



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

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20 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, 2 April 2025**.

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Thursday, 20 March 2025

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

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

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

This is Ngunnawal country.
Today we are all meeting 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.

Land—public unleased land review

Ministerial statement

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) (10.02): I am pleased to update the Assembly today on the comprehensive review and reform underway of the Public Unleased Land Act 2013. I know many people have been waiting for this moment.

Public unleased land makes up the veins of our city, and every one of us interacts with public land each time we step outside our home. Public land ranges from our roads, footpaths and cycle paths to our neighbourhood parks, reserves, verges and nature strips. Canberrans highly value their access to these spaces. This is especially so because public land is used for so many purposes, including active travel, sport, events, festivals, enjoying nature, making social connection and celebrating culture. Public land use has economic benefits for businesses by supporting major events, as well facilitating outdoor dining areas, access to utilities or construction and development.

As the population of Canberra grows and demand for more and higher density housing increases, the importance and value of public spaces in our urban environment is only increasing. The Public Unleased Land Act, also known as PULA, is the primary legislative framework that the government uses to manage public land. The act regulates many aspects of public land use, including work on public land, issuing permits for use, placing signage, temporarily closing public roads, graffiti visible from public land, and much more. The system has a broad remit that engages many users with varying needs, from individuals to tradespeople and community organisations to commercial organisations, developers and organisers of major events.

However, issues with administering the act emerge immediately in its objects. There are just two objects in this act, but there is an inherent conflict between them. It is because the objects are for the act to protect public land and to enable its use. It is not

that this tension cannot be worked through, and those who administer the act do a valiant job. However, it does mean there is complexity in the framework from the outset. That is only exacerbated with the framework of the act as it goes on. Covering such a broad range of activities and places creates unavoidable complication and engages many areas within government and government decision-makers. I note that, unusually, the PULA contains much of how things should be done within the act rather than within a regulation, and that makes it even more difficult and less agile as a framework.

PULA was introduced in 2013. While there have been minor amendments since, there has been no review or reform since. Further, the act was intended to be reviewed very soon after it was introduced, due to it carrying over many elements from the legislation's predecessor, particularly as it relates to the value placed on different land types, which have changed dramatically in the last 12 years and beforehand. Thus, it is a framework that is even more outdated than it appears.

We committed to reviewing this act at the election, and I am pleased to advise this work is underway. The review will ensure the act is fit for purpose and reflects contemporary use and value ascribed to places and assets. We will modernise the act to ensure public land and its use and value are appropriately defined, that positive uses of land are supported and encouraged, and that supporting processes are simplified and ensure that encroachment on any public land that is used for through movement, including footpaths, roads and shared paths, are limited or otherwise appropriately compensated for. That is particularly relevant to one of the issues that Mr Emerson was advocating for earlier this year.

A whole of government approach is being taken to this review due to the many complex interactions directorates and agencies have with public land. While the review will be largely internal to the ACT government, I am committed to target stakeholder consultation as we refine the legislative framework and incorporate the feedback we have received over many years of the act's operation. The review will look closely at the value of public land to the community and objectives for different areas, and will consider how the values, objectives and allowed activities interact. Determining this and having a shared understanding across government and the community is paramount if we want to have a streamlined system. To achieve a shared understanding, this information has to be accessible, transparent and easy for people looking to engage with or use public land, as well as those who are making the decisions.

Like the review of the Urban Forest Act, the review has a distinct focus on ensuring that the act is not inadvertently undermining legislative or strategic objectives of government. Also, it should align with existing legislation, rather than add another layer of complication, which I am sure is music to Mr Cocks's ears. Aligning the public unleased land framework with the planning system is crucial, as development applications often include permits and licences for construction that engage public land. It is also important to ensure that it is not operating in conflict with or creating unnecessary tensions with the Nature Conservation Act or undermining other environmental objectives. For example, it must not unwittingly create or enable ecological fragmentation.

Alongside the review of PULA, the government has also committed to develop a

comprehensive guide that will clearly identify sites which are suitable for community and private events, weddings, hawkers, busking, rallies and activations, and to provide information on the available services at the site, such as water and electricity, the approvals required and any complexities. This will assist event organisers in understanding which area is most suitable for any type of event and that they are aware of what is required for a site when making an application for use, while also supporting ease of event delivery.

Public unleased land is highly valued, and reviewing and reforming the act that administers its use and applications for its use is about ensuring we are valuing different parts of land fairly and appropriately, providing clarity about what the primary objectives for those different parts are, and ensuring that this information is clearly understood by those who seek to use it and those who assess and decide on the applications for use.

I commend this statement to the Assembly. I present the following paper:

Review of the *Public Unleased Land Act 2013*—Ministerial statement, 20 March 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (10.08): I very much look forward to seeing the results of this review. Members might recall that I moved a motion last year on urban agriculture in the ACT. One of the calls in my motion was for the government to:

- (a) investigate opportunities for urban agriculture activities co-located with suitable ACT heritage sites, with a view to the ...
- (ii) promotion of agriculture activities on suitable and underutilised public lands within the urban environment, including for use in further “incubator” farm programs and the small businesses that may emerge from them ...

Embedded within this motion was an implicit call on the government to work better between directorates in identifying suitable public land for a variety of uses for the community. Former Minister Vassarotti’s office was frequently finding that it was extremely difficult for EPSDD, on their own, to get progress on identifying land for community use. You could say that this was a big underlying motivator for how the Greens decided to progress my motion in the first place. The Greens wanted to create an authorising environment for the public service to get some movement on identifying public land for better uses.

When Ms Cheyne describes the tensions in the objects of the act, it rings true for me. One arm of government is trying to protect public land and another arm of government is trying to make better use of it. Progress currently requires cross-directorate circuit-breakers.

Reform of the act could be extremely useful if it lands right. The Greens will, of course,

be alert to other impacts that will flow through to the planning and regulatory system. It does need to land right. Our team will be watching this closely and with great interest. I am looking forward to it.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Social Housing Energy Performance Initiative Ministerial statement

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (10.10): I am pleased to rise today to update the Assembly on an important milestone demonstrating the ACT government's commitment to ensuring nobody is left behind in the transition to net zero. On Monday, 3 March 2025, the Deputy Chief Minister and I, alongside our federal government colleagues, jointly announced an additional \$12.9 million of commonwealth investment under the Social Housing Energy Performance Initiative, which we will call SHEPI, for ACT social housing properties. The SHEPI funds upgrades to social housing properties which are reducing electricity bills and making homes more comfortable, ensuring everyone reaps the benefits of the energy transition.

The additional funding expands on an existing \$7.2 million investment by the commonwealth under the SHEPI and demonstrates that the ongoing collaboration between the ACT and commonwealth governments will increase the quality of social housing stock through fully funded energy upgrades. The \$12.9 million the ACT will receive through the program expansion will see the installation of rooftop solar panels and batteries for up to 7,500 social housing properties. These solar and battery systems will be operated as an innovative virtual power plant, providing benefits to the electricity grid and savings to tenants. Virtual power plants harness household battery storage to release solar generated renewable energy into the grid to address frequency and voltage imbalances, local disruptions or disturbances, and will keep the network stable for consumers.

There will be cost savings and revenue from the power generated by the virtual power plant, and these benefits are expected to flow through to tenants' electricity bills and will support the ongoing maintenance of the infrastructure. The installation of solar and batteries connected to a virtual power plant will also provide an opportunity for local industry to pitch innovative solutions and contribute to the energy transition. The additional commonwealth funding builds on the significant body of work already progressing in the ACT to provide energy upgrades and bill relief to those who need it the most.

Minister Berry, the Minister for Homes and New Suburbs, and I have joint responsibility for the ACT government's Home Energy Support Program. Since 2022, this program has delivered assistance to low-income and vulnerable households facing energy hardship, supporting the uptake of energy efficient upgrades through targeted rebates and fully funded retrofits. Under the program, 2,800 public and community housing properties in the ACT have already received fully funded insulation and electrification upgrades. Funding provided through the first iteration of the commonwealth SHEPI has allowed for the expansion of the Home Energy Support

Program to insulate and electrify an additional 900 properties. These home upgrades are being delivered at pace. At the end of 2024, an average of 56 properties were being upgraded per week by our local industry partners.

In addition to the insulation and electrification upgrades currently being delivered under the Home Energy Support Program, the ACT government has committed to the electrification of all feasible social housing properties in the ACT by 2030 under the Integrated Energy Plan, and we are well on track to meeting this commitment. We know that these energy upgrades are making a significant difference to the lives of social housing tenants here in the ACT. Surveys demonstrate that these upgrades have led to improved thermal comfort, wellbeing and climate resilience. Eighty-six per cent of tenants surveyed in 2024 reported the comfort of their homes had improved since receiving the upgrades, and 64 per cent said their wellbeing had improved.

We have also received feedback from tenants that their homes are now much warmer in winter and cooler in summer, and that the money they are saving on energy bills can now be used for other important household expenses. Once gas appliances are upgraded to electric options, householders can disconnect gas, saving \$300 per annum in connection charges alone, and these results show what we in the ACT already know: our focus on renewable energy solutions is providing essential cost-of-living relief to those who need it most.

The plan to connect rooftop solar and batteries to a virtual power plant is the next step following on from electrification and insulation work completed and funded through SHEPI and the ACT's Home Energy Support Program. It is expected that the virtual power plant project will be implemented over four years, from 2025-26. The next steps are to undertake detailed policy and program design to ensure the project delivers maximum benefits for social housing tenants and the renewable energy transition. A procurement process seeking innovative approaches from industry will also begin in the coming months.

The ACT government will continue to work closely with the commonwealth to ensure a just transition for all as we move towards net zero emissions here in the ACT. I look forward to updating the Assembly on further milestones highlighting how all Canberrans are benefiting from the ACT government's renewable energy initiatives.

I present the following paper:

Social Housing Energy Performance Initiative Expansion—Ministerial statement,
20 March 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.15): I welcome the minister's statement today. It outlines a positive piece of work that builds on the ACT's agenda to electrify the whole city which we agreed to last term and focuses on what is known as the just transition—the idea that, as we move to a new energy system, we need to make sure everybody in the community benefits from it. Investment in the electrification and

insulation of social housing is such an important part of that just transition agenda.

I particularly acknowledge the role of my federal colleagues, the Australian Greens, in securing the funding that will be rolled out in the ACT. This program was initially secured by the Greens in negotiations with the federal government, with initial funding of \$300 million. In November 2024, a further \$500 million was added to the program, which is a substantial injection that is now flowing through to the rollout in the ACT.

After those negotiations last November, the Australian Greens secured life-changing upgrades for 50,000 social homes across the country. People will have their homes electrified and they will save, on average, approximately \$1,800 a year on power bills. That is happening right across the country, but I am very pleased with the impact in the ACT. Certainly at the time that the negotiations took place, the Australian Council on Social Service applauded the federal government's deal with the Greens to invest an additional \$500 million to retrofit another 50,000 social housing properties with energy-efficient electric and solar upgrades. As the CEO of ACOSS, Dr Cassandra Goldie, said:

“This is an important investment that will improve the lives of thousands of people living in social housing who are struggling with extremely hot conditions and skyrocketing energy costs ...

“Home energy upgrades mean permanent and significant cuts to energy bills, healthier living conditions, and a significant reduction in carbon emissions.

Cassandra Goldie sums up perfectly the point of this program, and I am very pleased about the impact it will have in the ACT.

Certainly, from a local point of view, while the Greens have no federal representatives at the moment, it is clear through programs and outcomes like this that we are still able to deliver significant outcomes for Canberrans. This money flowing from the federal government sees \$7.2 million allocated to the ACT in the first round and a further \$12.9 million in the second round. They are the numbers, but it is about the real impact on the ground for people who are living in social housing. They will have a better quality of life and lower energy bills. I thank my colleagues in the federal parliament for their work to secure this funding.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Arts—support 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) (10.18): It is an honour to provide a statement today outlining the ACT government's support for the arts, culture and creative sector. As Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, I want to continue to make progress towards the ambition of Canberra becoming the arts capital of Australia. I look forward to building on the work that has been done during the last

term of government by my predecessor in this portfolio, Minister Cheyne.

Canberra has a vibrant arts community. We have visual arts, craft and design, dance, literature, music, theatre, screen, digital games development and community arts. We see the imprint of arts and culture throughout our city, whether it is driving past the instantly recognisable and crowd favourite Belco owl sculpture, by the late Bruce Armstrong, picking up Chris Hammer's 2024 ACT Book of the Year, *The Seven*, at a local bookshop, participating in a dance workshop at the heritage Gorman Arts Centre, or spotting Canberra landscapes while watching the Australian-British comedy drama series *Austin* on the ABC.

Canberra is a special place where people embrace arts, culture and creativity in their everyday lives, and the numbers speak for themselves. We have the highest level of creative intensity per head of population in Australia—that is, the proportion of total employment in creative occupations across all industries. We also consistently have the highest attendance and participation rates at cultural venues and activities; not to mention, our arts industry is a major tourist drawcard, with arts and cultural experiences being one of the key reasons visitors come to Canberra.

The arts are highly valued by Canberrans, with 85 per cent acknowledging the significant positive impact across a range of areas, including our sense of wellbeing and happiness, understanding other people's culture, and the ability to think creatively and develop new ideas. The benefit was highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, as, during that period of isolation and uncertainty, we turned to books, films and music for comfort. The sector showed resilience and innovation, offering one-on-one concerts, livestreaming of performances, and artwork tributes to our health workers. The flexibility and energy have continued in the years since.

However, I acknowledge that the sector is under pressure. Still rebounding from the pandemic, artists and organisations are grappling with other disruptors, including rising costs and changing audience habits. Despite this, the sector continues to produce high-quality content that people want to pay for and experience. That is why the government is committed to ongoing support for artists, arts workers and creative practitioners to recover and build resilience and create sustainable careers. ACT government support for the arts, culture and creative industries is guided by Canberra: Australia's Arts Capital Arts, Culture and Creative Policy 2022-2026 and its corresponding action plan. The policy, developed following wide consultation with the sector, identifies 10 focus areas that build on Canberra's strength and attributes to deliver against the strategies in the Statement of Ambition for the arts. The three strategies are: create amazing art and culture—everywhere, at any time, for everyone; develop arts, cultural and creative industry, practice, and facilities—supporting creation and culture at all levels, via any path; promote our arts and culture—to attract artists and creators, arts workers, visitors and investment.

This year, the ACT Arts Fund will deliver over \$11 million directly to individual artists, arts organisations and community groups to create new work, foster professional development, enhance skills and engage with participants and audiences. Of this \$11 million, over \$9 million each year is invested in a network of 29 leading arts and cultural organisations and facilities. These organisations engage with the local community to provide programs, services and expertise to support and develop the arts in the ACT.

They provide a range of services, such as opportunities for professional artists to develop their skills or for audiences to attend an exhibition, concert or theatre performance or undertake a ceramic, jewellery or studio glass-making classes.

In 2023, collectively, these 29 organisations delivered over 8,000 workshops, developed 621 new works, held 227 exhibitions and held 711 performances. These organisations attracted over 600,000 patrons across their programs and delivered 1,949 targeted programs to support access and diversity. Leveraging our investment, organisations generated \$9 million in own source revenue, employed 130 full-time equivalent staff, provided 2,285 paid artist opportunities, and 5,746 skills and development opportunities.

Through project grant funding, the government supports individual artists to develop their creative practice and assists them to establish income-generating careers in their field, allowing artists and arts workers to be remunerated. These grants also provide diverse cultural experiences for Canberra audiences and consumers.

One of the ways we are elevating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's cultural and artistic practices is through the Cultural Arts Program. This grant program aims to reflect Canberra's unique culture and identity by funding self-determined programs that enhance arts and cultural outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and build cultural leadership. Wiradjuri artist, Rechelle Turner, and Ngunnawal Wiradjuri artist, Megan Daley, are being supported to develop their textile practice into garments and accessories with the aim of launching their own fashion label. The Indigenous fashion industry is a growing sector which provides a contemporary and meaningful way of cultural storytelling and knowledge-sharing. This project will enhance arts and cultural outcomes for these two artists.

The ACT Book of the Year Award is also an important mechanism through which Canberra's rich literary talent has been recognised and celebrated since 1996. Previous winners have described the awards as crucial to giving them the space to write, making them feel like a "real writer", and resulted in attracting new readers.

Raising the profile of local artists and providing indirect support to the sector can be equally impactful. On 19 February, I announced the launch of the artsACT Artist Database, which is a commitment that we took to the election. The database aims to increase creative activity across Canberra by connecting businesses looking to engage local artists for pay opportunities, including small to medium venues wishing to support and showcase artists and creators as part of the ACT government's liquor fee reductions to support the night-time economy. Canberra artists across all art forms can self-nominate to be included on the database hosted on the artsACT website. A night-time venue wanting to book a musician or performer will be able to search the database and find the details of an appropriate artist.

The ACT government is committed to raising the profile and understanding the value of arts and creative work, as well as artists' and arts workers' rights. Artists should be paid fairly and in accordance with legal requirements. The Remuneration Principles and Practices for Artists and Arts Workers has become a practical guide for those looking to engage artists in the ACT. Representation on behalf of ACT artists and creative workers is also made at intergovernmental discussions, including by the establishment

of the Australian government's Creative Workplaces. Its aim is to support the sector to understand their rights and meet their workplace obligations by providing information, resources and referral of information about pay, safety and wellbeing.

Looking ahead, there is a busy and exciting agenda for the arts, culture and creative sector in 2025. The government is continuing to invest in Canberra's network of arts facilities to make sure they are suitable for artists, arts organisations and visitors. The 2024-25 budget included \$5.8 million to undertake essential upgrades and corrective repairs and maintenance works. The \$12.9 million upgrade of the Gorman Arts Centre is underway and will improve building operation, accessibility and sustainability for resident artists and arts organisation, as well as centre visitors, while preserving its heritage significance. The \$2 million upgrade of Tuggeranong Arts Centre theatre is near completion. Works include improvements to back of house and cross-stage access, as well as the replacement of sound and lighting systems. New theatre seats will be separately installed in July 2025 during the gap in the centre's theatre programming.

Shortly, I will be announcing the selection of an artist for the public artwork to honour Canberra's "soup kitchen lady", the late Stasia Dabrowski OAM. This artwork will be located in Garema Place in early 2026 and will join the other 116 public artworks in the ACT government collection.

The second iteration of the Canberra Poneke Indigenous Artist Exchange will open for expressions of interest this year. Through this program, an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander artist will spend four weeks in Poneke, New Zealand, working in a new environment and engaging with Maori culture, the Wellington arts sector and the wider community. A Maori artist will be given the same opportunity to come to Canberra over the same period to connect with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture. This project has the potential to deepen our understanding of traditional cultures and build new international partnerships.

Work on the Kingston arts precinct continues. This year has seen continued consultation with arts organisations on the concept design, as well as meetings of the reference group appointed to guide the design and development of the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art space within the precinct. This is an exciting project and, once completed, will be a vibrant destination for visitors and locals to explore arts and culture in the ACT.

Throughout this term, I look forward to working with stakeholders to embed the sector's value, develop capacity and provide Canberra audiences with high-quality and engaging arts and cultural experiences.

I present the following paper:

Artist Registry and Support for the Arts—Ministerial statement, 20 March 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.30): I rise to say how incredibly disappointed I am that there are no arts facilities anywhere in the Murrumbidgee electorate. The policy for arts “everywhere, at any time”, does not apply to the Murrumbidgee electorate. People need facilities to be able to come together in a space, to bring like-minded people together, to form relationships and to build a community. This connects people and reduces loneliness in the community. It is good for people’s mental health. I cannot say how often we have asked for some arts facilities and, yet again, we never get them. I hope, perhaps in the budget, maybe something will change then. We can only hope and pray.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (10.31): Minister Pettersson is right: Canberra does boast a vibrant arts community. So I was very glad to hear him outline the ACT government’s ongoing investment in Canberra’s art and Canberra’s artists. The launch of the ACT Artists Database is a strong step in the right direction for supporting creative people in the ACT. I would strongly encourage local artists across all art forms to nominate themselves for inclusion in the database on the artsACT website.

In Brindabella, we can already see the positive impact of the ACT government’s investment in the arts. The minister has just updated us on the significant upgrades to the Tuggeranong Arts Centre Theatre. They are nearing completion. This is very good news. One hundred metres down the road from the Tuggeranong Arts Centre, Tuggeranong has received a new piece of public art. Dream Lens recently found a new home watching over Lake Tuggeranong or South Point Shopping Centre, depending on which side you are peering through. The much-loved or, at least, very provocative piece has been relocated from Northbourne Avenue. I am eagerly anticipating the completion of the landscaping and lighting works around it. Given Tuggeranong is largely underrepresented in the ACT’s public art collection, this is a welcome addition. I trust it is just the beginning.

I would also like to highlight the recent work of Tracy Hall. She is a talented mural artist living in Gordon. With support from the ACT government and members of the community who donated to her fund, Tracy has created an extraordinarily large mural along Woodcock Drive in Gordon. The mural has already garnered much admiration from the community. I hope Tracy is able to continue her work elsewhere in Tuggeranong and perhaps the ACT.

In its plan for Tuggeranong released last year, ACT Labor committed to establishing a permanent exhibition space at Lanyon Homestead. Planning and design works are also underway to better utilise the former Shearer’s Quarters and the Nolan Gallery, so we can make the most of its picturesque location on the Murrumbidgee River and the uninterrupted views of the Brindabellas.

Also in the plan for Tuggeranong, ACT Labor committed to installing a photo lab at Lake Tuggeranong College. The only time in my life that I did not participate in artistic endeavours of some kind was during my two years as a student at Lake Tuggeranong College. I regret that, because the art scene at Lake Tuggeranong was strong then and is stronger now. The exhibition of Lake Tuggeranong College’s artistic talent at Tuggeranong Library last year is a testament. I am looking forward to viewing the images that will come out of the new photo lab, which I understand will be located in

the library. Facilities like this at ACT public schools allow, encourage and enable the next generation of artists to refine their craft and develop their passion to, instead of being students, they become artists. I cannot wait to work closely with the minister to deliver on these commitments in Tuggeranong and ensure that our arts community continues to thrive.

The arts are an integral part of our community, and it is our responsibility to support and nurture this sector. The initiatives and investments outlined by the minister are vital steps towards achieving this goal. We shall continue to champion the arts and provide our artists with the resources and opportunities they need to succeed.

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 want to thank Minister Pettersson for the update, particularly in relation to the artists register, which has been a longstanding idea that I am very keen to see expanded and have more people on it. I want to commend Minister Pettersson for delivering it and the directorate, of course, for delivering it ahead of time. It is a terrific election commitment, particularly in how it interacts with our night-time economy reforms.

You would recall that last year, we passed some laws in this place that were about recognising our hospitality sector and our hardworking artists that engage with the hospitality sector and trying to increase the amount of art generally that is available through our night-time economy. One of the ways that we have encouraged this is through a reduction in liquor licence fees for venues which showcase artists, musicians and other cultural activities. Venues that have a total occupancy of 150 people or less and hold a minimum of 10 eligible events within a 12-month period can apply for an 80 per cent discount on their next liquor licence fee, which can be really quite significant. Eligible events include live music performance, performance arts events, such as theatre performance, visual arts events, an arts exhibition, a book reading, a planned performance of traditional dancing or any other event which fits the criteria in the guidelines.

To support this, we recognised that not all venues that have a liquor licence might be regularly engaged with the arts scene. They might not know where to start in terms of how to host a book reading if they are a cafe or how to bring in a musician to play on Friday nights. That is really what was driving the artists register, and it is great to see it up and running. I am very keen to see it expanded and for these two processes to support each other, particularly given that we do have another election commitment to expand the types of venues that can be eligible for a liquor fee reduction for hosting activities like DJs, musicians, art exhibitions et cetera, up to a 350-person capacity. It is obviously subject to the budget, because it is a budget initiative, but I look forward to being able to deliver on that in this term of government. Again, the artists registry will be a terrific place for people to go to see who is out there and who they might be able to host in their venues and bring even greater connectivity and activation to those places.

Just quickly to correct the record, to Ms Carrick's comments, I know she is a longstanding advocate for an arts centre in Woden. But a physical building is not art in and of itself. Since 2019, there has been a Woden arts program. Its sole focus, its mission, is to showcase artistic practice which engages and collaborates with the

community to activate locations in the suburbs of Woden—Chifley, Curtin, Farrer, Garran, Hughes, Isaacs, Lyons, Mawson, O’Malley, Pearce, Phillip and Torrens.

Activities include two regular art classes held at Woden Library, a Woden public art trail, community neighbourhood days and various pop-ups offering creative experiences for the local community. There is a terrific, dedicated website that shows what is available. Also, applications are open right for activations in Woden for 2025. That is open until 30 April. I would hope that perhaps Ms Carrick would like to promote that. That would give more opportunities for art and activation in Woden.

To link it back to the artists registry, the Woden Arts site has a big shout-out for the artist registry, because you can use the register to sort by location. They are stressing that they want to support south-side artists but that, to do that, they need to know who they are, and to please register through the artists registry. I am pleased to say that there are already artists who are located in Woden who have registered through the site. Indeed, I hope that more do, particularly given Ms Carrick’s advocacy and the opportunities that are available through Woden Arts.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.41): I thank the minister for his update and for his genuine and deep interest in the sector. I know that the minister has been out talking to the arts organisations and the artists. It is really pleasing to see that. I am also really glad that the minister and the government remain committed to the goal of making Canberra Australia’s arts capital. I think it is really good that we have not shifted from that goal.

Art is so important to Canberrans, and it was great to hear a recap of this. We have the highest audience participation rates in the arts. I used to be an arts practitioner. It is a great description. Most of what I consider I did was playing and practising. I am now really an audience member. So I am visiting it from a different perspective, and that is really great to do. It is such an important way for us to connect and to process the things that are going on—and there is a lot going on. There is a lot of climate and environmental art at the moment. I think a lot of us are processing eco-grief in that way. There is a lot of art about loneliness and fears. There is a lot of instability going on at the moment, and it is so important for us to maintain that outlet for our practitioners and for our community who participate in that through community art or through audience participation.

We have so many talented creatives. I am worried, though, that we are not supporting this sector in a way that matches our stated ambitions. We know that we have a lot of creatives moving out of town. There is a bit of a talent bleed to Sydney, Melbourne and Wollongong, to places where there seem to be better creative paths and better career pathways. We know the costs for being an artist have risen. Insurance is one of them. There is a parliamentary inquiry into this at the moment. I am hoping it comes up with some useful ways forward.

Costs all across the board have risen for artists, as they have for many other sectors. We know that a lot of our arts organisations are genuinely struggling, and we are starting to see the impacts of that with some of the organisations already sacking staff, reducing their programs, completely changing direction and saying, “We are not doing production work this year; we are putting a pause on that.” I am quite worried that we

are going to see a raft of long-established arts organisations that have been underpinning our sector for decades just falling over.

I am pleased that the government has committed to a 25 per cent increase plus CPI to the arts organisations and increases to artists. A lot of us are a bit worried that it sounds like that is not going to start until next year. I am concerned that that may not be starting soon enough. It is also not that much money for a sector that makes the contribution that we have heard. We know the contribution this sector makes in terms of what we value and what it means to be human beings and Canberrans, but we have heard a lot about what this sector contributes to the economy. It is 130 FTE jobs, 2,235 paid opportunities for artists, from a really small budget of \$11 million from the government. There was a UC report into the creative industries that showed that the whole creative sector is contributing \$2.9 billion to the ACT. I understand the minister's viewpoint that the creative industries is broader than the arts, but a \$2.9 billion contribution is pretty significant in terms of our local economy, particularly for such a small spend.

I understand that we do need to maintain our facilities, and some of our facilities need a bit more maintenance than they have had. But I am increasingly concerned that we still seem to be repeating the same pattern of building new facilities—we have a large facility extension going on and a large facility being built at the moment—but we do not always have the commitment to provide ongoing program funding. We have seen this pattern repeated over and over again. When we are looking at an \$11 million budget for program funding, you can see why this budget is really not stretching far enough.

I always put that in context. We are talking about an \$8.5 billion budget or a \$9 billion budget—I will be interested to see where the next one lands—and \$11 million is not much from that. We manage to find \$8 million every year for the horseracing industry. I have certain views on whether that is a good use of funds for Canberrans. But, quite apart from whether you think it is good value for money and something we should be paying for, \$8 million for one tiny branch of the entertainment sector versus \$11 million for the entire art sector gives you a good idea of where our priorities are at the moment.

I was disappointed yesterday that we did not get firmer commitment from the Assembly for librarians. By my reckoning, paying for an extra 30 or 40 librarians would probably only cost us a few million dollars. So I am not entirely convinced that we have our funding priorities in the right place. We need to make sure that we are paying for the jobs and funding the sectors that we want to be thriving and continuing. I think we actually can do this if we do this well and thoughtfully.

I want to finish with a quote from the minister: “We have the highest levels of creative intensity per head of population in Australia.” We know how vibrant our local sector is. We need to make sure that we are supporting it and that we do not let it collapse around us.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Housing—homelessness

Ministerial statement

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

Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (10.46): Homelessness can happen to anyone, at any time. If it does occur, we all want homelessness to be brief, rare and non-recurring. This government is committed to ensuring that vulnerable Canberrans, especially those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, get the support that they need when they need it.

The ACT government has committed over \$140 million in homelessness funding over the next four years for emergency and transitional accommodation, free food and counselling and social inclusion supports. The homelessness services we fund aim to assist people to resolve crisis, re-establish family links where appropriate and enhance the capacity of people to live independently. These services are available to a range of cohorts, including single men, single women, families, youth, First Nations and vulnerable Canberrans with more complex needs who may need accommodation and a range of different supports.

