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Debates and Questions



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Madam Speaker Lambley took the Chair at 10 am.

MESSAGE FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR
Message No 12 – Assent to Bills Passed in November 2025

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have received Message Number 12 from His Honour the Administrator notifying assent to the Bills passed in the November meetings of the Assembly. The message is dated 15 December 2025.

SPEAKER'S STATEMENTS
Photographer in Chamber

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have given permission for the professional photographer to be here for this part of the proceedings this morning. The photos will be used to renew the DLA (Department of the Legislative Assembly) collection and will be used in corporate materials and publications.

Executive Director of Parliamentary Support – Appointment

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the appointment of Candice Maclean as the Executive Director of Parliamentary Support. Candice has decades of experience as a senior policy lawyer and over recent months has been acting as Ombudsman and Deputy Ombudsman. I welcome her to the Department of the Legislative Assembly.

Members: Hear, hear!

The Administrator of the Northern Territory

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I sent an email to all members yesterday drawing attention to Standing Order 30 which prohibits referring to the Administrator in a disrespectful manner. I did this to ensure members are aware of the appropriate standards of the conduct of debate in a Westminster parliament. Given some commentary about this email, I consider it necessary to clarify matters for the Assembly before we commence debate.

The principle is neatly summarised in *Odgers' Australian Senate Practice* which states:

> *This rule is founded upon the need for mutual respect between the branches of government … and on the requirement that the holders of these offices remain above political disputation. This prohibition is more restrictive than the injunction against 'offensive words ... imputations of improper motives … [and] personal reflections' against senators and the members of other Houses …*

The *House of Representatives Practice* also upholds this principle, stating:

> *The practice of the House is that, unless the discussion is based upon a substantive motion which admits of a distinct vote of the House, reflections … must not be cast in debate concerning the conduct of the Sovereign or the Governor-General, including a Governor-General designate.*

Whilst the oldest traditions were most restrictive, a contemporary standard was set by Speaker Snedden in the House of Representatives in 1976, who stated:

> *Some past rulings have been very narrow. It has, for instance, been ruled that the Governor-General must not be either praised or blamed in this chamber and, indeed, that the name of the Governor-General must not be brought into debate at all. I feel such a view is too restrictive. I think honourable members should have reasonable freedom in their remarks. I believe that the forms of the House will be maintained if the Chair permits words of praise or criticism provided such remarks are free of any words which reflect personally on His Excellency or which impute improper motives to him. For instance, to say that in the member's opinion the Governor-General was right or wrong and give reasons in a dispassionate way for so thinking would in my view be in order. To attribute motive to the Governor-General's actions would not be in order.*

I intend to apply that standard to this Assembly.

I also advise the Assembly that as the Administrator's commission commenced on 1 February, he should be referred to as His Honour the Honourable David Connolly, Administrator of the Northern Territory.

VISITORS

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of Ms Vida Goodvach, President of the Northern Territory Jewish Community Association and Vice-President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry; Dr Janice Warren, Secretary of the Northern Territory Jewish Community Association; and Professor Alan Berman, Dean of Law at CDU (Charles Darwin University) and committee member of the Northern Territory Jewish Community Association. On behalf of honourable members, I extend a warm welcome to you.

Members: Hear, hear!

CONDOLENCE MOTION
Bondi Terrorist Attack

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Chief Minister): Madam Speaker, I move that this Assembly:

- expresses its profound sadness and condolences to the family and friends of the 15 victims of the Bondi terrorist attack on 14 December 2025
- further expresses its deepest condolences to Australia's Jewish community and, in particular, the Jewish community of Sydney and the wider Sydney community
- pays tribute to the bravery of those whose acts of courage saved lives on that terrible day
- condemns the hatred, extremism and evil behind the gunmen's actions
- on behalf of all Territorians, stands with Australians in our call for unity and peace.

They came to celebrate. They came to share the festival of lights together with other Australians. They were somebody's father, somebody's mother, somebody's child, somebody's *bubby-zeidy, savta-saba*. Like us, they lived in the lucky country, a place proud of its multiculturalism and belief in giving people a fair go. There were 15 Australians; 15 innocents; 15 victims.

Words are inadequate to express the white-hot anger, the gut-wrenching horror and the deep grief. Like most Australians, I was shocked when I first heard of the atrocities at Bondi on Sunday 14 December 2025. An unimaginable evil had struck. How could this happen here in our nation on Bondi Beach, an iconic and internationally renowned relaxed playground for everyday Australians? The Bondi attack was the largest terrorist attack on Australian soil in our nation's history. Families were torn apart, loved ones missing the chance to say goodbye—fear, terror and inexplicable grief.

Just six minutes is all it took to carry out this atrocious attack and send a shockwave across our nation and around the world. Australians of all walks of life were shocked at the ferociousness and horror of the attack. This is not the Australia we want. This is not who we are.

Today, as a parliament and as a community, we come together in absolute unity to call out this behaviour, grieve and solemnly reflect on the lives lost on Bondi Beach that fateful day. I thank Vida Goodvach, the President of the Northern Territory Jewish Community Association; Janice, the secretary; and all the other community members who are here today—Michelle—for coming.

Today, we mourn and remember:

- Edith Brutman, Vice-President of the New South Wales branch of international Jewish group B'nai B'rith, who was described as a gracious woman, passionate about dealing with prejudice and discrimination.
- Tania Tretiak, 68 years, a loving grandmother who was out with her family to celebrate Hanukkah. Reports say she spent her final moments shielding a child from gunfire.
- Sofia and Boris Gurman, 62 years and 69 years, who had been married for 34 years. Their 35th wedding anniversary was due last month. Sofia worked at Australia Post while Boris was a retired mechanic. Bondi

locals described them as honest, hardworking, kind, warm and respectful. They were very brave, killed while trying to stop one of the attackers by grabbing his gun and wrestling with him.

- Boris Tetleroyd, 68 years, who was with his son, Yakov, at the festival when the shooting began. Both men were wounded. Boris, sadly, was fatally wounded. He was a musician and a cherished family man.

- Adam Smyth, 50 years, who was a father of four. He was walking along Bondi Beach with his wife, Katrina, when gunfire claimed his life. He loved his sport, following the Liverpool Football Club, Sydney Swans and Manly Sea Eagles.

- Tibor Weitzen, 78 years, who together with his wife, Eva, was part of an organisation, Friends of Refugees of Eastern Europe (F.R.E.E.). It brought elderly Russian-speaking members of the Jewish community together. He was a much-loved grandfather and great-grandfather. Tragically, one of his grandchildren was a first responder and was treating people when she came across his body. He was affectionately known as the lollipop man as he handed out sweets to children at shul.

- Rabbi Yaakov Levitan, 39 years, who was a father of four and described as the spine of all Jewish organisations in Sydney. He was the chief operating officer of Chabad in Bondi and shared a close bond with another victim, Rabbi Eli Schlanger. As reported online by Chabad News, 'Eli had the visions and ideas and Yaakov figured out how to get it done'. They died together and were laid to rest on the same day.

- Reuven Morrison, 62 years, who migrated to Australia from the former Soviet Union in the 1970s as a teenager. He had told the ABC, 'We came here with the view that Australia is the safest country in the world and the Jews would not be faced with such antisemitism in the future'. A retired businessman, he was devoted to his community and sacrificed his life in order to help others flee, throwing bricks at one of the gunmen to distract him and using his own body as a shield. He was a devoted family man who was fun and happy to be around.

- Alexander Kleytman, 87 years, who was a Holocaust survivor who came to Australia from Ukraine. He was a keen chess player, an author, a defender and promoter of the Jewish faith and a father of two and grandfather of 11. He had survived unspeakably harsh conditions in Siberia and died shielding his wife from bullets.

- Marika Pogany, 82 years, whom her family said was known to all as Omi, was a beautiful mother, grandmother, sister, aunt and steadfast friend whose warmth and energy touched countless lives. She was a long-serving volunteer and had hand-delivered 15,000 meals to Jewish seniors via a kosher meals on wheels program. She was a dear friend to the former President of her homeland of Slovakia, Zuzana Caputova, even attending her inauguration in 2019. She was a keen and good bridge player, forming many friendships over years through that game.

- Peter Meagher, 61 years, who was a former police officer and working as a freelance photographer at the Hanukkah event. 'Marzo', as he was known, spent decades volunteering at the Randwick rugby club and trained as a divemaster. In the police he had risen to the position of detective sergeant until his retirement in 2020. He was described as gentle and calm, a loving man and a respected police officer who believed in justice. He received a number of commendations during his 35-year policing career, including for his work on the investigation into the Lindt Cafe terror attack in December 2014.

- Dan Elkayam, 27 years, who was a French IT engineer who moved to Australia in 2023. He was a keen soccer—or football, as he insisted on calling it, according to his close friends—player. He was remembered as an adventurous young man who loved to travel and was friendly to everyone.

- Rabbi Eli Schlanger, 41 years, who was respected and loved by his community. He was a father of five, head of the local Chabad mission and one of the organisers of the Chanukah by the Sea event. Rabbi Schlanger and his wife had just celebrated the birth of their new child in October. He served as a chaplain to New South Wales Corrective Services and at St Vincent's Hospital in Darlinghurst. He was remembered as a passionate, energetic and happy person.

- beautiful 10-year-old Matilda Britvan. She was so devastatingly young. Matilda was given the most Australian name that her parents knew. She was bright, joyful and spirited. She loved animals, practised judo and, like all 10-year-old girls, was thrilled that she had just mastered her cartwheels and splits. She loved her younger sister, Summer, and tragically on that fateful December day, Summer witnessed her beloved sister being shot.

The story of these 15 incredible Australians will remain with all of us because their lives mattered, and they will be remembered.

Today as a unified democratically elected parliament we offer our thoughts and prayers to the families and loved ones experiencing the raw pain of this attack. We stand in solidarity with the Jewish community in the Northern Territory, Sydney and across Australia. Anti-Semitism and hatred have no place in this country.

On Friday last week while in Sydney for National Cabinet I visited Bondi, and in Jewish tradition I placed at the memorial a rock which I inscribed, 'With love, Northern Territory' and made a small heart on the back. While there I was fortunate to speak with one of the chaplains who had been delivering services to the hundreds of people who had been gathering daily to reflect, grieve and pay their respects. Chaplains had been there providing support and lending an ear to people who needed it. Volunteers were there busy collecting every stone that had been placed for them to be kept and later put in a memorial. I had the opportunity to speak with Peter Wertheim AM, Co-CEO of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, about the profound impact this tragedy has had on all Australians about the profound impact this tragedy has had on all Australians.

