the car parks were closed and we saw significant works going on. I would love to see the data for November 2018 and November 2017. That is a topic for a later discussion.

I thank members for their support for the motion. We all look forward to seeing important interventions across government agencies and non-government partners to

help to provide some important interventions in the Dickson precinct.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Therapeutic Support Panel for Children and Young People report 2024

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (5.07): I rise to speak to the inaugural Therapeutic Support Panel for Children and Young People 2024 report. Tabling the report reaffirms the ACT government's commitment to raising the age of criminal responsibility and updating the Assembly on the important work of the panel.

The ACT government is committed to improving supports for children and young people involved in or at risk of harmful behaviour, and their families, by progressing significant reforms across child protection and youth justice and building a better system that can best support children and young people. To support this commitment, the ACT government undertook legislative change to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12 in November 2023. We will be the first jurisdiction in Australia to raise the age to 14 as of 1 July 2025.

As a human rights jurisdiction, the ACT government is proud to lead this important change. Raising the age is just one part of a broader shift in the way we view children and young people in the ACT who are at risk of or engaging in harmful behaviours—a shift away from traditional and often punitive responses and towards responses that focus on meeting the underlying and unmet therapeutic needs that we know, clearly, from research and evidence, underpins harmful behaviour in children and young people.

By raising the age, the ACT government recognises evidence that exposing children and young people to the criminal justice system can have a significant impact on their cognitive, emotional and social development that can result in lifelong interactions with the justice system. Instead, formatively informed therapeutic and restorative care should be provided to children and young people who are engaging in harmful behaviour, which will improve life outcomes and community safety overall. This is about building a better system to support children and young people whose complex lives lead them to engage in behaviour that is harmful to themselves and others.

The ACT government has also recognised that an effective therapeutic support system is needed to ensure that children and young people have access to the supports they need when they need them.

The Therapeutic Support Panel was established in March 2024 with the aim of

providing this support to the children and young people referred to them for being at risk or who are engaging in harmful behaviours. The panel works with children, young people, families and kin to understand their needs and assist them through specialist supports with the aim of addressing the issues they are facing before they engage in further risk-taking behaviour.

The panel includes a range of qualified experts in fields such as psychology, education, mental health, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, whose focus is both on meeting the needs of each individual child and young person referred to them and identifying systemic gaps and challenges that stop children and young people getting access to the help that they need.

This approach mutually benefits the children and young people working with the panel and the communities they live in, leading to decreased harmful criminal and antisocial behaviour and the creation of supportive environments where children and young people are safer and healthier.

Over time, the insights provided by the panel will help the ACT government to build a better system that will have a positive impact on the long-term wellbeing of at-risk children and young people, their families and the broader community.

The Therapeutic Support Panel's 2024 report identifies opportunities for systemic reform and improvements within the service system to better support at-risk children, young people and their families, based on the experiences that the panel has had with children and young people referred to them to date.

Initial referral data highlighted in the report shows that all children and young people referred to the panel to date have complex unmet needs and are in urgent need of alternative therapeutic support. Every one of the children and young people has faced complex trauma or family violence. Over half have mental health issues. Most have disabilities, and many are disengaged from education, lack stable housing, have substance abuse problems or are in frequent contact with the police.

While the report highlights the time it will take to gather data and identify trends, it is clear that these children and young people are in need of support. While it is hard to read about the challenging experiences faced by these children and young people, it is promising that the expected underlying unmet therapeutic needs are starting to be identified and these children and young people and their families are starting to get the support that they need.

Importantly, the report highlights key systemic issues that the panel is starting to observe that are affecting the ability of children and young people and their families to get the support they need to prevent their engagement with harmful behaviours. (*Extension of time granted.*) These issues include the need for services, systems and organisations to adapt to new legislation, practices and changed cultures, recognising that the traditional youth justice models have proven ineffective for long-term improvements. This is an ambitious long-term reform and some of these processes will take time.

