



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Tuesday, 3 September 2024

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Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR: Madam Speaker, Minister Cheyne is away from question time today, attending a funeral, so Minister Steel will take questions on the city services portfolio, and I will endeavour to respond to questions in Minister Cheyne's other portfolios: arts, culture and the creative economy, human rights, government services and regulatory reform.

Questions without notice

Ginninderry—joint venture partnership

MS LEE: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, answers to questions in estimates indicate that Riverview Projects has not provided any additional equity to the Ginninderry joint venture, while the Suburban Land Agency has contributed more than \$115 million. Questions taken on notice also indicate that the government estimates that Riverview Projects stands to make more than \$487 million in profit, as well as an additional \$85.8 million from additional contracts that Riverview Projects hold in relation to this joint venture, which includes their sales and marketing contract. During estimates it was also revealed that the SLA are currently discussing variations to the 99-year agreement with Riverview Projects. Minister, why is Riverview Projects receiving over half a billion dollars in profit from this joint venture when the SLA appears to be contributing all the equity and wearing all the risk?

MS BERRY: I have provided answers to a number of questions on notice on this particular issue, in particular during estimates. I will take the question on notice, but I am confident that that information has been provided to the Leader of the Opposition.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

MS LEE: Minister, what benefits does the joint venture provide Canberrans, given that it is their money which has funded all additional equity payments, and it appears that Riverview have provided none?

MS BERRY: The Ginninderry joint venture has released 1,550 dwellings since its inception. It has 115 affordable dwellings, 22 community dwellings and 53 public housing dwellings. In a few years it will have a new primary school. It has parks and it has a community centre. There are currently 2,200 residents living in Ginninderry at the moment. Those are the benefits that our community is receiving and those benefits will continue to be received as part of the joint venture.

MR PARTON: Minister, what changes to the 99-year contract are you reviewing with Riverview Projects?

MS BERRY: I do not have that information to hand. It might not be available at this stage. Those discussions might not have occurred with the SLA. I will take the question on notice and see whether there is any further detail to be provided. However, as I said,

I have responded to a number of questions on notice, and I direct members to those.

Ginninderry—joint venture partnership

MS LEE: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, answers to questions in estimates—so we have received them—indicate that Riverview Projects has not provided any additional equity to the Ginninderry Joint Venture, whilst the SLA has contributed more than \$115 million, yet the Ginninderry Joint Venture stands to make more than half a billion dollars in profit through this joint venture and other contracts which, as reported in the media, “may not comply with the government’s own procurement rules”. It was also revealed that more than 32 conflicts of interest have been reported as a part of this joint venture. Minister, has the Ginninderry Joint Venture project been independently reviewed to guarantee that this agreement has been carried out with transparency and integrity and is in line with your government’s own procurement rules?

MS BERRY: The joint venture agreement is continuously being reviewed by the Suburban Land Agency.

MS LEE: Minister, are you confident that the 99-year agreement, which provides Riverview Projects with half a billion dollars in profit, complies with your own government’s rules when it comes to procurement?

MS BERRY: Yes; I am confident. I should say that the ACT government encourages and regularly receives reports or declarations of any conflicts of interest from the Ginninderry Joint Venture, their partners and the Suburban Land Agency, and, as I said, the agreement is constantly being reviewed.

MR PARTON: Minister, can you rule out that lobbying played a significant part in providing this 99-year contract which provides substantial financial benefits to Riverview Projects?

MS BERRY: I was not around when the project was first considered by the government. However, I would suggest that there probably was some kind of lobbying, as there is from any stakeholder that wants to do work with the government, but that would have occurred well before my time in this place.

Distinguished visitor

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, could I just let you know that we have a guest in the chamber this afternoon: Dr Mark Robinson, who is a member of the Queensland parliament. Welcome to Canberra and the ACT Assembly. I hope our members behave while you are here!

Mr Robinson thereupon entered the chamber and was seated accordingly.

Questions without notice

Land—community use

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Planning. Minister, what is the

government doing to ensure more land is available for community uses in the ACT?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Orr for her question. Just recently I released the Statement of Planning Priorities, where we acknowledged the need to continually assess our community needs throughout the ACT; that also includes the need for places of religious worship to meet the needs of our diverse communities. I was very pleased recently to announce the ACT government has released an expression of interest for a range of community facility blocks in Canberra. These will provide an opportunity for community organisations to come forward and to be able to express their interest and demonstrate the need they have in their community to deliver a place of community activity, a place of community worship, a place for religious-associated use, or, indeed, for aged care. There are initially six blocks identified: in Gungahlin, Chis olm, Evatt, Kambah and Gowrie, as well as a block that has been identified in the new Molonglo town centre.