As horrific as this tragedy is, we must not forget the amazing and inspirational stories that have come to light. We all saw the footage of the surf lifesavers and off-duty medics helping the wounded while gunfire continued to explode around them. There were the shopkeepers, cafe owners and those at North Bondi RSL who hid people in their premises, giving them a safe haven when they were fleeing from the shooting.

Strangers shielded others with their bodies—people like Tash Willemsen who had been operating the petting zoo at the festival with her mother and stepfather when the shooting began. She grabbed Matilda's younger sister, Summer, another girl and a young man with a disability and held them close until after the shooting. Her mother, Ally, also shielded a young girl.

Jessica Rozen was five months' pregnant with her third child at the time. She used her body to shield three-year-old Gigi, whom she did not know but saw crying as people fled in terror around her. Gigi's father, Wayne, said that Jessica is a superhero, but Jessica said that any mum would do that.

We also heard about 14-year-old Chaya Dadon who left where she was sheltering to lay on top of two young children, shielding them from the gunmen. Chaya was shot in the leg and thankfully survived. Her grandfather says that her name means life; on that day she delivered on that.

The Bondi lifeguards on the day braved the intense danger to help others during the shootings and after. Lifeguard Jackson Doolan ran from a neighbouring beach armed with medical supplies. He had heard the shooting and ran towards it.

Rory Davey helped rescue those who had fled to the sea when the shooting started, like student, Levi Xu, and his friend who started to struggle in the water but did not want to call for help. They were afraid of drawing the attention of the shooters. Lifeguard Rory plucked them from the sea as well as others who were in that situation.

When the wounded and dying needed to be moved urgently, lifeguards used their iconic red-and-yellow lifesaving boards as stretchers. Surf Life Saving New South Wales Chief Executive Steve Pearce said at the National Day of Mourning service that he was proud of every lifesaver who saw things that night that people should never see.

Police officers Constable Scott Dyson and Probationary Constable Jack Hibbert, both new to their jobs, did not think twice about risking their lives as they ran towards the shooting, helping people to take cover. They were both badly wounded.

Let us not forget Detective Senior Constable Cesar Barraza who heroically broke his cover to deliver the shots that ended the siege. A veteran of 16 years' experience in the New South Wales Police Force, Detective Senior Constable Cesar Barraza's aim was true. His subsequent actions in helping secure the terrorists and the scene, helping his junior officers and his follow-up actions are a massive credit to him and the New South Wales Police Force. He was brave, quick-thinking and professional, and we salute him and his colleagues.

We are also grateful to the teams of medics, paramedics, emergency hospital staff, nurses, doctors and surgeons who we are told did not even need to answer the call to serve; they raced to the hospitals or the

site to render assistance and save lives. Some were already at Bondi, having time off, and they bolted to action, treating the wounded even as bullets were still flying.

No-one in the world will ever or should ever forget the astounding courage of Ahmed Al Ahmed. The footage of him wrestling the rifle from one of the shooters, all the while getting injured himself, is something you cannot forget. He was asked what made him do it. He replied, 'To stop him from killing innocent people'. This 44-year-old Syrian refugee, a father of two and an Australian Muslim, was a unifying force at a time our nation needed it most—the embodiment of courage, compassion and humility.

In the depth of great darkness shone so many lights, highlighting the strength, resolve and determination of the Australian spirit. In the hours and days after, more than 100,000 Australians rolled up their sleeves across the nation and gave blood to support the victims. These deeply personal and meaningful contributions are proof once more that good triumphs evil.

On behalf of the people of the Northern Territory, I expressed our thoughts and prayers to Premier Chris Minns and the people of New South Wales.

Following the attack, I contacted and met with members of our local Jewish community, including the Member for Johnston, who were understandably distraught and deeply concerned. We provided as much support as we could at a time of great uncertainty. Police gave security information to try to ease local concern.

From Central Australia to the Top End Territorians held vigils, and it was wonderful to see the moving response to the stone laying instigated by the Member for Johnston and religious leaders out the front of Parliament House. We all participated.

Now is a time for unity and to come together as a nation. We are one, and we are many.

We will never forget what happened at Bondi. We will never forget the 15 innocent people who had their life ripped away from them in a brutal and callous act of violence and hatred.

I pray that justice be done, that grieving family and friends find peace and that as a nation we unite to ensure this never happens again.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, with a heavy heart I support this motion.

Edith Brutman; Dan Elkayam; Boris Gurman; Sofia Gurman; Alexander Kleytman; Rabbi Yaakov Levitan; Peter Meagher; Reuven Morrison; Marika Pogany; Rabbi Eli Schlanger; Adam Smyth; Boris Tetleroyd; Tania Tretiak; Tibor Weitzen; and young Matilda—those 15 names should echo in this Chamber. They are 15 innocent people for whom that day should have been a summer evening with family and friends, a community celebration and the beginning of school holidays. Instead, it has become a day of mourning.

As we meet in the Northern Territory parliament today, we commemorate those lives that were taken in the Bondi massacre and place on the record something that must be said plainly: this was an act of anti-Semitism. Jewish Australians were targeted. A celebration of light was met with darkness, and our nation will never forget it. To the families, friends and all those who carry grief from that day, we cannot lift your pain, but we can stand with you and ensure that our country stands with you not just in words but in resolve.

Among that horror Australians also witnessed extraordinary courage. We honour the spirit of the Bondi community, the surf lifesavers—the lifeguards—who rushed to that scene, the New South Wales Police officers who ran towards the danger, the medical teams, the firefighters and the ordinary community members who became first responders in an instant, without thinking, providing aid and comfort when it mattered most. In moments when fear could have taken over, people chose humanity, and we should say clearly and with gratitude that those heroes saved lives.

I place on the record our opposition's thanks to the Chief Minister, her office and the Northern Territory Police for briefing us in the wake of those attacks, particularly Acting Deputy Commissioner Travis Wurst, and updating us on the work the police were doing in the Northern Territory and the support offered to our local Jewish community at the time, when anxiety and stress were acute.

It is important to honour the heroes of Bondi. It is also important to learn from the mistakes that allowed hatred to grow louder in our community and across the country. We must confront the truth that in the period following 7 October, not enough was done to combat anti-Semitism, not early enough, not consistently enough and not firmly enough. That is why we support the national measures to confront anti-Semitism and

strengthen Australian social cohesion, including the federal government's Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion, which we hope will shine a light where too often there has been evasion, minimisation or the deadliest one—silence.

We also must confront something else: leadership matters, and social cohesion is not built by slogans. As leaders, particularly in politics but in all facets of community life and even in the media, we must acknowledge that sometimes our own behaviour, rhetoric and willingness to inflame division rather than lower the temperature has not helped our community come together. We must be capable of moral clarity and not moral convenience. It is not a binary choice as a leader. Compassion should never be selective, and hatred can never be excused—ever.

When we speak about practising what we preach, we should remember the example of Ahmed Al Ahmed who—without knowing the victims and who they were or their story, what the attackers' intentions were or why the violence was unfolding in front of him—put his own life on the line because it was the right thing to do. He did not ask who deserved help; he acted. That is shared humanity, and that is the standard that we should all set for ourselves in this place.

I acknowledge Ms Vida Goodvach and Dr Janice Warren. I have not seen Professor Alan Berman, but I have spoken to him.

The Northern Territory is one of the greatest multicultural successes in the world. It did not happen by accident; it was built deliberately through leadership, respect, connections and the daily work of all our communities choosing to live together. We honour the leaders who have come before us who shaped that legacy for the Northern Territory. That is why it is so important to reflect on what happened in New South Wales. Our strength can be their strength in that time of deep grief.

We owe it to the leaders who come after us and to the children who are watching us here and now to ensure that the Northern Territory remains a place where people of every culture and faith are safe, welcomed and feel like they belong in our community without fear.

May the victims of Bondi be remembered. May the heroes of Bondi be honoured. May we do the work that ensures this nation never again sees a day like that.

Mr MALEY (Agriculture and Fisheries): Madam Speaker, I pay tribute to the lives lost during the horrific terrorist attack at Bondi on 14 December last year. It was an act of violence that shocked our nation and will forever be etched in the Australian collective memory.

I acknowledge the members of the Jewish community here today. I thank you for your presence.

This was a deliberate act of violence that targeted innocent people going about their daily lives in a public place—in a place that should always represent safety and freedom. The Northern Territory stands with all Australians in remembering those lives lost. We remember the 15 victims and acknowledge the families who had their lives changed forever.

We recognise the extraordinary bravery of the first responders who acted with courage and professionalism in the face of these unimaginable circumstances. Medical teams, police, emergency personnel and members of the public acted with selflessness and resolve in the face of chaos and danger. Their actions saved lives and brought comfort in the darkest of moments.

We also acknowledge the deep impact this event had on the broader Bondi community and Australians everywhere.

Anti-Semitism and hatred have no place in our country, on our streets and in our institutions and society. Australia is at its strongest when people of all faiths, cultures and backgrounds can live safely, openly and without fear.

Recently in Alice Springs I met with two women who are part of the Jewish community there, Karen Zarinski and Hadassah Dardik. These women expressed their love for Alice Springs and the community they are a part of. Most importantly, they spoke of the rich and diverse Territory—a place they are proud to be part of. It was a reminder of the cultural richness of the Territory. You just have to look around the Chamber to see that diversity.

We were elected by Territorians to govern, reduce crime and restore our lifestyle. We have all spoken in the Chamber about the importance of the unique Territory lifestyle, and part of that is a diverse multicultural community. We want to be strong. We want to have connected communities across the Northern Territory free from fear and hatred.

Although no words can undo the harm suffered, we owe it to the victims and the public to continually strengthen the safeguards that help prevent violence and protect our communities. In this time of collective mourning the Assembly pays tribute to the resilience of the Bondi community whose compassion and unity have shone through in the aftermath. We honour the memory of the victims and extend our heartfelt sympathies to all those who carry the weight of this tragic event.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, I add my voice to this motion and reflect on what this moment asks of us, not just in grief but in leadership.

The events at Bondi were devastating. They shook the Jewish community and the country. While today is rightly about remembrance and respect, it must also be about reflection.