Ultimately, the report confirms our understanding that timely, appropriate therapeutic

support is essential for the better long-term safety, health and wellbeing of our children and young people. We are committed to these reforms, and we owe it to our children, young people and the community to make these changes. We are strengthening families and prioritising trauma-informed approaches. We can see the benefits of this across not only the work of the Therapeutic Support Panel but also the reform of the children, youth and family system; the implementation of the Our Booris, Our Way final report recommendations; and the Next Steps for Our Kids strategy.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the work of the panel chair, Dr Justin Barker, members of the Therapeutic Support Panel and the therapeutic support case management team, and I thank them for their expertise and advice

The inaugural report from the panel demonstrates the hard work they do every day to support vulnerable children and young people. I look forward to the government's continued work with the panel to achieve better outcomes for children and young people, families and communities in the ACT. I commend this report to the Assembly.

MR SPEAKER: When members are responding to papers, can they take into account, or at least remind staff, that there is a five-minute limit on that particular section of the debate for each member? It is in the standing orders that we have a five-minute limit.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Statements by members

Planning and development—proposed Weetangera childcare centre

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.14): I rise to speak about the proposed childcare centre at block 10, section 26, Weetangera—60 Southwell Street, Weetangera. I have had a number of constituents, namely residents in Weetangera, reach out to my office and contact me personally about this development application. The DA proposal seeks to build an 86-place childcare centre with parking for 26 vehicles to be accessed from Southwell Street.

The site is opposite the Weetangera Primary School and preschool but is zoned RZ1, which is primarily for single-dwelling residential use. While I recognise the need for more childcare opportunities in the ACT, especially in our suburbs, I bring to the attention of the Assembly just how many emails and phone calls I have received expressing concerns with this DA.

I encourage residents in Weetangera and anyone else with an interest in this matter to submit a representation on the DA to make sure that their views are taken on board and to ensure that they are heard. Of course, as I am one of the local members, people can feel free to reach out to me with any queries or expressions of opinions. I will certainly be keeping an eye on this as it moves forward. Thank you.

Legislation—Appropriation Bill 2024-2025 (No 2)

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.16): I am sad to say that I was waiting for some answers from Treasury on the budget bill that we are currently considering. I lodged the question on 20 February. The answer was due back on 28 February. Our secretariat has followed

up more than once, and we still do not have it. It is a shame, because I think the answers may have informed questions during parliament this week; and there are hearings tomorrow, and it would have been really good if the members who were going to those hearings had the answers.

It was quite a simple question. I simply asked what the money was being used for. I would imagine it is information that is readily to-hand for someone who has drafted a \$388 million budget bill. I do note that I would not have needed to ask the question at all if it had been contained in the explanatory statement, but the explanatory statement was less than three pages.

I have put up budget bills seeking to return \$8 million to Treasury that were longer than this one, so, all around, I am a bit disappointed that we do not have the information. I am very much hoping that we get this information as soon as possible. We saw this morning the chaos that is caused when people do not have the information that they need when they are considering a bill that needs to pass before parliament.

We need information so that we can consider it carefully and so that if we are bringing amendments, they are well-informed. Please meet the timelines, and please provide it as quickly as possible.

Kidsafe

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.17): Today I would like to briefly speak about an organisation working tirelessly to ensure the safety of children and is working passionately to advocate for the community sector overall. That is, of course, Kidsafe.

I had the privilege of visiting the Kidsafe offices in late January. I had a wonderful time being shown around various organisations located in the Pearce Community Centre. I would like to sincerely thank the wonderful Francis for being an extremely warm and friendly host—making it easier to make connections between my office and the organisations who share a community centre with him.

As a politician, one of the hardest tasks is ensuring people know they can simply reach out if they need to chat or want our advocacy. Francis did a wonderful job of ensuring everyone we met at Pearce knew who I was and that I was interested in the work that they did, which I absolutely am.