The supports we have in place change people's lives. In the ACT, 84 per cent of people who were at risk of homelessness were supported to maintain their current housing. Of that 84 per cent, 90 per cent of those people in public or community housing were assisted to remain in their tenancy and a further eight people were assisted into private or other housing; two-thirds, or 63 per cent, of people at risk of homelessness in private rentals or other housing were helped to remain in their tenancy; and a further 87 people were assisted into public or community housing. The ACT government has also committed to the delivery of 5,000 new affordable rental dwellings to grow the ACT property portfolio to 13,200 homes by the end of 2030, making it easier for Canberrans to access the housing they need.

It is heartening to see another Aboriginal community-controlled organisation, Yerrabi Yurwang, in partnership with Marymead Catholic Care Goulburn, was successful in the recent grant opportunity to delivery tenancy and property management services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Starting on 1 February 2025, this program will ensure strong connections between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the broader service systems to ensure that clients can access specialist homelessness services and cultural supports. These connections will also support clients to access longer-term more appropriate accommodation. We will continue to work at this through our commitment to make 75 public housing properties available for specialist housing and homelessness services, including to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, adding to the more than 700 already operated in partnership with community housing providers.

Despite this increased investment, the ACT and the whole of Australia continue to see pressure on housing and homelessness services. A large number of those experiencing homelessness may find themselves requiring housing support after a personal crisis—for example, finance, the breakdown of a relationship or health—and can quite often restabilise after a period of support. However, those experiencing persistent homelessness often experience a range of challenges and higher levels of complexity requiring longer periods of supports. Many of these clients have complex lives and experience ongoing episodes of homelessness due to mental health, alcohol and other drug issues and/or other vulnerability issues which prevent them from maintaining engagement with support services. For many of these people, the critical success factor is the frontline workforce who continue to operate in a trauma-informed way to

reengage clients. This highly skilled and dedicated workforce make a huge difference in the lives of Canberrans. I personally want to thank them for all of the work that they do.

As the Minister for Homelessness, I want to assure the Canberra community that helping address homelessness is a priority for me. I look forward to working closely with the sector throughout this term of government.

I present the following paper:

Homelessness—Ministerial statement, 20 March 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.50): People often raise concerns with me about the increasing prevalence of homelessness in our community. They will be hoping that Minister Berry's statement signals a step change in the government's approach to supporting the most vulnerable Canberrans and more than just a commitment to business as usual.

So far, business as usual has given us the highest rates of persistent homelessness in the country, rising to almost 50 per cent among First Nations people experiencing homelessness; 2,000 homeless Canberrans; and stories of women sleeping in their cars with their children in the back seat, parked at shopping centres with well-lit car parks, chosen specifically because the public bathrooms there remain open late. Business as usual has crisis accommodation providers like Samaritan House reporting they could fill three times the number of beds they have with men in need; Karinya House reporting that there is a cohort of pregnant women in the ACT who are homeless and are not being serviced due to the Karinya's limited resources; and 900 children in our community experiencing homelessness, 180 of whom presented to homelessness services alone, unaccompanied by a family member.

Business as usual is not working. So I am hopeful that, with this morning's statement, the government is not reinstating a commitment to business as usual but is instead committing to meaningful change. Canberra should be a city where a safe place to sleep is available to everyone, not just for those who can afford it. That is not currently the case.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.52): I will provide some statistics that I think will show that everything is not as rosy as Ms Berry would present. In response to a question on notice that I asked earlier this year, we have, unfortunately, seen a record growth in the number of those experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. In 2022-23, that number was just under 4,000. In 2023-24, it was over 1,000 more, nearly 5,000 experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. In addition, the number of Canberrans experiencing persistent homelessness has, for the last three years, remained over 1,000. The number of Canberrans experiencing persistent homelessness from 2021-22 to 2023-24 has remained over 1,000.

I want to echo Mr Emerson's critique that business as usual is just not working. The numbers prove that. The number of unique rough sleepers averaged per month in 2021 was 49. In 2024, at that point, we had 74. The number of unique rough sleepers, people who are sleeping in a vulnerable situation without a roof over their heads, has grown as well. Business as usual is not working.

I also want to thank Mr Emerson for a question on notice regarding the service supplied by OneLink—question on notice No 8. OneLink is a 1800 number that provides a support service, including for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness. The support link operates Monday to Friday, 8 am to 6 pm, and Saturday and Sunday afternoon. If a message is sent outside those times—and this is the minister's answer—"staff will review the request and respond the next business day". Unfortunately, if someone has, for example, a domestic violence crisis situation on the weekend and they need support and help to find somewhere safe to be, the next business day could be the Monday or, if it is a public holiday, it could be the Tuesday. Business as usual is not working, and I urge the minister to come up with some better solutions.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Health—order for the production of documents

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.55): I move:

That, in accordance with standing order 213A, the Assembly orders the Minister for Health to provide the Assembly with:

- (1) a list of any inquiries, reviews, and other initiatives which have been commissioned by the Government since 1 July 2019 and relate to the ACT health system;
- (2) a list of the recommendations made by each, including the Government's response (if any), the implementation status of each recommendation, and a timeframe for the implementation of any outstanding recommendations; and
- (3) a list of any recommendations which were accepted by the Government but which will not be implemented.

I am aware of the other business that the Assembly needs to address today, so I will be brief. This motion simply seeks the release of information relating to reviews and inquiries into the health system. I note that in one of the question times this week, the minister made the claim that a royal commission was not necessary because of the reviews that we have already undertaken into the health system.

I thought this was interesting, because few Canberrans would interact with the health system and conclude that it was effective, efficient and well-managed, which raises the question of what exactly those reviews have considered, what their recommendations have been and whether those recommendations have been implemented, because we do not have the health system that we deserve. In fact, we have a health system that has sharply deteriorated in recent years, despite record levels of funding and new capital investment.

This motion seeks to have a comprehensive list of inquiries and reviews of the health

system that have been commissioned by the government. We deserve to know what has been undertaken, what changes this work has delivered and how this could possibly substitute for a royal commission, because I am not convinced the minister's claim is true. The health officials who speak to me are not convinced, and members of the community who rely on the health system are not convinced either. But I will let the minister make her case.

On that point, I really want to give a shout-out and acknowledge the minister's office. They have worked really well with my office and discussed the wording and the timeframe of the motion in good faith. Honestly, the staff in the minister's office are just wonderful, so we want to thank them for all of their hard work on this, and also the Assembly staff.

The wording has been tightened. There has been an amendment circulated by the minister which we will support, because our goal is simply to see the release of this information. Again, I thank the minister's advisers and the Assembly for their support on this motion.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.58): I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit all text in paragraphs (1), (2) and (3), substitute:

- “(1) a list of any inquiries or reviews commissioned by the Government since 1 July 2019, which relate to the ACT Health Directorate or Canberra Health Services, and that made policy recommendations to the Government;
- (2) a list of the recommendations made by each, including the Government's response (if any), the implementation status of each recommendation, and an expected timeframe for the implementation of any incomplete recommendations;
- (3) a list of any recommendations which were accepted by the Government but which will not be implemented; and
- (4) notwithstanding provisions of standing order 213A, material is to be provided by Friday, 2 May 2025.”.

I want to start also by thanking other members and their staff for their collaboration on this motion, and I thank Ms Castley as well for the comments that she has made about my office. They are indeed a fabulous team, and they have worked very closely with her office, particularly to understand the intent of her motion. My amendment seeks to ensure that that intent is achieved without inadvertently capturing literally hundreds of initiatives that are undertaken by individual clinical and policy teams that may result in service improvement but do not involve consideration of policy recommendations or decision-making by the executive, and particularly by ministers and/or the cabinet.

My understanding is that Ms Castley's intention for this motion was to get an understanding of reviews and inquiries that have made policy recommendations to the government and that therefore individual matters were not in the scope of this request. Canberra Health Services, in particular, does hold sensitive information about reviews of individual patient matters and the performance of individual health workers and

teams, so I appreciate the opportunity to clarify that it was not the intention to capture these.

While my amendment is written as a full replacement, because this was the most straightforward way to do it, it does really only amend clause 1 and adds an adjusted timeline for the provision of information at clause 4. The amendment to clause 1 helped to link the requested list of inquiries and reviews to the list of recommendations that had already been sought in clauses 2 and 3, which have not been amended in any meaningful way.

As members would know, each directorate's annual report already includes a complete list of outstanding recommendations from oversight agencies and Legislative Assembly committees and where these are up to. So while Ms Castley has indicated in her comments that she is not really across all of the reviews that have been held into the health system, I would encourage her as a starting point to look at pages 29 to 49 of the Canberra Health Services 2023-24 annual report, which outlines the status of responses to recommendations from the Auditor-General, the coroner, the Inspector of Correctional Services and a number of Legislative Assembly committees.

Those were among the reviews and inquiries I was referring to in my comments in the Legislative Assembly, and I have previously had a conversation with the CEO of Canberra Health Services talking about the hundreds of recommendations that Canberra Health Services is already responding to from across these reviews, inquiries by oversight bodies and, indeed, by the Legislative Assembly itself.

In that context, I do need to give a shout-out to a previous—some time ago—shadow minister for health, Mrs Dunne, who was very active in instigating and working very hard on Legislative Assembly committee inquiries into the health system. Ms Castley may benefit from going back and having a look at some of those inquiries, including an inquiry into the financial sustainability of the health system that was undertaken by this very Assembly a couple of iterations ago.

It is also the case, of course, that the government, ministers, cabinet, the Health Directorate and CHS themselves commission inquiries and reviews that do make policy recommendations. Indeed, there have been several reviews relating to the Health Directorate and Canberra Health Services, and the former Calvary public hospital as well, commissioned by government since 1 July 2019, the largest of which—and the most contentious, I think—being the culture review updates. The culture review itself was commissioned before 1 July 2019, but there were two updates—annual updates—that made further recommendations, which have been very transparently delivered and responded to.

The vast majority of these, of course, are already publicly available, with updates on responses provided regularly, including through ministerial statements and tabled documents in this place. And in considering the response to this motion, no doubt consideration will be given by officials as to whether any recommendations that have not previously been made public, if there indeed are any, relate specifically to budget advice or sensitive public service matters, but that is entirely a matter for officials considering the outcome of this motion.

I would suggest officials may also wish to consider whether to make public the cost of responding to this motion, Mr Assistant Speaker, as is done with responses to questions on notice, because, essentially, most of this work is doing Ms Castley's basic research for her. It is the type of work that opposition staffers and parliamentary libraries usually do for members of parliament. It is not the original intention—

Mr Hanson: You are not on the hill anymore!

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No; I was a staffer in a very small office where this is exactly the type of work that staffers would do.

Mr Cain interjecting—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Cain!

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The only point I am making is that I think taxpayers deserve to know how much it costs to do Ms Castley's research for her—for public officials to do Ms Castley's research for her. Taxpayers deserve to know what the cost of that is; that is the only point I am making.

Of course, as I said, we have commissioned a number of reviews, and some of those that have been commissioned include: the Review of the COVID-19 Response Operating Model; the Independent Review of the ACT Government managed 'Ragusa' Quarantine facility during the COVID-19 pandemic; the LGBTIQ+ Health Scoping Study; and the Palliative Care Service Function Review.

In September 2022, of course, I also established the Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Expert Panel to help prioritise strategies to achieve better health outcomes for children in Canberra and the surrounding region, particularly the most vulnerable in the community, and that resulted in the Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Plan. And I have also established the ACT Health System Council, which held its first meeting in November 2023. Consistent with its terms of reference, the council provides advice to the Minister for Health and the Minister for Mental Health—I am now both—on matters relevant to a sustainable health system, and the 2023-24 annual report of the Health System Council is publicly available and notes the advice that the council has been providing.

The findings of these reviews and inquiries have been very valuable in forming our policy direction, and I look forward to the Assembly receiving this information by the updated date of Friday, 2 May. Again, I want to thank members across the chamber for their collaboration in this and their agreement to the extended timeframe, given the amount of work that will need to go into responding to this motion. I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (11.05): Just very briefly, the Greens will be supporting Minister Stephen-Smith's amendment, but I welcome the fact that there has been a good degree of collaboration in the background to get an agreed text, and I think that is a positive thing. Whilst there is obviously some disagreement on the minister's view about whether this should come through or not, at least we have been able to refine

it in a way that is suitable. We are happy to support that amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Short-Term Rental Accommodation Levy Bill 2025

Mr Steel, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (11.06): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Today I present to the Assembly the Short-Term Rental Accommodation Levy Bill 2025. The bill will deliver on the government's commitment from the 2024-25 budget to introduce the short-term rental accommodation levy. The bill imposes a levy on booking service providers who make, arrange or facilitate short-term rental accommodation bookings in the ACT from 1 July 2025.

This bill is modelled on similar legislation that has been enacted in Victoria, where the levy is set at 7.5 per cent. I note the Tasmanian government has also announced a 5 per cent levy on short-term rental accommodation but is yet to implement it.

We expect that this bill may have a modest but positive impact on incentivising the supply of long-term rentals to local renters, rather than being made available to short-term visitors.

Short-stay platforms will remain an important part of the visitor economy, but this bill strikes a fairer balance between the costs of operating a hotel, motel and other accommodation which are subject to reasonable regulation and often payroll and other taxes. However, the primary purpose of this bill is to generate revenue which goes to delivering critical government services, including Canberra's great local tourism offerings and events.

The levy will apply to any booking by a booking service provider for a rental period of not more than 28 days made on or after 1 July 2025. The levy is 5 per cent of the consideration for a booking. Booking service providers will have an obligation to register, lodge quarterly returns and pay the levy within 30 days of the end of the quarter.

The government has taken the approach of levying the service providers. A further benefit of levying the platforms is that there is minimal complexity for the owners of short-term rentals. We have already undertaken industry consultation with the major platforms to learn from the experience of implementing the Victorian levy.

The bill sensibly addresses the complexity of what is and is not short-term rental accommodation, given the broad array of options, with a focus on fairness. I note that “a building” for the purposes of the levy is any structure with a roof and walls; for example, a yurt may be subject to a levy. Similarly, with the recent trends for tiny homes and caravan accommodation, we are ensuring that we are effectively capturing all forms of short-term rentals fairly.

The bill provides an extensive list of excluded accommodation for the avoidance of doubt. Caravan parks, for example, are not subject to levy, nor are housing support, student accommodation or emergency accommodation. The bill provides for further forms of accommodation to be excluded by regulation. The bill also amends the Taxation Administration Act 1999 so that general tax administration and enforcement provisions of that act will apply. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Heritage and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Mr Steel, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (11.10): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Heritage and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 to the Legislative Assembly. The bill makes statute law revision amendments to ACT legislation, covering the heritage, planning and sustainable development portfolios, following guidelines for the technical amendments program approved by the government.

The bill is part of the government’s regular program of omnibus amendment bills that make minor policy and technical amendments to the statute book. They are generally not significant enough to justify the presentation of separate legislation in each case but are also generally unsuitable to be made as editorial amendments in the process of republishing legislation under the Legislation Act 2001. The government is committed to ensuring ACT legislation is current and accessible. A well-maintained statute book improves access to ACT legislation. This bill contains minor policy and technical amendments to three pieces of legislation administered by the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate and myself as minister—namely, the Heritage Act 2004; the Planning Act 2023; and the Planning (General) Regulation 2023.

I would now like to outline the provisions of the bill. Currently, part 16 of the Heritage Act 2004 includes cross-references to the Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act 2004—the reporting act. These references include bodies subject to the reporting act. The Public Sector Management Amendment Act 2016 changed the language used in the reporting act from “public authority” to “public sector body”. The amendments to

part 16 of the Heritage Act 2004 update the language to align with the terminology used in the reporting act. The term “public sector body” is defined in part 1 of the dictionary of the Legislation Act 2001.

The bill proposes technical amendments to the Planning Act 2023 to correct a number of drafting errors, which include minor typographical errors and other minor administrative amendments. The bill also includes an amendment to clarify the expiry of section 521 of the Planning Act. Specifically, section 521 of the Planning Act is a sunset clause for the University of New South Wales lease provisions. Section 521 currently expires on 8 July 2025. I will refer to the University of New South Wales as UNSW from now on. This expiry date appears to be an error, as the Planning Bill 2022’s explanatory statement provides that the relevant clause “will expire if a lease is not granted within five years of this act commencing”. As the Planning Act commenced on 27 November 2023, the date of expiry of section 521, based on the intent outlined in the explanatory statement for the Planning Bill, does not align.

The bill proposes that the Planning Act be amended so that the provision expires five years from the commencement of the act—namely, 26 November 2028. This amendment will enable the government to grant a lease for the Canberra City campus. The UNSW’s Canberra City campus will establish education and research facilities, collaborative industry activities and facilities. This includes parking, student accommodation, student services and retail to support the campus population. The campus will facilitate innovation and growth in the defence and cybersecurity industries, building on Canberra’s strengths and providing greater opportunities to collaborate. The new campus will also be part of the reimagining of the City Centre’s eastern corner, capitalising on the area’s capacity to collocate education, recreation and tourism uses. The new campus will be a key driver for City Centre success.

The UNSW’s master plan identifies four stages of construction between 2025 and 2036. Construction on state-of-the-art educational stage 1 buildings in Parkes is scheduled to commence later this year, pending necessary approvals, including those from the National Capital Authority. UNSW Canberra is engaging with the community and stakeholders to help inform the implementation of new building and public space development for the new campus, as defined by the approved master plan for the campus. Through the City Renewal Authority, the ACT government is overseeing the sustainable design quality of the new campus under the precinct deed with UNSW. This will ensure that the benefits for the Canberra community are realised. The CRA will retain two hectares of land currently occupied by CIT Reid.

Finally, I will speak to the amendments to the Planning (General) Regulation 2023. The bill includes amendments to the Planning (General) Regulation to correct a drafting error for the prescribed amount of greenhouse gas emissions required for an environmental impact assessment when a development will produce large volumes of operational GHG emissions per annum. The bill corrects the threshold limit for an environmental impact assessment from 250 tonnes to one kilotonnes per annum.

The lower 250 tonne threshold for an environmental impact assessment appears to have been drafted in error, as the now repealed Planning and Development Act 2007 and the repealed Planning and Development Regulation 2008 previously set the threshold at one kilotonne per annum for an environmental impact assessment. The policy intent

with the Planning Act was to retain the previously set thresholds to reduce the regulatory burden for lower impact developments, such as minor road projects. As such, clause 45 of the bill re-establishes the one kilotonne per annum threshold for significant developments.

In summary, this bill makes minor and technical amendments that increase the clarity and transparency of a number of provisions in the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate's portfolio legislation and ensures that the statute book remains clear and fit for purpose.

I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Appropriation Bill 2024-2025 (No 2)

Detail stage

Debate resumed.

Clauses 1 to 7, by leave, taken together.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (11.18): I would like to make a few points about health and the appropriations. I will not be long; I just want to cover off a couple of the points that we have seen with regard to the minister's work and developments in the health system since she joined the portfolio in 2019.

On her watch, we have seen health spending skyrocket while outcomes have plummeted. Wait times for emergency care and elective surgery remain amongst the worst in the nation despite more and more money spent in health. There has been a blowout of \$160 million in the implementation of DHR, for which the minister keeps on coming back to the Assembly for more and more money to support, demonstrating the arrogance of the health minister when she says the system is a success. We have seen the establishment of an operations centre in which clinical recommendations are overridden by bureaucrats, seeking efficiency over patient care; and the death of a four-year-old girl callously written off by the minister, who said of the incident that people die all the time—it is part of running a hospital system.

Surgeons have signed open letters expressing a lack of confidence in the executive leadership of Canberra Health Services and noting the system reeks of disrespect and fosters a culture of orders and directives over consultation and collaboration. There has been the resignation of some of the country's top orthopaedic surgeons from the public health system and their replacement with locums, one of whom is in his mid-70s and came out of retirement, I believe, and another about whom we have heard concerns raised by specialists, who are worried about patient outcomes; current staff survey results showing the rock-bottom level of morale being anonymously leaked to the opposition by health officials; and deliberately hiding previous staff surveys showing poor treatment and burnout by staff—only making their way to the public thanks to the ombudsman.

The cost of seeing a GP has increased to more than \$80 for a visit, on average—the

highest in the nation. We have the worst bulk-billing rates in the nation. We have the AMA constantly criticising the health minister, saying that ACT public hospitals are performing below the standard the community should expect; our tertiary hospital is plagued with training and accreditation issues; junior doctors having to sue the hospital and the government to get paid the money they have worked hard for; and 75,000 Canberrans receiving text messages relating to old health test results, possibly breaching Privacy Act provisions. And the list goes on.

After all of this, the minister needs another \$300 million to bail out the health system so it can keep operating, because she could not get the forecasts right. This is the ACT health system under Rachel Stephen-Smith, and Canberrans deserve better.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.20): I commend clauses 1 to 7 to the Assembly. Of course, the reason that we are debating these clauses today is because CHS, Canberra Health Services, is experiencing continued strong growth in demand for acute health services, and we are seeing that across the ACT, as other jurisdictions are as well. This has been placing pressure on the health workforce, on health infrastructure and on the budget.

In the 2023-24 financial year, CHS saw an increase of 107,000 patient encounters compared with the previous year. We thought that post-pandemic growth was potentially going to be a one-off, but what we saw in the first six months of 2024-25, July to December 2024, was that Canberra Health Services had around 85,000 more patient encounters compared to the same period in the year before, from just over 528,000 to just over 612,700, about a 16 per cent increase in those particular numbers.

Those encounters included, over a six-month period, almost 6,000 more emergency department presentations, 6,600 overnight hospital admissions and more surgeries and procedures, more specialist appointments and more walk-in centre presentations. In the walk-in centres, for example, there were 5,800 more presentations than the same period the previous year.

Like all jurisdictions, CHS is seeing a growing number of maintenance-care type patients as well—that is, patients who are medically well and ready for discharge from hospital but who are unable to be discharged to an appropriate aged-care or disability service. The ACT has the highest proportion of these maintenance-care type patients in the country.

This is a direct result of 10 years of neglect of the aged-care system under the previous coalition federal government. The bulk-billing rates and the GP access that Ms Castley has talked about are the direct result of 10 years of neglect of the health system under the previous coalition federal government that the Albanese Labor government has been addressing through significant investment in Medicare and significant investment and reform in aged care. But these are pressures that are coming on to state and territory systems across the country because of 10 years of neglect of health systems, of aged-care systems and of systems that support vulnerable people in our community under the former coalition government.

But despite these pressures, and quite contrary to Ms Castley's rhetoric, we have in fact

seen improvements in Canberra Health Services' performance over recent years. The ACT improved on the seen-on-time measure at our emergency departments—more than any other jurisdiction in the 2023-24 period—moving from 51 per cent of patients seen on time to 62 per cent, the fourth-best overall and the best of any of the smaller jurisdictions outside of those very large jurisdictions that have multiple small emergency departments where pretty much everyone gets seen on time. Medium wait times also dropped every year over the past four years to a low of 25 minutes. So Ms Castley's rhetoric about performance worsening is simply untrue, and it is not supported by the data. It is also not supported by the most recent AMA scorecard where, in fact, the ACT President of the AMA talked about encouraging performance in the ACT health system.

When compared to peer hospitals, Canberra Hospital and North Canberra Hospital were the best performing in the country on the proportion of emergency department presentations with a length of stay of four hours or less. The ACT improved on this measure, a critical safety measure, more than any other jurisdiction—again, completely contradicting Ms Castley's rhetoric.

In relation to some of the things that Mr Rattenbury talked about in the in-principle stage—and I will go to some of those more specifically—it is also important to recognise that the ACT also had in 2022-23, which is the latest data I have available to me, the lowest rate of potentially preventable hospitalisations of any jurisdictions. So, despite the challenges that we are facing, our performance there is good. This reflects the ACT government's investments in things like GRACE, supporting people in residential aged-care facilities to get health care in their facility and not have to come to hospital. That investment saw a reduction of around 25 per cent in the number of residential aged-care residents having to present to emergency departments when it was expanded across our health system.

Ms Castley also claimed in the in-principle stage that Labor did not talk about health system demand during the campaign and that we were not transparent with people that the health system was facing high demand. In fact, I had been talking about the high demand on our health system for months in the lead-up to the election. I talked about it through July and August, and we talked about it a lot during the campaign. We spent much of the election campaign talking about how to address demand on the ACT health system; about growing the health workforce with 800 more health workers; about investing in infrastructure, like the new more than \$1 billion north-side hospital; about more community-based health centres—which those opposite never committed to; about investing in primary care; and about expanding nurse-led services in schools and in walk-in centres—which, again, those opposite have never supported. Those opposite talk about them positively during an election campaign and, as soon as the campaign is over, they start denigrating our nurse-led services yet again. We talked about investing in better support for people with chronic and complex conditions outside the hospital, about care closer to home.

In the in-principle stage, Mr Rattenbury talked about the three factors underpinning the additional appropriation for health. I will not spend much time on the relatively small amount that is about making up for an expected under-achievement in own-source revenue from CHS. The two main elements are, of course, the additional funding directly to increase CHS's budget of \$227 million to respond to the increased demand

and then the additional funding related to the National Health Reform Agreement funding from the commonwealth.

In relation to the \$227 million, the factors that have led to this increased demand, of course, are multifactorial. It is probably, in part, due to a lack of access to primary care, but it is fanciful to suggest that this is solely to blame for the sharp rise over such a short period of time. Mr Rattenbury made a really lovely speech about the importance of investing in primary and preventative care. But it is disingenuous to say that Labor disagreed with this in principle in our parliamentary agreement negotiations.

It is true that we could not agree on how this objective should be achieved and, in particular, we did not support implementation of the Greens' grossly under-costed GP clinics initiative. For example, the Greens never identified where these would go but budgeted a tiny amount for the refurbishment of existing facilities. Mr Rattenbury was a member of cabinet and the expenditure review committee for many years and should therefore be well aware that we do not have conveniently located buildings just sitting empty and waiting for a minor refurbishment to be turned into a new service. So I can only assume that the Greens were talking about replacing other services—but they have not said what they were—or perhaps not progressing with the multidisciplinary care specifically focused on those with complex and chronic conditions that Labor has been talking about, including in our new health centres.

In any case, we all agree that primary care is critical, and it is why we have committed to \$11 million more to support bulk-billing, \$4 million more to support wellbeing and professional development in our primary health workforce and, of course, have supported the commonwealth government's record investments in Medicare.

We also all agree that the prevention of unnecessary hospitalisation, keeping people well in the community, is the broader objective. But the Greens—apparently so big on evidence with their questions about modelling, cost-benefit analysis and health economists—failed to acknowledge that the ACT actually has the lowest rate of potentially preventable hospitalisations of any jurisdiction. Their main focus during the parliamentary agreement negotiations—and they have made no secret of this—was five new safe havens, an expensive model that has never, to date, been evaluated but which the Greens wanted to massively expand without any actual evidence base to support it. I am not saying safe havens are not good; but, if the Greens want to insist on evidence-based policy, they should stand by that.

The other main factor is replacing funding that we projected on the basis of available information in May 2024 that the ACT would receive from the commonwealth under the National Health Reform Agreement. Again, Mr Rattenbury is well aware that there was a high level of uncertainty in putting together the 2024-25 budget, when he was a member of the expenditure review committee that put it together.

Mr Cocks continued to raise this matter in question time, asking what the evidence was. It was the projections of those large jurisdictions themselves and the data that they provided to the national health funding body that underpinned the assumptions that we made—the same assumptions that, presumably, the Tasmanian Liberal government made and has had to address in its midyear review as well.

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) (11.30): I am just going to speak procedurally for a moment here. We are still on clauses 1 to 7. So I might seek that we vote on these and move into the health bit, which we have been debating—and I expect that vote might also happen. That is how everyone will know where we are up to in the parts in the schedule, because I have lost track—and it turns out that we all have. So perhaps we might vote on this, with the Assembly’s indulgence, Mr Assistant Speaker, and then we can move into the parts themselves.

Clauses 1 to 7 agreed to.

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

ACT Local Hospital Network and ACT Health Directorate—Parts 1.1 and 1.2.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Werner-Gibbings): I understand that it is the wish of the Assembly to debate parts 1.1 and 1.2, being the ACT Local Hospital Network and ACT Health Directorate, together. That being the case, the question is that the proposed expenditures be agreed to.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Community Services Directorate—Part 1.3.

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) (11.32): I rise to speak in support of this bill and provide further detail on how this bill best supports the important work we are doing to build a strong economy and a safe and connected Canberra. The 2024-25 budget review contains two measures directly related to my Children, Youth and Families portfolio: both are incredibly important. They are a continued demonstration of our commitment to provide safe and responsive services to children and be accountable for the services we offer.

First of these is an investment of nearly \$25 million to support our out of home care sector. This is a demand-driven system, and often supports people with complex needs who require intensive support. We do not and will not turn away vulnerable children who need our help. The funding is used to cover a range of services, which include early intervention and support for families to keep children at home with parents. These supports can include diagnostic assessments, access to allied health professionals and in-home care. It also includes funding for residential care programs, often for children and young people with disabilities. The programs can offer support workers, access to therapy and specialist equipment. This funding is needed to keep children at home safely with families and so that when kids do come into care, they can access the vital supports they need.

Unfortunately, some children in care can have a poor experience, and in some instances they can even be subjected to further harm. This is something that this government takes very seriously, and we work every day to build a system that keeps kids safe, strong

and connected, wherever they are. This incorporates the requirement for the second funding measure within my portfolio responsibilities that this bill will support. This is an allocation of \$200,000, which will ensure that we can respond effectively to civil cases arising from child abuse where the government has a duty of care. This investment will mean that the government can respond in a timely manner to legal processes and is resourced for compensation payments.