It was an awful and disgusting act of anti-Semitism on a community who did not deserve it, with 15 lives lost at a time when they should have been celebrated. As leaders we need to be honest with ourselves. Social cohesion does not maintain itself; it requires effort, restraint and care. I think it is fair to say that at times across politics, public debate and community life, we have all fallen short of striking the right balance between spirited debate and respectful discourse. Disagreement is healthy in a democracy. Passion is not a weakness, but when our words harden divisions, we fail to listen and we prioritise being loud over being responsible, cohesion suffers.

The Jewish community has felt those consequences deeply, so today I say with clarity that Territorians stand with you; you are not alone.

I acknowledge the tireless work of Vida Goodvach, Janice Warren, my colleague Justine Davis and the Northern Territory Jewish Community Association, whose leadership over many years has helped foster an environment where people of all backgrounds, faiths and cultures can live and work together with respect.

I acknowledge the pain and the strength and leadership from the Member for Johnston. I know it has been a difficult time for you, but you have guided us all through this. I thank you for that as a colleague.

It is moments like these when leadership is not about speeches alone; it is about creating space. The vigil that the Member for Johnston set up and helped arrange on the steps of parliament did exactly that. It allowed us to gather, mourn, reflect and stand together in a way that was dignified, respectful and deeply human. That mattered to the Jewish community and the Territory more broadly.

If there is one lesson we must carry forward it is this: cohesion is a shared responsibility. It belongs to all of us in this House regardless of party. It belongs to leaders in every community. It requires humility, the willingness to say that we can do better and the resolve to actually do so.

Mr CHARLS (People, Sport and Culture): Madam Speaker, at the outset I acknowledge those in the gallery today, including members of the Jewish community, and I extend my sincere condolences to anyone in my electorate and any Territorian who was personally affected by the tragic and violent terrorist attack at Bondi on 14 December 2025.

In particular, I recognise Vida Goodvach, President of the NT Jewish Community Association, an organisation that I met with prior to the Bondi incident and in the immediate aftermath, along with Janice Warren, vice-president of the Jewish association.

Although unable to be here today, I also recognise Dan Sivan, a teacher who is a migrant from Israel, and his wife, Maria Vescan, notably contributing significant history to the Darwin Holocaust Memorial and Education Centre at the Darwin Military Museum.

When the terrible news from Bondi emerged, one of the first calls I made was to my parliamentary colleague the Member for Johnston, not as a political act but as a human one. In moments like this differences fall away. When one community is targeted, unity must be our response. Shared humanity must always come before division.

Unfortunately, 14 December will go down as a day that in the future when we will say to each other, 'Where were you when you heard the news of Bondi?' We will immediately reflect on connection to community, places and family and friends.

My own connection to Bondi and the Jewish community was only brief; however, having spent my first years in Australia in New South Wales, it was a must-do location to visit. It is a beautiful place to visit, picnic, play and spend time with family and friends. These are the most innocent of pastimes; there can be nothing purer. It is why this attack was on not only innocent lives but also the values that underpin our nation: safety; freedom; mutual respect; and the right of all Australians to live without fear. Its impact was felt far beyond Bondi, reverberating across Australia and into communities in the Northern Territory.

The attack occurred during Hanukkah, a time when families and members of the Jewish community were gathered together sharing moments of faith, family and reflection. What should have been a sacred, peaceful and innocent time was violently taken from them. The timing of this attack compounded its cruelty and amplified the pain felt by a community that knows too well the consequences of hatred left unchecked.

What we, as a community, can take away is the response. By and large, the sense of community unity in the days and weeks that followed were overwhelming. Whether it was on national or international stages with large events like the three-minute silence observed during the third Ashes cricket test in Adelaide or the New Year's Eve event in Sydney with the image of a menorah projected onto the Harbour Bridge and Opera House, it was humbling to see Australians respond.

The National Day of Mourning on 22 January to honour the victims of the Bondi terrorist attack was observed across the country in shared grief, reflection and solidarity. Even our own Parliament House was illuminated to acknowledge the Bondi victims and honour their lives on that day.

In the Northern Territory we saw the same spirit of unity reflected in the days and weeks that followed the Bondi tragedy.

Despite the horrific event only just occurring, a previously scheduled Hanukkah gathering fostered by the Northern Territory Jewish Community Association went ahead. It became not a celebration in the usual sense but a moment of connectedness and resilience, embodying the true meaning of Hannukah as the festival of light—perseverance, faith, identity and hope in the face of darkness.

I was honoured to attend that dinner on behalf of the Northern Territory Government to pay our respects to the Darwin Jewish community and to stand alongside its members during what must have been an incredibly difficult time. Thank you, Vida, for the humbling invitation to join you at this time, shared with others who came to support, including former Senator Nova Peris and the Member for Johnston.

I was also honoured to attend separate vigils held at Parliament House, including the vigil organised by the Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory with the support of the Member for Johnston on Sunday 21 December and the sunset candlelight vigil organised by members of our South Pacific nations community the following Sunday, 28 December.

In keeping with Jewish tradition, those present laid stones at the main Parliament House vigil, including many of my colleagues in this Chamber, to pay our respects and stand in solidarity with Jewish Australians. The sight of these stones building up over the next week was a moving reminder of those who lost their lives. Each stone laid tells our Jewish community that we are with them at this most difficult of times.

The sunset event hosted by The Friendly Island People association in Darwin and led by Reverend Viliami Mila demonstrated the love, respect and sense of warmth that these communities offered to the family and friends of those lost at Bondi and to the Jewish community in the Territory.

These were events where Territorians from all backgrounds came together to mourn, lay stones, light candles at sunset and stand shoulder to shoulder in rejection of hatred and violence. These moments matter. They show who we are as Territorians.

On a personal level, just over a month after this event, I visited Bondi with my family on a heavy, rain-soaked day in Sydney. Standing at the memorial was deeply moving. It was a place of quiet sorrow, but also one of dignity and care. On the day of our visit, Rabbi Noach Koncepolski was present, as members of the Jewish community continue to take turns caring for the memorial—holding space for remembrance, grief and reflection. That simple but powerful act speaks volumes about resilience, faith and collective responsibility.

I acknowledge the New South Wales Police Force and all first responders whose actions in the immediate aftermath of the attack and whose continued presence since have provided reassurance and safety during an extraordinarily distressing time. Their professionalism and calm reflect the best of public service.

Before concluding my remarks I will reflect on the privilege of living in the Territory. In the Territory we do things differently. Our multicultural community is not just something we speak about, but something we live. We are proud to be home to many multicultural associations, including the Northern Territory Jewish Community Association. We are strengthened by the diversity, generosity and contributions of migrants and refugees who call the Territory home.

It is not something that was created; it is a product of the way this community grew. It is in our DNA, and it should be something we are proud of and defend with all we have. Part of that DNA is being a Territorian first and then an Australian, and rejecting conflict or bringing conflict from other places. This is captured as, what is often used in commentary around these issues, social cohesion.

I suggest that, by and large, the Northern Territory could give the rest of the country a lesson on social cohesion. As the Minister for Multicultural Affairs I know that our government is committed to supporting our community to be a place to envy through our approach to grassroots multiculturalism. We want to ensure our communities are supported, connected and empowered in not just moments of celebration but also times of grief and challenge.

Since the Bondi attack I have spoken with many people from Muslim backgrounds across our community, including medical professionals, business owners and people from many walks of life. They have been unequivocal that the terrorists responsible for this heinous act do not represent their values, faith or community. They made it clear that these acts compound the challenges they already face and unjustly place innocent people of faith under suspicion and pressure they do not deserve.

In closing I will touch on one final lasting memorial. Earlier I touched on the Jewish tradition of laying stones, with many hundreds of stones laid out the front of Parliament House in the two weeks following the Bondi tragedy. The Jewish community collected these stones and approached this government to find an appropriate lasting memorial to house these stones forever. I am pleased to confirm that we have found, in association with the Jewish association and working together with the Darwin Military Museum, that home. It will be at the Darwin Military Museum at East Point.

Members may be aware that the Holocaust Memorial, which has been open for the past 18 months, is a permanent exhibition tracing the history of the Holocaust and is dedicated to the memory of all victims and survivors. The exhibition provides a space for reflection and education. It is designed to foster empathy, awareness and critical thinking about one of the darkest chapters in human history. The concept of permanently adding the stones to this memorial was raised by the Jewish community, and we will work towards an appropriate day to open this to the public.

I place on record my sincere thanks to Dan Sivan and Vida for the incredibly thoughtful and deeply personal tour of the Holocaust Memorial. I also acknowledge Norm Cramp and the team at the Darwin Military Museum and the Defence of Darwin Experience. It is a truly unique place of Territory history, where every visit reinforces the importance of remembrance. Being there a few weeks ago with Dan and Vida was humbling, as the common goal was to simply find a way to reflect on how to best honour the lives of the Bondi victims.

We are in this Chamber to do the same thing. The Bondi attack on 14 December 2025 was a moment in time for our country to stop, pause and refuse to allow this to occur again. Anti-Semitism, extremism and hatred have no place in Australia. They have no place in our communities, institutions or public life.

Today we remember those who were lost. We honour their lives and, on behalf of Territorians, express our deepest condolence to the family and friends of those tragically lost.

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Madam Speaker, I share my condolences with the Jewish community regarding the victims of the Bondi massacre and their families. I acknowledge all the people who responded bravely and with humility by trying to protect innocent people as the tragedy unfolded. I share my deep condolences with the Jewish people of the Northern Territory who also felt the terror of this event, some of whom are here today.

The terror of this attack also comes into the Chamber, as one of our members of the parliament, her family and her community are targeted by hate crimes. I reach out to my *gutharra wamuttjan* in this Chamber, the Member for Johnston, who is Jewish and grew up in Bondi.

Gutharra wamuttjan, I acknowledge the hurt that you have gone through and that you have been feeling during this time. I stand with and beside you. By the words *gutharra* and *wamuttjan*, you know that means being adopted into Aboriginal family. That is how much we care and bring people together to be with us so that you feel that you are not alone and that you have a family here as well. That is Yolngu *rom*; I am always with you.

We have family sitting up there. We are also thinking about you. Our thoughts and feelings are with you and the community about what happened.

On this land we have people from many places who are of many backgrounds and faiths. This has existed for tens of thousands of years, as different tribes lived all across Australia. Today we want to live in harmony and accept people of different cultures living together and celebrate our diversity.

When somebody comes along with hate and violence, it deeply impacts everyone. We must not spread more fear and create more violence; we must turn to our neighbours and show them that we care. From this tragedy we can show people that we do not want to live with division. We want to live in a place that is safe for everyone.