On to Kidsafe more broadly—they do wonderful work educating new parents on how to ensure their children stay safe. One of the most visible projects they undertake is checking the installation of car seats for children. These are essential safety devices. Even if a parent invests in a top-quality seat, if it is installed incorrectly, it cannot provide even a fraction of the protection it is meant to provide.

I sincerely wish to acknowledge the hard work Kidsafe does in helping these young families. As the cost-of-living crisis becomes harder for families to bear, the cost of safety devices and precautions means many families opt out, as the immediate demands of rent and groceries and electricity are always going to take priority.

I encourage all members here to take the time to reach out to Kidsafe and talk to them

about the corners families are forced to cut and, by extension, the increased demand upon Kidsafe as an organisation. Thank you.

Dementia—Memory Walk & Jog

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.19): On Tuesday in a debate about the standing order 213A motion, I gave a commitment that I would be submitting freedom of information requests to cover the caretaker conviction issue. I wish to confirm for members of the Assembly that I have done so.

Secondly, and more joyfully, I wanted to talk about the Memory Walk & Jog, which was held a couple of weeks ago on Lake Burley Griffin. It was a fantastic opportunity for many members here to join the community and to get out, be active and support this great initiative.

There are 433,300 Australians living with dementia at the moment and, of those, 6,000 are Canberrans. That does not include the 1.7 million Australians who help care for people with dementia, which is a brain condition that can happen to anyone, although it is more prevalent for those over the age of 65. It was a fantastic day for us to get out and join the community.

What was particularly poignant was people with bibs saying who they were walking for—whether it be their nan, or a friend, or, as I noticed in one instance, it said, “me”. I thought that was particularly poignant in terms of describing why it is important to come together as a community to recognise the impact of dementia and to help raise funds for this fantastic charity.

Clean Up Australia Day

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) (5.20): I want to take a moment to thank everyone who participated in Clean Up Australia Day on the weekend. We have already heard many contributions in this place, but I especially wanted to single out the City Services crew, who hosted two clean-ups themselves: in Lanyon, which I attended, where we collected rubbish between the local shops and the Point Hut Pond District Park; and in Harrison, covering the urban open space that weaves through the suburb.

It was wonderful to see the community spirit to keep our city tidy at our locations and throughout the city. There were about a dozen volunteers joining us at each of the City Services-hosted locations—on the smaller side, but what we collected was mighty. To hear just how many locations were registered and how many people were turning up at each registered location—I think that is a terrific effort right across the city.

City Services has had a long engagement with Clean Up Australia Day in collecting rubbish from registered clean-up events. This year they collected rubbish from just 22. This is fewer than previous years because of a very good thing: this was the first year where we provided the option to event organisers to drop-off the waste collected from their activity for free. Over 130 vouchers were issued to redeem at Mitchell or Mugga Lane Resource Management Centres, and you have heard other members talk about

how well that system worked this week.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Women—gender inequality

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (5.22): As we approach International Women’s Day on 8 March, I am reminded of the profound impacts that collective action can have on achieving true gender equality. This year’s theme, “March Forward”, is a powerful call to acknowledge the progress we have made, while also recognising that there is still more to do. Despite the strides we have taken, women and girls in our community and beyond continue to face systemic barriers that hinder their potential. The harsh realities of gender-based violence, the gender pay gap and the underrepresentation in leadership positions are a stark reminder that we need to do more.

Some would say that the issue of gender equality is one that has been overemphasised in recent years. However, all you need to do is look around the world: the fragility of the issue of gender inequality cannot be missed. It takes one policy, one decision-maker, to undo all the work we have done and the progress we have made in recent years. We cannot relent in our efforts to address gender inequality, because around the world there are still women who cannot drive and who do not enjoy the same rights and privileges that, arguably, we enjoy today. There are still women who cannot have an education or even hold a job.

Gender equality benefits us all. It means that you have 50 per cent of your population contributing meaningfully to society. That affects our overall quality of life as a society. As we celebrate the achievements of women in our community, we must also commit to dismantling the inequalities that persist. It is not enough to acknowledge these issues once year. These issues demand our sustained attention and action every day.