We have attempted to be as fiscally considerate as possible in requesting these measures. In a challenging budget environment, I am constantly looking at how I can strengthen our system, maintain its financial viability and ensure we get the best value for money for our community. The measures brought forward today are important in responding to community need and continuing to build a safe, strong and connected Canberra. I commend this bill to the Assembly.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (11.35): While I support this bill, I rise to note the variation to appropriations in the Community Services Directorate. An additional \$21.4 million is sought for child and youth protection, and while no-one in this place would object to appropriately funding out of home care, this is a significant increase. My concern is that there is no real explanation or justification for this significant increase. An increase of this magnitude cannot be justified by broadbrush claims of increased costs to service delivery. What went so wrong with the budget planning process that this could not be anticipated? Canberrans deserve a better justification for how and why this additional spending is needed, and we, on this side of the table, will be keeping an eye on the spending and also any defectiveness of any intervention.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate—Part 1.4.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (11.36): Within the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate the government will create a whole-of-government central reserve. The bill appropriates \$19,935,000 to that reserve.

The government will reprioritise existing funding across the ACT government to create a central funding pool to support the delivery of critical services to the ACT community and address areas of service need in the ACT public service. The costs of the fund will be met within existing provisioned funding. This funding is required to be appropriated, despite been drawn from existing provisions, to ensure it can be available as a last resort to address any further unexpected cost pressures, beyond the Treasurer's Advance contained in this appropriation, without having to resort to a third appropriation.

While clause 14 of the Financial Management Act contains provisions enabling a transfer of up to three per cent between appropriations, this central provision is a more transparent way of the government identifying potential sources of funding, from within existing provisioned funds, to be able to be transferred for the basis of addressing unexpected cost pressures.

I appreciate the complexity of some of the measures before the Assembly and I thank

both the ACT Greens and the Canberra Liberals for engaging with those provisions and the complexity. We have provided briefings to assist them. We would like to provide as much assistance in ensuring there is absolute clarity on the purpose of this provision. I can confirm that the creation of this reserve is not based on existing knowledge within government of cost pressures that would see us expand this appropriation. It is the government's intention that there would be no spending against the reserve, and it is created as a prudent and conservative approach to financial management in the territory. I can further confirm that there will be reporting on this central reserve in the quarterly financial statements, regardless of whether there are any calls on it. Calls on the Treasurer's Advance are similarly reported through the quarterly financial statements. I commend the CMTEEDD appropriation to the Assembly.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.38): The Canberra Liberals cannot agree to this part of the appropriation bill.

On one level, there is the provision outlined in the papers for a somehow unanticipated \$26 million in spending on the PCHRM project. This is the human resources IT upgrade that has been coming for some time. Although this is apparently partly offset, it is not clear by what. It only adds apparently an extra \$17.2 million to the budget deficit, but it is a testament to the scale of this budget blowout that I can even say that it is "Only \$17.2 million dollars." It is incomprehensible that the government had no idea that they were going to overspend on this project this financial year. If it was not an overspend, if it is new work that was not planned when the budget was first approved, it should wait the roughly three months that would allow it to be considered as part of next year's budget. The government has made no case. In fact, I do not believe they have even referred to this in any of the debate or discussion around this bill. They have made no case that this funding is urgent.

The bigger problem, though, in this line, is the so-called whole-of-government central reserve that the Treasurer has just spoken to. A few of us have been trying to get to the bottom of this thing—a mysterious \$20 million fund so that the government does not have to come back with another appropriation bill this financial year. I did seek and receive a briefing from the government on the use of this mysterious reserve, and those who briefed me—they went to considerable lengths, without prompting, to reassure me that this is definitely not, absolutely not, in their words, "A slush fund." Well, it is a slush fund. The central reserve is nothing more than an extra \$20 million slush fund for the government to bail out over-spending agencies without proper scrutiny. The Treasurer already has an advance of about \$80 million to cover unforeseen expenditure. This new fund will see that total rise to a staggering \$100 million—giving the government an even greater ability to cover up budget blowouts without first seeking Assembly approval. Labor has a track record of cost overruns and mismanagement, and instead of holding departments accountable for their budgets, they have simply given themselves an extra, even bigger buffer to spend as they please.

The details of how this money is used will not even be available to the Assembly until August—45 days after the end of the quarter. That is not accountability; that is not transparency, that is deliberate obfuscation! The Assembly needs to be able to provide oversight of how taxpayer money is spent, and Canberrans deserve to know when things are going off the rails. The executive should not be able to simply allocate millions of dollars behind closed doors without proper scrutiny, and the question has to be asked,

no matter the denials from the Treasurer: what is the risk this extra money is supposed to cover?

After the passage of the bill today, irrespective of this provision, the Treasurer will have at least \$80 million up his sleeve through the Treasurer's Advance. What does the Treasurer know that we do not? What new unanticipated massive blowout in the next three months is the Treasurer expecting to use this advance on? What is the risk to the ACT budget that justifies setting aside a total of \$100 million for flexible payments to something for the next three months?

In seeking to reassure the Assembly, the Treasurer and his officials have repeatedly told us the fund is 100 per cent offset. Well, it seems like a nice accounting fudge, but if it was not for this slush fund, there would be an extra \$20 million to pay for the health blowout; or if the government preferred, it could have fully offset the extra \$17 million required for the HR system overspend; or it could have allocated it to any one of the overspends and the issues in this budget. It is quite simple. This line item establishes an opaque \$20 million slush fund, which means the deficit will be \$20 million higher than it would otherwise be.

There are members in this place who like to talk about transparency and who like to talk about the oversight of the legislature. I am going to be very interested to see exactly how those members vote. I encourage the Greens—who profess to be champions of transparency and good governance—to look at the track record of this government, and when the Treasurer says trust me: think twice.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (11.44): I thought I would speak briefly to this central reserve item in the budget because it was certainly one that we looked at very closely, as well, in the discussions both in the committee and then in the subsequent briefing with the Treasurer's office, and I thank them for the time and the discussion on that one. This is the first time we have seen such a thing in the budget, so it was important that we did understand why it was being put in place, where it was coming from and how it was intended to be allocated.

The thing that, in the end, has seen us comfortable to support this at this time, is the explanation that this is money that has been pulled together from already appropriated funds, and it is the government's intent to use this first, ahead of the Treasurer's Advance. That being the case, we think that this is a way to address a potential risk to the budget in a way that—well, on the face of it, and on the explanation—seems a practical one, and one that we can support at this point in time.

We will be closely monitoring how it plays out, given that we have not seen this before. Mr Cocks has made a point about when it gets reported on. We will be keen to see that reporting and see the way in which this is being used. If this is a case where already appropriated funds are used ahead of needing to then tap into the Treasurer's Advance, then we think that that is an acceptable and reasonable way for the government to manage the budget and to not further add to the bottom line.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.46): I will not be supporting this part of the appropriation bill. I understand it is coming from other contingencies in the directorates. I cannot see where the contingencies are reduced in the directorates' books or in their

appropriations. It seems that they still have the funds from the first appropriation and an additional \$20 million is appropriated. They have been told not to spend their contingency, and so another \$20 million has been appropriated to the Treasurer so that he can spend it. The government now has a \$100 million slush fund. I am not clear what the difference is in using this \$20 million first or the Treasurer's Advance. The money is still being appropriated. There is still a \$100 million slush fund for the last couple of months of the year. I will not be supporting this \$20 million.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.47): I was not intending to speak again, but, given Mr Cocks's comments about the PCHRM project, I thought it was important to put some information on the record. Mr Cocks is not covering himself in glory as the new shadow Treasurer, having, post hearings, confused the ACT Health Directorate budget with the Canberra Health Services budget, which is multiple times as large, and claimed zero growth in expenditure for health funding.

Mr Cocks: No; I did not.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: You did, actually. I can table the Canberra Liberals media release, if you would like, Mr Cocks, but it is pretty clear that the Canberra Liberals were talking about zero growth in funding for health expenditure, and they included a table that was about the ACT Health Directorate. There is no doubt about that.

Anyway, on the PCHRM, which Mr Cocks did not ask any questions about in the inquiry on the budget—and he has now also misrepresented the PCHRM program—the reason this program is included in the budget review is that it is ahead of schedule. It is going well. It is not an additional \$26 million, as Mr Cocks indicated; it is release of a provision. Some of the offsets are specifically identified in the budget review papers, which Mr Cocks also did not mention. He talked about it as an additional \$26 million. What he would note, if he actually looked at the budget papers, is that future year funding is not for publication. The reason for that is that it is subject to procurement processes. You do not want to give a clear indication to the market of what you think the outcome of that procurement process is going to be; you want to get the best outcome for taxpayers' money. Mr Cocks should understand that. He has been in this place long enough that he should understand that.

I wanted to put that clarification on the record in relation to the PCHRM. The program is going well. The program is ahead of schedule, and that is why additional provision funding has been brought forward and released for this particular financial year.

Question put:

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Noes 15

Yvette Berry
Andrew Braddock

Michael Pettersson
Shane Rattenbury

Noes 9

Chiaka Barry
Peter Cain

Mark Parton

Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel	Fiona Carrick
Jo Clay	Rachel Stephen-Smith	Leanne Castley
Thomas Emerson	Caitlin Tough	Ed Cocks
Laura Nuttall	Taimus Werner-Gibbings	Jeremy Hanson
Suzanne Orr		James Milligan
Marisa Paterson		Deborah Morris

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Justice and Community Safety Directorate—Part 1.5.

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) (11.54): I am pleased to speak in support of the 2024-25 budget appropriation. The budget review provides for \$259,000 in 2024-25 to continue planning and consultation to inform the introduction of electronic monitoring in the ACT. Electronic monitoring is expected to improve outcomes for offenders and community safety by increasing compliance rates and deterring offending behaviour. The technology and additional monitoring are expected to build the community's confidence in our ability to monitor a person's compliance with a community-based order and respond to any breaches.

The funding provides for staffing to continue work on developing the policy and legislative framework, to design a monitoring and response model and to undertake the planning required to engage a supplier to provide an electronic monitoring system. Work will also be undertaken to ensure operational agencies are in a position to implement electronic monitoring as soon as possible. This work will inform what is anticipated to be a staged implementation, including consideration of the most appropriate approach and timeframe for delivery of the government's commitment to trial electronic monitoring for domestic and family violence offenders. This will give victim-survivors, the domestic and family violence sector and the broader community confidence that the electronic monitoring system is safe for use.

I go to the Police, Fire and Emergency Services portfolio. Australia has some of the strongest firearms laws in the world. However, there are opportunities to address known gaps to help prevent further tragedies where firearms are involved. On 6 December 2023, national cabinet committed to implementing the National Firearms Register, which is a federated model for firearms information management, over a four-year timeline beginning 1 July last year. This landmark decision was driven by the tragic events on 12 December 2022 in Wieambilla, where Constables Rachel McCrow and Matthew Arnold, along with neighbour Alan Dare, lost their lives. The National Firearms Register represents the most significant reform to the Australian firearms management system since the National Firearms Agreement was introduced in 1996, following the Port Arthur massacre.

In December 2024, I, as the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, signed a federation funding agreement that will see the commonwealth government commit \$18.7 million over four years to support the ACT to develop the ACT's digital Firearms

Registry and ultimately enable full participation in the National Firearms Register. This funding builds on \$996,000 provided by the ACT government in the last budget to commence design and discovery for this work. The National Firearms Register is expected to be operational by mid-2028. The four-year timeframe for delivery reflects the time required to undertake the legislative, policy, data and technical improvements necessary to make the National Firearms Register fit for purpose so that it can deliver on its law enforcement and community safety objectives.

The National Firearms Register will be an integrated system that connects and draws information from existing commonwealth, state and territory firearms registries, portals and management systems to one central register. This capability will improve the oversight of firearm management across borders, reducing the flow of firearms to the illicit market and empowering police to manage risk more effectively. The ACT government is strongly committed to this crucial national initiative and will work in close collaboration with our counterparts to enhance firearm regulation and public safety.

This budget review is also providing \$9.658 million for wage increases and benefit changes for ACT Policing engaged under the 2024-27 Australian Federal Police Enterprise Agreement. This funding will ensure continuity of service and promote recruitment and retention within ACT Policing. Funding from 2025-26 has been provisioned. The funding of salary increases arising from the AFP Enterprise Agreement is required to ensure that ACT Policing can continue to meet the objectives of government, as set out in the purchase agreement between the ACT government and the Australian Federal Police. The purchase agreement objectives include ensuring appropriate policing levels for the ACT community, sustained high quality service provision and the provision of professional corporate services.

We understand that a strong enterprise agreement is one mechanism to encourage the recruitment and retention of ACT Policing members. Improved policing recruitment and retention rates have positive flow-on impacts and benefits to the community. Importantly, they assist in ensuring that ACT Policing have the capacity to deliver the range of policing services needed to ensure the safety and security of the ACT community.

The ACT government is not party to the AFP's industrial negotiations. However, the government and I are supportive of ACT Policing staff being paid well for their significant contributions to community safety. In June 2023, the ACT Chief Minister and the then Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services announced a significant funding increase for ACT Policing, with an extra \$107 million to fund an additional 126 police positions and other items over the next five years. This is the single-largest staffing and funding boost ever received by ACT Policing.

The government has made a further commitment to increase additional police numbers, from 126 to 150. This will build on previous investments and ensure that the territory is well-positioned regarding issues of policing and community safety into the future. I commend the budget appropriation to the Assembly.

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (12.00): The opposition will support this appropriation, but I would like to make some brief comments, specifically on the \$9.658 million

appropriation to fund the wage increases of ACT Policing. One of the most fundamental duties of government is to keep our community safe, and the government will never be able to fulfil this duty if they neglect the men and women who serve on our front line in ACT Policing. For too long our police have been asked to do more for less.

Canberra has the smallest police force per capita and has amongst the worst-paid police force in Australia. Also, our officers are forced to work in squalid conditions which have routinely been contaminated by leaking sewerage, including human faeces and urine, flooding when it rains, and contamination from toxic lead dust and diesel particulates. In conditions like these, is it any wonder that the ACT has such a hard job recruiting new officers and retaining its workforce? Of course, it does not help that the ACT government will not give our officers the tools that they need to keep our community safe. They refuse to introduce Jack's Law to combat knife crime and protect officers from needle-stick injuries. They refuse to give police adequate legal protections from assault. They have made Canberra the narco-tourism capital, with the decriminalisation of hard drugs like heroin and ice, and they have opened the flood gates to outlaw motorcycle bikie gang meets by refusing to implement anti-consorting laws—the only Australian jurisdiction not to do so. And, as we saw yesterday, they are determined to let repeat offenders loose in our community on bail, despite having a history of violent crime.

It is a very dire environment that Canberra's police force is asked to operate in by the ACT government. Our men and women on the front line deserve to be fairly remunerated, and that is why we will support this appropriation. We regret that it was not more generous. Perhaps that is because, for a long time, the budget has been mismanaged and priorities have been wrong. It is hard to pay for essential services when you run out of money.

The Canberra Liberals thank ACT Policing men and women on our front line for all the work that they do to keep us safe. Regrettably, it is often a thankless job, but our community is better off for their contribution.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Total appropriated to territory entities.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Treasurer's Advance—Part 1.6.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Total appropriations.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Title.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (12.04): I support the

title and I support Appropriation Bill 2024-2025 (No 2). I take this opportunity to close the debate on the bill and thank colleagues for their contribution. This is an important bill that provides funding to ensure the continued delivery of important frontline services in our hospitals, in our out of home care system, and for our police force. There are significant pressures on our public health system. The investment in this appropriation today will help to sustain the delivery of quality and accessible healthcare services for Canberrans.

The ACT's economy is strong and robust. Inflation is down, growth is strong and wages continue to grow. We will continue to support our local economy and will deliver a responsible approach to invest in our essential public services.

I take this opportunity to thank ACT Treasury for their work in preparing the budget review and the appropriation bill in such a short period following the October election. In particular, I thank Acting Under Treasurer Russ Campbell and his deputy, Scott Austin, for their diligent work throughout the budget review process.

I commend the title and the appropriation to the Assembly.

Title agreed to.

Bill, as a whole, agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 12.05 to 2.00 pm.

Questions without notice

Minister for Health—conduct

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Earlier today, I listed many of the problems with the health system that the minister claims to be a success. For these problems, the minister has variously blamed strong growth, sick Canberrans, New South Wales patients, clinicians, surgeons, the federal coalition, the opposition and many others outside government—even a committee that did not do an inquiry got a mention—despite her six-year tenure as minister. Minister, do you take any responsibility for problems in the health system?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have consistently taken responsibility and acted to continue to improve outcomes in the health system. Ms Castley's introduction is not accurate. Indeed, Mr Rattenbury and others on the committee looking into the appropriation bill were asking about what is the explanation for increased demand, and I have sought to, as best we can, explain the changes and the increases in demand that we are seeing across our health system. That is not about blaming other people; that is about understanding the pressures that the health system is under—to which I am responding as health minister.

I have consistently put work into things like supporting CHS to establish the Integrated Operations Centre and the planned care work, which has seen really significant improvements in our emergency department performance; and the structural change in Canberra Health Services, with the acquisition of Calvary Public Hospital Bruce—something those opposite opposed. We have seen a significant improvement in

emergency department performance at North Canberra Hospital and we have seen improvements in planned care across the public hospital system.

I do take responsibility for addressing the challenges that our health system faces, which are very similar to challenges faced by health systems across the country. I also take responsibility for some of the significant changes that have been and will continue to be made—some of which involve tough decisions that, clearly, those opposite would be absolutely incapable of making.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, do patients sitting on waiting lists for months or years longer than recommended share your view that our health system is a success?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Ms Castley continues to put words in my mouth. I have never denied that there are significant challenges in our health system, as there are in health systems around the country and around the world. Some of those challenges predate the COVID-19 pandemic, and some of them have been significantly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors.

Ms Castley, again, talks about elective surgery. I really feel for people who are long waits on the elective surgery waitlist. That is why we have made and continue to make record investments in elective surgery while we are working towards achieving the target that we set at the last election of 60,000 elective surgeries over four years. We are on target for an absolute significant record in elective surgeries this year, and we have set a new target for 70,000 elective surgeries over the next four years—the exact same target, I would hasten to add, that those opposite set. So they are not showing any greater level of ambition when it comes to delivering on elective surgery.

The most significant impact that we have seen on our capacity to meet targets—and Ms Castley is aware of this—was the fire at Calvary Public Hospital in December 2022. That significantly impacted that year’s capacity to deliver on our elective surgery target. We have been catching up since then, and we will deliver an absolute record number of elective surgeries this year. We have already started to see, as I mentioned in question time yesterday, our elective surgery waitlist turning around as a result of this hard work across planned care and the investments that the Labor government has made.

MR HANSON: Minister, is it a so-called success that fewer Canberrans can access a bulk-billing GP than ever before and that the rest of us are paying \$80 in out-of-pocket costs to see a doctor?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again, Mr Hanson uses the word “success” as if it is a quote from me, as if I had been saying that the primary care system is a success. I have been saying—along with my state and territory colleagues—that the primary care system is in crisis, and the reason it is in crisis is due to the years and years of Medicare rebate freezes under the previous coalition federal government. The primary care system has been in crisis, but the Albanese Labor government has been investing billions and billions of dollars in addressing the challenges in primary care.

Opposition members interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Mr Speaker, I do need to call a point of order here. This is

ridiculous—I cannot hear myself.

MR SPEAKER: Members, if we can let the minister answer the question.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am indeed answering the question, because the question was about primary care, which was completely neglected for 10 years under the previous coalition federal government—not just neglected; but deliberate decisions were made to undermine the primary care system. There were deliberate decisions made to continue a freeze for years and years on the Medicare rebate—something that has been turned around by the Albanese Labor government. And they have committed to do more. Just today, they have committed to continue to reduce the price of pharmaceuticals for all Australians.

Canberra Health Services—Canberra Hospital Integrated Operations Centre

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. The Assembly has heard how your operations centre seemingly exists to override the recommendations of clinicians and specialists, replacing the primacy of patient care with bureaucratic priorities. Could the minister explain why administrators in the operations centre are able to overrule experienced, professional clinicians who actually know the patients and their needs?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Ms Castley clearly does not pay any attention to what people say more broadly in the media landscape nor to what I have said previously in this space. Because if she did, she would understand that those people working in the operations centre are themselves experienced clinicians—

Ms Castley: They are not surgical clinicians!

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: She just said they are not! She just said that these people working in the operating centre are not experienced clinicians—

Mr Cocks: A point of order. The minister has just misquoted the interjection. The comment was around “surgical clinicians”.

MR SPEAKER: I would suggest that the minister will be more able to answer questions without the current level of interjections, whether she is misquoting them or not. Minister?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you, Mr Speaker. And you are right. The operations centre has driven significant improvements in patient-flow through our hospital; seen more patients getting admitted to our hospital on time from the emergency department; and seen more patients getting access to surgery in a way that reflects our commitment to equity of access in terms of clinical need, which is always determined by specialist clinicians. Clinical need is always determined by specialist clinicians, and Canberra Health Services has made that clear, and also treat in turn equity of access to our elective public surgery list.

What I have said also, in relation to the concerns that were raised with me by a small

group of surgeons that day—it had not been raised, as far as I can recall previous to that—that day I said to the Chief Executive Office of Canberra Health Services, “Look, there must be a way we can resolve this issue. It is not okay if senior clinicians and surgeons feel— (*Time expired.*)

MS CASTLEY: Minister, how many times has the operations centre downgraded the category “recommended” made by a clinician or specialist, when you say they always put patients first?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: That is not exactly what I said. What I said was that the clinical urgency category is always determined by those clinicians—those experts. That is the advice I have received. That is what the CEO of Canberra Health Services has said publicly. I believe the answer to Ms Castley’s question is never, but I will take the question on notice and come back to her.

Again, I would try to encourage Ms Castley to stop scaremongering, to stop misleading Canberrans about the way that our health system works—

Ms Castley interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I was about to be unparliamentary!

Ms Castley interjecting—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I would try to encourage Ms Castley to stop deliberately misrepresenting what is happening in Canberra Hospital, to listen to what people have said publicly about this service—

Mr Hanson: You’ve been misrepresenting who started the Medicare freeze! Be honest about it!

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I would encourage Mr Hanson to refer back to the *Hansard*! What I said was that keeping the Medicare freeze—

MR SPEAKER: On a point of order, Ms Berry.

Ms Berry: Seriously—the level of the interjections! The interjections themselves are continuing and it is difficult to hear the minister. The minister should not have to yell to respond to the questions.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Berry, I think your point of order is certainly valid. We are two questions in, members; can we try to be sensible? Ms Stephen-Smith, do you have more?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I just wanted to finish my point, Mr Speaker. What I actually said was “kept the Medicare freeze going for years and years and years”. That is exactly what the previous coalition government did.

MR COCKS: Minister, is the operations centre only necessary because you lost control of the budget?

Ms Castley: Good question, Mr Cocks; I like it!

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Ms Castley has just said that it was a good question; it is a bizarre question! The operations centre was set up last year as part of our planned work. It was, in fact, part of the work we did during and following the COVID-19 pandemic, which, again, those opposite would prefer to pretend had never happened and had not had any impact on our health system. One of the things we did—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Can we just put a lid on it, or I will start to warn people and name them. Minister?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: We have been working through the establishment of the operations centre for some time. I think I have also previously said in this place—and certainly on radio interviews, which Ms Castley probably does not bother listening to—that we have been talking about things like an operations centre for quite a period of time. In visiting Gold Coast hospital and a visiting trip we did to Singapore with what is now the Health System Council but what was then the partnership board—

MR SPEAKER: On a point of order, Mr Hanson?

Mr Hanson: I acknowledge the fact that there has been a level of interjections, but part of it is driven by the minister. Because if you go to standing order 118(d)(iii), answers to questions “shall not contain ... imputations”. I think that the slurs that the minister has been directing at Ms Castley—that she doesn’t listen to radio interviews or whatever it might be—are imputations. She is there to answer the question, not to direct imputations and slurs, and there are standing orders against that.

MR SPEAKER: Members, I would suggest that there is some merit in Mr Hanson’s point of order.

Ms Berry: On that point of order, Mr Speaker; the slurs were flying thick and fast from the opposition as well.

MR SPEAKER: And so, members, what I am going to suggest to you is that if you are not playing nice, they probably won’t and vice versa—

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: You have got 17 seconds to complete that answer, Minister.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you Mr Speaker. I am merely making the point that

we have been talking about establishing an operations centre, or a command centre, for many years. I am pleased that it is up and running and that it is helping, along with the investments that we have made to improve the performance of Canberra Hospital and Canberra Health Services more broadly.

Housing—Short-Term Rental Accommodation Levy Bill 2025

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, this morning you introduced the Short-Term Rental Accommodation Levy Bill. In your remarks, you said:

We expect that this bill may have a modest but positive impact on incentivising the supply of long-term rentals to local renters, rather than being made available to short-term visitors.

Treasurer, do you have any modelling or quantification of what you expect that impact to be on the availability of long-term leases for Canberrans who are struggling in this housing crisis to find or keep an affordable home to rent ?

MR STEEL: No, I do not, and we have been clear—and the previous Treasurer was clear—that we think this will be a very modest impact, because at the time that the policy was developed and announced, in the budget last year, Treasury had numbers showing that there were only around 1,100 short-term rentals in the ACT used through these platforms. So any change that we see will be very small in number—regardless of whether it is five per cent, 10 per cent, or even 50 per cent—in terms of the number of short-term rental accommodations that might move to a longer term rental being available for Canberrans. At a time when we do need more housing supply, this still has a potentially positive impact. I think it is a bill worthy of consideration by the Assembly, and I hope that the Assembly supports it.

MR RATTENBURY: What evaluation has been done of the Victorian model of levying short-term rental accommodations that has convinced the ACT government to adopt a similar approach in the levy bill presented to the Assembly today?

MR STEEL: It differs in a number of ways. The Victorian levy was introduced with quite significant changes to their unit corporations legislation and rules, which were, as I understand it, designed to allow body corporates to stop short-term rentals from being let out within those body corporates' unit titled apartment complexes, for example. We have looked very closely at the Victorian model. There were significant issues with the implementation of the levy itself, and we have learnt from those. Treasury has designed the bill in a way that makes sure that the levy is applied to the total cost of a booking and it has a process that has been set up for exemptions, including exemptions by regulation if need be. It does not apply to the range of existing accommodation, like hotels, for example. It is specifically designed to deal with the short-term rentals that are provided through providers like Airbnb and Stayz.

MS CLAY: Will the government run a regulatory impact assessment this term to consider further options to prioritise housing for long-term renters, such as limiting short-term renting to a person's primary residence when they are out of town or if they have a spare room?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Certainly, I am not going to announce government policy in question time. What I will say, as I have said in relation to the introduction of this bill, is we think that short-term accommodation providers will continue to have an important role to play in the ACT's accommodation market and in supporting tourism in the city. We know that during sitting weeks in particular there is an influx of people coming into the capital to work and do activities associated with the national capital. That is a good thing. I am sure that that will continue and there will be a range of short-term accommodation that continues as well. We are looking, of course, at a range of other priorities that we have outlined that we took to the election in relation to housing. They are the priorities that we are acting on, like the missing middle and like building 1,000 new public homes.

Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—Closing the Gap

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. In 2020, as a signatory to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the Labor government committed to “mobilising all avenues and opportunities available to them” to overcome the entrenched inequality faced by too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Today is National Close the Gap Day, and last week the Productivity Commission updated the Closing the Gap dashboard with the latest data on the ACT government's progress. The number of First Nations people living in overcrowded homes has increased, the rate of hospitalisation of First Nations women experiencing family violence increased and, predictably, demand for homelessness services for First Nations women fleeing violence also increased. Minister, will these alarming statistics lead to any change when it comes to ensuring First Nations women in our community are safely and securely housed, or is it your position that the government is “already aware of the problem and already fixing it” despite evidence to the contrary?

MS ORR: I am not going to take a position, and I have not taken a position on the public record or even privately at all, with regard to any of this—that everything is fine and that there is nothing more to do. I have been quite open and have previously stated publicly—and, Mr Emerson, I am happy to reply with my thoughts on this at any time—that the most recent indicators tell us that there is more work to do. What we can see is that there are areas where we are making improvement. There are other areas where we clearly need to do more. That is what I have always said with regard to this and that is what we as a government will continue to focus on with the community by working with them on how we can continue to close the gap and make improvements in the areas we need to.

MR EMERSON: Minister, why has the government failed to provide data on the number of First Nations women reporting domestic violence as common in the ACT since the agreement was signed in 2020, particularly when local First Nations leaders have identified an urgent need for a specialist and culturally safe domestic violence crisis service?

MS ORR: On the issue of data, there are parts where the ACT and other jurisdictions are not able to provide data for tracking, as per the current dashboard. It has been an ongoing program of the Joint Council on Closing the Gap to look at how we actually

improve the data. We are actively involved in that, as are all other jurisdictions, and we will continue to work towards getting better data so that we can monitor these things across all the areas needing improvement. There is an inherent link in Mr Emerson's question, that, because we do not have the data, we cannot consider other responses or work with the community on considerations or insights they might have—from, say, qualitative data, their own experiences or quantitative sources of data. I do not think that is quite the right inference to make. We can certainly take feedback from a range of areas. It is not solely limited to reporting from this particular indicator.

MS CARRICK: Will the minister commit to tracking and providing all the data needed to at least measure the ACT's progress against its commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap?

MS ORR: As I said, the joint council has been addressing the improvement of data to inform closing the gap. The ACT and all jurisdictions have made a number of commitments through the joint council and we will continue to work on the commitments that we have made.