The Jewish community has known terrible tragedies. The Holocaust of World War II is a great horror that everyone must ensure never happens again.

As an Aboriginal person I understand this. On 22 January when we shared a day of mourning, I could understand this mourning. Many people of the Aboriginal community know this mourning. I know the stories my grandparent being shot by pastoralists on our country and of another grandfather being taken by police and treated badly while walking all the way to Darwin prison from Arnhem land. We know the stories of the massacre at Gan Gan in north-east Arnhem Land and elsewhere. We know these things in our histories, and in our hearts, and we know that there is a need for healing.

We can hold the hands of our Jewish brothers and sisters at this time as they experience this tragedy and feel fear in a place where they should feel safe. We understand some of your suffering, because we too have experienced some of this suffering. In response we must fight to bring back safety by working towards *magayamirr-rom*. This is creating a pathway for peace and harmony for everyone to live together without fear.

I convey my heartfelt condolences to the victims and the community. We feel your pain, and we stand with you.

Mr YAN (Treasurer): Madam Speaker, I express my profound and deep sorrow following the terror attack at Bondi on 14 December 2025. I acknowledge in the gallery the representatives of the Northern Territory's Jewish community.

Like everybody across Australia, Territorians watched these horrific events unfold in shock, disbelief and deep sadness. What was a place of joy, community and celebration was violated by an act of hatred and violence. It stole innocent lives and left families and communities forever changed.

Today we remember the victims—each one a person loved and each one a life of meaning and contribution all taken far too soon. We honour them not as names on a list but as parents, grandparents, children, friends and neighbours. Their loss is felt not only in New South Wales but also across our nation. We remember each of the victims by name and with profound respect:

- Edith Brutman, a devoted community leader and advocate remembered for her kindness and service
- Dan Elkayam, a young man full of life and potential
- Boris and Sofia Gurman, a devoted couple who confronted the threat at great personal risk
- Alex Kleytman, an 87-year-old Holocaust survivor whose life was a testament to resilience and hope
- Rabbi Yaakov Levitan, a spiritual guide and pillar of his community
- Peter Meagher, a former police officer and community volunteer
- Reuven Morrison, who confronted danger to give others a chance to escape
- Marika Pogany, whose warmth and care enriched those around her

- Rabbi Eli Schlanger, a leader whose daily acts of compassion touched many
- Adam Smyth, a beloved father and local whose loss is felt deeply
- Boris Tetleroyd, Tania Tretiak and Tibor Weitzen, each remembered with love by their families and communities
- Matilda, a bright and joyful 10-year-old, whose life was unjustly taken far too soon.

We honour Ahmed Al Ahmed, a bystander who, without hesitation, confronted one of the attackers and disarmed him, saving countless lives at the cost of his own safety. His bravery exemplified the best of us in the darkest of hours.

We honour Gefen Bitton who, seeing danger and distress, ran back towards gunfire in an effort to assist, even as he sustained grievous injuries.

We honour Reuven Morrison who, in a final act of self-sacrifice, charged at an attacker to protect others, allowing a mother and child to escape harm.

We acknowledge the courageous first responders, volunteer surf lifesavers, lifeguards and off-duty officers who rushed to help under fire, providing first aid and shelter, using surfboards as stretchers and confronting the wounded while danger still loomed.

We remember others whose instinct was to protect the vulnerable, shielding children, guiding others to safety and offering sanctuary to strangers. These acts of selflessness in the face of terror reflect an unshakeable belief in the values of everyday life.

The Northern Territory understands grief and resilience. We are a community built on looking out for one another, across cultures, faiths, distances and differences. When tragedy strikes anywhere in Australia, Territorians feel it personally because our sense of community does not stop at our borders. In moments of darkness, we also look for the light. At Bondi that light came from many ordinary people who showed extraordinary courage and whose first thought was to help others and run towards danger rather than away from it. These are the people who make our nation strong, forge the identity of Australians as a people who look out for others and will have your back in times of need.

This attack was also an assault on faith and identity. It targeted people gathered in peace and celebration. It was motivated by hatred and anti-Semitism.

I speak directly to the Jewish community of the Northern Territory: this parliament stands with you. You are valued, respected and an integral part of our community. Your faith, culture and contribution enrich the Northern Territory, and any attack motivated by hate against you is an attack on all of us. The Northern Territory Jewish community may be small in number, but it is strong in contribution to business, professional life, community service and civic engagement. You belong here; you are welcome here and, most importantly, you are safe here. You are and always will be a part of our community.

I acknowledge the Member for Johnston, a member in this Chamber who is also a member of Darwin's Jewish community. I acknowledge the deep sadness and hurt you have felt.

Territorians reject hatred in all its forms. We reject anti-Semitism, racism and violence. We reaffirm our shared commitment to respect, tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

The Northern Territory is a place where people step in when others are in need. That is who we are, and that sets apart from the rest of the country. Because of our isolation, we rely on each other to step up when others need help. We see that during cyclones, floods, bushfires and personal hardship. The courage shown at Bondi reflects values that Territorians know all too well: mateship; responsibility; and a belief that every life is worth protecting.

To the families of the loved ones who were killed, there are no words that I can say in this Chamber to ease your grief, but know that your loss is acknowledged by this parliament.

To those who were injured, the witnesses and the first responders who carry the heavy weight of that day, we acknowledge your trauma, courage and ongoing recovery.

As we honour those who were lost, we also reaffirm who we are as Australians and Territorians. We choose compassion over fear, unity over division and strength over hatred.

May the victims' families find comfort in the care of community and country. May we continue to stand together resilient, inclusive and d2etermined in defending the shared values that bind us all.

I commend these words to the Assembly.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Madam Speaker, this motion reflects not only a moment of profound tragedy for the community of Sydney but also a moment that shook the heart of our nation. What was meant to be a day of joy, connection and celebration—a gathering centred on family, community and culture—was instead torn apart by an act of violence.

Fifteen innocent Jewish Australians lost their lives. Fifteen people who had gathered in love and safety now leave behind families who are going through unimaginable grief that no words can truly erase. A day that began with happiness and warmth became a day marked with sorrow and mourning.

Although it has been almost two months since that horrific attack, the weight of that loss has not faded. That is why we have come together today to remember the 15 lives lost and to pause, reflect and stand in solidarity to acknowledge the pain felt by the Jewish community and reaffirm that hate and fear has no place in the Australia that we all strive to live in.

I acknowledge the extraordinary bravery of the Bondi hero Ahmed Al Ahmed. On that day Ahmed put his own life on the line. He stepped into danger without hesitation, placing himself directly in harm's way to stop the violence unfolding around him. His action helped prevent further loss of life and spared families from the devastation of saying goodbye to loved ones far too soon. Ahmed Al Ahmed showed the courage, selflessness and humanity that we must hold onto in times like these. He deserves the title of hero.

As we reflect on this tragedy may we continue to stand together to support one another and honour those we have lost by building a future grounded in compassion, unity and empathy.

I acknowledge those in the Chamber and the Member for Johnston.

Mrs CARLSON (Wanguri): Madam Speaker, I rise not to debate legislation nor to advance an argument but to acknowledge a moment of profound national grief and send my condolences to the lives lost at Bondi Beach on Sunday 14 December 2025 and the family and friends of those victims. I also extend my condolences to the members of the Jewish community here today.

Fifteen innocent lives were lost. I also acknowledge those who survived, now with lifelong injuries and trauma.

What occurred at Bondi Beach was not just an incident confined to a place on a map; it was the rupture of the everyday fabric of our Australian life. Bondi is built as a place for normality—for errands, conversations and passing moments. Because it was so ordinary, it could be any of us anywhere. It has shaken the country in the way that words struggle to hold.

I say this as Bondi was the last place I lived before returning to the Territory after my own tragedy. I lived and worked at Bondi Beach. I became part of that Jewish community. Today I speak for Territorians and as an Australian standing with millions of you and others who felt that shock in the chest. It still lingers.

We acknowledge first and without condition the lives that were lost. They were not symbols. They are not names scrolling across a screen; they are individuals who belonged to families, friendship circles, workplaces and communities and to you, also, Member for Johnston. They had routines, plans, frustrations, jokes and futures. Those futures ended violently and without warning.

To their families there is no statement in this parliament that we can offer to feel sufficient, but silence would be worse, so let this be said plainly: your loved ones mattered, their lives mattered and the weight of your loss is recognised in this place where the nation speaks to itself.

We also acknowledge those who survived; those who were injured and those who walked away physically unharmed but internally changed. Trauma does not announce itself; it arrives quietly and sometimes much later. Recovery is not linear, and it is not visible. You deserve patience, support and understanding for as long as it takes, and our parliaments need to recognise that.

In the midst of this devastation Australians witnessed something else which deserves recognition without embellishing or mythology. People stepped forward, not because they were trained to and not because they were asked to but because they saw another human being in danger and chose not to look away. There were individuals who shielded strangers, guided others to safety and intervened with nothing but innocence and courage. These were not acts performed for recognition; they were acts borne of conscience. Although we must never romanticise tragedy, we should acknowledge the humanity that surfaced when it was most needed.

Alongside them were our essential services: police officers who made split decisions under extreme pressure; paramedics who treated the injured amidst chaos; firefighters who secured unsafe spaces; and hospital staff who absorbed wave after wave of trauma and carried it home with them after their shifts. Their response was not abstract; it was deeply human work done under impossible conditions. We must be honest that the impact of that work does not end when the emergency does; recognition must extend beyond thanks to ongoing care, resources and support.

What makes this tragedy resonate so deeply is not only what happened but also where it happened. Bondi Beach is a public place, a shared space and a place where Australians of every background move side by side without needing permission. Many tourists come and acknowledge the beauty that it is, the beautiful blue water and the white sands.

Australia is not monocultural; it never has been. Our streets and schools, workplaces and communities are built from many history layers together. That diversity is not a weakness to be managed; it is a reality to be respected and protected. When violence enters such a space it tests more than security arrangements; it tests our values and it asks whether we retreat into suspicion and whether we resist the urge to fracture.

Many Territorians understand the importance of community. They know that safety is not created by distance but by one another and connection. That is across our Territory, and we need it across Australia. Neighbours who know each other, services that are trusted and systems that intervene early, not after the damage is done—that is the Australia we must continue to build across all communities.