The ACT Women’s Award, which will take place today, honours individuals who have dedicated their lives to advocating for gender equality and empowering women in our community. These individuals remind us of the challenges we face, and that change is possible when we work together to challenge the status quo. However, their efforts must be met with robust policy commitments, adequate funding for women’s services and an unwavering will to address the root cause of inequality.

I would like to warmly congratulate all the finalists for the awards and the honour roll. I was not invited to that award, but anyway! Once again, I want to congratulate all the finalists for the award and those who will be placed on the honour roll.

International Women’s Day calls on colleagues and friends and the broader community to move beyond words and into action. We must strengthen the protections against gender-based violence, improve economic opportunities for women, and create

pathways for greater representation in leadership and decision-making spaces.

International Women’s Day is about celebrating what makes us unique. It is about celebrating the women in our lives who have contributed meaningfully to society. But it is also about accountability. Let us honour the resilience of women and girls by ensuring that their rights, safety and opportunities remain at the forefront of our social agenda and legislative decisions. Let us commit to a Canberra where gender equality is not just an aspiration but a lived reality for us all.

Domestic and family violence—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.26): I rise to speak the words of some of the Aboriginal women in our community who are crying out for help and who are tired of their cries going unheard: women experiencing violence in their own homes, seeing no way out, yet being given no choice but to wait it out. This is a statement I received yesterday from a young local Aboriginal woman.

Over the weekend I was involved in an incident where I was abused to the point where I was running for my life. I contacted services to be told I would be placed on a waiting list, and that I don’t fit the criteria. This isn’t right. Don’t I have a right to feel safe? I don’t contact many services, but this time I had had enough and needed help, only to be told they couldn’t help me. I keep to myself and do what I have got to do, but Canberra is a place to help people—to allow us to walk around feeling safe and having the right to be free. But that is not happening. Services let me down, and now I live in fear. I don’t get to sleep safe at night like you do. I don’t get to eat at my house like you do. So please remember me when you all go home at night and feel safe and warm and full, with a good feed, because I don’t.

This statement is from another local Aboriginal woman, and it is entitled “Silence”.

Not how I thought my life would turn out. I blamed myself for a long time for what was happening to me. My mouth was too big. I was loud. But that wasn’t a reason to be bashed and silenced to the point where I was confined and isolated. My children suffered. The only way I could protect them was to silence them and keep them close. My children were my reason to live and plan on my next move, working on getting out. The thought of leaving was scary. I had nowhere to go, but I was determined to leave. If I went to my family, he would find me and drag me back home only to cop a flogging. Times when my kids would be cleaning me up the next morning, covered in bruises, unable to move. My kids were taken due to abuse, and I was broken. I couldn’t fight anymore. My body was bruised and now numb. My kids were placed with my family. I stayed away because it was safer for them and for me. Where I am at now is building a relationship with my kids and trying to heal myself.

This third statement is from another local Aboriginal woman, and it is entitled, “Broken and Falling”.

Growing up on missions with elders, family and community, it was safe. We knew our boundaries. We were loved and cared for and were taught our ways, our law. I was very young when I got in my first relationship, and I was so in love I

sacrificed my way of living and gave up what I believed in and moved in with him. Things changed very quickly. I could hardly breathe with the hits. The shouting was so loud and wouldn't stop until I fell and broke. And that was just the beginning.

Waking with bruises, unable to move, the silence was deafening. The fear of where he was and what was coming next. Were my kids okay? Who was going to look after them? Oh no, where were my children? It was so quiet—oh wait, it was still darkness. It was so dark I couldn't see in front of me. It was the darkness of my black eyes and my bloodied nose, pillow covered in blood, not tears. My tears never came. There was too much fear. I was paralysed with fear.