MS ORR: Minister, how will the EOI process provide a fair opportunity for a range of community groups to submit their interest?

MR STEEL: The government can sell community-zoned land to community organisations through a two-stage sales process, commencing with the expression of interest. This is a process that I set up that is fair—when I previously had policy responsibility for this area. This has been reflected in the recent Statement of Planning Priorities, which identified the release of land for community facilities. Expression of interest is aimed to improve transparency in the process, to hear from all potential organisations that may be interested in development on the land and to identify an organisation whose proposal best meets a range of criteria, including benefit to the community and financial viability. Depending on the type of lease being granted and the number of shortlisted respondents, the second stage of the sale process will then go into a request for tender stage.

DR PATERSON: Minister, how can interested groups indicate their interest to the government?

MR STEEL: I encourage any interested community organisations to engage with the expression of interest process, which is available now on Tenders ACT. Any interested community groups will have the opportunity to download the documentation, put together a case and submit their proposal to the government for consideration. Since taking on the planning portfolio, I understand that more than 20 organisations, including sporting, community, multicultural and religious groups have already registered their interest with the ACT government for the release of community land, showing there is continuing demand for space to deliver new community facilities. I am pleased there is now another opportunity for community facilities land for those organisations to express their interest in, and I am sure there will be further opportunities as the Planning Directorate continues to look at opportunities for other blocks that are zoned for community facilities in Canberra as well.

Majura Valley—farming leases

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Planning. Minister, I refer to recent media reporting in relation to your lease offer to the Majura Valley farmers. The reports

have said that you intend to offer a lease agreement and that you only commenced lease negotiations with the commonwealth in August, despite Senator Katy Gallagher giving in-principle support to the land transfer back in March, allowing Defence to negotiate with the ACT. Senator Gallagher then wrote to the farmers in June advising that Defence was still waiting for the ACT to get the approval to start negotiations, three months after she gave in-principle support. This ongoing uncertainty is causing significant stress to the farmers. Minister, why was approval for formal negotiations only given in August if the commonwealth gave in-principle support back in March?

MR STEEL: The ACT government has been in constant discussions with the commonwealth for some time—certainly well before March—in relation to providing certainty for the Majura Valley farmers about their land tenure arrangements. Of course, it was only recently, when we had a change in federal government, that this discussion even became possible. The coalition simply would not engage with the ACT in relation to resolving the issue of the split blocks in Majura Valley. It was great to have that letter, which enabled us to start the formal stages of the negotiation in March. Of course, during the negotiations, there will be stages where the ACT government will need to seek legal advice and consider that advice in responding to the commonwealth.

Ms Lee: Point of order, Madam Speaker. I have been listening to the minister rabbit on for a minute now. Ms Castley's question was very clear, asking why approval for the formal negotiations was only given in August. I ask you to ask the minister to be direct.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think the minister is responding to the timing of the propositions.

Ms Berry: My point of order is on Ms Lee's point of order, referring to the Minister for Planning's "rabbiting on" about something. I want to seek your guidance on that.

MADAM SPEAKER: I am just going to remind everybody to be mindful of their language over the final two days of sittings. Mr Steel, you have 20 seconds.

MR STEEL: There will be times when we will need to consider legal advice. Of course, we have been talking with the commonwealth in some detail—the most recent meeting between officials was, I believe, on 21 August this year—discussing some of the more detailed conditions that might be attached to the degazettal of commonwealth land, which is ultimately required to enable us to offer longer-term leases.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, will you commit to finalising the leases with the Majura Valley farmers before the caretaker period commences?

MR STEEL: No, and I have been very clear about why that is the case—because it requires the degazettal of national land to be able to provide them with 25-year leases without a withdrawal clause, so that they can have certainty about the future use of this land in the Majura Valley. The intention that I have—and that I have indicated to the Majura Valley farmers—is that I want to give proper legal effect to the future land tenure arrangements in the Majura Valley. In order to do that, we need to have the commonwealth degazette the land.

I have also spoken on the phone to the occupants, indicating to them that there may be

a need to have special purpose legislation brought in to the Legislative Assembly and passed through the Legislative Assembly to be able to issue a lease that provides that legal certainty. Once the degazettal happens, it is certainly the intention, in discussions that I have been having with the planning directorate, that they would brief an incoming government about the best way to provide proper legal certainty and effect to the 25-year leases for the Majura farmers for any incoming government.