Moments like this ask something from us beyond procedural responses; they ask us to slow down, listen and remember that behind every policy decision are real people whose lives can be irreversibly altered in a moment. Let us honour those lost by not allowing their deaths to harden us, but letting them sharpen our resolve to do better and stand together without fear that tempts division. Let us be clear about the work ahead and steady in our commitment to our country and our communities where public spaces remain places of belonging and not fear. Let us ensure that when history looks back on how Australia responded it does not see panic or fragmentation, but care, responsibility and our collective strength.

To those we lost, you are remembered. To those who grieve, you are not alone. To those who serve, you are seen. To this nation, may we meet this moment not with suspicion but with solidarity, because that is how we honour the lives of those who should still be with us today.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, I offer my deepest condolence to the families, friends and loved ones of those affected by the horrific Bondi attack.

I stand as the Member for Gwoja, the Northern Territory's largest and most remote electorate, and I bring forward the voices of heartache and disbelief that so many remote Territorians shared in this moment of deep pain. Across every corner of the Territory, Territorians were in disbelief of what happened—emotional, sad and crying because they could not believe that this was happening in Australia, supposedly the lucky country. I bring forward the voices of people in remote Aboriginal communities who share their condolences. They share in mourning the loss of life in this horrific event. It is important to remember that we stand here not as individuals but as members who represent the Northern Territory. I want to ensure those voices are heard. They share in the mourning with the rest of the nation.

This senseless act of violence has shaken us all. It has caused profound grief, fear and heartbreak for not only those directly impacted but also Australians everywhere.

We mourn the loss of life, we stand with those who were injured and we hold close the families who are now living with unimaginable loss.

Australia is a place where we should feel safe to live, gather and embrace our cultures, customs and religion without fear. This is a fundamental value we share as a nation.

I am not Jewish, but my family has connections and roots in the Jewish and Palestinian communities. Their lived experiences and stories remind me every day that violence and hatred only divide us, while compassion and understanding bring us together.

I think about beautiful Matilda, a 10-year-old child who lost her life. She will never know what an amazing country Australia is to live in. I think about 10-year-old children who grow up being demonised for being Jewish or Palestinian. That is not the country I want to live in.

We need to embrace each other and celebrate difference. Children should not grow up in fear of being who they want to be or hiding who they are and their customs, values and traditions. We should be embracing it. There is no room for hatred in our community. This moment calls on all of us to choose empathy over fear, unity over division and love over hate.

I extend my heartfelt condolence to all those affected. I reaffirm my collective commitment to a safe, inclusive and compassionate Australia. In this time of darkness we must come together to find the light to support one another.

To our Jewish communities in the Northern Territory and across this country, I say to you: we are all people, different in story but equal in worth. This is a country where you are valued and loved.

When we have a moment to reflect on that, let us remember that we are all people. We all come from different backgrounds, but what makes us better is when we come together and support one another.

To be silent is to be complicit. We cannot just leave here today having spoken words; we have to take action so that when my cousins who are Jewish or Palestinian are exposed to horrible comments and discrimination, we call that out. We have a role to support our fellow Territorians so that they do not live in fear and feel free and empowered to celebrate their customs and culture because we are a multicultural nation. No-one should live in fear of expressing who they are. The job for us leaving here today is not to be silent but to stand against injustices and make the world a better place so that we do not see these horrific events unfold in the future, which would mean we are going down a path that is not good and not the Australian way. The events that unfolded last year are un-Australian.

I love this country, and I want everyone who calls Australia home to love this country. I want my Jewish brothers and sisters to move to Australia and know that they are loved, supported and embraced to share their values and traditions. I want every person from around the world to know that when you call Australia home you live in a country where people support, value and love you and, as we have seen, in a time of need come together and wrap their arms around you. That is the Australia I choose and for which I come to this parliament every day to work hard to make a reality.

Like everyone else, I acknowledge the Member for Johnston for being the light of this parliament in this time of tragedy and for making sure we knew the appropriate ways to express our grief, sorrow and support.

To the members of the Jewish community across the Northern Territory, please do not be afraid in times of need to reach out and talk to us. We are here for you and every person who calls the Territory home.

I still cannot believe sometimes the horrific events that unfolded at the end of the year, when families should be coming together to celebrate the holiday season. The trauma and grief that our fellow Australians had to deal with during that time are unimaginable.

Like the Chief Minister, I acknowledge the amazing heroes who stood up and put their lives on the line to save fellow Australians—our frontline services, police, ambulance, paramedics, healthcare providers and community members who came together in a time of need. That is the Australian way.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, I offer my condolences to the victims of the horrific attack at Bondi, their families, loved ones and those whose lives have been shattered by an act of senseless violence.

What happened that day was confronting and deeply distressing. I, like many across the world, watched the news as it unfolded, waiting for updates, seeing the number of innocent victims rise and feeling that familiar helplessness, knowing that there was nothing we could do to stop what was happening at that moment.

Innocent people lost their lives in a much-loved and public place that should be safe, ordinary and familiar—we know how iconic it is—a place where people were simply going about their day at the beach or nearby

attending a celebration event for Hanukkah, meeting friends and living their lives as they should. No words spoken in this Chamber can ease the grief of the families of the victims: Edith Brutman; Dan Elkayam; Boris and Sofia Gurman; Alex Kleytman; Rabbi Yaakov Levitan; Peter Meagher; Reuven Morrison; Marika Pogany; Rabbi Eli Schlanger; Adam Smyth; Boris Tetleroyd; Tania Tretiak; Tibor Weitzen; and the youngest victim, Matilda.

I acknowledge the pain felt by our Jewish community, particularly in the Northern Territory. You have joined us here today. Thank you for being here; I believe this matters. It matters that we all pause today to reflect, acknowledge this loss and stand together in rejection of hatred and violence in all its forms.

The Northern Territory is a long way from Bondi, but Territorians felt this deeply. I have always believed that the Territory is a special place. We are shaped by hardship and resilience; by people who came here with little and built lives together; by Indigenous Australians who have endured for many years; and by migrants, refugees, Defence families, workers, entrepreneurs and adventurers who chose this place or who, like me, are proud to have been born here and chose to stay. We are small in number, but we are strong in spirit.

Our diversity is not unfamiliar to me. It is lived. It is neighbours, schoolyards, workplaces and people knowing each other by name when going to the shops. Our Jewish community in the Territory may be small, but its members are part of who we are. They are Territorians and part of our shared story. They belong here just as every Territorian does, regardless of faith, culture or background. I say all this because, as Territorians, we can share with other Australians how we deal with tragedy.

What I believe defines us is not difference, but how we live with that difference. As Territorians and Australians, community matters. Looking out for one another matters. When something threatens the safety or dignity of any one person or group, it concerns all of us and we will not stand for it.

This attack was not just an assault on individuals; it was an assault on the idea that people should be safe in public places, safe to live freely and safe to be who we are. Violence motivated by hatred has no place in our society. It has no place in Australia, and it has no place in the Northern Territory. At the same time I believe we must hold fast to what makes us strong—not fear or division, but decency and respect for one another.

Territorians and, indeed, Australians have always faced hard things together. Regardless of our origins, I have seen how we rebuild after cyclones, tragedies and bombings. We have now seen how we stand together after Bondi.

Many of us came together in keeping with Jewish tradition to lay a stone at Parliament House to remember those who lose their lives. I hope that each stone laid assures members of our Jewish community that we stand in solidarity with them at this most difficult of times.

I was pleased to hear the Minister for Multicultural Affairs talk about what will happen with those stones at the request and with the support of the Jewish community. They will be sent to the Holocaust Memorial, which is the perfect tribute. I went to the Holocaust Memorial at the Darwin Military Museum last year. I encourage everyone to go along; it is fascinating, and an amazing tribute to a tragic time in the world.

The Territory's resilience is not loud. We are reminded in times like these that Territorians will show up for each other quietly and consistently.

Today I honour the victims of the Bondi attack by remembering them, standing with their families and recommitting myself and this parliament to the values that keep our community strong. That is who we are in the Northern Territory and who I believe we must continue to be. We send our thoughts to those who lost their lives. May they rest in peace. May their families find strength in the support of a nation that grieves with them.

I pay my utmost respect to the Member for Johnston, who is part of our Jewish community—and much loved, according to your Jewish family.

Thank you so much to everybody who has spoken so far—there are more to come—and shared today's condolences. It is a reminder of what it is to be Australian. Listening to everyone's reflections and stories took me straight back to the time when we heard the news breaking. It is important that those stories were shared. I am grateful and privileged to hear those stories. I look forward to the remaining stories we will hear today.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I support this condolence motion and thank the government for bringing this to the House.

On 14 December last year, as everyone has said, what should have been a time of celebration at Bondi Beach—a joyful Hanukkah event—was transformed into one of the darkest days in Australia's recent history. An act of brutal violence claimed the lives of 15 innocent people.

I thank the Chief Minister and others for sharing with this Assembly the names and stories of all the victims. This act of anti-Semitic terror has devastated the Jewish community and the wider Australian community.

I stand in solidarity with those who lost their lives, those who were injured and those who mourn. For too many people, their lives will never be the same. For me and many others, the image of Matilda's mother, Valentyna, distraught and holding Matilda's coffin will stay with me forever. The pain of losing a child is one that every parent fears, and one which no parent should ever have to experience. My heart is with Matilda's parents, Valentyna Poltavchenko and Michael Britvan, who have asked Australia to remember Matilda's name.

I also honour the bravery of the everyday Australians who selflessly covered children's bodies with their own to shield them from bullets. I have listened to the testimony of one of the survivors, Jessica Rozen who, pregnant with her third child, protected a stranger's child, calming her and shielding her with her body. Bystanders and lifeguards rushed under fire to provide lifesaving first aid. Boris and Sofia Gurman demonstrated unbelievable courage by trying to disarm the gunman and were both tragically and horrifically killed. Ahmed Al Ahmed, the Syrian–Australian shop owner, took down one of the gunmen, risking his life to save an unknowable number of lives. This bravery and selflessness is who I think most Australians want us to be as a nation.

As others mentioned, I acknowledge my incredible colleague Justine Davis, who is part of the Bondi Jewish community. Your strength, wisdom, empathy and leadership are an inspiration to me and many others. I am sorry for your loss.

I thank Justine, Vida Goodvach and the rest of the Jewish community for their leadership in setting up the vigil in front of Parliament House for the community to gather and honour the victims. Many of my constituents spoke to me about how much it meant to them to have somewhere to gather and mourn. The interfaith vigil was an incredibly moving and important event. Thank you for that.