Budget—forecasts

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. Forecasts in the budget review over the forward estimates suggests revenue will go up by 7.1 per cent per year, on average, which is faster than Labor has ever before predicted. Treasurer, how will you achieve this remarkable feat?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Treasury continues to make reasonable assumptions in relation to revenue and they continue to revise that at each budget. That will be based on the context of the budget and the information intelligence at that particular time. Of course, we will all be looking next week at the federal budget and some of the figures that will be presented there and how that might affect the territory's forecasts. We have also made a number of decisions in previous budgets. I had a question from Mr Rattenbury before about a revenue measure that we took in the last budget that has, of course, been factored into the forward estimates in terms of the revenue that it will provide of \$12 million over the next three years. Indeed, there have been other revenue measures taken by the government, such as the payroll tax surcharge, that have seen revenue increase over the forward estimates. So they are some of the reasons why the revenue is forecast to increase, and it is based on the most reasonable assumptions by Treasury. We will continue that approach in future budgets.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, will the almost 30 per cent increase in rates revenue in this term form part of your revenue raising strategy?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. It completely mischaracterises what has occurred in relation to rates policy setting, where average rates increases will be 3.75 per cent in the first year of this four-year term, and then we will, of course, look at making further decisions beyond that, based on the budget context. So it is not true to say that there will be a 30 per cent increase in average rates. We have not made a decision to do that. What is factored in is the growth in the number of rateable properties in the territory, which we do expect to increase. We do expect the economy to grow. We do expect more homes to be built and, as a result, more blocks of land will be then

rateable under the rates system. You clearly have not taken that into account in asking me the question. We do expect that over time, yes, revenue will grow because the territory will grow. There will be more homes, there will be more people, and we will need to deliver more services to them and make sure we have a sustainable revenue base to do that.

MS MORRIS: Treasurer, how will increasing the Police, Fire and Emergency Services Levy by an average of 10 per cent per year, and the Safer Families Levy by 17 per cent per year, contribute to your revenue raising strategy?

MR STEEL: I reject the premise of the question. For every budget where a revenue decision is made like that, it is justified based on its merits, and we provide information about the justification for it in the budget papers. Specifically in relation to the Safer Family Levy, we provide information about how that is spent, and that has been subject to considerable debate in the Assembly. This goes towards important services to the community. That is the purpose of those levies, of those taxes. We think it is important to deliver good emergency services and good fire services to the community, and that requires revenue to be able to fund them. If you have a different proposition—that you want to see the police or emergency services defunded—then you should have taken that to the election and been transparent before the election.

Planning and development—Woden town centre

MS CARRICK: My question is to the minister for planning. On 6 October 2017, during Chief Minister's Talkback, I asked the Chief Minister about increasing activity in Garema Place:

In addition to the pop-up park and the new hotel between Bunda St and Garema Place, is the strategy to bring people to the area by building up high rise residential around it and do you therefore have any concerns about overshadowing?

The Chief Minister responded with:

No, I don't think it would be appropriate to have high rise residential around Garema Place, it certainly is appropriate in the broader city and yes there is an agenda to increase the residential population of the CBD and there is a number of projects and land release that are underway now that will achieve that outcome.

He went on to say:

We certainly need to be conscious of the aspect of that particular place so in the middle of winter when the sun is low and coming from the north, principally then yes you wouldn't want overshadowing of Garema Place in that context.

I note the zoning around the perimeter of the Woden Town Square is 28 storeys, even on the north side of the square. A 24-storey residential tower has just gone up on the north-west side of the square.

Minister Steel, if solar access is important for Garema Place and other centres across Canberra, will you change the 28-storey zoning around the perimeter of the Woden Town Square to ensure the existing building heights are not increased and sun stays in

the square?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question, and I note that she has raised this before in a previous role. She has been provided with an answer before, which is firstly that the Woden town centre and some of the other town centres did not actually have any height limits whatsoever until relatively recently. That was changed, and those height limits were put in place.

The other thing that continues to be the case, including under the new planning system and the advent of the design guide mechanism, is that solar access has to be considered in the assessment of planning proposals and that would be considered in relation to any proposal to build a building on the edge of Woden Town Square, for example. So that would need to demonstrate how that solar access would be continued and the benefits of the building more broadly, to get a good outcome for the community under an outcomes-based planning system that has design at its centre. So there may not be a possibility of building a 28-storey building if it blocks the entire solar access for the Woden Town Square. So simply cherry-picking one metric from the Territory Plan is not going to tell you what might be the outcome for a particular site.

The site will be looked at and the proposal will be looked at by the independent Territory Planning Authority based on all of the design guides which are required to be responded to under the new planning system and the Territory Plan as well as the broader Territory Plan requirements, including about solar access, and a decision would be made based on that, not just one particular metric around height limits.

MS CARRICK: Minister, will you bring forward planning to determine where Woden's entertainment precinct will be, noting that Bradley Street is for Westfield's restaurants and that our entertainment precinct should not be in the gaming clubs?

MS CHEYNE: I will take the question as Minister for the Night-Time Economy. I have also answered this one before, in that it is premature to speak about where the entertainment precinct will be. It will be subject to community consultation, and I have also said that we would not be progressing with entertainment precincts until the city centre entertainment precinct had been in place for a year, and I am not even sure it is six months yet.

MR EMERSON: Minister, will you improve the playground at Woden Town Square and talk to the building owners around the town square, including within Westfield, to encourage active fronts?

MR STEEL: Happy to take the question across a few different portfolios.

I am really pleased with the work that we did a few years ago as part of the Woden experiment, to work with the community and undertake what was a genuine experiment to see how we could activate the Woden Town Square with a range of different new places and spaces to improve the square, which, quite frankly, beforehand was a bit of a desert with sort of rolling spinifex plastic bags kind of going through! That was about the only activity occurring in the square. It is now starting to come to life because of residential development around it and the government's vision around providing more mixed use development in there, rather than just the retail facilities and some public

service departments.

So we will continue to work with Minister Cheyne as well, looking at the opportunities around the activation. Westfield is interested in that, I have already had conversations with them about how they can further activate the spaces around their shopping centre, and there may be further opportunities through Minister Cheyne's review of the Public Unleased Land Act, to look at opportunities around those spaces as well.

Certainly there have been upgrades in the Woden town centre at Edison Park in relation to the playground there, and I am sure that there will be further opportunities in the future to enhance the spaces. Led by Minister Pettersson, the new CIT will deliver brand new public plazas on the western and northern sides of the campus, which simply did not exist before, and will provide great tree canopy cover and opportunities for play well.

Roads—vulnerable road users

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, I am concerned about changes to the road layout as a result of construction works related to light rail and the consequential impacts to cyclist safety. For instance, the off-ramp from Commonwealth Avenue to Parkes Way has a narrowed left turn that requires motorised traffic to cross an active travel path. I am aware of at least one near miss in that area. What has the government done to ensure the safety of vulnerable road users in that area?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. As we see considerable construction activity on the western side of Commonwealth Avenue right along the light rail stage 2A alignment, Infrastructure Canberra has been considering pedestrian access through the area. I understand that temporary protected bike lanes have been installed as part of the raising London Circuit project and, of course, as part of stage 2A in that broader footprint to ensure cyclist safety.

In response to community feedback, temporary traffic management measures where the bike lanes cross on or off off-ramps onto Parkes Way have been reviewed and adjusted to ensure visibility both for people driving and people cycling in the area. In particular, the barriers at the crossing were repositioned to increase visibility for cyclists and drivers.

Infrastructure Canberra is continuing to work with Canberra Metro as well, to ensure that safe and clear pedestrian and cyclists signage and wayfinding mechanisms are in place prior to works commencing in different parts of the footprint, so that people have the best information about how they can move through the area. We continue to provide regular information as well through construction maps on the Infrastructure Canberra website. We are happy to take on feedback, including from the cyclist community, if there are particular barriers that people are experiencing.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, when did the movement of those barriers occur, given that a near miss happened just this morning?

MR STEEL: I understand it was recent, but I am happy to come back on notice with the specific time.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, what guidelines exist to ensure that vulnerable road users are kept safe during construction works and that there is a minimum width for cycle lanes and footpaths to ensure they are sufficiently separated from other traffic?

MR STEEL: While there is no Australian guidance for the width of temporary cycle lanes or separation from motor vehicle traffic, Infrastructure Canberra and TCCS do require contractors to follow the Traffic Guidance Scheme, which is a process to ensure the safety of all road users while temporary traffic management measures are put in place for construction works. The scheme requires identification of potential risks for people riding bicycles; implementation of temporary traffic management measures, such as signage and barriers that comply with Australian standards; and reviewing and adjusting temporary traffic management measures on site, as required. Infrastructure Canberra also consults regularly with Pedal Power on the Traffic Guidance Scheme. There is no doubt that this is a dynamic construction site. So there will be a need for changes throughout that will need to be looked at on a case-by-case basis, and the arrangements may look different in different parts of this project and, indeed, other projects around the territory.

One of the issues that I am sure Minister Cheyne will consider in her directorate in relation to the Public Unleased Land Act review is the use of public land during construction, particularly private construction, and what further arrangements might be put in place to ensure safe access for pedestrians and cyclists as well.

Law and justice—restorative justice

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, what makes the 20th anniversary of the ACT's restorative justice system such a significant milestone?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Tough for the question. The ACT's restorative justice scheme increases access to justice, providing restorative justice options for victims of offences at every stage of the criminal justice system. When the scheme started, it was one of the most ambitious of its kind. Today it continues to serve as a model for other jurisdictions across Australia and around the world.

The 20th anniversary allowed for a celebration of the extraordinary contribution of the scheme to strengthening the justice system, fostering a culture of empathy and accountability and cementing Canberra's reputation as an innovative jurisdiction. The ACT's restorative justice scheme has seen high compliance rates, at 96 per cent in 2023-24, and participation satisfaction rates, reliably, at between 95 per cent and 99 per cent across the life of the scheme—stats that, I think, in any portfolio, are incredibly enviable.

The success of the scheme in providing accountability, healing and restoration is testament to the dedicated staff and the community of practice that has been built around it.

MS TOUGH: Attorney, how has the restorative justice system benefited the ACT community?

MS CHEYNE: It has provided opportunities for victims of crime to meet with the person responsible and to hold them accountable, in a way that is safe, respectful and meaningful to them. It also provides an opportunity for people responsible for the crime to be accountable for their actions and to take meaningful steps towards repairing the harm caused or addressing the causes of their offending behaviour.

Over the 20 years of the scheme, thousands of Canberrans have taken up these opportunities and experienced the benefits. Since 2005, the restorative justice unit has convened more than 1,124 face-to-face conferences involving 5,882 victims of crime and 4,047 offenders. At its heart, restorative justice increases access to justice by providing more paths of resolution and more access to these paths.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, what does the future hold for the ACT's restorative justice system?

MS CHEYNE: Restorative justice is a mechanism that can assist, if not be central to, meeting many of the government and community's objectives, including reducing recidivism, increasing rehabilitation and improving victims' outcomes. When it commenced, the scheme continued ACT Policing's work with children and young people responsible for less serious offences. It was expanded to include adults and serious offences in 2016, and domestic, family and sexual violence in 2018.

As a government, we have committed to supporting an expansion of restorative justice accessibility criteria and we are seeking to support the establishment of community-based restorative practice in the ACT. An independent review of the ACT restorative justice scheme—which I expect might have been Mr Rattenbury's question—is nearing completion. I look forward to this next bank of evidence from which we can further extend the scheme and to do so thoughtfully, progressively and, as always, based on evidence.

Education—civics and citizenship

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the minister for education.

Minister, I refer you to recent reports from the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority that only 28 per cent of Australian year 10 students can demonstrate proficiency in civics and citizenship, a number which is declining. While it is commendable on its own that the ACT is leading the nation, is it the ACT government's position that the rates of proficiency are still problematically low, that it is concerning they are declining and that our schools should be aiming for 100 per cent proficiency?

MS BERRY: I thank Miss Nuttall for her question. Of course, we always aim for the best possible outcomes in our public schools in the ACT around civics education. I have confidence in our teaching professionals that they are delivering civics education as is required under the Australian Education Act.

MISS NUTTALL: On what timeline does the ACT government expect to see ACT students' civics and citizenship scores increase?

MS BERRY: It is our expectation that they would be on a continuous improvement. If there were an issue with that continuous improvement, then we would work with teaching professionals to see how we could support them to ensure that those improvements occur more regularly.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, what other strategies does the ACT's education system have to inoculate young people against misinformation and disinformation?

MS BERRY: There are a range of things that happen within our schools around AI and internet capabilities. In fact, there was a nation-leading program that was being delivered out of Dickson College which talked about misinformation on the internet. I understand the program was successful and a number of students who participated in the program talked about how much they had learned as part of that new program that was introduced at Dickson College. So we are looking forward to rolling out those kinds of initiatives across our schools as we manage our way through changes across technology and how we can arm our students with the resources that they need to respond.

Government—Human Resources Information Management System program

MS CLAY: In 2017-18, \$15 million was approved for the design and implementation of a whole-of-government HR management system, HRIMS. By June 2023, work had stopped, the system had cost \$78 million and government abandoned it. The 2023-24 budget business case recommended a replacement project for HR management and estimated the replacement cost would be \$65 million, with the first \$35 million approved for 2023-24. Is the replacement HR system being delivered within the \$65 million budget?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the question on notice to double-check, but Ms Clay would be aware that there was a conversation earlier in the appropriation bill debate about the PCHRM, which is the replacement system, and the \$26 million that was identified in the budget review papers for that. I clarified for Mr Cocks that \$9 million of that had already been identified as an expenses offset and the rest was to bring forward and release a provision for that project. I will take the specifics of Ms Clay's question on notice, but I believe that is the case.

MS CLAY: Can you confirm the total cost to government for implementing the harmonised HR system across directorates will be \$143 million?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again, I will take the question on notice to ensure that I come back with accurate information for Ms Clay.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, how confident are you that the government will be able to stick to the estimated cost of \$65 million for the replacement system, given what happened last time?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am confident based on the advice that I have received to date, but, of course, some of this work is still subject to procurement. That is, again, going back to the conversation that we had in the appropriation bill debate earlier. This

is why some of the numbers have not been published in our papers in relation to specific elements of that project, because there are procurement processes that will have to be undertaken. But, overall, I have a high level of confidence in the advice that I have received.

Government—spending

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. In the appropriation bill, which we debated this week, the government effectively replenished the Treasurer's Advance to a value of around \$80 million and allocated another \$20 million to a newly created central reserve provision, for a total of \$100 million. Treasurer, why do you need \$100 million for the next three months?

MR STEEL: This is part of prudent and responsible conservative financial management to make sure that we do have provision for—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Members. Members!

MR STEEL: —unexpected costs that may arise before the end of the financial year. As I said in the debate already, which Mr Cocks would well know, we do not have any plans for the use of the central reserve at this point in time. We hope that we do not have to use it, but we also want to continue to deliver important government services before the end of the financial year without having to come back for a third appropriation bill, which might put at risk the delivery of those services. So we have the Treasurer's Advance. It has been in the Financial Management Act for years and years. It is a well understood and transparent process to be able to access that fund. As I mentioned in relation to the central reserve, it is reprioritising an existing appropriation for various provisions in the budget. We will also report on any use of that. We do not expect, at this point, to use it, but it is there if it is needed to manage the cash needs of the territory, at a time when we are experiencing significant unexpected pressure, particularly in the healthcare system.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, could you specify exactly what cuts or offsets are being made in this budget and exactly where they come from, to offset that so-called central provision?

MR STEEL: I reject the premise of the question. This is simply reallocating existing provision. I would not characterise that as cuts; it is just provision that has not been accessed.

MR CAIN: Treasurer, despite your earlier non-committal, do you actually expect to expend this initial \$80 million advance, and on what do you expect to expend it?

MR STEEL: I know that the Liberal Party are not great at pivoting, but I refer the member to the answer that I gave to the first question from Mr Cocks.

Schools—ATAR results

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. In 2019, the Education Directorate stopped the publication of ATAR statistics of schools from being released publicly. This included the number of year 12 certificates, the school's median ATAR and the percentage of eligible students who had an ATAR of 65 and above. At the time, the minister said this was damaging student welfare. Minister, how does releasing school-by-school data and celebrating high achievement damage student welfare?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Hanson for the question. Of course, we always celebrate high achievement in our schools, regardless of where it comes from, but what we were learning was that publishing the scores of schools was pitting schools against each other in an unhealthy way that was impacting on young people's wellbeing. So the BSSS, the Board for Senior Secondary Studies, who manage our college system in the ACT, made the decision that they were no longer going to publish ATAR scores. I think the feedback that I had following that decision, and there have been some years between then and now, was that oftentimes it was not noticed and in other cases people recognised that it was not the way to celebrate achievement.

MR HANSON: Minister, how does the government use school-by-school data on ATAR in its decision making?

MS BERRY: Well, we work with our school communities on the results within our schools to ensure that our college system, operated by the BSSS, is providing the best opportunities for young people, whether that is through an ATAR or whether that is through other employment or workplace opportunities. These could be providing apprenticeships, like the Head Start program that the ACT government is funding to provide young people with opportunities to get into jobs within trades which we so desperately need, or like the Women in Trades program in our schools, so that there is not just one pathway to achievement; there are many and multiple, based on a young person's passions.

MS BARRY: Minister, what indicators are publicly available for parents to judge if schools are appropriately preparing ACT students for further education?

MS BERRY: The best thing that a parent or family and carers can do with regard to public education is that they will always find a place in their local public school. The second thing is to go and visit the school and talk to the teachers and meet the school principals and other students, and that will give them a very good feel on what the school is able to achieve for their young person. But most of all, they will always have a place in their local public school.

Light rail stage 2B—substation

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Stage 2B of the tram will require the construction of a traction power substation in the inner south precinct. In a submission to the EPBC, the power substation is said to be about 30 metres long by about 10 metres wide. Minister, where will the 300 square metre substation be located in Yarralumla?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. As I have said in my ministerial

statements to the Assembly, including in response to Ms Castley's motion this week, the ACT government will, through Infrastructure Canberra, be consulting with the community on the draft environmental impact statement for stage 2B of light rail. That was submitted to the commonwealth environment department in December and will go on public exhibition, we expect, around the middle of the year.

It will enable the community to see a significant level design of the project, including proposed locations for the traction power stations. It will provide an opportunity for the community to provide their feedback. That will be around what the potential impacts of those are and other benefits of the project, and that will be taken into consideration by the government as we finalise the EIS as part of the project.

I appreciate that you will use anything to oppose this project, Mr Hanson. You have been fairly consistent about that, even when your party was supporting light rail and then they backflipped, and now you are continuing to oppose this city-shaping infrastructure project that is critical for our city's future.

MR HANSON: Minister, can you guarantee that, when you do this consultation, you will include concerns about the location of the final 300 square metre substation, not just its design?

MR STEEL: That is the purpose of the consultation. It is very much a place-based exercise. It will show the level of design that we have done on the stage 2B alignment, including the supporting infrastructure like traction power stations. They are necessary to support the electrical infrastructure needs of powering the light rail system. While it does run wire free from, it is proposed, Alinga Street through to around Hopetoun Circuit, it will require power through overhead lines from that point onwards through to Woden and, indeed, beyond in the future. So there will be power needs that need to be supplied as part of the project, and we look forward to hearing from the community about that.

An extensive piece of work has been done to look at the options there, and we are looking forward to hearing from the community about all of the potential impacts, whether it be the specific site, the look of the particular power stations and a range of other matters that may be raised by the community.

MR COCKS: Minister. What influence, beyond ticking the consultation checkbox, will environmental and noise impacts have on the location of this 300 square metre substation?

MR STEEL: I reject the premise of the question. It shows a contempt for the process and the project, especially when you consider—and Mr Cocks probably is not aware of this—that what we are talking about here is a 1,000-page document. A very thorough piece of work has been done and a considerable amount of resources have been devoted, supported by the commonwealth's funding for this stage of the project.

That will provide a significant level of information to the community so that they can properly respond to us. We can then consider that feedback and try to minimise the impacts as far as we can in delivering this critical project, which benefits the entire community, particularly along the line to Woden but also those who will connect with

it as well.

ACT Policing—response times

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police. Officers stationed at the city police station are saying that the closure of London Circuit for construction works is delaying police response times, making it harder for police to respond to incidents of crime. Minister, how long have police response times blown out since construction work commenced, and what is your plan to bring response times down?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. I will take that as a question on notice. But I will say there has been a huge amount of work done with ACT Policing and with ESA around response times for the whole of the build of light rail stage 2A. There was a walk-through again on Monday morning by all the agencies. They feel pretty confident that they will be able to deliver services to the community on time. As the build moves and shifts over time, there will be constant consultation between those agencies and Infrastructure Canberra on any impacts that can be mitigated. The advice that I have seen from ACT Policing and from ESA is that they feel very confident they will be able to deliver services to the community on time.

MR SPEAKER: Just to be clear: you are taking the detail part of that question on notice.

DR PATERSON: Yes.

MS MORRIS: Minister, is it true that a temporary police station was planned to service the eastern side of London Circuit but is now no longer going ahead?

DR PATERSON: No, that is not true.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, has the government abandoned its plans for a temporary police station because it has mismanaged the budget and run out of money?

DR PATERSON: No, that is not true. The city police station remains open and accessible to the public. There is a lot of signage that has been put up to direct the public to the city police station, and it will remain open for the course of light rail stage 2A.

Parliamentary privilege—ACT public service employees

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for the Public Service. A member was recently approached by an ACT public service official who wanted to share concerns about their workplace. The official does not have confidence in the public interest disclosure process and was reluctant to share their concerns with the member, fearing the loss of their employment as retribution. Minister, would the disclosure of information to a member of the Assembly be grounds for any sanction or the termination of their employment?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I do not believe it would, but it does probably depend on the type of information that was disclosed. As an example, I could say that there are very strict privacy provisions in a range of acts, including the Children and Young People

Act, with which I am very familiar. For example, if someone who worked in that space were to share information about a young child or a young person involved in the child protection system outside of the appropriate system, for example, then that could be a cause for disciplinary action.

In relation to the public interest disclosure scheme, however, there are appropriate reporting officers for public interest disclosure, and there are also rules around what MLAs should do if they receive information that would potentially constitute a public interest disclosure. That information has been circulated previously to members of the Assembly. So I would encourage any member of the Assembly who is approached by someone who wishes to make a public interest disclosure to review that information and provide advice to that individual about what the appropriate avenues for public interest disclosure are and what their role in the process is.

MS CASTLEY: Does the government accept that any retribution, or even the threat of it, would be an interference with the work of a member and potentially be a contempt of the Assembly?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I do not believe that there is any threat of retribution for a public servant where they are disclosing information in the public interest. There are a lot of public servants in this town, and we are very well aware that they talk to people and that information is disclosed outside of formal channels to politicians on all sides. Generally speaking, those kinds of things are not pursued with any great rigour, other than if there is a specific harm that would be caused by the disclosure of that information or if it has clearly been a breach of legislation.

MR COCKS: Minister, will you inform the ACTPS formally that communications with members of the Assembly will not cause any retribution or dismissal, given that this is not the first time we have heard these fears from ACTPS staff.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will refer Mr Cocks to my earlier answers. There is no black and white in relation to this matter. Again, I will give another example. If, for example, a public servant was to disclose to members of the opposition subject matter that is subject to cabinet consideration in the context of a budget, prior to a budget being brought down, that would quite legitimately be the subject of disciplinary action. So each individual circumstance would need to be taken on its merits. If people have genuine concerns about the way that their agency is operating and they have raised those concerns through appropriate channels, and they do not believe that those concerns are being heard, we are certainly all aware that that is a time when we would expect public servants may go and talk to members of the Assembly, either on the government side, on the crossbench, or in the opposition.

International relations—Beijing sister city

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, this year marks the 25th anniversary of the Canberra-Beijing sister city relationship. What activities are planned to mark the anniversary?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. Yes; 2025 does indeed mark the 25th anniversary of our sister city agreement with Beijing. The agreement was

signed in September 2000 by the then Chief Minister Kate Carnell and has been the cornerstone of our relationship with China, which I note is our jurisdiction's single largest export market. The partnership is aimed at strengthening cultural, business, tourism, trade and educational ties.

The government plans to mark this 25th anniversary in various ways. This has included formal recognition at the Lunar New Year celebration and the opening ceremony of the Chinese cultural showcase at this year's Multicultural Festival, alongside the Chinese ambassador. We are also working with the Chinese embassy on an event at Canberra's Beijing Garden later this year, and we are working with the Beijing municipal government on a number of other activities.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, how has the sister city relationship developed over the past 25 years?

MR BARR: The relationship has enhanced our city's partnership with China. It has fostered collaborations in trade, innovation, education and tourism. It has also contributed to the broader Australia-China relationship and has broad economic and cultural benefits. One such local example is the establishment of the Beijing Garden. The government recognises the value and potential growth that China presents to the territory economy, particularly in tourism and education. China continues to be the number one international visitor market for the territory, with nearly 29,000 visitors for the year ending in September 2024, contributing \$322 million to our economy. To put this in context, visitors from China represented 15 per cent of the total volume that contributed 52 per cent of the total international visitor spend. These figures are encouraging and we look forward to building on this momentum through the upcoming delegation to China next week, with the aim to both celebrate the Beijing sister city relationship and continue to deliver the government's international engagement and tourism strategies.

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, what is the government aiming to prioritise during the upcoming trade mission?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. The trade mission is an opportunity to further develop our education, tourism, investment and aviation opportunities. It is being supported by Tourism Australia and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The government seeks to engage across those priority sectors. The week-long mission will commence in Beijing and include a meeting with the mayor and the municipal government. Other engagements include Air China, Cathay Pacific, a number of Chinese tourism distribution partners, hotel investors and operators, as well as a senior high school in Shanghai that is delivering the ACT year 12 certificate through the Board of Senior Secondary Studies.

Further questions can be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice Transport Canberra—electric buses—procurement

MR STEEL: Yesterday I was asked about concerns around modern slavery, relating to a contract that we have with VDI Australia for electric buses. I can inform the Assembly

that all ACT government agencies are required to consider ethical behaviour by suppliers under the Charter of Procurement Values, which is time stamped at 2020. It was brought in under Minister Orr. Under the charter:

Territory entities must not knowingly engage with suppliers that demonstrate business practices that are objectionable, dishonest, unethical or unsafe.

This includes being alert to modern-day slavery and leveraging national and inter-jurisdictional initiatives to abate such practices.

Transport Canberra has had a contract with the Australian company, Vehicle Dealers International, VDI, for the supply of Yutong battery-electric buses. Although the Government Procurement (Ethical Treatment of Workers Evaluation) Direction, which I referred to yesterday, was introduced in April 2023 after the procurement of the supply of the 90 purchased Yutong battery-electric buses was active, as part of the procurement, I can confirm all tenderers were required to complete an ethical supplier declaration. The declaration covers a number of legislative requirements, including the commonwealth Modern Slavery Act 2018. The ACT government Charter of Procurement Values 2020 also applied to the procurement.

I have also been advised that VDI completed the ethical supply declaration for both procurement and the supply of battery-electric buses for both the 12 leased Yutong battery-electric buses contract and for the 90 purchased battery-electric buses.

Transport Canberra contacted VDI to address the issues raised, and VDI has confirmed in writing that it is not aware of any incidents of modern slavery involved in its operation and supply chain. VDI has undertaken several steps to identify any potential instances of modern slavery. Some of these include monitoring and evaluation of its subcontractors, education of staff on the activities constituting modern slavery, as well as advice on where to seek further information and report any suspected incidents, and a requirement for all suppliers to comply with the code of conduct and strong record-keeping. Additionally, in February 2025 VDI conducted an audit which failed to detect any incidents of actual or suspected occurrences of modern slavery in the supply chain.

Transport Canberra will continue to work closely with VDI, as well as other jurisdictions like Transport for New South Wales and the New South Wales anti-Slavery Commissioner. If there are any other further issues that come to light, they will be taken into consideration by Transport Canberra in relation to any future procurements that may be undertaken in relation to the purchase of electric buses in the future.

Roads—vulnerable road users

MR STEEL: I can respond to another matter that was raised in question time today. Mr Braddock asked me about pedestrian and cyclist safety in relation to the light rail stage 2 project. I was talking about the lack of national Australian guidance for the width of temporary cycle lanes for the separation of motor vehicle traffic.

I also wanted to add that New South Wales does have a framework for temporary traffic management, whereby traffic speeds are 60 kilometres an hour; however, this is not

applicable to the raising London Circuit or light rail Stage 2A projects, as the speeds are reduced to 40 kilometres an hour under the temporary traffic management plan.

City and government services—libraries

MS CHEYNE: I apologise to Miss Nuttall. This is overdue, certainly, regarding bilingual story time, from February. At the time I said, about the programming of bilingual story time, that I was not aware there had been any changes to the scheduling of it overall but that I would come back if I was incorrect.

It was correct that I was not aware, but I have now been made aware, on 3 March, that bilingual story time is undergoing a review. This is due to presenter availability, some cancellations that occurred and changes in demand for bilingual story time towards the end of last year that took Libraries ACT to a point where they believed it was an opportunity to take a pause and undertake a review of the program to ensure that it was meeting the needs of the community.

While that pause is underway, there have been, still, I believe one or two bilingual story times undertaken. I certainly know there was a Mandarin bilingual story time not too long ago, and that review is due to be completed next month, after which I am expecting a schedule of bilingual story time to be reinstated.