I kept asking what I did wrong. Shut your mouth, don't fight back and don't cry. Save your tears. Losing yourself in isolation. Where are my connections? Gone. Lost. To be no more. Feeling alone and the shame. Bearing the pain. The never-ending bashings. Forever walking on eggshells. Again, who will take my kids? A constant cry from a mother's heart has stopped. Please stop—no more, it hurts. My children, please help my children and keep them safe. I don't know if I'm going to survive this one. It's a long night. Please hug and kiss my kids tonight and let them know mum will be home soon.

As an Aboriginal woman, for me it was hard to leave. It's not about leaving the relationship. We leave community, family and at times our children. Where would I go? There was nowhere. It was all gone for me a long time ago. My songlines were broken. My stories were no more. I was not protected. Neither were my children. No-one was going to help. I just wanted to be heard and for the pain to stop, not having to fight to keep my children—the justice system at my door, Housing sending letters. I just wanted to be alone. If too many people came, they would find out how broken I was.

In closing, I ask my colleagues in this Assembly to reflect on these statements. I have been provided with more, which I would read if I had more time. It is time for action, and it has been for far too long.

International Women's Day

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.31): I rise today to share similar thoughts to those of Ms Barry about the upcoming International Women's Day on Saturday, 8 March. International Women's Day 2025 is dedicated to honouring the achievements, resilience and contributions of women around the world. The campaign theme for International Women's Day 2025 is "accelerate action", which calls for increased momentum and urgency in addressing barriers that face women in both personal and professional spheres.

International Women's Day will be commemorated across the ACT by numerous organisations, and I am looking forward to engaging with Canberrans at these events. This morning I attended the Planning Institute of Australia ACT division International Women's Day breakfast at the Marion. It was a wonderful event celebrating women in planning. Tomorrow morning I will attend the National Association of Women in Construction ACT chapter International Women's Day breakfast, also to be held at the Marion. I look forward to hearing from Jo Farrell, Natalie Waters and others whose experiences and stories will undoubtedly be thought provoking and inspiring. I am also looking forward to attending an International Women's Day celebration lunch hosted

by Consult Australia and Engineers Australia. I note that Engineers Australia has a very successful and professional female CEO.

These events are incredible opportunities to celebrate women in our professional industries and in our community. The celebration of women in our industry of politics is vital as well. As a member of the only party in this place with a female leader, I am proud to be a Canberra Liberal and celebrate our party's efforts to promote women. I acknowledge the work and efforts of my female Liberal colleagues in this place—Ms Castley, Ms Barry, Ms Morris and Ms Lee.

I pay tribute to the Women's Council of the Canberra Liberals and acknowledge the wonderful work that they perform in our party and across the community more broadly. In particular, I want to acknowledge the wonderful work of my female staffers, Sophie, Swan and Jessica. Their tireless work helps me to perform my duties in this place, in the electorate and in my portfolios.

Most importantly, I want to acknowledge my family: my wife, our five daughters, daughters-in-law and granddaughters, my mother, who is my hero—and there is a story behind that—my mother-in-law; and all the wonderful women in my personal life on this International Women's Day.

In summary, as we celebrate International Women's Day, let us remember that our actions today shape the future of women in the ACT for generations to come. I hope that we can all commit to making sure there are no barriers to women succeeding in whatever they choose to do.

International Women's Day

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.34): I also want to take this time to acknowledge International Women's Day this Saturday. Mr Speaker, as you have heard from many other members in the Assembly—and I am glad that it is something many of us are appreciating—this year's theme is to march forward, looking at how far we have come, but also pushing for change where it should be.

The WGEA data report was recently released, and it clearly shows how far off we still are. Traditionally, those in female-dominated industries are, on average, paid less than those in male-dominated industries and, nationally, we have a gap of \$28,425 a year. Why are we still seeing wages in these industries lower than average? Why are we still not seeing fair compensation for aged-care workers, childcare workers, nurses or retail employees, to name just a few? Not only must we improve the economic standard of workers in these industries; we must provide opportunities for women and gender-diverse people to enter traditionally male-dominated industries.