Every member of our community, but especially us as leaders in the community, have a responsibility not to merely express sorrow but to stomp out the growing hatred and extremism in society. We saw another example of how this is growing, just a couple of weeks ago, with an attempted attack of terror in Perth where a homemade bomb was thrown into a crowd during a Survival Day event on Australia Day. Thankfully it did not detonate. We must confront the underlying hatred that breeds this violence. We must confront and reject anti-Semitism and all forms of discrimination in our society.

This is why I spoke out against this government's weakening of our hate speech laws last year. I remain deeply concerned that these changes will allow more anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and other hate speech to grow in our communities, making our multicultural and multifaith communities in the NT less safe and feeling less welcome.

I will address something else with clarity and care. This attack was perpetrated by individuals driven by ISIS ideology, an extremist ideology of hatred that has nothing to do with the legitimate advocacy for Palestinian rights and human dignity that many Australians from all backgrounds engage in peacefully. In the aftermath of this tragedy some have sought to conflate these two. This does a profound disservice to the victims of this attack and the many who work peacefully for justice. We must reject this conflation.

What unites us in our grief should also unite us in our values—that every innocent life matters and every child deserves to grow up free from violence. We can and must condemn the taking of innocent life wherever it occurs, regardless of who the victims are or who the perpetrators claim to be.

I condemn anti-Semitism and all hatred against people for their religion, their culture or who they are. Everyone deserves to practise their religion in peace and live free from discrimination and hatred.

May our words today honour the memory of those lost at Bondi. May this Chamber and all Australians stand unequivocally against anti-Semitism, hatred and division in every form.

Ms CAHILL (Trade, Business and Asian Relations): Madam Speaker, I extend my deepest condolences to the Jewish community in the Northern Territory.

I grew up in New South Wales, and Bondi Beach was an iconic place. As a girl from the country, a visit to Bondi Beach was extraordinarily special and a privilege. To think of this beautiful part of Australia that is iconic across the world having been awfully damaged in the psyche of our country forever just defies logic.

Like most people in this Chamber, I will forever remember where I was in the precise moment that I learned of what was unfolding in Bondi and the total disbelief that this could be happening in our country, in this day and age. This was something that had not touched and should not touch our shores. This is not who we are as a country. To so tragically lose those beautiful 15 lives and for so many people to have been so horribly impacted physically, emotionally and mentally for decades to come is something that I will struggle with for a very long time.

Many of the victims of this terrible tragedy came to our country to escape environments that were horrendous. They looked to Australia as a place of freedom, a place to celebrate who they were and who they wanted to be. They are:

- Edith Brutman
- Dan Elkayam, a French national who was here living his best life
- Boris and Sofia Gurman, who saw danger unfolding in front of them and unhesitatingly as a couple raced to try to stop tragedy from happening and tragically lost their lives
- Alex Kleytman, a Holocaust survivor who deserved to end his years in peace in the country that he had come to learn to love as home
- Rabbi Yaakov Levitan
- Peter Meagher, a policeman who had spent his entire career protecting and serving his community
- Reuven Morrison, a Soviet-born businessman who came to our country to build a new life for himself and his family
- Marika Pogany, a Czechoslovakian immigrant who was spending her time making her community better
- Rabbi Eli Schlanger
- Adam Smyth
- Boris Tetleroyd
- Tania Tretiak
- Tibor Weitzen
- None of us will ever forget the images of young Matilda, just before the tragedy unfolded, having the best day with her sister.

As a mum I really struggle with what happened. As an Australian I cannot comprehend it. As a Territorian, where we are such a diverse and multicultural community, where we embrace each other's differences and celebrate them every day, I cannot understand how in this country we have come to a point where this tragedy could have unfolded.

To the Member for Johnston, I extend my condolences to you and your community. I cannot begin to imagine the strength it has taken to put your needs to the back and stand up for your community. The Jewish community in the Northern Territory is very small. One of the beautiful things about the Territory community is that we have embraced the members of the Jewish community, stood with them and shown them that it does not matter if you are a small community within our wider community; you are a critical part of who we are. We want you all to know that we stand with you today and forever.

Our country is at a crossroads, and the choices we make following the tragedy that occurred on 14 December will shape our country for generations to come. We cannot allow hate to flourish; we must get the next steps right. We must remember who we are at heart as we move forward. The soul of this country is compassionate, and our community is one that embraces diversity and differences. We welcome and encourage those things.

We must send a clear message to those who would perpetrate such horrendous violence in our community: you are not welcome here; we do not want you here; and we will not tolerate your behaviour.

We will do everything we possibly can to ensure that the tragedy of Bondi never happens again as we work together to make Australia what it deserves to be—a country of love, compassion and caring that welcomes every person who wants to call Australia home. We need to send a strong message, particularly to our Territorian community—probably the most diverse multicultural community in our country—that this is a place that can show you how to live your life in peace and harmony. We will lead the way to show Australia and the rest of the world what the future should be for this country and what it will be.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Chief Minister and the government for bringing this condolence motion to the Chamber.

As everyone knows, I grew up in Bondi. Every day of my childhood I walked over that bridge that was on our screens. My family and close friends still live there. The places where this violence occurred are not abstract to me; they are woven into my life and my memory.

I am also a Jewish woman. I have lived with anti-Semitism, not as a theory but as a lived reality. That knowledge has shaped how I have experienced the days and weeks since this massacre.

I acknowledge, as others in the Chamber have, Vida, Janice and Ellis, the Jewish people who are watching and those who work in this building who came to talk to me over the last few months. I hope that you all feel held and honoured by what people have said in this Chamber today.

Immediately after the massacre we worked with the Speaker and the DLA to arrange a memorial circle in front of Parliament House. I express my thanks to the Speaker, both on behalf of the Jewish community and me personally, for her great support over this time. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Members of the Northern Territory community came together to lay stones in the tradition of Jewish mourning, share condolences and stand quietly in grief and solidarity. As we heard from the Member for Nightcliff, many people talked to me about how important it was to have a space to come together to express their condolences and their care for what had happened. That memorial has been transferred to the Holocaust Memorial where it will remain as an ongoing reminder of this time of profound loss and of our Territory community choosing to respond to this with care and humanity.

Last weekend I returned to Bondi for the first time since the massacre to attend my cousin's bat mitzvah—a young girl's coming of age ceremony—held only minutes from where the attack took place. I spent time at the site of the massacre and time with people who were there that night, and attended vigils held in memory of those who were killed. To move between celebration and mourning in the same place within the same day is something that I will carry with me for a long time.

Violence of this kind resists simple explanation. It demands seriousness, care and humility. Anti-Semitism is real and must be named and confronted, just as all forms of hatred and dehumanisation must be.

We honour those who were killed not by rushing to certainty or blame, but by committing ourselves to understanding, prevention, community safety and responding to violence with compassion rather than fear.

My Jewish identity and Jewish tradition are deeply intertwined with *tikkun olam*—the responsibility to heal the world—and with justice. I cannot speak about this massacre without saying that this must be a time when we name all injustice, understand the connections between different forms of hatred and speak out against all racism, all anti-Semitism, all Islamophobia and all violence.

We do not honour victims or confront hatred effectively by collapsing grief into slogans or blame. The horrific violence at Bondi cannot be reduced to protest movements, political debate, universities, journalists or parliamentary speech. Recognising the reality of anti-Semitism does not require us to abandon careful evidence-based understanding of violence nor to assign collective responsibility to entire communities or movements. We dishonour those who are killed by constructing sweeping theories or assigning collective responsibility to political opponents or institutions.

We honour them best by committing ourselves to understanding and prevention. We can condemn anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and terrorism unequivocally. At the same time we can defend freedom of expression, democratic protest and the right to disagree. Speaking against anti-Semitism does not require

silence on Palestinian suffering, and caring about Palestinian civilians does not imply tolerance for terrorism. As I have said before in this Chamber on many matters, democratic debate itself is not a danger.

This massacre took place on the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, the festival of lights. When I attended the memorial at Bondi Pavilion the rabbi said, 'Let this be a time to reflect on what visible light you can bring into the world'. In the Jewish tradition of *tikkun olam*, people were encouraged to perform a mitzvah—a good deed—in memory of those who were murdered. He ended with a beautiful song, part of the Jewish Mourner's Kaddish, a prayer for peace for all people of all backgrounds and all faiths:

May the one who makes peace in the heavens bring peace on all of us and on all the world

And let us say amen.

This moment calls on all of us to not only mourn but also act. The mitzvah, the good deed, the light each of us can bring, is an invitation to everyone, regardless of background, faith or community to make a contribution towards healing and justice.

In offering our deep condolences to those who were killed, to those who were injured and to all who are grieving we honour their lives by committing ourselves to reject hatred, to stand against violence and to bring light into the world wherever we can. In the spirit of *tikkun olam* each of us has the opportunity and the responsibility to heal the world in our own way. Whether through small acts of kindness, speaking out against injustice or fostering understanding against difference, we can ensure that the memory of those lost inspires care, compassion and justice.

May this immense tragedy remind us that our strength as a community and as members of this Assembly is measured by how we not only mourn but also respond with courage, compassion and a refusal to let hate and division define us.

I am grateful to other members in this Chamber for sharing the names and telling some of the stories of the people who were killed. Today we remember Rabbi Eli Schlanger; Peter Meagher; Boris Gurman; Sofia Gurman; Edith Brutman; Tibor Weitzen; Alexander Kleytman; Dan Elkayam; Reuven Morrison; Yaakov Levitan; Marika Pogany; Adam Smyth; Boris Tetleroyd; Tania Tretiak; and Matilda. May their memory be a blessing.

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I too express my deepest condolences to all those who have been affected by this terrible Bondi massacre.

To our Jewish friends, neighbours and fellow Australians, we stand with you. Your grief is our grief, your fear is our fear and your determination to live freely and openly is our shared determination.

Motion agreed to.

Members stood for one minute's silence as a sign of respect.

Madam SPEAKER: I thank honourable members for their contributions to this motion, and I thank all the guests who came to join in this condolence motion.

The Assembly suspended.