Legislative Assembly—questions without notice **Statement by Speaker**

MR SPEAKER: There are some matters arising from question time from this chair. I just wanted to reflect, after a somewhat robust question time today, that I am here to referee question time. I am here to keep order and to preside over a respectful workplace. I am also here to facilitate the ability for non-executive members to ask questions of the government, and, hopefully, to facilitate meaningful responses from government. I think, by and large, that is what we get.

Respectfully, I would say, without naming names, that there are some ministers who go to greater lengths to answer questions than others, but that is by the by. I just want to say that it got a little robust. My advice to non-executive members, for what it is worth, is that if your questions are particularly pointed and politically robust, I would be surprised if you do not get a pointed and politically robust response. I think that on occasions, thought should be given to what it is that you want to achieve from the question. But I would also suggest to ministers that if your responses are laced with political attacks, you can probably expect that there will be some robust interjections that come back your way. So in the interests of keeping it sensible, it would be really cool if we could consider those things.

I would also like to make mention of the length of questions. And I note that Ms Carrick, and I am sorry for naming her, is not here with us at this stage; Mr Emerson is. We do not have a standing order in this place about length of questions. What is it in the House of Reps? I think it is 30 seconds. I would dread for us to get to that point. I would dread for us to have a standing order in place where there is a time limit for questions, but I want to draw members' attention to the fact that some of those questions are getting pretty long. That is all I have got; thank you, members.

Papers

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

Education and Care Services Ombudsman and National Education and Care Services Freedom of Information & Privacy Commissioners—Annual Reports—

2022-23, dated 14 March 2024.

2023-24, dated 3 December 2024.

Planning (Ainslie Volcanics) Amendment Bill 2025

Mr Rattenbury, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (3.17): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

If you are like me, you have probably spent a fair bit of time trekking around Mount Ainslie. But what many in our community may not know is that just at its base, nestled in the suburbs, lies a critically endangered grassland that is now under threat from development by Indara communications, a company that represents the likes of Optus and Vodafone. These industry giants are now proposing to install a 28-metre-high telecommunications tower on an area of critically endangered grassland, a tower that could easily be built on an alternative location. Today, I am proud to be introducing legislation which, at its core, will revoke and prevent approvals for development of the environmentally important Ainslie Volcanics off Limestone Avenue.

As a community, Canberrans take pride in our commitment to caring for the environment. Today, the Greens are calling on members of the Legislative Assembly to reflect that commitment and reflect the significant community opposition to the construction of a large telecommunications tower at Ainslie Volcanics. Ainslie Volcanics is an area of critically endangered grasslands that grassroots community volunteers have invested hundreds, if not thousands, of hours into restoring. Building a tower here threatens to undermine the hard work and dedication of these community volunteers, and this Assembly should not stand for it. This site is home to some of the last remaining natural temperate grasslands in Australia, and it is our responsibility to do everything we can to restore and protect them. While it is true that Ainslie Volcanics has faced significant decline, our focus as a society should be on repairing and restoring it, not abandoning it and giving up.

In 2024, as a condition to supporting the Labor Party, the Greens secured a written and public commitment to specifically protect this site. This legislation we are proposing today provides a mechanism to help us deliver on this commitment, and I am hopeful the whole Assembly can get behind this proposal to protect this site.

Our legislation follows the same approach, unanimously supported by the ACT Assembly in 2021, to stop an incinerator from being built in Fyshwick. At the time there was significant community opposition to the proposal, with significant concerns surrounding the pollution and potential impact on air quality, as well as other issues such as traffic and the like. Following a considerable community campaign, everyone in the ACT Legislative Assembly agreed change was needed, and specific legislation was brought forward to completely stop any new incinerators or large-scale waste facilities from being built in Fyshwick.

Now, in the case of Ainslie Volcanics, members of the Assembly face a similar choice. While the current planning laws technically allow this tower to be built, it is clear that this does not reflect what the Canberra community want. It is the Assembly's job to step in and fix things when they are not in the best interests of our community. This is the moment for all members of this place to take action and listen to the community to secure a better outcome. This does not have to be a complicated decision. The government's own planning document showed that this tower could have been placed just a few hundred metres up the road, avoiding this entire issue.

The community, along with the Greens, are not against the idea of a new cell phone tower; there are practical alternatives available. What we need now is the political will to make them a reality. It has happened before in a way that all parties were willing to support, and the proposal before this place today is not much different.

I would like to speak to the selfless community members who have tirelessly fought to protect this precious part of Canberra. In particular, Marianne Albury-Colless and Amy Blain are both Ainslie residents who have put countless hours of their own time not just in weeding and planting to protect these grasslands but also to doing the complicated administrative work to save Ainslie Volcanics from development.

There are, of course, many others who have joined in as part of this broader community effort, and I acknowledge all of them for their contribution to protecting our important places and for helping to restore them. It is fair to recognise that over a period of time, a range of important habitats are not what they used to be, but that does not mean we should give up on them. As I said earlier, it means we need to really value those restoration efforts. It is people like Amy and Marianne, and all of us involved, who make a real difference in our community, and they are the reason the Greens and I are moving this bill today.

This bill has three key components. Firstly, it revokes the currently approved development application at the Ainslie Volcanics site so that we can immediately protect this site from development and reverse the decision which has been made at the expense of that area.

Secondly, it ensures that any further development application submitted to the government must be refused so as to ensure we continue to protect our environment now and into the future. This section of the bill differs ever so slightly to the precedents set by the example put forward by the government in 2021. Rather than simply mandating that the government must not accept the development application upfront, as was done in the 2021 amendment, which effectively excluded the site from the development process altogether, this bill takes a different approach. It requires the

government to refuse any development application that may be submitted. This ensures that in the unlikely event that a development application is lodged between the introduction of this bill and its potential passage, it will still be covered by the legislation and prevented from proceeding. While this may seem like a technical distinction to some, it is crucial to highlight, because the Human Rights Commission's opinion in this bill's compatibility statement raised some ambiguity. They expressed uncertainty about whether this decision would impact the right to a fair hearing for anyone who might submit an application between now and the potential passage of this bill. The commission made it clear to my team that they were unsure whether this was a concern for the bill. This uncertainty arose, in part, because the approved development application was secured by a corporation, not an individual. As the commission noted, the right to a fair trial primarily applies to individuals, not corporations, so it is unclear whether the bill would affect that right in this context. Nonetheless, I thought I would address this directly with members in this place.

Thirdly, this bill includes a provision that will ensure it remains constitutional, giving anyone impacted by its passage an avenue to seek just compensation from the government. I think many would agree that this is a reasonable clause and is necessary given the nature of what this bill seeks to achieve.

Finally, I would like to touch on one last point, which is the only remaining aspect of the human rights considerations not yet addressed in my speech. Notably, the right to a healthy environment, introduced after a motion by Jo Clay and the Greens in the last Assembly, has recently come into effect. In fact, to my understanding, this bill is the first considered by the ACT Human Rights Commission whereby this right is actively implied and engaged.

At its core, the right to a healthy environment means that governments have a responsibility to protect against environmental harm that could interfere with fundamental human rights, such as the right to life, cultural rights and privacy. This includes safeguarding ecosystems and biodiversity, which are essential for the enjoyment of all human rights. This means that, since its passage, governments are now required to take proactive and effective steps to conserve and sustainably use our natural environment. This principle is directly engaged in the case of this bill, and, by association, in the case of the protection of Ainslie Volcanics. In light of this principle, this bill, by virtue of attempting to protect a site that can be ecologically restored, directly engages and furthers the right to a healthy environment.

As we speak, the Ainslie Volcanics remain under threat. Local residents continue to dedicate countless hours to restoring this important site because they know that in a climate crisis, safeguarding and restoring our environment is essential to our survival. This bill is not merely another piece of legislation; it is the difference between environmental destruction or environmental conservation. It is a choice between prioritising developers or listening to the voices of the community. The passage of this bill is crucial to preserving these grasslands for future generations. I urge the members of this Assembly to act with urgency and conviction. We can no longer afford to hesitate or debate the need to protect our environment. Ainslie Volcanics requires immediate protection, and this bill provides a clear path for us to make that happen.

I will take this opportunity today to flag with members that it is my intention to bring

this bill back for debate as soon as practical after the various processes of the Assembly are undertaken, and that is the usual committee processes and the like. But given the impending development on this site, it is important that we address this bill and make a decision as soon as practical. Having said all of that, I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Domestic and family violence—coercive control

MS CASTLEY(Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (3.27): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) coercive control is a pattern of abusive behaviour used to dominate, intimidate, and manipulate victims, often leading to significant psychological and emotional harm;
 - (b) domestic and family violence remains a pressing concern in the ACT, with coercive control being a key factor in many abusive relationships, and a precedent for almost all intimate partner domestic violence homicides;
 - (c) several Australian jurisdictions, including New South Wales, Queensland, and Tasmania have moved to criminalise coercive control to provide better protection for victims and hold perpetrators accountable; and
 - (d) law reform in this area must balance the need to protect victims with safeguards to uphold due process, ensuring that laws are clear, enforceable, and do not inadvertently criminalise ordinary relationship disputes or misunderstandings;
- (2) acknowledges that:
 - (a) there is strong community and expert support for criminalising coercive control as part of a broader strategy to combat domestic and family violence, including support from the Australian Federal Police Association;
 - (b) the ACT Government has a responsibility to ensure its legal framework adequately protects victims while safeguarding individual liberties and preventing wrongful convictions; and
 - (c) effective reform requires thorough consultation with legal experts, law enforcement, victims' advocates, and the broader community to ensure a workable and effective legislative response, supported by a community education campaign; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
 - (a) introduce legislation to criminalise coercive control in the ACT, ensuring it is clearly defined and includes appropriate evidentiary standards and legal safeguards, consistent with the approach of New South Wales;
 - (b) conduct a comprehensive review of existing domestic violence laws to identify gaps and ensure consistency with any new coercive control offence;

- (c) provide improved support and resources for victims, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, through education, advocacy services, and enhanced law enforcement training to better identify and respond to coercive control; and
- (d) report back to the Assembly within six months on progress towards drafting and introducing this legislation.

I move this motion as a first step towards legislating for a criminal offence of coercive control in this term of the Assembly, building on the work of the Canberra Liberals team in the last term.

Before I get to the specifics of what the legislation would do, I would like to share some personal thoughts and experiences of coercive control, just to explain why it is necessary. A member of my family had been in a situation. We hear the words “love bomb”, “gaslighting” and those kinds of terms. This is not something that has happened recently; this was back in the late 80s. Her partner retired and had the ability to drive her to and from work on occasion, which sounded lovely and fun in the first instance, until it got to the point where he drove her to work every day and sat in her office for a full eight hours every single day of her shift. He put Serepax in her coffee at night-time in order to have his way with her. Of course, with the shame and then isolation, we no longer saw her. She did not know how to tell her family what was going on or how to get away from it. Words come to mind when you think of coercive control. There is shame, degradation of the human person and denial of freedom.

Another example is my stepfather. He was outwardly violent towards my mum. There was no coercion with regard to that. However, there was the impact that his relationship had on me as a child. He loved me. He bought me my first pair of fabulous shoes and would do all sorts of wonderful things for me, but I knew, when I heard his car coming down the street at the end of every day, that the best way to behave at that moment every day was to sit on the toilet, sick to my stomach, and just wait to hear what the mood was like when he walked through the door. That taught me pretty quickly that you shush, you behave and you do not make waves; otherwise your mum might cop another belting. That is no way for families to exist.

Then there was my son and his first girlfriend. I think we all panic when our kids get their first girlfriends or boyfriends, but it is a bit fun and exciting. However, his first girlfriend had significant mental health concerns and would threaten to commit suicide when he, as a 14-year-old, could not cope with her concerns. Every time he tried to break up with her, she would threaten to commit suicide, and he was petrified. He was petrified of what would happen and how he could possibly help her, so he stayed until her father rang me and said, “Please do not let Lachlan come around anymore. I think he is in trouble.” These are very real examples of coercive control, and that is just in three generations of my family.

Creating a criminal offence of coercive control is an essential tool for protecting women and families at risk of violence, because, as things stand, ACT police do not have the power to intervene until a situation turns violent, but everything that goes on before that violent moment destroys a person. The police want to intervene. I have spoken to officers who wish they had the power, because they genuinely want to protect families but legally cannot. That is why we need the offence here in the ACT. Other states,

including New South Wales and Queensland, have already legislated the change. Others, including Western Australia and South Australia, are undertaking work ahead of future legislation. Tasmania managed to make this work in 2005. The ACT risks being left behind as the only jurisdiction in which it is not illegal for someone to coercively control another person. For a progressive jurisdiction, I find this staggering.

The Assembly previously considered my motion to criminalise coercive control but chose to vote it down—not to work with me nor work on a way we could move forward, even if time were needed. There was no consultation or opportunity to better protect men and women—local families; your neighbours—facing the risk of domestic and family violence. Members in this place chose to vote against it, including the Chief Minister, the Minister for Women, the Leader of the Greens and the rest of Labor and the Greens. They put politics first and voted against the motion for legislation. I have often wondered whether any of those members have subsequently reflected on their vote. I have wondered whether any of them asked themselves if this was what they intended to fight against when they embarked on a career in politics. I wondered whether they read stories about women in Canberra who have experienced the brutality and terror of domestic violence and whether legislation could have made a difference and helped them be safe.

I read an article in *City News*. It was last year, so it is not current to today, but some of the statistics in that talked about one in four women and one in seven men having lived with a partner and experience emotional abuse. One in six women and one in 13 men have experienced economic abuse. I looked around the room during question time today and did a quick count of the people in the chamber. There were 18 women in the chamber during question time, so, on the statistics, that would mean that 4.5 of the women and 2.1 of the men in this room have possibly lived through emotional abuse with an intimate partner. On emotional abuse, it would have been three of the women and one of the men. Those statistics are pretty staggering. The article went on to talk about the age groups and cohorts. Between the ages of 35 and 54 is the prime time for women.

As I said earlier, I wonder whether people have come to regret the decision to vote against the motion. In, I think, less than 12 months, how many families have experienced coercive control and intimate partner violence? I hope people have come to regret their decision. I hope that is recognised today and that we have a second chance to do the right thing and enact legislation to protect women, men and families. I particularly hope that Greens members have reflected on their position, because a year ago they were in a governing agreement with Labor and did not have the freedom to vote on their conscience. A year ago they were in—

Mr Rattenbury: That is so patronising.

MS CASTLEY: It is a question to ask. There was the luxury of telling yourselves that the opposition was a necessary evil, but today you have the freedom to do the right thing—to do what the Greens in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australian have done in opposing coercive control. If we work together to make this happen, whether Labor backs us or not—and I know that there is an amendment, so I will talk to that in my closing remarks—we can offer women and families more protection against violence. Work with me, as I had hoped people would have done last year when

I moved a motion and proposed a bill. I hope that we can come to that agreement today. It looks like we may be able to. I will save the rest for my closing remarks.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (3.36): I move the following amendment:

Omit all text after “That this Assembly:”, substitute:

“(1) notes that:

- (a) coercive control is a pattern of abusive behaviour used to control and dominate a person by creating fear and denying their liberty and autonomy. Coercive control can involve physical or non-physical violence or a combination of both and has a devastating impact on a victim’s identity, their physical health and social and emotional wellbeing, and their connection with friends, family and culture;
- (b) domestic and family violence is a national crisis, and multiple Death Review Reports have found that coercive control is present in almost all intimate partner homicides;
- (c) several Australian jurisdictions, including New South Wales, Queensland, and Tasmania have moved to criminalise coercive control to provide better protection for victims and hold perpetrators accountable; and
- (d) law reform in this area must be carefully considered to avoid misidentification of the primary aggressor and ensure police and other justice stakeholders are equipped to understand and enforce the law appropriately;

(2) acknowledges that:

- (a) there is community and expert support for criminalising coercive control as part of a broader strategy to combat domestic and family violence, including support from the Australian Federal Police Association; and
- (b) effective reform requires thorough consultation with legal experts, law enforcement, victims’ advocates, and the broader community to ensure a workable and effective legislative response, supported by a community education campaign; and

(3) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) consult with the Domestic Violence Prevention Council in relation to best practice responses to coercive control;
- (b) continue to develop the ACT’s Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy with specialist ACT agencies to ensure a coordinated response to domestic, family and sexual violence;
- (c) conduct a review of legislation relating to the criminalisation of coercive control nationally to assess implementation, effectiveness and identify any gaps, assess the ACT’s current legislative framework in so far as it captures coercive control, and introduce legislation informed by the review;
- (d) enhance support and resources for people experiencing coercive control and improve awareness of, and responses, to coercive control in the ACT

community:

- (e) increase the capacity of frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services to respond to coercive control;
- (f) improve the provision of training and education to police and other justice agencies, including the judiciary, in relation to coercive control; and
- (g) report back to the Assembly within six months on progress in relation to these activities, including in relation to a timeline for legislation.”.

As I have said before in this chamber, the prevalence of domestic, family and sexual violence in this country is unacceptable, so I welcome Ms Castley’s motion today and to have the opportunity to speak about this issue.

Two in five women in Australia have experienced intimate partner violence since the age of 15. These rates are higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disability, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. I spoke on Tuesday about the hundreds of women in Australia who have been killed by men in the last year. This is unacceptable. We must do more to address this epidemic, through education and primary prevention, through supporting frontline services to respond, and by holding perpetrators to account.

In response to these alarming statistics, the ACT government has made significant investment over the last few years to increase supports available to victim-survivors and boost efforts to hold perpetrators to account. To ensure our investment is coordinated and targeted, work is underway to develop a comprehensive, evidence based ACT domestic, family and sexual violence strategy, in partnership with specialist frontline services, which will centre the voices of victim-survivors and explore all levers to prevent gender based violence.

Many, if not all, of the most serious, high-risk family violence situations involve coercive control. Coercive control is a pattern of abusive behaviour used to control and dominate a person by creating fear and denying their liberty and autonomy. Coercive control can involve physical or non-physical violence, or a combination of both, and impacts a victim’s physical health and social and emotional wellbeing, isolating them from friends, family and other supports.

Alarmingly, the ACT’s Domestic and Family Violence Death Review report found a clear pattern of coercive control was present in nearly all homicides reviewed and was a significant predictor of domestic and family violence homicide. Insights from the death review really drive home the need for everyone in our society to understand the signs of coercive control and to know how to support friends and family who are victims of coercive control. Importantly, the death review found most victims looked to friends and family for support and had limited contact with services. The death review stressed the need for both community education and training for frontline responders, including police, to understand coercive control better in order to hold perpetrators accountable.

Similar recommendations have been made by other specialists in the ACT and nationally, noting that education and training for community support for frontline services is critical to improving responses to coercive control. For this reason, in 2022

the Domestic Violence Prevention Council recommended against criminalising coercive control in the ACT as a standalone offence and instead recommended that we monitor the experiences and results from other jurisdictions first.

Indeed, even jurisdictions that have criminalised coercive control emphasise the importance of education and training. In December last year, the New South Wales Implementation and Evaluation Taskforce formed to provide advice to the New South Wales government on the implementation of a new offence. They found that, whilst more time is needed to assess the success of criminalisation, training for police and courts and broader initiatives to educate the public were fundamental to efforts to combat coercive control.

Coercive control is currently an offence in New South Wales and Tasmania. New South Wales passed a standalone offence in November 2022 and it commenced last year. Queensland has also passed legislation to legislate a standalone offence which was due to commence in May this year. South Australia is committed to criminalising coercive control following more in-depth consultation with stakeholders. Western Australia is taking a phased approach to criminalising coercive control, commencing with the system's reform, education and training prior to the introduction of legislation. Victoria and the Northern Territory have not committed to criminalising coercive control. Both address coercive control through their existing family and domestic violence legislative frameworks, similar to the ACT.

The ACT's legislative framework already recognises coercive control and provides options for people experiencing coercive control to seek support and safety, so I rebut Ms Castley's statement that police cannot do anything if they are faced with a situation where they suspect there is coercive control. The definition of family violence in section 8 of the Family Violence Act includes "coercion or any other behaviour" that "controls or dominates the family member" and "causes the family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of the family member or another person". It also includes sexually coercive behaviour. This means that a victim-survivor experiencing coercive control can seek a family violence order to protect themselves. A breach of a family violence order is a criminal offence under section 43 of the act.

A statutory review of the Family Violence Act is required to commence in August this year. That will also provide an opportunity for us to consider improvements to the way our legislative framework recognises and responds to domestic and family violence. We have the opportunity in the ACT to review the operation of the offences that have been introduced interstate—their operational impacts and outcomes for victim-survivors in particular.

The ACT government is also progressing the Coercive Control Response Package to build awareness and capacity across the ACT community to better understand, identify and respond to coercive control. The package provides \$375,000 to deliver a range of community based education initiatives, including training for ACT Policing and the courts, delivery of public education, and integrating coercive control into the ACT Domestic and Family Violence Risk Assessment Framework. The ACT Coercive Control Response Package will support a strong and consistent approach to identifying patterns of coercive control. Doing the groundwork allows us to consider and address some of the risks with criminalisation that have been identified, especially by the

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

A key risk by creating a standalone offence relates to misidentification. Without proper training and education around coercive control for responders, there is a significant risk that the victim-survivors will be misidentified as perpetrators, which results in adverse and potentially lifelong consequences. The 2023 National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence speak to these long-term impacts, stating:

Being misidentified as the perpetrator has significant detrimental and harmful impacts for victim-survivors, increasing their contact with the criminal justice system and potentially resulting in unwarranted orders or sanctions being taken out against them. This further limits their capacity and willingness to seek and access support from services, police and the justice system, placing them at further risk of harm.

Misidentification itself may be exploited as a form of coercive control and systems abuse by perpetrators. We know from other jurisdictions that these risks are very real. The Women's Legal Service in Victoria found that, of 55 women named as respondents to family violence intervention order applications, 32 were incorrectly identified. A whole-of-population study of First Nations women killed by male partners across several Australian jurisdictions between 2006 and 2016 found that close to a third of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women murdered by intimate partners had previously been identified by police as perpetrators.

The ACT government is also being led by the views and expertise of our local ACT domestic and family violence specialist sector. The Domestic Violence Crisis Service published their position statement in responding to coercive control last year. This advocated for a whole-of-system response to address coercive control and family violence, including further education, cultural change, and appropriate resourcing of crisis response, support and legal advocacy services. In DVCS's view, criminalising coercive control is unlikely to generate the level of change needed and risks causing further harm to victim-survivors. They also raise the misidentification risk that I have outlined. This is a key ongoing concern raised by advocates in the ACT and across Australia.

We are listening to these concerns and, before we progress to change the laws, we need a coordinated approach to promote cultural and attitudinal change. We must ensure a consistent approach to coercive control across our policing, legal, justice and community service systems and ensure that the needs and experiences of victim-survivors are at the forefront of any reform. The 2024 report to the Criminology Research Advisory Council, led by Dr Kate Fitz-Gibbon, into the views of victim-survivors about the criminalisation of coercive control, quoted one woman, who summed this up neatly by saying:

You can put anything you like on law but if it isn't supported by a justice system, and that's the police right through to the courts, then it's not worth the paper it's written on.

Our amendments to Ms Castley's motion seek to reflect the complexity and nuance which exists in relation to this issue. We are bringing the amendments to this motion to

build a solid foundation of education, training and community awareness, to learn from the experiences of other jurisdictions, to respect and be guided by the views of victim survivors, and to take a nuanced approach to ensure that we use all the tools at our disposal to increase safety.

In particular, our amendments outline a new paragraph 3 which will include consulting with our specialist family violence services, through the Domestic Violence Prevention Council and directly through the development of the strategy; reviewing the legislative landscape nationally and learning from the experiences of other jurisdictions and looking at our own legislation here in the ACT; ensuring we do the groundwork in providing education, training, resources and support to victim-survivors, the frontline services sector, the police and the judiciary to ensure the features and dynamics of coercive control are well understood, and so that the law, when it commences, can actually operate to keep people safe and hold perpetrators accountable.

Many of these actions are already underway, but there is still lots of work to do. This work will position us to ensure that we introduce legislation that is effective, increases safety and does not have negative unintended consequences. I look forward to continuing this work and working with members of the Assembly to achieve this.

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (3.48): I thank the Leader of the Opposition, Leanne Castley, for her work and her advocacy on what is a most serious matter for our community. I also thank her for her heartfelt contribution and for sharing her own experiences of domestic violence and coercive control over three generations of her family.

Domestic violence is a cancer on our society. It can be open and overt, but more often it lurks in the shadows and is very difficult to detect. While the wounds of physical violence leave a physical mark, it is far more challenging to detect and prosecute an individual who employs complex patterns of behaviour to cause psychological and emotional trauma to their victim through control, domination and intimidation. But it is important that we do, because it is exactly that sort of behaviour that precedes almost all intimate partner violence, and that is why Ms Castley has long advocated for coercive control laws in the ACT, even introducing those very laws herself in the Tenth Assembly.

I also acknowledge my colleague the shadow attorney-general, Peter Cain, for the substantial body of work that he undertook alongside Ms Castley in the planning and preparation of those laws, which were ultimately defeated by Labor and the Greens. The laws Ms Castley presented to the Assembly were modelled from the New South Wales government's landmark Crimes Legislation Amendment (Coercive Control) Bill 2022, which created a standalone offence of coercive control that carries a maximum sentence of seven years in jail.

The New South Wales government adopted a careful, cautious and measured approach to criminalise coercive control. It followed 2½ years of unprecedented consultation which included at least seven stages of development, such as a discussion paper, a parliamentary inquiry, a public exposure draft bill and roundtables. The New South Wales government also backed their laws with well-funded education campaigns and

funding for training for police and the judiciary. They also legislated a review period to ensure the laws were operating as intended.

But it is not just New South Wales that has acted to stamp out coercive control. Queensland, Tasmania, Western Australia and South Australia have all moved to do the same. There is widespread stakeholder support for coercive control in the ACT. The President of the Australian Federal Police Association, Alex Caruana, has said that a standalone offence for coercive control will give police, victims and support services greater avenues to investigate and report this type of controlling and predatory behaviour. ACT Policing respond to multiple domestic and family violence incidents every day. Nearly half of the assaults reported to police are related to domestic and family violence, and police believe that is only the tip of the iceberg.

The CEO of YWCA Canberra, Frances Crimmins, said:

YWCA Canberra is not alone in supporting this legislative reform. We know through the 2022 Monash University survey of nearly 1300 survivors of domestic violence that survivors overwhelmingly support criminalisation. It is evident in police data that domestic violence incidents and offences in the ACT continue to increase and we know that non-physical forms of violence that degrade, humiliate, control, stalk or isolate are abundantly present in survivor stories of domestic violence. Coercive control is intrinsic to domestic and family violence.”

There is also widespread agreement that education and thorough consultation with legal experts, law enforcement, victims, advocates and the broader community is critical to ensure effective reform. This was the approach that the New South Wales government took, which Ms Castley has always looked to do and which the ACT government can also look to do in the development of the ACT’s own laws.

It has been around nine months since coercive control laws were brought to this place by Ms Castley and rejected. A lot can happen in nine months for someone living in an abusive relationship. I thank Ms Castley for once again bringing this most important matter to the attention of the Assembly today.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.53): I thank Ms Castley for bringing this motion to the Assembly. It is high time that the ACT addresses the criminality of coercive control and the insidious and devastating impact of coercive control across our community.

I asked a local First Nations leader who has spent her life on the front line in providing family, domestic and sexual violence crisis support about the impacts of coercive control. This is what she told me:

In my experience professionally and personally, it’s about controlling the things that they know you love and will hurt you. They will threaten to kill your children, your family, your pets. The fear already inflicted in the victim freezes her to not leave, because he makes you believe he is stronger than the police. And he reinforces that he is not scared of them. People with disabilities have their medications, their liberties, and their equipment also used against them. They attack your whole world around you, and you can’t even run, because so much is at stake. Someone or something gets left behind. It’s the enormity of everything she has to lose to seek safety.

I cannot stress enough: the fear is so debilitating; women get overwhelmed and stay. She always sleeps with one eye open so she can prepare herself for what's coming next, just so there's less noise and disruption in the household. This is the ugliness of his abuse, and the strength of her love to protect others. When a perpetrator threatens a child, a mother suffers in silence to save her children and family. This is the power of the fear that drowns her to his submission. She quietly suffers at the hands of his mind and fists. She is the ultimate sacrifice for his abuse.

I asked what criminalising coercive control would mean for the women she had encountered and continues to encounter in her line of work, and she said:

It would put a name to this behaviour that women are already suffering. It would help women to recognise it—to spot the signs earlier and leave earlier. It will put perpetrators on notice, and also educate them. We really need to step up as a society, to listen to the people who these women run to for safety—the refuges, FDSV workers, who have been in the game for a long time, and most importantly, the survivors who escaped. Give them the voice they deserve.

By bringing forward this motion, Ms Castley has, I hope, accelerated the timeline for reform in this area, bringing the Assembly together with an opportunity to say in consensus: “Enough is enough. It's time to make this change.” I particularly appreciate that she has done so with a motion that is carefully worded, free of unnecessarily political language and focused closely on addressing a concerning issue of great importance to people experiencing abuse in our community.

I also thank Minister Paterson and Mr Rattenbury for collaborating on constructive amendments to the motion that will ensure these reforms are developed through thorough consultation, that there will be enhanced support resourcing for victim-survivors, increased capacity for frontline services, and improved training and education for the police responding to these offences. I believe these amendments strengthen the motion and help set up the government to implement these reforms successfully. I also thank Minister Paterson for agreeing to incorporate changes I requested to enable us to make a firm commitment today to introduce legislation to protect against coercive control rather than considering possible legislation.