MR CAIN: Minister, why can't you alleviate the stress that this is causing these hardworking farmers and follow through on the promise you made?

MR STEEL: Because I am not the commonwealth, I cannot make a decision to degazette the land. That is what is required to give legal certainty to these farmers in the Majura Valley. In order to issue a lease, national land needs to be degazetted and transferred to the territory, and the territory, potentially through legislation, needs to be able to issue a 25-year lease. That cannot be done right at the moment, and it cannot be done before caretaker. But what I have said to them is that we are clear about our intention that the ACT government will offer a 25-year lease with no withdrawal so that they continue their agribusiness activities in the Majura Valley in the future once the commonwealth has degazetted the national land portion of these split blocks.

Majura Valley—farming leases

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Business. Minister, back in December 2022 you promised the Majura Valley farmers that you would work with the Department of Defence and get their leases renewed. Last month, nearly two years on from that commitment it has now been reported that the fine print does not provide assurance of an actual lease renewal and that formal negotiations have only just commenced. As Minister for Business, do you continue to back the farmers to obtain these lease renewals to enable them to operate and run their businesses like any other rural lease holder?

MR STEEL: I will take the question, Madam Speaker. In relation to the specific conditions in the leases, I certainly encourage the Majura Valley farmers to discuss these matters with the Planning Directorate. I have written to them, and we certainly understand from most of those farmers that they want to continue their agribusiness activities. They have been saying for some time to the ACT government that they want certainty to be able to invest and continue their agribusiness activities in the Majura Valley. Certainly the intention of the ACT government is for them to do that through providing them with a 25-year lease with a no-withdrawal clause so that we are not taking back their lease during those 25 years, so that they can continue their business activities.

It was a surprise to hear that there may be other intentions, potentially not to continue some of those agribusiness activities, but I have been advised by the directorate that the original leases prior to 2004, in fact, included a restriction that the lessee must not assign or transfer the lease without having obtained the written consent of the ACT Planning and Land Authority. So, the intention of having a similar clause is to make sure that these leases are not provided to a developer who wants to develop the lease for a land use other than agribusiness. We want to make sure that these leases are there for the rural uses of the occupants of the Majura Valley. Indeed, there would not be any issue

with transferring it to someone within their family or as part of a deceased estate. We have been clear about that.

MS CASTLEY: I will try again, because this is about business, and I am asking the minister if he can commit to advocating for the Majura Valley farmers to have this issue resolved before caretaker provisions kick in.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, just to be clear, Ms Castley was directing this question to the Minister for Business, but, as allowed, Mr Steel is choosing to respond.

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I refer her to the answers that I gave to the earlier question, where I have been very clear that this requires a degazettal of national land, which is not within the ACT government's control. Therefore, it will be up to the commonwealth to do that, and potentially for us, in a future term of this Assembly, to consider special purpose legislation to give proper and legal effect those leases. And given that we are in the last sitting week of this term that is not going to be possible this term.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

MR CAIN: Minister for Business, Minister Gentleman, do you have confidence in Minister Steel's handling of this matter, given the concerns that farmers have raised this week?

MR GENTLEMAN: I certainly do have confidence in Minister Steel's handling of this issue. It has been ongoing for many years, and, as we know, these split blocks, partially owned by the ACT government and partially owned by the commonwealth, cannot be sold until, of course, we get the degazettal. It is very clear. It is a bit like trying to build a busway across commonwealth land without permission! One must talk to the National Capital Authority. In this case, we must talk to the commonwealth and ensure that we can get the degazettal, purchase the land and sell it to the Majura farmers.

Public Trustee and Guardian—conduct

MR CAIN: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney-General, the Auditor-General recently published report No 6 of 2024, which inquired into the Public Trustee and Guardian's failed ICT renewal program. The report found that the Public Trustee and Guardian had misappropriated the funds from the guarantee and reserve account towards the ICT program. Disturbingly, the Auditor-General found that "it is questionable whether the Public Trustee and Guardian's use of funds from the guarantee and reserve account for its ICT renewal activities was legal". Attorney-General, have you taken any steps to refer any alleged instances of corruption within the Public Trustee and Guardian to the Integrity Commission, or taken any disciplinary action against any of the officials involved?

MR RATTENBURY: I am aware that the Auditor-General has tabled that report and

that it focuses on a period from 2016 to 2023. As Mr Cain has noted, it is critical of the management of the program and the ICT activities. In particular, the audit raises concerns with planning and design, budgeting, governance, procurement and implementation.