NOTICES

Mr EDGINGTON (Housing, Local Government and Community Development): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next meeting day I shall present a Bill entitled Housing Amendment Bill 2026, Serial 55.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next meeting day I shall present a Bill entitled Sentencing Amendment (Murder) Bill 2026, Serial 51.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next meeting day I shall present a Bill entitled Electrical Safety Amendment Bill 2026, Serial 50.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I shall present a motion that this Assembly:

1. refers the appointment process for future Administrators of the Northern Territory to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee for inquiry and report, including the consideration of:

   (a) best-practice standards for vetting and due diligence

   (b) clear responsibility and accountability for each stage of the appointment process

   (c) how relevant information should be identified, assessed and documented

   (d) the adequacy of existing safeguards, checks and balances

   (e) options to strengthen the appointment process to ensure transparency, integrity and sustained public confidence in future appointments.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I shall present a motion calling for this Assembly to:

1. call on the Chief Minister to revoke the appointment and accept responsibility for a decision that has undermined trust in the Territory's democratic and constitutional institutions

2. note that the appointment has irreparably damaged public confidence in the office of the Administrator and in the judgement of the government

3. note that the incoming Administrator, David Connolly, has a documented history of public statements containing racist, homophobic and sexist language

4. note that these statements are wholly incompatible with the …

Mr EDGINGTON: A point of order, Madam Speaker! This morning you made a ruling and referred to Standing Order 30. I ask that you rule that this motion be out of order.

Mr Paech: What are you afraid of?

Mr Young: Gagging debate.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence!

The motion you gave notice of had one part that I could hear clearly breached Standing Order 30—that is, disrespecting the office of the Administrator. You can either change it on the floor now or give notice of it at a different point.

Mr YOUNG: Just gagging debate, Madam Speaker; that is all they are doing.

Madam SPEAKER: Are you accusing me of gagging debate?

Mr YOUNG: The government—I said, 'They are'.

Mr EDGINGTON: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Clearly a matter of dissent—those comments were directed at you and the Assembly.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Can I speak to the point of order?

Madam SPEAKER: No; take your seat, please, Deputy Opposition Leader. You are not respecting my position and the advice I gave every member in this Chamber yesterday morning—a reminder it was.

I have told you that part of that motion is in breach of Standing Order 30—that one line. I will give you the opportunity to change it now and re-read the motion and not include the inference to the current Administrator, or you can leave it and come back to it at a different point if you wish.

If you disrespect me and my determination, you can leave the Chamber. It is up to you, Member for Daly.

Mr YOUNG: No problem. Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I shall present a motion that this Assembly:

1. calls on the Chief Minister to revoke the appointment and accept responsibility for a decision that has undermined trust in the Territory's democratic and constitutional institutions …

Mr EDGINGTON: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Mr YOUNG: I have not got to that point yet.

Madam SPEAKER: Take your seat, Deputy Opposition Leader.

Mr EDGINGTON: Standing Order 30; that motion shows disrespect for His Honour the Administrator …

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Gwoja, take your seat.

Mr EDGINGTON: The underlying issue of that motion is it is disrespectful to His Honour the Administrator of the Northern Territory.

Madam SPEAKER: Please repeat what you just said—the first part of the motion.

Mr YOUNG: I started again, just to give clarity …

Madam SPEAKER: Start it again. Let us think about exactly what you are saying because this is contentious. It was always going to be contentious, and you are intending to bring on this motion that looks like it is contravening Standing Order 30 in more than the original way I suggested. Please start again.

Mr YOUNG: I was changing a bit of it, which I will get to.

Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I shall present a motion calling for this Assembly to:

1. call on the Chief Minister to revoke the appointment and accept responsibility for a decision that has undermined trust in the Territory's democratic …

Madam SPEAKER: Pause there. That is contravening Standing Order 30. You are saying that his appointment has undermined trust.

Mr YOUNG: I have not said whose appointment yet. I have only said the Chief Minister …

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Daly, take your seat, go away and have a think about this motion. It is in contravention of Standing Order 30. I have advised other members of your team that we need to keep personal inferences that disrespect the Administrator out of this Chamber. Take some time and think about how you can rephrase it or do not go there.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I shall move that this Assembly calls on the Chief Minister, in response to widespread community concern, to request that the Governor-General review the commission of the Honourable David Connolly as Administrator of the Northern Territory.

Mr EDGINGTON: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 30; you made it clear this morning. The very nature of this motion imputes misgivings about His Honour the Administrator of the Northern Territory, and should be rejected.

Madam SPEAKER: I agree with that. The way I am interpreting this is that any personal comment or inference about the Honourable David Connolly is an infringement of Standing Order 30. If you want to talk about process without using his name or the particulars around his appointment, that is broadly acceptable. However, in this case you have mentioned his name and inferred that his appointment is in someway unsatisfactory, so I will not allow that motion.

J DAVIS: Can I amend it?

Madam SPEAKER: You can amend it on the floor if you like.

J DAVIS: Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I shall move that this Assembly calls on the Chief Minister, in response to widespread community concern, to request that the Governor-General review the process of the commission of the Administrator of the Northern Territory.

Mr MALEY: A point of order, Madam Speaker! That is still wider than your ruling from earlier today. Any motion that deals with the appointment of the Administrator is a personal attack on him, because they are reporting him for whatever reason and talking about mistrust and widespread concern. That is an imputation. We do not know whether that is true, but that is what they are asserting. We are saying that is not correct. Your ruling is broader than that, so it is out of order.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! It is clear that this motion is talking about the process of appointing someone, whether that be an Administrator or a Governor-General; it is not speaking about him as an individual or his role as Administrator. It is talking about the actual process of appointing an Administrator and recommendations to the federal government.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Johnston, are you referring to the specific appointment of the current Administrator or the general appointment of an Administrator?

J DAVIS: It is the general appointment.

Madam SPEAKER: Can you make that a bit clearer in your motion? I will give you another go to make that perfectly clear. Let us know what you come up with.

J DAVIS: Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I shall move that this Assembly calls on the Chief Minister, in response to widespread community concern, to request that the Governor-General review the process of the general appointment of Administrators of the Northern Territory.

Madam SPEAKER: I will accept that.

Mr MALEY: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I am more worried about the bit about the widespread concern. That is the bit we are talking about because it relates to the Administrator.

Madam SPEAKER: I am satisfied that is not in breach of Standing Order 30. As long as it does not personalise in any way the appointment of the current Administrator and in doing so disrespect him, I am satisfied, but I will listen to what you have to say, Leader of Government Business.

Mr EDGINGTON: Madam Speaker, the words 'widespread community concern' imply that there is concern about His Honour the Administrator of the Northern Territory. Those words imply that there is concern about his appointment to the position of Administrator of the Northern Territory. Those words clearly make this motion out of order.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 1; you have made a ruling about this. On the General Business day it will be up to the parliament to talk about what the widespread community concern is. It is not the role for that to happen now. This is giving notice of a motion. Let us have the debate tomorrow in a respectful way, but this is about appointments of Administrators.

Madam SPEAKER: I accept this motion. I do not think it is in breach of Standing Order 30, but if the debate goes to personalising it in terms of the current Administrator, people will be stopped and told to refrain.

QUESTION TIME

Public Sector Code of Conduct – Equality

Ms UIBO to MINISTER for YOUTH, SENIORS and EQUALITY

The Public Sector code of conduct requires senior public servants to uphold equality, inclusion and respect and to avoid conduct that could reasonably be seen as discriminatory. When a senior public servant's public comments are said to undermine respect for women or LGBTIQA+ Territorians, how does this raise a conflict? Does it even raise a conflict with the CLP government's equality commitments? What does this mean for their suitability to hold a senior government role?

Mr CHARLS: Madam Speaker, can I please ask the Opposition Leader to repeat that question?

Madam SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, would you repeat the question?

Ms UIBO: Of course I can because it is an important question.

The Public Sector code of conduct requires senior public servants to uphold equality, inclusion and respect and to avoid conduct that could reasonably be seen as discriminatory. When a senior public servant's public comments are said to undermine respect for women or LGBTIQA+ Territorians, does this raise a conflict with the CLP government's equality commitments? What does this mean for their suitability to hold a senior government role?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I need to be honest; I do not know which public servant the Opposition Leader is referring to. If I can get more context to what it is, I can respond to that question.

Mr Paech: Answer the question.

Mr CHARLS: That is what I am saying: if I cannot understand the question, I cannot answer.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence!

Minister, you cannot ask a question of the opposition member who asked the question.

Mr EDGINGTON: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 109; the question itself has little detail and it is asking the minister for an opinion. That question should be ruled out of order.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! There is no inference of a personal opinion in the question. I ask for your ruling on that.

Madam SPEAKER: I did not hear that, and we have already had it stated twice.

If the minister does not want to answer the question, are there any other questions?

Health – Federal Government Funding

Mrs CARLSON to CHIEF MINISTER

Territorians know that our hospital system continues to face significant and ongoing pressures. For far too long the Northern Territory has received less than its fair share under national health funding arrangements, placing additional strain on our frontline services and their staff. Can you update the Assembly on how the Finocchiaro CLP government is stepping up to advocate for a fairer deal from the Commonwealth and delivering real outcomes for Territorians so that they can access the care they need, when and where they need it?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Wanguri is passionate about equality of healthcare for Territorians in her electorate and no matter where people live in the Northern Territory.

We are a beautiful jurisdiction covering 1.4 million square kilometres, so the delivery of health services is a big exercise compared with some other states and territories. One thing we shamefully uncovered on coming to government—despite the Opposition Leader being a former Health minister and the former Chief Minister being a former Health minister—is that the Territory had been chronically underfunded on health by about $400m per year, probably since self-government.

We have been working closely with the federal government on the National Health Reform Agreement. I was in Sydney on Friday and was able to sign it, with my state and territory counterparts and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. I thank him for the deal that Territorians got.

Do I wish it was more? Absolutely. It is about $1bn over a five-year period and it will plug a gap, but there will not be a profound shift in the delivery of health services because of the chronic underfunding we had. There is additional work to be done, and the Minister for Health is spearheading a lot of it.

It is good news. This is a landmark agreement, make no mistake; it is just that the Territory comes from such a low base that we do not want to over-applaud the achievement when we should never have been in this position in the first place. It represents the single biggest contribution to our hospitals that the Commonwealth has ever paid, and we are grateful for that. It will make a difference.

There is a lot more work to be done in our health system. We will continue that strong and important advocacy because the Territory has vast distances and complex health requirements and systems. We are far away. People need to know that our health systems are strong and, no matter where they live, that they will be supported.

We have incredible staff. I thank our health professionals across the Territory. Whether they are in clinics or hospitals, they do an amazing job caring for Territorians. We thank them for their support over a difficult time, but we are turning a corner. That is important. This agreement is a significant step in the right direction.