Evidence tells us how important this reform is. We know that intimate partner murders are predictable. The New South Wales review found that 99 per cent of domestic violence perpetrators who killed their partners used coercive control in the relationship. It is the most common risk factor leading up to intimate partner homicide. Given this, it beggars belief that time and again we hear of victims having reported patterns of abuse to police, only to be told the abuse is not serious enough or not technically an offence. “It's not illegal to be an arsehole” was the response one woman received when she sought police protection.

The fact is that our current legislation does not adequately cover the scope of behaviours and patterns of abuse that exist in coercive control. I have heard firsthand from women in our community who wished it did and have suffered because it does not. Criminalising coercive control will eliminate any confusion or doubt that may exist that this is a form of abuse, and it will compel police to take patterns of abusive behaviour seriously. As with any significant reform, of course, it is absolutely critical that, in

progressing the required legislative changes, they are enforced by extensive and robust consultation to make sure we get this right.

Today, my office spoke with Sara Cronan, who worked as a prosecutor for 25 years, including 15 years as a public prosecutor in the ACT. She said that, as a policy matter, this is way overdue. She wished the offence of coercive control had existed when she was working for the DPP. When she first heard murmurs about coercive control being criminalised in other jurisdictions, Ms Cronan held reservations that it would be a very difficult offence to prosecute, but she was impressed by the legislation introduced in New South Wales, which she said was carefully and sensitively drafted, informed by extensive consultation and supported by a strong public awareness campaign. When I discussed this matter with Ms Cronan last year, she said she would be confident in using the New South Wales legislation to prosecute and would be very happy to see this legislation introduced in the ACT.

My office also spoke with Cecilia McKenzie, a Wiradjuri woman who previously worked at the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre and was heavily involved in advising the New South Wales government on the rollout of their coercive control reforms. She emphasised that a strong public awareness campaign will be absolutely crucial to the success of these reforms. Prior to the New South Wales public awareness campaign, 32 per cent of people had never heard the term “coercive control”, and a further 28 per cent had heard the term but did not know what it meant. Only one in five people could correctly identify at least one aspect of coercive control. Now one in two people can tell you what coercive control is and, importantly, that it is a crime. Ms McKenzie said that campaign and the reforms must also be informed by a close and collaborative relationship between the police, the First Nations community and people with lived experience, otherwise, we risk enabling misidentification and intrinsic racism to jeopardise the success of these reforms. I implore the government to take her advice.

It is a tragedy that many Canberrans who are suffering in silence will be relieved by the passage of this motion today. For their sake, I hope we have legislation before us soon with protections put in place as quickly as possible thereafter—protections that make it clear that abusive, degrading and controlling behaviours in intimate relationships are not just morally wrong, a bit of a concern or a bad sign or a harbinger of violence to come but are also criminal and will not be tolerated in the ACT.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.00): I stand to support the motion as amended. I thank Ms Castley for driving the charge on legislating coercive control in the ACT. I, with others in this chamber, acknowledge that criminalisation and the justice system alone do not effectively address coercive control due to complex cultural issues.

I commend the ACT government for following advice from peak bodies about an incremental approach to legislating and safeguarding adverse effects through community awareness campaigns and law enforcement training. However, a commitment to further progress legislation must be made. Whilst we monitor early stage outcomes in other jurisdictions, I believe that in the ACT we have the community sector expertise to collaborate on effective training programs and public education now.

This amendment assures that, prior to legislating, law enforcement, community services and members of the public have a better and shared understanding of what constitutes

coercive behaviour. I acknowledge how significant it is to be discussing coercive control, how far we have come and how far we have to go. I would like to note that coercive control is not limited to domestic and family violence but is in the workplace and out in our communities. Thank you, Minister Paterson, for including my changes. I thank members across the assembly for collaborating on this issue to get the nuance needed to progress this motion.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.02): Today I rise in support of Ms Castley's motion with a deep sense of urgency and responsibility. Obviously there will be a comment from Ms Castley on the amendments that have been presented.

Coercive control is a form of abuse that operates in the shadows, gradually stripping victims of their autonomy, dignity and, in far too many cases, their very lives. It is a calculated, insidious pattern of behaviour designed to dominate, manipulate and intimidate. It isolates victims from their support networks, instils fear and erodes their sense of worth.

We do not have to look far to see the consequences of our failure to act. Take the tragic case of Hannah Clarke and her children, who were murdered in Queensland in 2020 by her abusive ex-partner. Before the horrific act of violence that took her life, Hannah was subjected to relentless coercive control; monitoring her movements, isolating her from friends, financial abuse and emotional manipulation. Had coercive controls been in place earlier, police could have intervened before it escalated to an ultimate fatal act of violence. Queensland has since criminalised coercive control, but how many more lives will be lost before we follow suit?

This is not just about law reform; it is about justice, particularly for those vulnerable ones in an intimate relationship. It is about recognising that domestic violence is not always marked by bruises and broken bones; sometimes it is the relentless psychological torment that precedes and enables physical violence. Coercive control is a precursor to almost all intimate partner homicides and yet, up to now, the ACT has failed to commit. We are failing victims by allowing this form of abuse to remain beyond the reach of our criminal justice system.

As has been touched on, I was honoured to accompany Ms Castley and to work with her in her role as shadow minister for domestic violence last term, and to jointly bring a bill before this Assembly, which was disappointingly defeated. Perhaps with the change in mood from the government, it should be recognised that the work was done by the Canberra Liberals previous to this term, and also in this very motion brought today.

It is interesting to look at Dr Paterson's amendment to Ms Castley's motion, which really keeps the key recommendation to come back to this Assembly within six months with a timeline for legislation and, of course, to consult up to that point with all affected stakeholders and responsible stakeholders. Quite frankly, I am not quite sure why Dr Paterson just did not support Ms Castley's motion, because her "calls on" basically just rewrites Ms Castley's "calls on", so it is a little bit disappointing to not show some sort of tripartite and independent unity here and get behind the original motion. I will leave the rest of that debate to Ms Castley and my colleagues to complete, but it is good that finally the government has committed to a timeline to introduce legislation. I hope that

commitment is followed through with. I hope the engagement with affected communities and important stakeholders is genuine because, as we have seen, this government is not renowned for genuinely consulting with those who are affected by its policies and proposed law changes.

We will be watching. We will be watching and we will be making sure that those who need to be talked to are talked to comprehensively and genuinely. So I want to thank, again, Ms Castley for bringing this important motion to this Assembly again, bringing this issue, again, to this Assembly, and who knows, perhaps the fruit of our labour will see some real change of heart and real action by this government.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.06): I rise to support Ms Castley's motion. I thank Ms Castley and Mr Cain for their ongoing advocacy in this space. Ms Castley's advocacy shows the importance of lived experience and how that can drive change.

Coercive control is a pattern of controlling behaviour used by a perpetrator to establish and maintain control over another person. It is often an underlay of domestic and family violence and intimate partner violence, as we have all heard. Coercive control is more than a single act; it is an ongoing and repeated pattern of behaviour used to control or dominate another person. It can include physical and non-physical behaviour such as acts of intimidation, threats and humiliation. Coercive control has been exacerbated by technology and it has helped abusers to gain, regain and sustain power over the other person.

Having both lived and professional experience, I know the significant challenges in identifying coercive control. The National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children (2022-2032) recognises coercive control as a key area of focus for addressing gender-based violence in Australia. However, widespread national reporting on coercive control is currently limited, and this has been highlighted as critical information in assisting in addressing this issue.

Australia has a magnificent cultural diversity, but this means many Australians are influenced by different cultures and religious values. Some Australians follow religious teachings that guide roles in relationships, and some Australians have cultural practices around matriarchal, patriarchal or kinship structures that involve cultures that may be considered inappropriate to the broader Australian community.

Human nature is complex, and each of us should have the right to decide what we consider acceptable in our relationship with others. For most of us, full control over our lives is fundamental to who we are. However, it is important to recognise that many may choose to surrender control, or some parts of control, of their lives to someone they trust. In many families, the structure will be that someone generally looks after the finances or is considered the first responder for issues with the children. This is not coercive control, but a conscious decision on what makes the family and the individual unique.

The challenge for all societies is where we draw the line on what is acceptable. There is, as is appropriate, considerable debate about where this line should be drawn. As the minister has mentioned, there are some limited provisions in the Family Violence Act 2016 relating to coercive control, specifically related to sexual coercive behaviour,

section 8(2)(a), and economic abuse of family at section 8(3). However, stakeholder groups are concerned about the adequacy of these provisions as they fail to address various forms of abuse, including monitoring, threats, emotional manipulation and other controlling behaviour.

As has been mentioned by various members who have spoken to this issue, other jurisdictions, particularly New South Wales, are well ahead of the ACT in having these conversations. As has also been highlighted, in New South Wales they had a two-year consultation process leading up to the implementation of specific coercive control legislation. The New South Wales legislation has now been in place for six months and data on the effectiveness of the legislation is starting to come in. The framework of the New South Wales legislation includes a process of ongoing consultation and evaluation of measures to respond to coercive control so that work remains ongoing to improve responses to coercive control. So there is some framework that we can work to. I also note that New South Wales is now able to produce a coercive control monitoring report, which shows numbers and identifies trends and locations where coercive control is prevalent. This will help New South Wales better target responses to this pernicious issue.

As set out in Ms Castley's motion, law reform in this area must balance the need to protect victims with safeguards to uphold due process, ensuring that laws are clear are enforceable, and do not inadvertently criminalise ordinary relationship disputes and misunderstandings. It is important that a coercive control response strategy is holistic and contains improved support and resources for victims, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, which are likely to be disadvantaged by any unintended consequences. It is important that we have a legal framework that empowers law enforcement to intervene in extreme cases where education and support mechanisms are unable to resolve complaints or concerns. It is important that we have a legal framework that sets out society's expectations and that can act as a deterrent, complemented by education, as has been indicated, advocacy and enhanced law enforcement training to identify our response to coercive control.

I share the frustrations of the community sector that the government has, to my knowledge, never commenced any kind of consultation or scoping exercise to consider law reform in this area. I know that in the past we had an expert panel appointed to provide regular progress reporting back to the Attorney-General and that the ACT Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Council discussed this some years ago. The community sector is ready and keen to work with government to develop a best practice framework supported by legislation to respond to coercive control.

I also understand the nervousness that there is in some areas about legislation which could be subjective. However, we cannot continue to put this issue in the too-hard basket. We are sophisticated enough to find the right settings and balance and to mitigate any risk or unintended consequences. It is time to get serious about this issue. I strongly commend this motion and thank Ms Castley again for bringing this motion to the Assembly. Again, I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.13): It is vitally important that we take any opportunity we can to talk about coercive control because, by its very nature, it is conduct that thrives in secrecy. The more light we can shine on problematic patterns of

behaviour designed to covertly disempower and control a person, the more power we give to those subjected to it to know what they are experiencing is not acceptable and, to the community, to know what signs to look out for.

We know coercive control is almost always an underpinning dynamic of domestic and family violence and that domestic and family violence claims the lives of more than 100 people in Australia every year and causes enduring damage to individuals and to society. I know there are people in this place and listening online who are living with or have lived through these harms and, on behalf of the ACT Greens, we acknowledge your experiences.

I welcome Ms Castley's motion being brought today so we can come together to condemn coercive control. We all agree that it is wrong to create fear in another and deny their liberty and autonomy through acts over a period of time, that it has a devastating impact on so many aspects of the victim-survivor's life and, at its most extreme, it is behaviour that can escalate to homicide.

There is, I think, some difference of views on the speed at which criminalisation should happen, without commensurate funding increases to support the frontline domestic and family violence sector, who will be called on to support their clients, and better and increased training for responders like police. It is so important that, first and foremost, we listen to the sector and victim-survivors and are led by their experience. It is important to remember that early consultation with key justice and community stakeholders, when the Liberals proposed a coercive control bill last year, identified a range of risks associated with immediate criminalisation. These risks included the significant risk of negatively impacting vulnerable communities and the need for additional training and education on identifying coercive control.

My position, supported by many stakeholders in the domestic and family violence sector, is that criminalising coercive control as a standalone offence in the absence of more funding for the sector and better education and training for the police will not actually help people experiencing coercive control. I am pleased to have raised these issues as part of this discussion and see them reflected in the amendment being moved today.

We know that a key risk of criminalising coercive control without improving our police training is the increased criminalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors and women with a disability, through misidentification of perpetrators. One stakeholder told me that their key concern with coercive control legislation is misidentification of the primary aggressor because of institutional racism in police. Another organisation told me it supports a number of women—Aboriginal women and women from non-Anglo backgrounds—who have been misidentified. I noted the figures that the minister shared in her remarks today of the experience in Victoria, and I recall from my conversations with the Victorian Attorney the very significant focus they were putting on that because of the sorts of figures that Dr Paterson provided today.

I have heard from women who have called police to report a breach of a protection order and also women who have called police after being assaulted, who present—and quite rightly as you would in such a frightening situation—as being heightened and upset to the attending police officer. In that difficult moment, the officer looks at the

situation in front of them—the seemingly erratic, emotional person—compares that to the calm and sensible person and can in those circumstances accept the advice given by the latter. We need to have police who understand what coercive control looks like, how victims of it can act and how perpetrators can act and how to look for patterns. It is sad but true that we hear from stakeholders that police are ill-equipped to identify even family and domestic violence offences when they have happened.

One stakeholder told me that an officer did not charge a perpetrator with a family violence assault because he was not sure that the situation required it. This was problematic because it was a case of a husband physically assaulting his wife. I have also heard stories from the sector about police inaction when they are presented with evidence about breaches of protection orders. In one case, police attended a location where a man was breaching a protection order, the female was upset and had called the police and, instead of moving on the man, the police cautioned the woman and left the man at the property.

In citing these examples, I am not seeking to cast aspersions on police. I think these are incredibly difficult and volatile situations. The observation I am trying to make is that the challenge of being human beings in those circumstances is that people are not always clear or do not have the right training to know how to act. The experience of the sector is that it is hard to trust that police will be able to accurately identify perpetrators if a new offence is created, when they cannot do so now within the current legislative framework.

I would really like to see a lot more police engagement in training with the sector. They must also be resourced to improve their systems to better track, monitor, respond to and escalate patterns of behaviour, instead of responding reactively to discrete events that occur in isolation. We need to prioritise a coordinated approach to promote cultural and attitudinal change. Most importantly, we need to ensure that the protection of victim-survivors is at the forefront of any reform.

I am aware that other jurisdictions have decided to criminalise coercive control as part of their strategy to address the insidious nature of domestic and family violence. The laws in New South Wales have only been in effect for a matter of months. I have heard that in New South Wales, while police are starting to charge the offence, they are not getting convictions or it is getting rolled into other charges when it gets to the Director of Public Prosecutions. The ACT has the opportunity to learn from the implementation of those laws.

In both New South Wales and Queensland, extensive multiyear consultation processes preceded law reform. In Scotland, the consultation and co-design period took around five years. Critically, legislation that was introduced in other Australian jurisdictions has been accompanied by significant resources to support implementation, including police. In these jurisdictions there has been a focus on educating police, and this is being done in partnership with frontline service sectors.

Passing the kind of motion or bill suggested by the Liberals without consideration of resourcing implementation is an ongoing frustration of the sector in Canberra. Indeed, if the government reports back to the Assembly with legislation but without any accompanying increase in funding to support its operationalisation, the legislation will

have been designed to fail and will do a disservice to people who experience coercive control, the domestic and family violence sector, and even the police, who will not be adequately able to enforce it.

While there are no doubt excellent police officers who are skilled and highly capable, these kinds of examples reported by key stakeholders, who have day-to-day experience in managing these issues, do give me cause for concern. At the moment, the sector's experience is that our police are incapable of responding appropriately to matters which are covered by current laws. So we have to really ask ourselves the question: are we ready to give them additional powers? Legislation can be impactful but it means nothing and can in fact be harmful if not enforced and implemented properly.

We are fortunate in the ACT to have a domestic and family violence sector that is steered by formidable advocates who understand deeply their clients' needs and work daily with agencies like the police and know their strengths and also the areas for improvement. The Greens will always seek to listen to the experience of the sectors impacted by changes proposed in this place. They are the experts who are dealing with it on a day-to-day basis. I look forward to the government reporting back in six months, having undertaken a review, and I make clear my expectation that this consultation should include key and varied stakeholders, such as the Domestic Violence Crisis Service and Women's Legal Service but many others as well. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the domestic and family violence sector, in its broad forms, the tireless efforts of victims' advocates and frontline service providers who spend their days listening to victim-survivors and working with them and our service systems to get victims the protection and support they need.

Turning to the specifics of today's debate, I was a little taken aback when Ms Castley suggested that the Greens' position on this issue in previous debates had been determined by our role in the government. On such an important issue, I do find that an incredibly patronising, inaccurate and disappointing comment. It is such an important issue; of course, we think carefully about it. The bottom line in this debate and this discussion, though, has been that there are really different views, and there are different views amongst the stakeholders. People I really respect, people I talk to as often as I can, actually have different views on this. It has not been a black-and-white discussion. So, to make that sort of comment, frankly, was most unfortunate.

The Greens have never said no to legislating on this matter. We are trying to think carefully about the best way to do it in light of feedback we have received, and that feedback has been mixed, I have had stakeholders who, as I say, I really respect saying we should do this right now and others who say that, if we do it now, it will have all the unintended consequences which I have spoken about in my remarks. So that is challenging.

Turning to the specifics of the proposed amendment, we will be supporting Dr Paterson's amendment. Despite Mr Cain's comments, I think it is actually very true to Ms Castley's original motion. I think it has really picked up points. I have watched the way it has evolved over the last two days, and I think everyone has worked hard to try and get a good outcome here. I really want to share that with the Assembly, because I think it reflects a positive and constructive discussion that people are trying to work through a tricky issue.

I particularly want to touch on a couple of points, and ones that we have particularly brought to the discussion that we are focused on. The amendment calls to conduct a review of legislation relating to the criminalisation of coercive control nationally; to assess implementation, effectiveness and identify any gaps; assess the ACT's current framework insofar as it captures coercive control; and introduce legislation informed by the review. I think this is really important. We are not the first to do this—and Ms Castley has expressed her frustration about that. But the opportunity we do have is to watch what is happening in other jurisdictions and learn from both, I guess, the strengths and potentially weaknesses of what their approach has been.

Particularly importantly for the Greens is paragraph 3(b) in the “calls on”, “to enhance support and resources for people experiencing coercive control and improve awareness of, and responses, to coercive control in the ACT community.” I have touched on this point and also paragraph (e), which is to “increase the capacity of frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services to respond to coercive control and to improve the provision of training and education to police and other justice agencies, including the judiciary, in relation to coercive control.” In our minds, these are the fundamental first steps. If we do these things and we do them well, I think we will then be in a great position to bring in legislation that then empowers those agencies to use those skills, to use that capability and to use legislation effectively.

I note the timeline of reporting back to the Assembly within six months and at that point outlining a timeline for legislation. I think where we have landed is actually a strong package that says, “Get on with these things that we need to do now and resource them properly; enable the various agencies to do their job well; and start thinking about what that legislation is going to look like down the line.” I think that is the best way to approach this. That is why we are very happy to support this amendment today. I am grateful to colleagues for what I think has been a really interesting discussion in the background. I think that this Assembly can land this in a way that can work really well for the benefit of our community.

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) (4.26): I thank Ms Castley for bringing this motion, and I recognise her work in this space, including the legislation that she brought last year, the careful way that she has been thinking about it and leading within her party, and how important that is. I think right across this chamber there is a bit of a unity ticket here in that we know we need to do more in this space and we know that legislation is part of the solution to that. But, as is often the way, we have different approaches to the mechanisms through which we are going to go about that. I want to acknowledge Ms Castley's very personal experiences in this space and also the presence of her mum as we work through this very important and very difficult conversation.

To perhaps summarise the contributions around the amendment that Minister Paterson has brought is the fact that legislative intent and legislative application, while we hope that they are in line, often can be different. A gap between intent and application—particularly when we are talking about instances of violence, complex contexts and long histories and patterns which might not be well understood—can have incredibly dire and unintended consequences. That is why I think all of us wish to engage in this so

carefully. It is why I agree with Mr Rattenbury that the amendment to the motion contains an airing of those concerns and why we want to go through this in a methodical way. I acknowledge, though, that we do have a starting point and that Ms Castley's work what she presented last year is a base from which we can work, and I thank her for the effort she took in doing that.

In explaining my position, and what I am trying to summarise as the positions, I will draw heavily from Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety research report in 2020 which, in summary, explains that legislation alone is not enough and that officers throughout the justice system and the community support sector need to be able to assess patterns of coercive control that would detect which party is the perpetrator and which is acting in self-defence or violent resistance.

I acknowledge that ACT Policing do an amazing job and in very difficult circumstances. and that there are multiple and competing pressures that they are under when responding to an incident. The priority for police, necessarily, is making an incident safe, and usual police practice is about determining who is the aggressor in that situation. But one of the issues that I think everyone in this space has touched on today is that any perpetrators of coercive control, of family and domestic violence, are not only incredible manipulators of the family environment, the home environment or their partner but also incredibly good at manipulating the system—for example, employing image management strategies such as calling the police first or being calm and very reasonable when police arrive. Also, as mentioned, the response might be violent but it is violent resistance from the person who is actually a victim or acting in self-defence or in simply trying to claim some of their self back in very difficult circumstances. That misidentification then can have such far-reaching consequences by not being identified as a victim, not being able to then receive support and being labelled the perpetrator.

The Queensland Domestic and Family Violence Death Review and Advisory Board review into cases of female deaths sparked this further work by ANROWS. That review found that, in just under half of all cases of female deaths subject to the review, the woman had been identified as a respondent to a domestic and family violence protection order on at least one occasion—almost half—and in nearly all of the domestic and family violence-related deaths of Aboriginal people, the deceased had been recorded as both respondent and aggrieved prior to their death. That indicates a very large number of victims who are being recorded as perpetrators, and the system is then responding to them as perpetrators with the usual system responses. That can include them not being identified as a victim but being criminalised and, indeed, being refused bail.

We know that one of the reasons that an increasing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are being remanded in custody is them being misidentified as offenders of family and domestic violence. We know that the rates of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls is incredibly high. So it then stands that, if there are so many incidents that police are responding to and misidentification is occurring, we are seeing some incredibly poor outcomes that have consequences that can go on for the rest of someone's life in those instances.

The report concludes that the gap between intention and application of legislation is largely due to a lack of comprehension of key concepts and certainty about procedural expectations, organisational practices and culture. I think it is those elements that we

are trying to address through this amendment: that legislation is a part of this—it absolutely is; we are all in agreement on that—but we need to approach it carefully and we do need to approach it holistically. I believe that that is what this amendment does, and I hope that we are able to reach a good conclusion on this very difficult matter today.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.35): I was in two minds about speaking on this today. I am probably going to seem a bit impatient because, frankly, I am impatient to see this problem fixed. The reason I am impatient and the reason I was in two minds about speaking on this is that, throughout the entire time we have been talking about this, I have been watching it unfold, and it is intolerable for me to watch more people subjected to a situation where they are being controlled, where you can see the path that they are on, and all you can do is talk and say, “You have to get out”—because sometimes it is not that simple.

I am not going to speak for long, but I will say that it is time for the government to really remember that there are people at the heart of this issue, and it is absolutely essential that we get on in spite of the challenges of definitions and processes. There are people who are suffering at the end of the day, people who are at risk of the worst possible consequences, and we need to get this legislation done.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (4.36): In closing, I would like to thank everybody for your contribution today. It, obviously, has touched a nerve. There is just so much to say. The first amendment that I saw this morning had removed any thought of criminalising coercive control—actual measures. It removed it and minimised it to “consider” again, which is what we did eight months ago. Then, this afternoon, after amazing soul-searching, it has now changed to criminalising coercive control and committing to that.

I am very grateful and thank the members who have worked to get it to this point. I do not understand why the minister could not have just agreed with my motion as it was written, because most of it was definitions and things like that that have been added here. Of course, we will be supporting this today. It is a good day.

I have heard a lot of speeches—I have pages of hand-scrawled notes from the debate this afternoon—that talked carefully about unintended consequences. But, along with Mr Cocks, my question is: why are we eight months down the track when we could have done this eight months ago and been that much further down the track? Yes, it is hard and, yes, unintended consequences are concerning, but Tasmania has had this legislation since 2005. There are some lessons that could have been learnt there, I am sure. The bill that was drafted that we brought to the Assembly last term was aligned with New South Wales. Sure, there are things to have considered, but the minister back then said, “We have to commit to go slow—education before legislation.” Of course, education must be part of this. But eight months ago we could have still been at this point today.

However, I am not going to complain. I am very thrilled that we are here, and I am thrilled that Minister Paterson has changed her tune with regard to the amendment that she brought forward this afternoon, compared to the one I saw this morning. I will just reiterate: Queanbeyan is 20 minutes down the road. We really need to move in lock-step

at times with them, and step up and make these changes. So it is a load off today, I have to say. This is a great moment for Canberrans, and I am thrilled that we are on track to criminalise coercive control. Again, I would like to thank Mr Cain for his work and I thank all of the members today. This is a win for Canberra. Thank you very much.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Legislative Assembly—ministerial staff—update

Pursuant to Standing order 213A and the resolution of the Assembly of 6 March 2025, the Clerk presented the following paper:

Ministerial staffing expenditure—Order to table—Copy of statement of response from the ACT Chief Minister—Breakdown of ministerial staffing expenditure for the current financial year and last five financial years.

Woden town centre—working group—establishment

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.40): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) the Woden Town Centre has undergone dramatic physical and demographic change over recent years, with the construction of dozens of high-density apartment towers;
 - (b) there has been a significant loss of sport and recreation facilities from the Woden Town Centre including the basketball stadium, bowling greens, bowling alley, tennis courts, YMCA gym, pitch and putt, and the outdoor 50 metre Phillip pool and ice rink which are planned to close;
 - (c) public transport services within the Woden Town Centre have been reduced, with no services currently providing access to the supermarkets, health centre and library located on the western side of the town centre;
 - (d) there is serious traffic congestion within the Woden Town Centre, with long queues affecting Corrina Street and often backing onto Melrose Drive;
 - (e) the community has reported growing anti-social behaviour around the Woden Town Centre, including the burning of a car within the Melrose Drive underpass which has led to the closure for many months of this critical pedestrian and cycling access point; and
 - (f) homeless people are sleeping rough in and around the Woden Town Centre;
- (2) further notes that the:
 - (a) new campus of the Canberra Institute of Technology is due to open this year to deliver education and training to 6,500 students; and
 - (b) the lack of holistic, coordinated planning has contributed to a significant decline in community amenity in the Woden Town Centre; and

- (3) calls on the ACT Government to establish a cross-directorate working group by June 2025 to identify opportunities to improve the town centre, including its adjacent residential communities, incorporating a holistic view of the physical, business and social aspects of the Woden Town Centre, including:
 - (a) articulating the direction of future land uses, major transport networks, open space and activity centres within the precinct, including highlighting opportunities for the planning system to support social and economic activity;
 - (b) in consultation with the community, identify sites for an aquatic centre, indoor sports stadium and arts centre to meet the needs of the growing community in the town centre's large catchment;
 - (c) identifying improvements to the pedestrian, vehicle, public transport and social connectivity within and through the town centre that will be required to meet the current and future needs of the community;
 - (d) enhancing the tree canopy and biodiversity through the Woden Town Centre and surrounding areas, particularly Yarralumla Creek;
 - (e) coordinating with the development of the Southern Gateway Planning Framework; and
 - (f) provide a progress report to the Assembly by the last sitting day of 2025.

The Woden town centre was built to service both Woden and Weston Creek. If you combine the population of Woden and Weston Creek, it is greater than the population of the inner north, yet there is not a single public art centre or indoor sports stadium, unlike in the inner north—unless, of course, you count the graffiti wall in the concrete drain which was Yarralumla Creek.

Cities are about the people that live in them. Within our city, town centres are identified for the provision of larger facilities and services—hubs where people can live, work and play. These hubs are important for the health and wellbeing of people. They provide places for people to meet, leading to reduced social isolation. The ACT Wellbeing Framework states that:

Wellbeing is about how we are doing, as individuals, as a community, and as a place to live.

What does community mean? Are we one community and we all go to the city, or is Canberra made up of many communities—geographic, sporting, cultural—with local friends and a sense of belonging to a local community?

The 2023 Woden district strategy introduced Woden with the following statement:

Woden District is located towards the southern part of the city. While the district has a relatively small population, it contains the Woden town centre, which is a major hub for employment, community facilities and transport for Canberra's south side. Canberra Hospital in Garran is another significant employment location.

Even the planning documents identify the town centre as a major hub for Canberra's south. It is time to treat it that way, to collaborate and to get better outcomes. It is on the backbone of our north-south public transport alignment. Buses hub in from all the

Weston Creek suburbs because it is their town centre too. Bus services are also available from the inner south and Molonglo, and rapids move through the town centre from Tuggeranong on their way to the city. Woden is the CBD of the south and accessible.

While it is a good town centre, it could be terrific with a bit of planning. Planning starts with population forecasts. But the current Treasury forecasts are out of date, with massive population growth in the north and much smaller growth in the south. This is inconsistent with the new district strategies, which find that Woden has future housing potential of an additional 21,000 to 23,500 dwellings. The Woden town centre will service over 80,000 people in the surrounding five-kilometre catchment.

Sadly, the government have chosen to use old, dodgy forecasts about population, and not the ones in their new planning strategy, in order to justify reducing the pool from 50 metres to 25 metres. While Woden should be a thriving, active hub, community facilities have closed, forcing people to drive to other districts for social and recreational amenity, often to the “golden triangle”, which is well-serviced with higher education, cultural and recreational facilities. This is Bruce through to Dickson and through to the lake. Many residents are concerned about the lack of planning in Woden and want to see integrated planning that balances the residential towers, commercial areas and jobs, public green spaces and community facilities.