While the findings of the report are disappointing, the report also identifies actions and directions of the Public Trustee and Guardian since 2023 that appear to be addressing some of the audit findings. One thing I can assure the community is that those matters are being taken very seriously and that we will be following through on the findings of the Auditor-General—

Ms Lee: A point of order, Madam Speaker.

MR RATTENBURY: I have a minute and 20 seconds. I am getting to the point.

MADAM SPEAKER: There is a point of order. Resume your seat, Mr Rattenbury.

Ms Lee: The point of order is that Mr Cain's question was very specifically about whether there have been any referrals to the Integrity Commission or disciplinary action.

MADAM SPEAKER: The minister is also talking about actions since 2023. You have the call, Mr Rattenbury.

MR RATTENBURY: Fine, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: You're done?

Ms Lee: So he wasn't getting to it.

Mr Rattenbury: I was, but if you interrupt me like that—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Steel: A point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think I can assume what your point of order is. Members, we will have no exchange like that across the floor.

Mr Steel: It is about constant interruptions, and that is also against the standing orders.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you for reminding me.

Ms Lawder: A point of order, Madam Speaker. With respect to Mr Rattenbury's comment, points of order are part of our standing orders. It is not an interruption, and it does not mean that a minister might just sit down. It is a quite legitimate and perfectly valid way of asking a question about the question that you have asked.

MADAM SPEAKER: As I say, members, we have two days to go, and our esteemed colleague from Queensland is being educated in ACT politics. Mr Cain, you have the call.

MR CAIN: Attorney-General, were you aware of these actions by the Public Trustee and Guardian prior to the release of the Auditor-General's report?

MR RATTENBURY: No, I was not. Going to Mr Cain's earlier question, I will be looking at the findings of the Auditor-General, and I am seeking advice from the agency on what further steps might need to be taken.

MR COCKS: Attorney-General, did you at any point seek advice from the Public Trustee and Guardian on the costings of the customer relationship management system; if not, why not?

MR RATTENBURY: I have, over time, a reasonably regular briefing program with the Public Trustee and Guardian. The sort of matters identified by the Auditor-General did not come to light during those conversations.

Health—maternity services

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, last February this Assembly passed my motion that called on the government to collaborate with the maternity reference group and the University of Canberra to conduct early design and feasibility before August 2024 to establish a co-designed, midwife-led freestanding birth centre, located alongside or fully separate from the new north-side hospital. Can you please provide the Assembly with an update on the early design you have committed to?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Clay for the question. As she would have seen from my media release in July, that work is underway. Targeted stakeholder engagement on the feasibility work commenced in August and will conclude in the coming weeks. That engagement is focused on understanding perspectives on the role of a standalone, alongside or freestanding birth centre; understanding perspectives on feasibility and options to meet community needs; and discussing views on the location of a birth centre.

This includes engagement with the maternity-in-focus stakeholder pool, which includes consumers, with two in-person and two online focus groups held; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, including the Birthing on Country cultural advisory group and Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services; and the health workforce, including consultation with Canberra Hospital, North Canberra Hospital and peak bodies, clinical colleges and universities.

The engagement outcomes will form part of the overall feasibility study. This study will deliver recommendations on how a birth centre should be delivered, in conjunction with the planning for the new north-side hospital. The study will consider the potential for other birth centre models—for example, a standalone facility in the community that is not on a hospital campus. I think Ms Clay and I would both agree that the new north-side hospital will need to have a birth centre. The question is not whether the new north-side hospital will have a birth centre; the question is whether there are other models that could complement that. I think she would be extremely disappointed if the new north-side hospital did not have a birth centre, so that is certainly part of the feasibility study.

MS CLAY: Minister, when will you be deciding whether there will be a freestanding birth centre as part of this work?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The birth centre feasibility study is expected to be completed by late 2024. That is also the time when Major Projects Canberra will be closing off the request for tender for the preferred contractors for very early contractor involvement in the new north-side hospital project. That process should be finalised by February 2025. That work will continue alongside the north-side hospital work. That will of course be a matter for the incoming government.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, will there continue to be a birth centre inside the new north-side hospital, as there currently is, in addition to the freestanding birth centre, for people who are risked out of birthing in the freestanding birth centre, or will people in that situation have no choice but to deliver within the standard hospital birth suites, with no continuity of care?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think I answered that question in my first response. The question for the new north-side hospital, I fully expect, will be whether a birth centre is integrated into the hospital, whether it is alongside the hospital—as it is at Townsville University Hospital, which I visited and met with the team there—or whether it is separately located on the new north-side hospital campus. The work to inform that decision-making is the work that I have been talking about.