We know that the fastest growing cohort of homelessness is women over 55. This shows the damaging effects in our inequitable society of living through a cost-of-living crisis.

Speaking of the female experience of the cost-of-living crisis, we need to acknowledge that the cost-of-living crisis has a gendered aspect to it. We know that women are more likely to experience insecure housing and are more likely not to access medical care due to the cost than men. These economic pressures not only reinforce gendered

inequities; gendered inequities create economic pressures.

We should also acknowledge that we are still dealing with a world that places an economic imbalance on the concept of care. To be clear, caring is deeply and profoundly meaningful work that everyone is capable of and can become good at doing. The trouble is that women are often presumed to be naturally better at caring. Often it comes down to socialisation and reinforced expectations. The assumption is that the woman is the one doing the caring in the first instance, but caring generally is not paid and, when it is, it is often paid lower.

Over lifetimes, as women are, in most cases, by default expected to take the mantle of primary carer in all aspects of their life, they forgo substantial revenue when they take time off work to care, reduce their hours and become the one who drops everything. We know that, partially due to these gendered expectations, the gender pay gap persists and women have so much less superannuation to ensure a secure retirement when they reach that age.

Money should not be the be-all and end-all, but, in this system, money keeps people alive and fulfilled, and gendered expectations of care encourage economic and social inequality. This is something we should always keep in mind when we are looking at our policy settings. We should consider the gendered elements of our economic decisions and make sure that we march forward in letter and in spirit.

As we march forward, we need to confront gendered violence. One of the biggest threats facing women today is gendered violence. As we know, prevention and early intervention are key initiatives to make significant progress in eliminating gender-based violence. I would like to see further investment in the development of men's behaviour change programs and other perpetrator-based interventions, which was a recommendation in the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children. The promotion of and government support for community organisations that assist women and gender-diverse people are also extremely important for large-scale changes in this area.

On International Women's Day, it is worth mentioning the rights of trans women in particular, who have come under attack. Between Trump's despotic declarations and active erasure and demonisation of trans folks, the Queensland government banning HRT and puberty blockers, and now the Northern Territory government seeking to repeal sections of the Discrimination Act that make it unlawful to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate individuals based on personal characteristics such as race, gender and sexuality, it is a bloody hard time to be trans. Trans women are often the first women to see their rights once again offered up for political debate. Frankly, it is on all of us to do better when it comes to human rights.

To wrap up, we have some amazing women's organisations in the ACT. I am still making my way around them, to meet everyone. I hope we can continue to extend our support for these organisations and help them to maintain aid to all those vulnerable communities.

I was able to dash out of the chamber on Tuesday, as was Mr Emerson, and attend the YWCA's IWD event. There were a few poignant comments from the panel that really

stuck with me. One was that we would all do well to understand in this place that the onus should not be on women to create more charities to solve systemic issues. Here in parliament is the place where we change the systems. Certainly, the community is incredibly agile and resourceful at meeting community need as it arises, and often far quicker than government. All too often, what happens in practice is that we end up leaving it to the charity of community to plug existing gaps in our social systems on the sniff of an oily rag.

Another thing that resonated was the point made that we are still not centring the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Islander women, particularly young women, and doing enough to take our cue from them and learn from them. I have some more events to attend in the next couple of days, and I am looking forward to them.

Arts—Shakespeare by the Lakes

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (5.39): Mr Speaker, “Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

I have risen to bring to the Assembly’s attention the successful season of Shakespeare by the Lakes, Canberra’s bold, vibrant, free and accessible summer festival. *Shakespeare by the Lakes VI: Macbeth* this year was a co-production between Lakespeare and the Q Theatre. It opened in Queanbeyan three weeks ago, before playing its free performances on the green grass under the summer sun at Tuggeranong Town Park, Patrick White Lawns and Haig Park between 21 February and 1 March. There were also a few very boujee, boutique, ticketed and sold-out shows at the Hub in Kingston and Lake George Winery.