It is well-documented that stronger social connections benefit your mental health. Catching up with people, doing something you love like art or getting physical activity at the local stadium with some social time afterwards is a great way to keep physically and mentally healthy. We all know that. So why haven't our facilities been replaced as the population grows? The basketball stadium, bowling greens, tennis courts and YMCA with the gym were sold to developers and have been replaced with seven towers. The pool and ice rink are to be replaced with five towers and the pitch-and-putt will become six towers. That is 18 towers on our recreation precinct.

The opening of the new CIT could help; however, as the Chief Minister said in 2016 in his Statement of Ambition:

Cities don't succeed by accident or by leaving things to chance—they require design, good governance and great collaboration.

We need to leverage the benefits of the CIT. But, to do that, we need to collaborate. We need to make the area a destination so the private sector is enabled to establish business. The extent of the planning is, “The tram, the CIT and the towers will bring activity”! The Youth Foyer, which provides a home for 20 young people to keep them in education, is a great facility but is located in the core of Woden with blank walls and an electrical substation where active fronts should be. What will the 6,500 students do for fun, when they are in the middle of two very large gaming clubs and Westfield? We need social infrastructure to support the students and our community.

Going back to the ACT Wellbeing Framework, the proportion of Canberrans reporting low wellbeing increased from 17.6 per cent in late 2021 to 25 per cent in 2023, and the decline in wellbeing has been disproportionately affecting some groups: those aged 18 to 29, those born overseas, and women. Now is the time to tie together planning and wellbeing and fix the Woden town centre, made even more urgent as we are about to

have an influx of students aged 18 to 29.

Let us run through how we stack up to other major hubs across Canberra. While all other centres across Canberra are zoned for lower building heights in the core to allow sun in for activity, Woden is different. Woden is zoned for 12 to 28 storeys, with the 28 storeys around the core, right on the perimeter of the town square, causing overshadowing and wind tunnels. Minister Steel would rely on the private sector to do the right thing by the community when zoning is for 28 storeys, and no doubt there are dollar signs in their eyes. Why put the directorate through the pain of a DA? Just fix the zoning.

There are many empty commercial areas, particularly at the bottom of the new towers, and, again, the town square has empty fronts, no coffee shops or other hospitality. We have been asking for many years for an entertainment precinct in Woden. We have around 35 towers either built or in the planning phase. How will you retrofit an entertainment precinct and manage noise complaints? In what decade will you address our concerns?

We are very pleased about the new CIT, which replaces the previous one which was demolished to make way for a car park for the hospital. However, it comes with no student parking. More double standards! Why do ACT public servants get car parks while students do not? The planning directorate in Dickson, which is on the light rail alignment, has around 285 underground car parks, and the newest building next to the Legislative Assembly, on the bus line, has three levels of basement parking. That is not fair for the students.

The lack of activity and people in the core of the town centre enables antisocial behaviour, and many people feel unsafe in the area. We need to spread the social infrastructure across Canberra because, unfortunately, most of it is located in the golden triangle.

To be clear about the golden triangle, Lyneham has the netball centre, the hockey centre and the tennis centre. Belconnen has the basketball stadium, which is being expanded. UC wants a large indoor stadium for its sports program, and AIS is being upgraded. That is where the Capitals play. These three facilities are all within five kilometres of each other.

The Murrumbidgee electorate does not have an indoor sports stadium. The government will tell us that we can use our schools for indoor sports. Why don't the Chief Minister and the Minister for Sport and Recreation tell their communities to use their school halls? Our Dodgers Basketball Club is scattered across six school halls and a church hall. How do kids get there for training after school, and how does the club build its community? Our volleyball club also needs a stadium for its teams.

It breaks my heart when kids tell me they do not play sport because it is too difficult to get there. That is what town centres are for, so that they can catch the local bus to their stadium. Yes, we have two ovals in Phillip, and you are upgrading the Phillip enclosed oval. However, it will be gated, like Phillip Oval, and people cannot go there to kick a footy unless they are training with a club.

Let us look at arts centres. I note that 29 organisations will receive funding from the ACT government, as outlined in Minister Pettersson's ministerial statement this morning. I wonder whether any of them are in the Murrumbidgee electorate. Of the 15 government-owned arts facilities listed on the artsACT website, 12 are in Kurrajong, two are in Belconnen and there is one in Tuggeranong. Kurrajong is the luckiest, with the Watson Arts Centre, the Ainslie Arts Centre, Gorman Arts Centre, the Street Theatre, the Manuka arts precinct, the Canberra Contemporary Art Space in Manuka, the Kingston arts precinct, with the Glassworks, Glassworks Chapel, Fitters Workshop, and the Megalo Print Studio and Gallery in the former transport depot. In addition, there are the Canberra Theatre and CMAG in the city. Not only does the Kurrajong electorate have most of the arts facilities; it also gets most of the funding for arts organisations.

We will be told that Gungahlin is getting a community centre, and that perhaps it will have arts facilities. We will be told about the commitment to build a home for the Woden Community Service, who provide services for vulnerable Canberrans. The new building will have some meeting rooms where we can have art workshops. I am sure you can tell what I think about that second-rate solution.

What is the pipeline of projects? You might think that Murrumbidgee would get some cultural and recreational investment, to bring some activity to the area and provide places where people can come together to enjoy social connection—one of the ACT Wellbeing Framework indicators. However, in the annual report hearings on 12 February 2025, the Minister for Economic Development, Chief Minister Barr, told us that he only looks after the projects on his list for the coordination and planning of strategic economic development infrastructure and projects. On the list, we have the Canberra Casino, Canberra Theatre Centre, Commonwealth Park aquatic centre, the convention and entertainment centre, Exhibition Park redevelopment, a new Canberra stadium, Telstra tower, Thoroughbred Park, elite sporting performance and venue agreements, and international education. While it is good to see that investment in the National Arboretum and Stromlo Forest makes the list, I cannot help thinking this is more about tourists than locals.

This brings me to the universities. I was very disappointed that the new campus for the University of New South Wales was not located in Woden, opposite the hospital. However, there was a benefit gained from giving the Reid site to the University of New South Wales, because we got a new CIT to replace our previous one.

The north has all of the universities—UC, ANU, ACU and ADFA, and I have heard that the AIE wants to be a uni. The new campus for the University of New South Wales presented an opportunity to create a health, recreation and sports precinct in Woden, but it did not even register on the Chief Minister's radar.

We know he is considering declaring an area in Bruce as an urban renewal precinct to support his ambitions for a sports, health, education and research precinct in Bruce, taking advantage of the strengths of the University of Canberra and the Canberra Institute of Technology. We miss out again, even though the tertiary hospital for south-east New South Wales is located in Woden and we need the benefits of higher education and sports. Where are the plans for a spread of cultural and recreational community facilities across Canberra? There needs to be a balance between infrastructure for the nation and tourists, and local communities.

I will share a bit of history. The 2004 master plan for Woden was okay, but things have deteriorated since then. In 2007, the then planning minister—now Chief Minister—rezoned our recreation precinct from an entertainment, accommodation and leisure precinct to a commercial precinct. When the then planning minister, Minister Barr, presented the government’s response to variation 259 in 2007, which was all about the private sector providing Woden’s community facilities, he said:

Providing specifically identified community sites may limit or diminish funding opportunities and remove the potential for cross-subsidisation and partnerships between community and other commercially oriented activities.

He left the delivery of recreational facilities in Woden to chance, to the private sector.

In 2007, Mr Ponton briefed the then Minister for Planning, Minister Andrew Barr, about the options for ownership of the Phillip pool. Minister Barr chose to sell the site, with future development requiring a 50-metre pool and an ice rink. These conditions were removed with the approval of the new Territory Plan in 2023. The site was sold to Geocon for high-yield development.

Chief Minister Barr responded to a letter that I wrote in 2018 by saying that community facilities may be developed within the commercial land uses that exist in the Woden town centre, and that the master plan recommended that new community facilities be delivered as part of a mixed-use development, rather than a standalone facility.

Community feedback on the master plan was that people wanted community facilities. The developers have not provided us with a new indoor sports stadium or an arts centre, and I would hazard a guess that it is because they do not make money from them. I would have hoped that Chief Minister Barr could also have worked that out over the last 20 years. Most of the towers have pools and, when Phillip pool has been closed, we have been told that local kids are breaking into the private pools in the towers for a swim. Come on; give them a decent 50-metre public pool.

The community has written to the government with their concerns for the last 20 years and has been fobbed off consistently by the Chief Minister and his ministers. The policy for the commercial sector to provide our community facilities has failed. The government will receive the lease variation charge and rates from apartments in 18 towers that are on the land that was our recreation precinct. The Woden community and Murrumbidgee electorate have had enough, and need some of this money to come back in the form of new, publicly funded cultural and recreation facilities. When I asked the government about intergenerational equity, I was told that young people will use the tram and the hospital, so they can help to pay for it. (*Extension of time not granted.*)

Standing orders—suspension

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (4.56): I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Ms Carrick from being granted an extension of time.

I will speak briefly to the motion. Ms Carrick, clearly, was just about to finish. To deny

her the ability to finish is petulant. It is typical of this government, which just wants to ride roughshod over members who are trying to have their say. Ms Carrick does not have long to go. She should be allowed to finish.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (4.57): We are all subject to the same rules in this place. In fact, Mr Cain denied a minister the opportunity to have an extension of time earlier this week.

Mr Cain interjecting—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Cain, please refrain from interjecting.

MS CHEYNE: Ms Carrick will have an opportunity to close the debate and to speak on the amendments, so there are plenty of other opportunities for her to speak.

Question resolved in the negative.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Then the question is that Ms Carrick's motion be agreed to.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (4.58): I rise in support of Ms Carrick's motion. In doing so, I acknowledge her passion for the Woden town centre. I recall going around the Woden town centre with Ms Carrick, back when she was the Chair of the Woden Valley Community Council, and looking at the state of Woden. Sadly, although there have been some improvements, we have seen some further degradation. Certainly, the improvements that Ms Carrick and the Canberra Liberals have aspired to see in Woden have not come to fruition.

It is good that we are back here and talking about Woden. I am certainly happy to do so; equally, my colleagues are happy to do so, because Woden—there is no doubt about it—has been left behind. There has been a loss of amenity over many years. Ms Carrick and I have raised families in that area. I come from Weston Creek; she comes from close to Woden. It is meant to be the jewel of the south. Members from Tuggeranong may disagree, but it is really the heart of the south, as we see it; certainly, in terms of Murrumbidgee, it is the Woden town centre.

Over time, we have not seen the amenity coming along. A sports centre is something that we have both been passionate about. We have seen golf courses go. We have seen a lot of other amenity go from that area. There really has been a failure in planning in that place. The Canberra Liberals, at the last election, took forward some strong policies for the Woden town centre, including the establishment of a multifaceted sports centre, which would be integrated with a 50-metre pool. Because of the budget mismanagement of this mob, they are having to flog everything off, including amenities like the 50-metre pool, which is causing a lot of dissatisfaction in the Woden community.

Without anticipating Mr Steel's contribution to the debate, I note with interest his proposed amendment, which is classic from this Labor government. The amendment

that has been circulated talks about the corridor between the city and Woden Valley. This motion is about the Woden town centre. It is a very specific motion about the Woden town centre. This amendment talks about the corridor—what will be happening in West Basin, on Commonwealth Avenue, Adelaide Avenue, and down Yarra Glen. It is about his dream of high-rise all the way down through Yarralumla, Deakin and places like that.

It will be interesting to hear what he says, but I can indicate that we want to keep the focus here today, in this debate—and we support Ms Carrick in doing it—on the Woden town centre. Certainly, we will not allow this minister to distract from that debate and try to turn this into a debate about somewhere that is not even in Woden, having regard to many parts of that corridor.

The debate needs to be focused on Woden town centre, so we support what Ms Carrick is doing here. We will be supporting her motion, and we will not be supporting the amendment that has been circulated by the government.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.02): I welcome the opportunity to speak today to our government's record of delivery in Woden, and particularly the Woden town centre's renewal, and outline the investments that our government has made, and the commitments that we have made to continue to invest in and plan for the future of the Woden Valley and the town centre.

We have been making, and we will continue to make, significant infrastructure investment in the Woden town centre. In social and community infrastructure, of course, we are nearing completion of a brand-new, state-of-the-art CIT campus, which will support over 6,500 students, have a multipurpose hall for events, and have significant upgrades to the public realm, with new green spaces that simply did not exist before, and new public plazas that will be a fantastic addition to the town centre.

We have undertaken major upgrades at Woden library, with new recording studios, learning spaces and study spaces. It has been a welcome addition to our best-used library in the city. We will build a new community centre in the heart of Woden in which the Woden Community Service will make their home. It will also have a large multipurpose hall and spaces for community and arts organisations to come together and use. I note Ms Carrick's comment on that. I know she continues to say that it will not have that large space, but it actually will. That is part of the design for the centre. It was in the functional design brief for the project, which is now in the finance minister's remit.

In sports infrastructure, we have undertaken a significant upgrade to Phillip Oval to support our local AFL and cricket clubs. We will continue to invest in Woden Park, the premier athletics facility owned and operated by the ACT government. We have been upgrading the Phillip District Enclosed Oval, with a brand-new sports pavilion, to support our Rugby club. I disagree very strongly with the proposition that UNSW should have been built there, ruining that space for our local Rugby Union teams. As I have noted, they have protested in the past when that idea has been raised.

In public transport infrastructure, we are bringing light rail to Woden. It is a significant

and transformative investment for the town centre that will support thousands of Canberrans each day to commute to and from the town centre. A brand-new public transport interchange is under construction and near completion, which will be supported by the opening of a brand-new, all-electric Woden bus depot—the largest in the country.

We are doing all of this, and we have already been investing heavily in active travel, health and community infrastructure and sports facilities right across the Woden Valley. We have strong commitments that we brought to the election.

It is not a secret that there are more people living in the town centre than ever before. A significant amount of public and private investment has been made in Woden as a key mixed-use precinct, with housing for the first time in the town centre, which was part of our government's deliberate effort to make sure that it is a more vibrant place, particularly outside Westfield trading hours, and outside work hours of the public service employment there, so that it has vibrancy on the weekend as well.

More people are living in the town centre because it is where they want to live, close to quality public transport, shops and community facilities. The ACT Planning Strategy and the Woden Valley district strategy set out the strategic direction for planning for the city. The district strategy identifies principles for ongoing development in the town centre by improving streetscape amenity and built form, quality pedestrian spaces, improved tree canopy cover, introducing parks and play opportunities, and it seeks the continued activation of the Woden town square to be a central point for the community. The strategy also identifies principles of supporting community, sport and recreation and retail facilities, located prominently and at accessible locations.

More people living and working in the town centre will mean more work is needed to consider how we continue to make it an attractive place to live, with the services and facilities that can support the community. That is what planning is about. It will require a partnership between the ACT government, community clubs and organisations, and private investment. We welcome that collaboration.

At the election, ACT Labor made it clear that we will continue to work with Scentre Group, the owners of Westfield, and with other partners, to support the continued renewal of and investment in Woden town centre. We also committed to further planning to progress the needs and requirements for a public high school and indoor sports facilities, and we will continue to work with the community to make further improvements to public spaces across Woden.

The most significant town-centre-shaping project that we are delivering for Woden is light rail. Light rail represents a significant opportunity for continued renewal and further engagement with the community about what Woden should look like into the future.

As I have spoken about in this place before, the government is committed to bringing land use planning together with transport planning, as we seek to provide more housing and community infrastructure. That is the purpose of one of the key pieces of the ACT government's next stage of planning reform, through the development of the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework. The Southern Gateway Planning and

Design Framework focuses on the land along the light rail stage 2B corridor and will be modelled off the City and Gateway Urban Design Framework 2018, which set the principles for development and growth to accompany light rail stage 1.

The government will be supporting today's motion because there is already an established inter-agency advisory group for the southern gateway project, which is getting underway, including representatives of divisions across the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, Infrastructure Canberra, Transport Canberra and City Services—TCCS—the Education Directorate, CMTEDD, the Community Services Directorate and the Suburban Land Agency.

This group provides ongoing input into the investigations and planning for the framework, ensuring consideration of community and recreation facilities, open space, flooding and stormwater, walking and cycling connections, and the traffic and utility infrastructure required to enable us to seek opportunities alongside the light rail stage 2B corridor, in terms of improved land use and, of course, the rapid bus corridor from the Woden town centre south to the edge of Torrens and Farrer. This piece of work will pick up not only the Woden town centre but also the linear corridor along Athllon Drive. Further to this work, community engagement will occur over the coming year to inform the development of the framework and shape our city.

As this work is already being undertaken by the government, we will support the motion that Ms Carrick has put forward. This is not new thinking; it is the existing policy of the Labor government. I sat down with Ms Carrick to have a coffee, and we discussed this piece of work, the working group that was underway and the opportunities to bring together a whole range of different inputs across government, to make sure that the Woden town centre is a great place to live and that we support renewal of it.

We will go further, because we recognise the opportunity that exists, and we are ambitious not just for the town centre but for the whole Woden Valley, having regard to the opportunities that this work presents and the benefits that light rail will bring to this precinct in providing access to mass transport. That is why our Labor government will seek the support of the Assembly to amend this motion to consider the future declaration of the entire light rail corridor for stage 2B from the city through to the Woden Valley as an urban renewal precinct.

A declared urban renewal precinct is focused on encouraging and promoting a vibrant city through the delivery of design-led, people-focused urban renewal, and encouraging and promoting social and environmental sustainability. It provides development from a people-focused perspective, founded on the principles of good design and place making, and supports strengthened economic diversification. Investing in our city, progressing urban renewal, building more quality homes where people want to live: it is not just our ambition for Canberra; it is what I am committed to do every single day.

I end on this note: I am ambitious for Woden, and I welcome every opportunity to outline our ambition for it and share our record of delivery. There is, of course, always more work to do. Planning is not a "set and forget" process. I recognise this. Our Labor government will be relentless in pursuing our vision for the Woden Valley and for all of Canberra. The new Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework is the way to achieve it.

Consideration of an urban renewal precinct will also further strengthen and provide a pathway for the delivery of that vision, as we continue to undertake consultation with the community. We know that the Liberals are opposed to light rail. As Jeremy Hanson mentioned, they are also opposed to the renewal of the entire corridor.

I move the following amendment to Ms Carrick's motion:

After paragraph (3)(f), add new paragraph:

“(4) further calls on the Government to consider the declaration of an urban renewal precinct for the Light Rail Stage 2B corridor between the city and the Woden Valley.”.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that Mr Steel's amendment to Ms Carrick's motion be agreed.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.12): I move the following amendment to Mr Steel's proposed amendment:

After “Woden Valley”, add “including the Woden Town Centre”.

My amendment is a simple one. I want to make sure that the urban renewal precinct includes the Woden town centre, so my amendment simply adds “including Woden Town Centre” to the end, after “Woden Valley.”

Ms Carrick's amendment to **Mr Steel's** proposed amendment agreed to.

MR SPEAKER: The question now is that Mr Steel's amendment, as amended, be agreed to.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (5.13): I appreciate that Ms Carrick has improved the amendment from Mr Steel and tried to sort of draw it towards the Woden town centre. My concern here is that it is a different debate. We have come down here and the debate that has been addressed by Ms Carrick is about the Woden town centre. It is not actually a debate about the corridor between the City and Woden, which Mr Steel, through this amendment, is trying to turn it into. I think there is a lot of complexity to that and there are a lot of issues to be addressed. We need to consider what the implications would be with light rail and with what an urban renewal precinct would mean. We are talking about Deakin; we are talking about Yarralumla; we are talking about the stretch going all the way through down to the town centre, and I think that that needs a separate debate. I do not think that you can just bang that on at the end of this and say the government is going to declare it and then they can come back and say, “Well, back in the Assembly on 20 March we all agreed that the government could declare this or look into declaring it.” I think that this is disingenuous.

So if you want to have a debate about light rail and you want to have a debate about urban renewal along the corridor, that is good; bring it forward as a motion. Let us have that debate in the Assembly, but to tack it onto this motion is not something that the Canberra Liberals will support today, even though I accept that Ms Carrick has tried to address that. It is something that I do not think that we, as the Canberra Liberals, can

support because it is difficult for us to trust Mr Steel, to be frank. He will come in here and just tack something onto the back of a motion from Ms Carrick saying, “Trust us. We will just declare this as an urban renewal precinct.” What does he mean by that? We have seen the high rise that they are putting in the Woden town centre. Is that what he wants all the way along the corridor? Is that what he means by that? What is it that he means by that? There has been no explanation. There has been no debate. There has been no opportunity for people like Mr Cain as the shadow planning minister and others to say, “Well, let us engage with this and consult and discuss.”

We are happy to have that debate. We are happy to have that debate but come back into this place and do it substantively. Do not try and tack it onto the back of Ms Carrick’s motion. I accept that you are obsessed about the tram and you do not really care about Woden; you do not really care about the town centre; you do not really care about planning. We get that, but try and get your focus on that. Get it off the tram for once and actually address the substantive issue before us.

Ms Carrick’s amendment to Mr Steel’s proposed amendment agreed to.

Mr Steel’s amendment, as amended, agreed to.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.17): I am enjoying this new parliament.

Firstly, I want to thank Ms Carrick for bringing this motion forward and for working with me, and with many others in here, so that we could work together on this and really get to a good outcome, I think.

Woden Valley started out in the early sixties as the first new town built outside what we commonly call the inner north and inner south. It was originally planned as a discrete unit, but the development at Weston Creek increased the population to a level where Woden could support a larger town centre and provide better town facilities. The town centre sits in the floor of the valley, and it is the major hub for retail, employment, service, trades, recreation and community facilities and public transport servicing the south side of Canberra.

The town centre seems inward-looking in its design, oriented about a central town square which provides a focal point for the busy daytime activities. Around the square, there are sites for a post office, retail and private enterprise, offices and commercial buildings, a theatre and a church centre. The population of Woden and Weston Creek peaked in the mid to late 1970s, with around 63,000, but the last four censuses have shown the population of Woden continuing to grow, from 31,336 in 2001 to 39,279 in 2021. The combined Woden/Weston Creek population in 2021 was 63,909, close to that peak in the late 1970s, and Ms Carrick has run us through her take on the increasing population in this area.

Woden has a slightly older age profile than many of the other districts, but this is expected to change over time with demographic shifts, population growth and increases in higher density dwelling types. There is a town park, but that is to the east of the town centre, and other public spaces are limited and moveability from east to west is constrained. This broadly reflects the demographic changes that have occurred in Woden and other districts. We have seen population growth in the early years slowing

down as families grow and people move out, and through denser development, more people then come back to live in the area. This population growth has been facilitated to a large extent by the compact planning policies that have been in place for a number of years in Canberra. There has been a substantial increase in residential dwellings, both within and adjacent to the town centre, such as in Lyons. It is being facilitated by planning policies and by land releases.

The planning system review that commenced in 2019 envisaged each district having its own strategy and policy which would be used to shape future planning policies and development. There was engagement with the local community to discover what they valued about the district and how they wanted to see Woden developing in the future, including how to provide housing for Canberra's future population. It would be fair to say the district strategies are a decent start, reflecting what people in other areas said. People want natural space, livability and diversity of lifestyle choice. All of these are really highly valued. Housing is important, but there needs to be a balance between community, environment and economic needs.

The recent residential developments have transformed the Woden town centre. For many years, there were more carparks than there were buildings. This has changed—some would argue too rapidly and without adequate community infrastructure to go along with it. The commitment of light rail to the Woden town centre is a game-changer, not only for the local community but also for further urban opportunities as part of the southern gateway area. As has been seen with the first stage of light rail, other positive community benefits and changes can occur once light rail between Woden and Civic is up and running.

I believe the government is already undertaking a lot of the work outlined in Ms Carrick's motion but this is a really good opportunity to make sure that work is pulled together, that community consultation is embedded in that work, and that it is presented to the community in a way that they can understand and input into it. Establishing the working group offers that opportunity to provide the concentrated focus on the functioning of an area. Gathering data and evidence from a variety of sources will really help the government understand the issues in a different way and produce better urban outcomes and places, so the ACT Greens will be supporting this motion.

I have also circulated some amendments to this. I worked on these amendments with Ms Carrick and I think we have gotten to a good place. We have shifted around where the community consultation goes because, of course, that needs to go with every element so we have just put that up to the top of the motion. I have also popped in a couple of calls that tap into the notes that were already in Ms Carrick's motion, just to make sure that there is something meaningful to activate those. We want to make sure the residential towers that are developing are socially and environmentally sustainable and adapted to the changing climate. Also, really importantly, that there are services and places for those services to address homelessness, and that there is adequate public housing, community housing and affordable housing in the Woden town centre as it develops. These are all really important decisions to be making at the outset of development. If these issues are only grappled with after land releases have already taken place, after contracts have been signed, after development has happened, it is too late to retrofit it there. So I commend our amendments to the Assembly.

I seek leave to move multiple amendments together.

Leave granted.

MS CLAY: I move:

1. In paragraph (3), after “June 2025”, omit “to”, substitute “and in consultation with the community”.
2. In paragraph (3)(b), omit “in consultation with the community”.
3. After paragraph (3)(d), insert the following new paragraphs:
 - “(e) investigating residential towers in the Woden Town Centre to ensure they are socially and environmentally sustainable and well-adapted to the changing climate;
 - (f) reviewing current levels of homelessness and community sector support services and identifying sites for new homelessness and community services as part of the Woden Town Centre development;
 - (g) ensuring there are adequate sites available for public housing, for community housing and for affordable housing so people stay in their community if they wish to and there are affordable options for people moving into the area;”.

MR SPEAKER: The question now is that Ms Clay’s amendments be agreed to.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.22): I will speak briefly because Mr Hanson spoke on a few different matters about the Liberal Party’s position. From today’s debate in relation to the amendment that I have moved, and from the Liberals’ opposition to it, it is clear that they do not support urban renewal of Woden town centre. They do not support more housing for our community. They do not support the planning work that is getting underway to look at more community facilities for the town centre to support the growing number of residents that it will have in the future.

That is important work we need to engage with, and it is based on a well-supported document, which is the Inner North and City Gateway Strategy. This was a piece of work that was undertaken about the same time as light rail was being developed for stage 1, and it is still being realised over this time. It is a long-term vision for both the City and the corridor, just as the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework will be a plan for the Woden town centre and the corridor. It is an opportunity to, I think, make sure we have really good design principles for this space; making sure the current residents and the future residents maximise the benefits from the future infrastructure that they will have through mass transit light rail, but also to identify other supporting infrastructure that may be required. Hence the engagement with such a variety of different parts of government and then with the broader community around that.

Now, I am not surprised by the Liberals’ position on this, because they campaigned against more housing at the election. They campaigned against urban renewal in the Woden town centre at the election. I remember, years ago now, when Mr Hanson stood up—

Mr Cain: None of that is true.

MR STEEL: Well, I am happy to come and table the piece of election material that Mr Hanson was sending around at the election. It was a scare campaign, let us be honest about that. Let me correct Mr Hanson. We are not planning to build high-rise apartments along the corridor. The town centres are an appropriate place for that type of development. What I propose, and what I have already outlined in the ministerial statements that I have provided outlining the next stages of planning reform, is that we are interested in human-scale development for more housing, opportunities for mixed-use precincts, better pedestrian and cycle connections, opportunities to provide better access and enhance the green spaces—the wonderful green spaces that we have in the blue-green corridor—through the Woden Valley district. That is the opportunity that we have through this, that has been completely and utterly rejected by the Liberal Party today. It is part of their continued approach in relation to light rail where they oppose it; even before they have seen the business case, they oppose it. It is the same approach again today in relation to the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework. They are not even willing to consider what the outcomes of it are.

So to suggest that this needs another conversation—well, of course it does. It will be a conversation that we have with the community. You have already ruled out doing this in your election commitments and in the campaign that you did against urban renewal, and you just voted against the interests of your own electorate in relation to the amendment to declare this as an urban renewal precinct, which has already been undertaken on the stage 1 corridor from the City to Dickson.

We know the benefits of the declaration because it is a provision under the existing act for both the CRA and the SLA, and it provides the opportunity to capitalise on the planning work and design work that we will do through the Southern Gateway Planning Framework. So I think the Liberal Party Murrumbidgee members should hang their heads in shame about their position on Ms Carrick's motion today and the amendment. The amendment should be supported because this is about renewing this fantastic Woden town centre that has gone through a significant period of renewal but will, of course, require further investment, more housing in the future, more facilities and an opportunity to enhance the public spaces around them.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that Ms Clay's amendments be agreed to.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (5.27): I will speak to Ms Clay's proposed amendments. But, before I turn to that, I will just briefly respond to the nonsense and doublespeak from Mr Steel. He comes in here when I clearly said my concern was that his amendment distracts from the motion of Ms Clay which is about the urban renewal of the Woden town centre because Mr Steel's amendment talks about the corridor. That Mr Steel believes that talking about the corridor of light rail is somehow the Liberals opposing the renewal of the town centre is Orwellian. But that is what you get from Mr Steel. He says one thing and he does another.

This is the guy that said that conservative economics was voting himself a \$100 million slush fund today. That is conservative economics! This is the fellow, who said about the Yarralumla substation, "Trust us. We are going to consult so well on that." Have

you been down to London Circuit and spoken to the businesses about how consultation for light rail is going? Yes, yes: “Trust us.” I have spoken to a lot of businesses that said, “We have not heard from them. The consultation has been absolute rubbish.” But Mr Steel has the audacity to come this place and say it is all hunky-dory. So let me be very clear, because Mr Steel is deliberately trying to twist this debate: what we are concerned about is the distraction from what Ms Carrick has put forward which is about the renewal of Woden town centre. We support that. The Canberra Liberals have always supported that. Mr Cocks and I have been out with Ms Carrick. It is a joint position that we have, the Canberra Liberals are for that.