Public schools—infrastructure

DR PATERSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister, what is the ACT government doing to ensure every ACT public school is a great school?

MS BERRY: I thank Dr Paterson for that question. The ACT government continues to invest in our public schools to ensure that they are great places to learn and great places to work. The most recent ACT budget includes nearly \$30 million for smaller scale upgrades across the existing ACT public schools we know and love.

The majority of this funding has been allocated to 61 projects across 44 public schools following an open application process. These projects include improved classrooms, upgrades to improve accessibility, new and upgraded outdoor learning areas, new and upgraded walkways, access ramps, landscaping works, improved staff facilities and improved administration areas. The remainder of the funding will be allocated towards high-priority school upgrades as they are identified throughout the coming year. There will be a particular focus on prioritising inclusive upgrades that ensure ACT public schools continue to meet the needs of all students.

This funding is part of the ACT government's investment of around \$100 million in renewing and upgrading public schools across Canberra in this term of government. This funding is in addition to other investments we are making in renewing ACT public school infrastructure, including our programs for heating and cooling upgrades and roof replacements across ACT public schools to improve thermal comfort and efficiencies and our investment in designing and constructing 17 new and expanded schools across

the city's growth areas.

DR PATERSON: Minister, Can you update the Assembly on how the ACT government is working to make ACT public school infrastructure more inclusive?

MS BERRY: I thank Dr Paterson for the supplementary. Late last year, the ACT government released a 10-year road map to build a more inclusive education system. Infrastructure is one of the seven focus areas in the Inclusive Education Strategy. The ACT government is building an education system that supports all children, no matter their background or life circumstances, to overcome and achieve. We know investing in safe, fit-for-purpose and inclusive infrastructure is key to encourage learning and belonging at school. Inclusive infrastructure is more than making buildings physically accessible. Learning environments need to be welcoming and accessible to diverse learners, including children and young people with sensory processing needs and intellectual disability; they should develop the whole child or young person intellectually, emotionally, socially, physically and culturally.

The ACT government has a central program fund to deliver inclusive infrastructure upgrades. Each year, a minimum of \$4 million from the Asset Renewal Program is allocated to inclusive upgrades. Infrastructure projects are supported by the principles of universal design. These works centre on the needs of individual students. Decisions around investments are made with the support of recommendations from the Education Directorate's Allied Health team.

MS LEE: Minister, why have you broken your promise to the Majura school community by going back on your word in terms of the modernisation project there?

MS BERRY: I have not. I have met with the Majura P&C community and we have already discussed a potential way forward, and they have been happy with the way that the government has responded at this point in time.

Public Trustee and Guardian—conduct

MR CAIN: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney-General, the Auditor-General recently published Report No 6 of 2024, which inquired into the Public Trustee and Guardian's failed ICT renewal program. The report highlights numerous deficiencies, and found that:

Documentation associated with the procurement of the three software vendors shows non-compliance with the requirements of the *Government Procurement Act 2001* and non-conformance with Government Procurement Framework expectations and an acceptable minimum standard of administrative practice.

Attorney-General, when did you first become aware of issues around the Public Trustee and Guardian's ICT renewal project?

MR RATTENBURY: The issues that Mr Cain has identified came to my attention through the Auditor-General's reporting process.

MR CAIN: Attorney-General, have you sought advice from the Public Trustee and

Guardian as to why they would consider that your government's procurement processes did not apply to them?

MR RATTENBURY: The findings in this report cover a period of a former leader of that office. There is now a different leader of that office, so I am not in a position to ask that question of the occupant of the position at the time.

MR COCKS: Attorney-General, how many other entities across your government operate with the belief that they are above the law?

MR RATTENBURY: It is clearly unacceptable for any of our public sector organisations, or parts of government agencies, to operate outside of the law. The government and all the ministers in the cabinet are very clear of our expectation that public service agencies follow the rules that are prescribed under various acts, and of course, there are disciplinary processes available where public servants step outside the rules.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR RATTENBURY: I think members of the opposition know full well what those options are, ranging from public service disciplinary processes through to the Integrity Commission.

Alexander Maconochie Centre—deaths in custody

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Corrections and Justice Health. Minister, I refer to the most recent death in custody at the Alexander Maconochie Centre. Minister, did drugs play a role in last week's tragedy and was the inmate found with drug-taking paraphernalia?