My entirely derivative idea for Shakespeare by the Lakes was to perform one of Western civilisation’s greatest cultural achievements for free on summer evenings in Canberra’s parks by Canberra’s lakes for every Canberran who wanted to come along. For obvious reasons, I did not participate at all in the production of *Shakespeare by the Lakes VI*; indeed, I stepped away from the production committee formally and entirely just after I was elected last October.

Joseph Papp founded New York’s public theatre’s free Shakespeare in the Park in the 1950s. His mantra was, “Public art is both important and necessary.” There was no problem, he said, in human society that could not be eased at least a little by having Shakespeare thrown at it.

Canberra, it seems, agrees. Shakespeare by the Lakes has attracted thousands of patrons to each season. This year, a crowd of more than 840 people came to Tuggeranong Town Park, that location’s biggest audience to date, while two performances at Patrick White Lawns played to nearly 3,000 between them. This proves that Canberrans really support art, even when it goes a bit dark.

Since the beginning, Shakespeare by the Lakes has been met with enthusiasm and praise from audiences and critics alike. It is now a vibrant and inclusive community event that is also Australia’s largest Shakespeare audience. Producing free, high-quality theatre is not without its challenges. Lakespeare relies on sponsorships, occasional grants and

donations from patrons to fund its productions. That is why it is hats off here to Rachel, who came to the Haig Park show this year and has donated \$1,000 to Lakespeare for the past three years. Thank you, Rachel.

If and when funded, the impact of Shakespeare by the Lakes extends far beyond the performances themselves. It provides a platform for local actors, directors and theatre professionals to showcase their talents and gain valuable experience. Because I do not have access to this year's audience reviews, I will finish by reading a message from an audience member at one of last year's performances of *Henry V*. I have no doubt her sentiments were the same this year. She wrote:

Hi. I am the white-haired old woman in France from whom King Harry borrowed the scarf tonight. What a fabulous performance. I have been attending theatre in Canberra for 40 years. I have seen a lot of Shakespeare. I was blessed to be around for Bell Shakespeare in the 90s. John Bell as Coriolanus, Prospero, King Lear—god, what a performance that was—Malvolio, Mark Antony. But I have also seen a number of very uninspired, bland productions of Shakespeare. I thought, “How could they have sucked the life out of this?”

Now I don't want them all to get swelled heads—okay, you can, a little—but the energy, enthusiasm and love for the text that you all showed tonight makes me think, here is Australia's new and exciting Shakespearean company, and the venue was perfect, up close and personal with the audience. I very much enjoyed being a groundling. Thank you so much. I am so looking forward to your next production, and when you are hugely successful in Sydney and Melbourne, and who knows where else, please don't forget us here in Canberra.

For *Shakespeare by the Lakes VI*, I offer congratulations to Denise, Paul, Sophia, Cathy, Kerri and Jordan, and the rest of the cast and crew of *Macbeth*—almost all Canberrans. Heads were cut off with aplomb and legs were consistently and outstandingly broken. “Lay on, Macduff, and damn'd be him that first cries, ‘Hold, enough!’”

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.43 pm until Tuesday, 18 March 2025 at 10 am.

Schedules of amendments

Schedule 1

CRIMES (CHILD SEX OFFENDERS) AMENDMENT BILL 2025

Amendment circulated by Mr Rattenbury

1

Proposed new Clause 2A

Page 2, line 6—

insert

2A Review date

A legislative review is to be presented by the ACT Attorney-General that ensures relevant stakeholders are adequately consulted and also the potential expansion of ‘child-related employment’ to other legal professionals and other professions. This is to be tabled by the last sitting day 2025.

Schedule 2

CRIMES (CHILD SEX OFFENDERS) AMENDMENT BILL 2025

Amendments circulated by Ms Morris

1

Clause 4

Proposed new section 124 (1) (sa)

Page 2, line 12—

omit

, provided by Legal Aid ACT

2

Clause 5

Page 2, line 17—

[oppose the clause]