What we do not support is Mr Steel trying to sneak in a little amendment to try and turn this into a debate about the whole light rail corridor and what he wants to do about the light rail corridor and the substations. He said there will be no high-rise at all on that corridor. Do you believe him? Members, do we believe Mr Steel? “Mr Substation Steel” said there will be no high-rise. It is difficult to believe.

In closing there, I will be supporting Ms Clay’s amendments.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that Ms Clay’s amendments be agreed to.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.30): I appreciate the Assembly’s attention to this matter. Population growth and the increasing density within the town centre itself intensifies the need for community facilities and for coherent coordinated planning. I hope the urban renewal precinct improves this planning. The community that I represent is frustrated and disappointed with years of inaction from the ACT government in addressing the needs of the residents of the Woden town centre and the wider Woden Valley and Weston Creek district that it serves.

The community is also frustrated with the clear imbalance of facilities and government investment across Canberra. Elite sporting facilities and national cultural facilities are essential to Canberra’s role as the national capital and attract much needed economic activity, but it must be remembered that local communities need facilities too, and the balance between national facilities and community facilities needs to be reprioritised.

I hope that with the creation of the working group we will have better coordinated work across the directorates in relation to the town centre, and we can begin to achieve more joined-up planning and better outcomes for the people of Canberra South. I am supporting Mr Steel’s motion for an urban renewal precinct because right now the current planning is not people-focused. It has been about town cramming for the housing crisis. The urban renewal precinct should put—it does have it in the legislation—that it is people-focused planning. Mr Steel mentioned human scale and green spaces so I support that and let us get some human scale into the area and some people-focused planning.

Ms Clay’s amendments agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Statements by members

Trees—urban canopy

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.33): I have received a sad tree story from Jess in Rivett, who has given me permission to share it with you all:

In the back yard of a home in Rivett, there was a huge native ironbark tree. It had a 20-metre-wide canopy and was around 15 metres tall and at least 90 centimetres in diameter at breast height. Being on the western edge of Canberra, this tree would have lived through the 2003 bushfires.

Yesterday it was felled as our family watched on with sadness. In the 11 years we have lived close to this tree, we have observed it as a great asset and habitat for native birdlife at all stages. Bird species observed in its boughs include gang-gang cockatoos, silvereyes, tawny frogmouths, yellow-tailed black-cockatoos, sulphur-crested cockatoos, wattlebirds, magpies, currawongs and rosellas.

How is a tree of such significance approved for removal? This would have been a protected tree under the Urban Forest Act 2023. Even dead trees of this size are meant to be protected under the new act. Not only did it provide habitat and intrinsic value but trees this age will form crucial hollows 100 years before anything we plant now.

How will we reach 30 per cent canopy coverage and halt species loss when we let things like this happen?

Those were Jess's words; thank you Jess for sharing those. We look forward to some briefings on the Urban Tree Act review in the future.

Australian Tourism Awards—ACT finalists

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (5.34): Tomorrow evening a number of Canberra tourism operators will be representing our jurisdiction in the 2024 Australian Tourism Awards.

I would like to take the opportunity this afternoon to wish all the best to the following: Questacon in the major tourist attractions category; the National Dinosaur Museum in the tourist attractions category; the National Capital Authority's Drone SkyShow for the major festivals and events category; the National Arboretum in the ecotourism category; the Museum of Australian Democracy in the cultural tourism category; POP Canberra in the tourism retail, hire and services category; the Canberra and Region Visitor Centre in the visitor information services category; Hotel Realm in the business events venues category; Alivio Tourist Park in the caravan and holiday parks category; Jamala Wildlife Lodge in the unique accommodation category; Midnight Hotel,

Autograph Collection in the four to four-and-a-half star deluxe accommodation category; the Local Village Markets in the excellence in food tourism category; and, finally, the National Arboretum Canberra, who have been nominated to represent the territory in the excellence in accessible tourism category.

All of those tourism entities have worked incredibly hard, and I wish them all the very best at the national awards tomorrow night.

West Belconnen Warriors Rugby League Football Club

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.36): I rise to speak about the 50th anniversary of the West Belconnen Warriors Rugby League Football Club, a milestone celebrating five decades of dedication, community and sporting excellence, and promoting the wonderful game of rugby league, which I played very badly in my younger years. Since its founding in 1975, the Warriors have been at the heart of the West Belconnen sporting community, nurturing local talent and building a proud legacy in rugby league.

On Saturday, 15 March, I had the privilege of joining past and present players, supporters and the wider community at the Canberra Rex Hotel for this incredible celebration, and I was fortunate to be able to spend at least the first half with that community. The night featured nice chats with past players, a fascinating display of memorabilia, and the highly anticipated announcement of the Team of the 50 Years in various categories. It was a fantastic evening filled with memories, camaraderie and a shared appreciation of the club's enduring legacy.

The celebration was a testament to the Warriors' resilience, passion, deep community roots and love for rugby league. It was an exciting moment to look forward, I trust, to 50 years of success ahead. Go the mighty Warriors! Thank you.

Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander peoples—Close the Gap Day

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.37): Today is National Close the Gap Day, marking 17 years since the start of this project to ensure the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is a day that highlights the ongoing impacts of colonisation and how colonisation is continuing through our dominant culture, including our systems of government and delivery of public services, failing to support First Nations people.

It is about systems change, and today on the release of their annual report, the co-chairs of Close the Gap have emphasised how solutions led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are critical to achieving systems change that is genuine and sustainable. For the ACT, there is lots of tangible advice to engage in genuinely shared decision-making, to provide funding that is long term and to co-design policies, programs and services.

Last week, the Productivity Commission updated its dashboard that is tracking Closing the Gap data in each state and territory. In the ACT, our data showed improvement towards most targets, including more babies born at a healthy weight and reduced over-representation of First Nations children in out-of-home care, but a worsening when it comes to youth detention and people living in overcrowded homes.

No matter how you cut it, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are still not experiencing the same quality of life as non-Indigenous Australians. That is a disgrace, and it is incumbent on all of us to humbly listen to and learn from the people experiencing this disparity. The Close the Gap chair said that today's release of the 2025 report is both a celebration of the progress made and a call to action.

Australian Citizenship Ceremony

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.39): I rise to talk to the Assembly about a very special event I had the honour of presiding over earlier this week, an Australian citizenship ceremony here in the ACT.

It was an incredible privilege to welcome new citizens and to welcome such an important milestone in their lives. Becoming an Australian citizen is a moment of great pride and significance, representing not just a commitment to our shared values of democracy, fairness and respect but the beginning of a new chapter as part of our community.

We were fortunate to have the Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP join us as our guest speaker, and his reflections on belonging, civic participation and the strength of Australia's multicultural society added a great depth to the ceremony.

The event was guided by Master of Ceremonies, Ms Sukriti Kapoor, who did a wonderful job in making the occasion welcoming, inclusive and memorable for all those involved in the day.

Mr Speaker, it was a joy to meet so many people from diverse backgrounds, all choosing to make Australia and, more importantly, Canberra, their home. Their excitement and gratitude were truly moving. I congratulate all our new citizens and thank everyone who contributed to making the ceremony such a meaningful and inspiring occasion.

Harmony Week

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.40): I would like to acknowledge that this past week has been Harmony Week, which tomorrow coincides with the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Happy Harmony Week to everyone! This week is about celebrating our culturally diverse communities and acknowledging the contributions they make to our society.

I want to highlight the significance of Harmony Week, especially in the context of rising Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. Unfortunately, we have witnessed discriminatory attacks on the Hindu temple in Mawson and the Buddhist temple in Lyneham. These incidents remind us of the importance of fostering a respectful and cohesive society.

True diversity goes far beyond sharing food and playing sports from different cultures. It is reflected in our daily interactions and conversations. I would like to empower our communities to connect and share deeper relationships. I am proud to represent the Murrumbidgee communities, a hub of these vibrant, diverse communities. Thank you.

Environment—logging

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.41): This Sunday at 12 pm in Petrie Plaza I have the privilege of speaking at the March in March for Forests Rally, organised by the Bob Brown Foundation. I wanted to give just a little teaser for my speech this Sunday, in the hope that members might reflect on how we can stop native logging.

Now, I do not think the logging industry would dare make native forest logging a thing here in the ACT—we do have a critical mass of Greens—but what we do get is a steady supply of wood from across the border in New South Wales, and we still have wood heaters. Especially in Tuggeranong, emissions from wood heaters do a fair bit of harm to people’s respiratory health. In fact, research by an ANU-led research network in 2023 found that somewhere between 11 and 63 deaths were attributable to wood heater smoke in the ACT each year, and sometimes it is people’s only option. The Greens have been asking the government to do work on that. But when people want cheap wood, often that wood actually comes from native forests across the border in New South Wales.

If the ACT continues to uncritically demand wood without taking responsibility for where it comes from, we are not being responsible consumers, and we are incentivising the problem of native logging. So if we want to stop rampant habitat destruction and reduce our emissions during the crunch of the climate crisis, you know what we have got to do.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

United Workers Union—action

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) (5.42): I rise today to speak about the recent efforts made by United Workers Union members, formerly employees of Certis and now employees of MSS Security Group, to secure their well-deserved rights and conditions.

Recently, Canberra Airport Group awarded the new contract for airport security screening to MSS Group. As part of this transition, hardworking security officers who keep the travelling public safe were made to reapply for their own jobs. They were told that sick leave accruals would be cut to zero, their income protection insurance would be eliminated and that their enterprise agreement contained provisions that MSS did not support.

United Workers Union members have been calling on MSS to respect the conditions that they had negotiated and earned. As part of this, they have been taking industrial

action to bring attention to their treatment and to put pressure on MSS and Canberra Airport Group to come to the table and respect their work. However, these demands have not been met.

I was concerned to hear that in a recent escalation that UWU organiser Fletch Beverley was arrested while attending a staff farewell lunch at the airport. Mr Beverley has been attending the airport alongside his members to organise, to hand out flyers, and to take part in rallies calling for MSS Security and Canberra Airport Group to respect the conditions and safety of their security staff. I am disappointed to learn that this was the outcome of Mr Beverley's good-faith organising efforts. Reminding new members to advocate for their own interests and to let the public know how their employers are treating them through rallies, flyers and other means is a fundamental aspect of freedom of association. The ACT government strongly supports union members in standing up for their rights and for legitimate union activity to freely take place without fear of retribution or retaliation.

The ACT needs more security workers. Like many other areas of our economy, it is an area in which we are seeing a distinct skills shortage. Ensuring workers' rights are protected is essential to attract and retain people to this industry, which enables businesses like the airport to operate in a way that keeps our community safe. Upholding security workers' rights is good for our economy, good for business, good for our community and good for workers. I urge the Canberra Airport Group and MSS to come to the table with United Workers Union members and to respect the vital role that they play at our airport and for our city.

Racism—International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.45): Tomorrow, Friday 21 March, is International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination—but, to this day, we are yet to make this a reality. The Australian Human Rights Commissioner has warned about the rise in racism in Australia in recent years. This includes violence and vilification faced by First Nations peoples during and following the Voice Referendum, Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian attacks that I spoke about earlier in the week, and antisemitic violence that has been highlighted at a national stage. We must confront the uncomfortable reality that Australia, since its conception and all days since, is rooted in racism and colonialism. The journey of truth-telling is an ongoing one. This city, too, sits on the unceded lands of the Ngunnawal people and other First Nations families that have connection to this place.

Although we should be proud of being a broadly socially progressive jurisdiction, we must remain cautious of narratives and sentiments that embolden racism. This includes harmful assumptions and scapegoating of migrants when it comes to true-blue Australian made crises like housing and climate change. The Greens are the only party that clearly make this distinction, defending migrants from the threats to their safety that are increasingly common in public spaces and universities. Addressing racism in all its forms is essential for a fair, compassionate and thriving society.

This year, we marked the 60th anniversary of the United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The decade when this convention was born was a time of great antiracist movements

internationally, for civil rights and against apartheid. But we see the daily tarnishing of civil rights and the continuing practice of apartheid today.

Tomorrow also marks the start of Israeli Apartheid Week. Israel this week has commenced its most intense bombing of Gaza since the ceasefire months ago, during the holy month of Ramadan. Israel is a settler colonial state, a type of government not unfamiliar to us here in Australia. Core to the project of settler colonialism is the genocide of the peoples who were there first. The shocking escalation of violence against Palestinians in the last year is wholly consistent with the apartheid project it has been conducting for years.

The world has stood against apartheid before. It continues to do so. My Greens colleagues and I have been proud to show up regularly in solidarity against the Israeli apartheid regime and its violence against Palestinians. We are proud to lead decisive steps to make sure the ACT government is well and truly divested from Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine. We welcome others in this place to join us to take a stand against apartheid and racism.

Nowruz

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.48): Tonight, at exactly 8.01 Eastern Seaboard Time, millions of people around the world will celebrate Nowruz, Persian New Year. This is no ordinary new year. It is a tradition that has endured for over 3,000 years, rooted in the ancient faith of Zoroastrianism and the great Persian empire. Nowruz means “New Day”, and that is what it will be: a moment of renewal, light conquering darkness, hope triumphing over despair for followers of this particular culture and religion. But Nowruz is more than just the marking of a new year; it is the heartbeat of a people who have refused to be silenced and a celebration of people who have withstood invasions, oppression and attempts to erase the meaning of this. From empires of the past to challenges of today, particularly in modern day Iran, Nowruz remains a symbol of resilience, unity and the unbreakable spirit of the Iranian people.

The history of Iran and its diverse ethnic groups, including Persians, Armenians, Assyrians, Kurds, Lurs, Arabs and many others, is one of strength, perseverance and cultural richness. Despite efforts to suppress their identity, despite external forces seeking to overshadow their traditions, Nowruz has prevailed as a reminder that no regime or oppression can erase the soul of a people who refuse to be silenced. It is a celebration not only of the new year but of the Iranian people's defiant endurance and unbreakable hope.

It is not just Iran's tradition; it is a heritage shared across nations, from Afghanistan to Azerbaijan, from Kurdistan to Central Asia, from Turkey to the Balkans, and, of course, the community here in Australia. Around the world, over 300 million people celebrate this sacred occasion, proving that no force, war, ruler or oppression can erase a culture so deeply woven into the fabric of history.

One of the most cherished traditions of Nowruz is the Haft-sin table. Seven symbolic items, each beginning with the Persian letter S, are placed upon it, representing renewal, prosperity, love and light. Another sacred tradition is Chaharshanbe Suri, a fire-jumping ceremony where people cast away the misfortunes of the past and step into the future

with courage. It is highly symbolic of getting over your challenges. These rituals are more than customs; they are declarations of survival, strength and faith in the future.

Nowruz is the only New Year celebration in the world that aligns with the astrological Solar New Year, the precise moment earth completes its orbit around the sun, representing to many the balance of light and darkness. That is what Nowruz has always stood for: balanced justice and renewal. For thousands of years, the Iranian people have faced hardship, but they have not surrendered their spirit. Through war, exile and struggle, Nowruz remains a sign of hope. It reminds us all that, no matter the darkness we face, life will return if we continue with hope and good spirit.

For the current nation of Iran, it is my hope that this day will include a free and democratic Iranian country. Today, let us not only stand to honour Nowruz but also stand in solidarity with those who fight to keep their culture alive and resist oppression. It is proof that the human spirit cannot be broken. I invite you to join me in acknowledging the communities within our country and within this city that celebrate this ancient tradition, particularly Canberrans with Iranian, Armenian, Assyrian, Kurdish and/or Arabic heritage. Nowruz Mubarak!

Emergency Services—ACT Community Protection Medal

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) (5.52): I rise today to congratulate the 2025 recipients of the ACT Community Protection Medal. These were awarded to six of our emergency services and police responders.

I congratulate Detective Sergeant Lauren Gilliland from ACT Policing. Lauren is recognised for her distinguished and outstanding service to the ACT community through her work at ACT Policing. Detective Sergeant Gilliland's work has revolutionised the delivery of training and investigations into sexual offences and child abuse in the ACT that is now recognised internationally as best practice.

I congratulate Michael Caldwell from the ACT Ambulance Service. Mr Caldwell was awarded in recognition of his commitment to the provision and improvement of professional pre-hospital emergency services within the ACT Ambulance Service communications centre. During his 14-year career in the service, Michael has progressed through the communications centre, from call-taker to now being Coordination Officer.

I congratulate Commander Guy Cassis, from ACT Fire & Rescue, who was awarded the medal in recognition of his distinguished and outstanding 22-year contribution to community safety through the awareness and promotion of firefighter health, safety and wellbeing.

I congratulate Nicola Lewis from the ACT Rural Fire Service. She was awarded in recognition of her sustained service to training and recruitment across the ACT Rural Fire Service.

I congratulate Commander Adam Hartnett from the ACT State Emergency Service.

Commander Hartnett was awarded in recognition of exceptional leadership and unwavering dedication as Commander of the Rivers SES Unit.

And, finally, I congratulate Mr Colin Dawes from the ACT Emergency Services Agency for his award in recognition of his leadership within ESA for nearly 20 years. During the recent emergency events of fire, smoke, storm and pandemic, Mr Dawes has proved himself as an adaptable, reliable, competent and compassionate leader, colleague and mentor.

I very much thank these amazing recipients for the work that they do for our community and dedication to their service.

Tibetan Uprising Day

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.55): On Monday, 10 March, I was honoured to join community commemoration of Tibetan Uprising Day at Parliament House. Members of the local Tibetan community were joined by others from interstate, especially Nowra and Wagga. On this day, the community commemorated the 66th anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan national uprising, a pivotal moment in their history, when thousands of Tibetans rose up to prevent the Chinese government abducting His Holiness the Dalai Lama—a day of resistance and remembrance.

Tibet is a country in the Himalayas, strategically relocated between China and India. Tibet's territory would make it the world's 10th largest nation. China invaded independent Tibet in 1949. On 10 March 1959, the Tibetan people rose up against the Chinese military occupation of their homeland. An estimated 87,000 Tibetans were killed during China's ensuing crackdown of the uprising. The Dalai Lama was forced to escape into exile in India with many Tibetan refugees. China has occupied Tibet ever since. Under Chinese occupation, an estimated 1.2 million Tibetans have been killed, 7,000 monasteries have been destroyed, and more than 150 Tibetans have self-immolated, or set themselves on fire, since 2009 in protest of Chinese rule. Tibet has been consistently ranked the least free place in the world by Freedom House.

I am deeply concerned about reports of forced displacement and environmental crisis in Tibet. Tibetan communities report that China is exploiting Tibet's resources, including lithium and copper, to fuel its expansion. China's mining and damming in Tibet are threatening Tibet's fragile environment, displacing nomads and villagers from their lands and livelihoods, and destroying sacred religious sites. Tibet, the world's third pole and roof of the world, is warming three times faster than the rest of the earth.

In February 2024, Chinese authorities violently arrested over 1,000 Tibetan monks and villagers for peacefully protesting against the massive Chinese dam project that would destroy six Buddhist monasteries and forcibly relocate two villages in eastern Tibet. For over six decades, under the guidance of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan people have maintained an unwavering commitment to nonviolent resistance in the face of oppression.

The focus of this year's commemoration was to encourage the Australian government to establish a formal policy regarding the recognition of future Dalai Lamas—specifically, to only recognise any future Dalai Lama selected in accordance with

traditional Tibetan Buddhist customs, rather than any appointment made by the Chinese government. This is certainly a position that my party supports. The Australian Greens have had a formal policy of support for Tibet since 2003-04, and Australia needs to use its voice to support Tibet.

I wish to thank the Geshe Lama, the President of ACT Tibetan Community, for the invitation to join the event and to speak. I acknowledge the resilience of the Tibetan community in Australia and their unwavering commitment to support their homeland.

Early childhood education—Genius Childcare

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.58): I rise to talk again about Genius Childcare. I am starting to lose count of how many times I have now spoken about this in the Assembly. It seems that not a week can go past before we hear more bad news for the staff and families of Genius Childcare. Late yesterday, we heard that more Genius centres have gone into administration, and it appears that includes the three centres that are currently open in Canberra, all of which are in my electorate of Brindabella. An educator contacted me yesterday afternoon, immediately after getting the news, to share with me that, at her centre, there are at least 20 staff and 80 families who will be impacted by this news. Personally, she will be in a pretty tough situation if they do close. My heart goes out to all of those educators.

Last month we saw CECA temporarily shut the Gungahlin centre for two weeks, which was then extended by another 60 days. We then saw Symonston close and a new provider step in, after Genius had not paid the staff or rent. I have heard today that they still have not paid the rent after moving out, and they probably never will, now that Genius has gone into administration. That landlord will lose out, having rented to Genius. From all of the reports that I am receiving, the families and educators at Symonston Bright Buds are having a wonderful time; the kids are really happy and the staff are, too.

Just this week, we watched the *Four Corners* report into the for-profit industry, showing that families are being taken for a ride by dodgy providers, children are being neglected or worse, and educators are being treated absolutely pathetically by their employers. Genius got a special mention for the supposed wealth of the owner and his inability to pay staff, so it was unsurprising to me to see that nearly every centre is now in administration.

I am a bit sick of the behaviour of Genius and of constantly talking about them. Early childhood education is so important to society, and it is important that all educators are treated with the same level of respect as workers in any other profession. Early childhood educators should not be treated as somehow lesser because they care for our kids. They are a qualified workforce.

I want to put this on the record because so often, when early childhood education is in the media and in debate, the subtext and language start to put it back as women's work, lesser care work, and not as important. The National Quality Framework states that educators need to be qualified. They need to be at least certificate 3, diploma or even university-qualified teachers, or working towards these qualifications. While I have some issues with the NQF and the national laws more broadly, and continue to fight for

them to be strengthened, they do provide a framework for qualification of educators working in the sector. Many of our tradies actually have the same level of qualifications as our early childhood educators, but we would not be standing here talking down their jobs.

Going back to Genius, my heart goes out to all of the staff and employees impacted by their going into administration. While we know that the centres will continue to operate for now, I understand that the uncertainty as to what the future brings is stressful, on top of what has already been a really stressful time, with wages and super not being paid, and unplanned closures when educators—in my opinion, rightly—have chosen not to turn up to work in protest at not being paid.

I understand the hotline that was set up for Genius families and educators at the end of last year is probably still running. I say to any families or educators here in Canberra that are worried to please reach out. I am consistently receiving reports from educators and their families that they cannot afford food right now. They are struggling with their mortgage or rent payments, while the owner of Genius is MIA, with some media reports this week saying he is in Dubai, of all places.

How is it fair that there are educators who cannot support their own families when they spend their days educating and supporting our kids and giving future generations the tools they need for success in their lives? When educators are not paid, they are driven out of the industry, for which I do not blame them, but it harms the wellbeing of the children they are educating and caring for, who have disruptive relationships and struggle to make connection with those educators.

The NQF, the National Quality Framework, looks at children's physical wellbeing but not so much at their emotional wellbeing. That is something that needs to be improved in the national law.

With the collapse of Genius, we witness the collapse of another childcare empire, the wealth of which has been built on the backs of vulnerable and exploited staff, and from the pockets of working parents and government subsidies. The empire was built because the state and territory regulators did not have the powers they needed to have a strong national law to stop this happening. It is a system that has allowed these dodgy for-profit providers to flourish.

I thank Minister Berry for writing to her state and territory counterparts last year. I will keep advocating for Genius staff and families.

World Water Day

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (6.03): I would like to offer my appreciation for and acknowledge World Water Day this Saturday, 22 March. On this day we recognise the importance of fresh water and bring the global water crisis to the forefront of everyone's mind. This year's theme is glacier preservation. Between 2000 and 2023, we have seen glaciers lose about 270 billion tonnes of ice a year, on average, outside the major ice sheets of Greenland and Antarctica. Clearly, it is a huge issue that needs attention.

I appreciate that glaciers are far from home. I know it gets cold here in Canberra but

not that cold, and here in Canberra we are passionate about our waterways. We have amazing access and availability when it comes to water, although we cannot take this for granted. It was only in 2019 that we last experienced a drought and in the early 2000s the destructive millennium drought hit us. I remember all of the water restrictions back when I was a kid—four-minute showers and using grey water to water the garden. That kind of frugality tends to stick with you. I still get a pang of guilt when I take long showers.

If water is scarce for us, let us also recognise that the water in our atmosphere, rivers, dams and soil is the lifeblood of our farmers' livelihoods. Farmers right now are battling drought conditions and a very dry start to the year in South Australia, and we cannot take our current position in the ACT lightly. The climate can change very quickly these days.

Thankfully, our amazing former environment minister Rebecca Vassarotti last year put up the ACT Regional Drought Resilience Plan, allowing the ACT to be more prepared in an emergency. She knew, more than anyone, that there is so much more to do in this space, and understood the pressing issues around water scarcity that Canberra's farmers and the broader community find so important. I am grateful to be taking on the agriculture and food spokesperson role, so that I can continue to advocate for the amazing work that she started.

We are in a unique position from that of other major cities around Australia. We are in fact landlocked. We are so far inland that we do not have direct access to the beaches and ocean. That is why it is so important to maintain our creeks and bodies of water. My local spots are Kambah Pool, Lake Tuggeranong and Tuggeranong Creek; but, in the end, all roads lead to the Murrumbidgee River.

On Clean Up Australia Day, I could see the pollution that plagues our backyard—the nasty floaties that, clearly, have been there for a long time. It is worth reiterating that the greatest contributors to the contamination of our bodies of water, as I understand it, are leaf litter and grass clippings. Garden fertilizers are also a naughty culprit. Phosphorus from green waste gets into our catchment and leads to algal blooms and a smelly lake.

To me, this is something that absolutely could be changed or reduced, but it takes government and community commitment. If we are encouraging people to be more conscious of picking up their leaf litter to protect our water sources, we also need to make sure government are being conscientious with their street sweeping and carefully picking up their grass clippings when they mow. A stitch in time saves nine and, like a lot of work that we talk about here in the Assembly, the earlier we intervene upstream, the better.

In his former role as minister for water, my Greens colleague Mr Rattenbury paved the way for demonstrating that the protection of our waterways is important, and I am honoured to be the new spokesperson for water. I am grateful that Mr Rattenbury was able to drive the re-naturalisation of sections of Tuggeranong Creek last year, to restore creek health and improve the quality of water entering Lake Tuggeranong. It is the real crown jewel of the south, although Murrumbidgee members might disagree! It looks amazing down there. Concrete sections of the drain have been replaced with a

naturalised creek bed, with water plants lining the edges and providing critical habitat for native wildlife, including water birds. I love birds. These plants will also absorb nutrients and pollutants, preventing them from entering Lake Tuggeranong and helping to reduce the formation of algal blooms. I am excited to see the CHIP report this year to further show the impact that this re-naturalisation process has on our waterways.

This is just one of the initiatives that Mr Rattenbury championed. Through his tenure as water minister, he managed to secure a significant funding boost for the Healthy Waterways program. Honouring the ACT Greens 2020 election commitment, he also oversaw the establishment of an Office of Water. Clearly, he did an excellent job.

It will be great to see the Healthy Waterways program continue this term in areas of the west Belconnen catchment, the lower Molonglo catchment, north Canberra and, of course, Lake Tuggeranong, and it will be awesome to see stage 2 of the program progress to the rest of Canberra.

We must not forget how important water is and how much we rely on healthy and strong waterways. I look forward to celebrating World Water Day this Saturday.

Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (6.08): I rise this evening to celebrate the opening, the beginning, of the new state-of-the-art Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation facility in Wanniasa. Last week I had the privilege of visiting the new facility not once but twice. On Wednesday, I was able to tuck onto a walk-through, along with Ms Tough, that was led by Minister Orr. On Friday, I was there to “decorate” the key handover, with other officials, to the operators of Gugan Gulwan.

Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation has been a beacon of hope, a pillar of strength and an established, nationally best practice Aboriginal organisation supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, their families and the community within the ACT and its surrounds for more than 30 years.

Through true listening, it provides prevention and early intervention supports and programs that are culturally safe and community driven. This new facility is not just a building; it is and will be a sanctuary where dreams can be nurtured and futures forged. It is a place where young people will find the support, guidance and resources that they need to thrive.

As I walked through this impressive new building, I was struck by the sense of possibility that permeates every corner. Its state-of-the-art facilities, its welcoming spaces and the vibrant atmosphere that has already been created speak to a future where youth are given every opportunity to succeed.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have culturally led the design of the new building. Its key features include a private central gathering place, a fire pit that acknowledges traditional and contemporary cultural practices, and magnificent, story-telling artwork.

Beyond the bricks and mortar, what truly makes Gugan Gulwan special is the people—

the dedicated staff, the passionate volunteers and the resilient young people who walk and will walk through their doors every day. It is this spirit and their determination and unwavering belief in a better future that I believe will breathe life into this place.

This is more than just a new building; it is a renewed commitment to Canberra's youth. We recognise the importance of providing a safe and supportive environment where they can learn, grow and achieve their full potential. We acknowledge the vital role that Gugan Gulwan plays in our community and pledge our continued support for its mission.

I would like to extend my thanks to everyone who has made this possible—the architects, builders and project managers who brought this vision to life, the staff and volunteers who work tirelessly to support our youth, and the young people themselves who inspire us every day with their courage and resilience.

Thanks should also be paid to the former Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Rachel Stephen-Smith. It is because of her commitment to and support for the facility that the ACT government's investment was made possible.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.11 pm until Tuesday, 8 April 2025 at 10.00 am.