MS DAVIDSON: I thank the member for the question. This is a very distressing time. Whenever there is a loss of life, family and friends and people who have known the person will really be feeling it. So my thoughts are with them.

This particular incident has already been referred for investigation by the ACT Inspector of Correctional Services and by WorkSafe, and it is also a matter for the police. So I cannot make any further comment at this time about what might be the circumstances. But I am very thankful that we have processes that enable full and thorough investigations to take place so that we can fully understand the circumstances that led to this tragic event.

MR PARTON: Minister, is there a wider problem here involving illicit drugs and access to them at the AMC?

MS DAVIDSON: I thank the member for the question, but I think what he is looking for there is an answer that would go to pre-empting the findings of investigations that are currently underway. It is important—

Ms Lawder: Point of order, Madam Speaker. Does parliamentary privilege mean that the minister should answer a question like that? It is not about the specifics of the case—

Mr Steel: Point of order, Madam Speaker. Ms Lawder is debating the question.

MADAM SPEAKER: I will go to Ms Davidson. There is a question there on broad policy, and I would take you to that response, please.

MS DAVIDSON: I thank the member for the question. While I cannot speak to the circumstances of this particular case while it is currently under investigation, it is important to note that there are a number of issues that go to safety for people in places like the Alexander Maconochie Centre. It is particularly helpful that we have organisations like the ACT Inspector of Correctional Services who are able to advise us and give us recommendations on where changes might be needed. That is why these investigations are so important.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what assurances can you give to Canberrans that drugs are not being smuggled into AMC?

MS DAVIDSON: I thank the member for the question. I think it would not be realistic to think that there is any environment in the ACT where such things could be prevented with complete assurance. We do our best to reduce the supply of illicit substances in high-risk environments, but we also need to take into account the recommendations of our Inspector of Correctional Services and other reviews that have taken place on how we can improve safety. That is not necessarily just about supply; it is also about what kinds of wellbeing programs are available to people and what kinds of harm reduction measures we can put in place to protect people's wellbeing and safety.

Public schools—religious education

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister, under the *Religious education in ACT public schools* policy, I understand that students are entitled to religious classes, which should be organised for a reasonable time, which is defined as no more than 40 minutes for one lesson or seven hours per school term as negotiated by the principal.

What guidance is available to teachers and principals to determine when these classes can be held, and is this a case of either/or, or is it the case that they must fulfil both the less-than-40-minutes and the less-than-seven-hours requirements?

MS BERRY: It is up to the school principal and timetabling at that specific school around any religious education that might be offered at a school community. Those decisions are made locally; however, the Education Directorate is always available to provide additional support should that be required during these processes.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, what efforts and supports are available from the ACT Education Directorate to support teachers to ensure that classes are held with minimal disruption to standard classroom activities?

MS BERRY: As I said in my first answer, these are specific to an individual school's circumstances and timetabling, so school principals will make those decisions based on those matters and the operations of their schools, as I said, in those circumstances. There

may be a variety of reasons where there might be different kinds of support required. The Education Directorate is there to be able to provide that advice in whatever varied form it comes to them.

MR BRADDOCK: I have a supplementary question. Minister, when will the *Religious education in ACT public schools* policy be reviewed, and who will be consulted as part of that review?

MS BERRY: There is no intention at this point in time to review that section of the Education Act.

Justice—corrections system

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Corrections and Justice Health. Minister, Julie Tongs, the head of Winnunga Nimmityjah, is quoted in the *Canberra Times*, after last week's tragedy, as saying:

There's lots of things that aren't right—
in our corrections system—

that keep getting covered up, and until we rip the scab off, we're not going to change anything," she said.

First Nations people make up only about two per cent of the population of Canberra but more than one-quarter of the prison population. Additionally, our recidivism rates are the worst in the country. Minister, why do you continue to fail so badly in the administration of a corrections system which so tragically lets down some individuals and their families and also fails the entire city with such poor broad outcomes?

MS DAVIDSON: I thank the member for the question. What we are talking about here is the need for further investment and more action to reduce the number of First Nations people who end up in our justice system. That is why the justice reinvestment strategy phase 2 that was launched today is so important—so that we can really address those underlying causes of why people might be engaging in behaviour that brings them to the attention of the justice system not just once but multiple times throughout their lifetime.

If we are able to continue to invest in those programs that we know work, like the justice housing program, like alternative bail support sites and like the drug and alcohol sentencing list, we will be able to continue to make a difference in reducing those issues.

MR PARTON: Minister, for how long has the government had the independent review into the over-representation of Indigenous people in the ACT criminal justice system, and when will it actually be released?

MR RATTENBURY: I will take the response to that question, Madam Speaker. The report is being provided to me. The government received it quite recently. I cannot think of the exact date. It will be released before the caretaker period commences.

MS LAWDER: Minister, how many more young men will need to die in custody for this government and for you, as minister, to live up to your human rights obligations?

MS DAVIDSON: I thank the member for the question. Every loss of life is a tragedy, and every loss of life has a ripple effect for the person's family, friends and community. That is why it is so important that we have independent investigations that help us to understand what can be done differently, and that we then act on the recommendations that come from those investigations. I will continue to do everything I can to seek the resources necessary to implement the recommendations that come from investigations such as these. We will continue to do everything that we can to improve that situation.

Alexander Maconochie Centre—deaths in custody

MR PARTON: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Corrections and Justice Health. Minister, the recent inquest into the death of a detainee in February 2022, combined with the critical incident report by the Inspector of Correctional Services, highlights the unsafe cells with known vulnerabilities to self-harm. The coroner found that the ACT government placed a prisoner with known vulnerabilities to suicide attempts in an unsafe cell the day before he took his own life.

In May 2020 it was identified that the doors at the AMC's management and crisis support units were no longer fit for purpose and were tagged for urgent replacement. The Inspector of Correctional Services noted that the rear cell door design flaw was reported by AMC facilities management in 2015, and another design fault was identified in 2020. Minister, why was the 2015 risk not addressed before 2024, given that this was the risk that enabled a detainee to take his life?

MS DAVIDSON: I thank the member for the question. The rectification works to the rear cell doors in the management unit were completed on 31 May 2022 and consisted of work to reduce the risk of horizontal bars being able to be used as ligature points. Cross braces were added to fasten the Lexan panels to the crossbars, and the foam tape previously used was replaced with anti-pick sealant. It is noted that there are no prison-specific national standards relating to harm minimisation of infrastructure. However, the work completed was in line with Victoria's Department of Justice and Community Safety cell and fire safety guidelines, as the most relevant reference.

MR PARTON: Minister, how many detainees attempted self-harm between 2015 and 2024 due to the two risks identified in the reports and not dealt with because of budget constraints?

MS DAVIDSON: I thank the member for the question. I think that to answer that question would require some significant work to look at what data we have and to be able to appropriately identify any of those situations. If what Mr Parton is talking about is specific to the doors, the details I have provided about the rectification works would certainly indicate that this is not something that we would expect to be an ongoing issue.

MS LAWDER: Minister, will risks of this nature identified in the future be actioned quicker than two years—in some cases—and up to nine years in others?

MS DAVIDSON: I thank the member for the question. Each time there is an

investigation into a specific incident, there are recommendations that go to the specifics of how we can reduce the risks of a recurrence of an incident. Different rectification works and infrastructure works will have different time requirements and resourcing requirements attached to them. I am reminded as well that we are talking about an environment that is not like getting your average tradie to come out and fix something, as you would do at home. It is a very specific environment that people are working in there. It is very important that the work is done—

Mr Parton: A point of order, Madam Speaker. It is simply on relevance. The question specifically asked whether these sorts of issues would be actioned quicker than two years. I hope that the minister can be relevant.

MADAM SPEAKER: She is referring to timelines and different activities and issues within the facility. You have 50-odd seconds left, Ms Davidson.

MS DAVIDSON: When we are talking about changes to, or rectification of, infrastructure works within a high-risk and highly specialised environment, it is really important that we are working in accordance with the relevant standards and that the work is undertaken by appropriately skilled people to be able to do that highly specialised work. The time and resources required for any specific rectification works to that kind of infrastructure would have to be determined based on what is requested.

Planning—Gungahlin town centre

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the minister responsible for the Suburban Land Agency. Minister, the Gungahlin Town Centre East Design and Place Framework was released last week. I am interested in how much space will be made available for commercial use that will help drive economic activity and employment in the Gungahlin town centre?

MS BERRY: These are the early stages of the planning processes for Gungahlin town centre east. There has been significant community consultation, which has fed in to the design and framework that was released on Friday. So there is no detail at this point in time on the specific question that Mr Braddock has raised.

MR BRADDOCK: Does the government have a vision for the Gungahlin town centre—that it is more than just a dormitory suburb?

MS BERRY: I do not think it is a dormitory suburb. Whilst it is not an area that is dear to my heart, I know it is to Ms Orr and Mr Pettersson. They are both very fond of it and talk in great detail about their electorate of Yerrabi and the Gungahlin town centre. I know that one of the things that is of great interest to a town planner like Ms Orr is Linear Park, which was also released as part of the design work and framework plan and came directly out of the mouths of the people who are part of the consultations there. I know that she and Mr Pettersson will be keen to see this work as it progresses, and, of course, there will be plenty more conversations to have on YourSay.

MS CLAY: Minister, how many square metres of land will be available for community use in the Gungahlin town centre?

MS BERRY: As I said, this design framework has just been released as part of the first batch of consultations with the community. There are more conversations to have, and I am sure that there will be many more ideas about the Gungahlin town centre going forward. As I said, this is the first part of that process and there will be plenty more opportunities for conversations about that project for the Gungahlin community.

Multicultural affairs—National Multicultural Festival

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, will the National Multicultural Festival take place again in 2025?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Pettersson for his very strong interest in our multicultural society of the ACT. I am happy to announce the festival will continue in 2025, Madam Speaker—just a little bit earlier.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, we have an important announcement.

MR GENTLEMAN: The festival will take place between 7 and 9 February. For its 27th year this iconic three day event will bring together and show case the vast and growing cultural and linguistic diversity of Canberra.

The festival celebrates the culture, history and heritage of multicultural communities, through sharing food, song and dance. Crowds can expect a largely similar footprint to 2024, with the event planned to span right across the city. As a government we are very proud to again to be delivering the country's biggest and most successful celebration of diversity. In the budget, we have committed \$1.7 million over this financial year to coordinate and deliver the celebration of this festival, and significant funding is invested in ongoing delivery and future growth of the festival to ensure it remains the most successful and celebrated multicultural festival across Australia. The investment covers, for example, proportionate sustainability and public safety measures, appropriate staff and operational resources, and investments in accessibility. The event is just one way our government embraces diversity and continues to support and recognise the significant value that our proud multicultural communities contribute to the city.

The festival is a large-scale visual representation of this government's ongoing commitment to ensure the ACT is an inclusive, harmonious and supportive place for all people to belong.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how is the 2025 festival progressing?

MR GENTLEMAN: Preparations for the 2025 festival are already well underway. Applications for community performers, stall holders and grants have now all closed. The government has received a lot of great applications, with over 300 stall applications, 29 cultural showcase applications and over 260 applications from community performers. It is wonderful to see the interest and passion from community members looking to participate in the festival. We are currently viewing the many applications and look forward to releasing the outcomes in due course. I can tell you

now that it is very exciting to see what is in store for next year.

In the background, we are progressing contracts and procurement processes, and liaising with experts to improve accessibility for all attendees and working hard to implement the feedback we have received from stakeholders. Learning from the success of this year's event we will certainly again carefully consider noise management and the placement of stages in the lead up to February's festival. Registration for the volunteer program will open shortly this year. If you love the event as much as we do, putting your hand up to volunteer is a great way to get more involved in 2025.

MS ORR: Minister, how does the National Multicultural Festival benefit Canberra?

MR GENTLEMAN: I know Ms Orr enjoys the festival as well. The festival, of course, benefits Canberra in many ways from a celebration of diverse cultures to the significant economic benefits. The National Multicultural Festival is such a wonderful and fun event, and it has become a much loved feature of Canberra's cultural and social calendar.

Looking back at the record-breaking 2024 festival, there were more than 170 cultures represented; over 417,000 people attended (up from 380,000 in 2023), and over 19,000 people from outside the ACT travelled specifically for this event, which generated 33,000 visitor nights. All up, the 2024 three day event contributed over \$21.2 million to the ACT economy. It is the highest economic benefit in the festival's proud 26-year history.

In addition to the significant contribution to the economy, crowds just love the event, of course. You do not have to look very far to spot the smiles and hear the laughs of Canberrans of all ages enjoying the festivities. So from the dancers, entertainers and cultural parade to the array of lunches and desserts available from all across the globe, the festival truly offers something for everyone. It is such a unique opportunity to be immersed in and learn about hundreds of different cultures without leaving our very own multicultural city. But do not just take my word for it, Madam Speaker; this year, attendees gave a satisfaction rating of 4.3 stars, out of five, and 88 per cent of attendees said they were likely to return for the 2025 festival.

Finally, the festival also offers an opportunity for locals and travellers to share, learn and celebrate cultures. It is an important recognition of the strength of our multicultural society.

Mr Barr: Further questions can be placed on the notice paper; thank you, Madam Speaker.