We will get straight to work to make sure that we are back at the table working through what comes next, and that is important to secure the Territory's health future.

VISITOR
Darwin City Council Deputy Mayor

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I welcome to the gallery the Deputy Mayor of Darwin City Council, Patrik Ralph. Welcome to Parliament House.

Members: Hear, hear!

Public Sector Code of Conduct – Respect for Aboriginal Territorians

Mr YOUNG to MINISTER for ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

The Public Sector code of conduct requires senior public servants to demonstrate respect for Aboriginal Territorians' culture and traditional practices and to avoid conduct that undermines trust or causes offence. When public statements by senior public servants dismiss Aboriginal cultural practices or question the legitimacy of Aboriginal land management, do you consider that conduct compatible with those obligations? How should suitability for senior roles involving Aboriginal affairs be assessed in those circumstances?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, without any specifics or cases from the Opposition Leader—sorry, the Deputy Opposition Leader; he probably wants to be the Opposition Leader. I do not understand the premise of the question because he is asking me for an opinion about no specific case. What he is asking is all hypothetical. I do not know what he is getting at. I do not know whether he even knows what he is getting at because every point of his question …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; there is no inference for an opinion, so it is not Standing Order 109. The question was specifically about suitability in the Public Sector related to the minister's portfolio, so I wonder whether the minister can answer it.

Madam SPEAKER: You have the floor, minister.

Mr EDGINGTON: It seems that both the Deputy Opposition Leader and the Opposition Leader do not understand the premise of their question because they are asking me to give an opinion on a hypothetical scenario that they are trying to put to the parliament. There are no specifics. It is hypothetical, asking me for an opinion. If they want to ask me a question about a specific case, I am more than willing to give what I know as answers to the Assembly and those listening. As the question stands it provides nothing but hypothetical garbage asking for an opinion.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. The question was pretty straightforward in regard to the Public Sector code of conduct. I am happy to simplify the question so that the minister will understand it. It is pretty simple. Would you like me to rephrase the question?

Madam SPEAKER: That is enough, Member for Daly.

Minister, I think what you have been asked is hypothetical. I agree with you, but it is up to you how you answer it.

Mr EDGINGTON: I have answered the question the best that I possibly can, given the substance of that question.

Police Public Safety Officers

Mrs ZIO to CHIEF MINISTER

As you are well aware, my electorate of Fannie Bay has long suffered the effects of antisocial behaviour in public spaces, on public transport and in and around public housing. With the announcement of the police public safety officers, my constituents are keen to hear more regarding the progress of this new policing stream and how it will be rolled out. Constituents especially want to hear how this new highly visible workforce will strengthen frontline responses and support sworn police to focus on core policing duties. Can you update the Assembly on the progress of the PPSOs, including when the community can expect to see the first group deployed on the ground?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Fannie Bay is a staunch advocate for her community. She is right; the people in the electorate of Fannie Bay have put up with a lot for far too long.

Although what we have been doing to reduce crime is working—it remains our single biggest focus in 2026—there is much more work to do. Evidence of that is our police public safety officer reform. We passed the legislation last year. The first squad will start this month, on 23 February. That is exciting. That will see 24 recruits commence.

There have already been 40 applications, so we have more than a full squad, which is fantastic. There has been strong uptake of this new policing role which will encompass some auxiliary roles—for example, PALIs in the regions, the transit safety officers on our bus network as well as public housing safety officers who do the work across public housing. We are bringing this in together.

We are having an 18-week recruit course and they will be given the tools and skills of police. They will hit the ground on 26 June. I will invite the Member for Fannie Bay to the graduation.

They will be deployed across urban areas. The entire point of our police public safety officers is that they are forward facing. We will see them dealing with antisocial behaviour at public housing complexes, at bus stops and on public transport, at public events, walking down the mall and in public spaces. The Member for Fannie Bay's beautiful electorate has many wonderful public spaces.

This will bring welcome reprieve for our front line because over time, as we build up, we will have a force of people who will be embedded in our community while our constable stream is in the background, responding to the 000 calls, doing investigative work and dealing with domestic violence incidents and those types of things.

It is a build-up, starting with 24; we will not see them in droves come recruit squad 1. We will build up, squad after squad. People will see in time just how much of a game changer this is for antisocial behaviour and law and order across the Northern Territory. It is the single biggest reform to policing in a generation, and we are proud and excited to deliver it.

It is getting towards the 23 February deadline now. We wish our recruits all the best for their gruelling training ahead, and we have full confidence in them. These recruits are on top of the three constable squads we will also have this year, so there will be plenty of police moving through our college this year. We are proud of that.

I reiterate that community safety and reducing crime remain our number one priority in 2026.

Judicial Standards of Conduct

Mr PAECH to ATTORNEY-GENERAL

As the Territory's first law officer, when a member of the judiciary is found to have made public comments that raise serious concern about their respect for Aboriginal Territorians, women and victims of domestic and family violence, what consequences ordinarily follow under judicial standards of conduct? How do those principles inform the expectations of other senior government roles?

Before the government tries to gag us, this is a real case which happened in the Northern Territory before. Would you like to tell us what the process is?

Mr EDGINGTON: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Again, I am not sure what is going on over there. Standing Order 109; it is a hypothetical question that he has put, and it should be ruled out.

Madam SPEAKER: No. Sit down.

Mr PAECH: Madam Speaker, speaking to the point of order, this is not a hypothetical matter; this has happened before. A member of the judiciary made comments about Aboriginal Territorians, and there is a process in place. My question to this government is: is that process still in place or, given recent appointments, has that changed?

Madam SPEAKER: The minister can answer the question.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I can see a pattern regarding all our hardworking public servants, although I am not surprised because it does not seem like those opposite respect them at all, given the line of questioning today.

The member has not given us a specific example. If there is a case where things have gone awry, share it with us so that we can answer the question. I do not have any of that evidence, so I cannot help you with that answer.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Ms Boothby: I have finished.

Madam SPEAKER: The moment has passed.

Corrections – Women in Custody

Mr PATEL to MINISTER FOR CORRECTIONS

The management of women in custody is an ongoing responsibility of the Corrections system and involves a range of professional, safety and service delivery considerations. Can you update the Assembly on the government's approach to the management of women in custody and outline how this approach is being implemented across the Corrections system?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Casuarina understands that breaking the cycle of reoffending will make a massive difference in his electorate, especially at Casuarina shopping square where there is a lot of criminal and antisocial behaviour.

What we are about on the Corrections side is making sure that women have an opportunity for rehabilitation to break the cycle of reoffending. The previous Labor government let it go through the roof and did not care about the people in custody.

I welcome the opportunity to outline the most significant Corrections reform delivered by the CLP Finocchiaro government—that is, the relocation of women prisoners into dedicated, standalone, entirely separate areas from the men's prison. This has been done in Darwin and Alice Springs.

For far too long in the Territory women were housed in male-dominated environments. While they were physically separated, their daily routines—including access to programs, services and rehabilitation—were shaped by systems designed for men, their movements were restricted, their health needs were secondary and their rehabilitation was constrained by the facilities behind the wire where men were wolf-whistling and calling out constantly on a day-to-day basis.

This government recognised that this was inequitable and not acceptable, so we acted to repurpose existing infrastructure into purpose-built correctional centres. These facilities are dedicated to leadership and tailored programs and have an operational model designed specifically for women.

The reform delivers immediate and measurable benefits. Access to health services has improved. Mental health and women's health support has improved. The facilities provide calmer safer settings focused on rehabilitation, not just containment. Most importantly, this reform strengthens family connection. Most women in custody are primary carers for their family, and the new facilities provide more appropriate visiting spaces and more defined environments for the children.

This is not simply a change in location; this is a change in approach. It reflects more modern correctional practices and national standards. It demonstrates a commitment to fairness, dignity and respect while maintaining community safety. Community safety is the number one priority of this government.

The CLP has delivered a practical cost-effective reform that improves the outcome and will break the cycle of reoffending. This government is focused on making sure community safety is the number one priority and that the women have access to rehabilitation programs to break the cycle of reoffending and make places like Casuarina shopping square better for the entire community.

Administrator Appointment – Vetting Process

J DAVIS to CHIEF MINISTER

What is the vetting process for the appointment of the Administrator of the Northern Territory?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, we are excited that yesterday started the Territory's 24th Administrator in His Honour the Honourable David Connolly. He will be sworn in on 27 February, which we all look forward to. This brings in a new chapter for the Territory.

Members interjecting.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I can barely hear myself with the carry-on over there.

His Honour has had a long and distinguished career in the agriculture sector. Agriculture is clearly part of our five tiers to rebuild the Territory's economy. He served as President of the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association. He had an extensive role to play in fighting for our cattlemen as part of Labor's live export ban. He was also a director at the National Farmers' Federation and has held a number of other roles. Needless to say, he has decades of experience in the cattle and ag industry more broadly.

We nominated Mr Connolly to be the 24th Administrator of the Northern Territory, and we cannot wait for the swearing-in on the 27th. The nomination goes to the federal government, which then does its own process, and it ultimately is signed off by the minister for Territories and the Governor-General, who designated His Honour to start yesterday. That has happened.

J DAVIS: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. The question was specifically about the vetting process, not the entire process. What is the vetting process for the appointment of the Administrator?

Madam SPEAKER: Just as Standing Order 30 is relevant to disrespecting, it is also a bit relevant in terms of promoting the Administrator. It is a general question that the member has asked; she has not particularly asked about the current Administrator. It is up to you how you answer it, Chief Minister, but I am cautious that there is a precedent that you neither promote nor praise a head of state, as you would not disrespect them also. Whilst I am not particularly of that view, somewhere in the middle is always where the solution lies.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Madam Speaker, I understand what you are saying. I think all I was doing was more introducing for the first time, if you like. Some people will be familiar with His Honour, given his experience, but I merely seek to put on the record his background and commitment to the Northern Territory, and the fact that we as a government are very much looking forward to his commencement.

On that note I also thank …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; I believe the question is specifically about the vetting process.

Madam SPEAKER: She still has a third of her answer to go.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I thank the past Administrator, His Honour the Honourable Professor Hugh Heggie, for his tireless dedication to the Territory. I believe he is on a well-deserved break, which is good. I look forward to catching up with him when he is back in Darwin.

I have answered the question. Those opposite have interrupted me twice in answering it.

There are federal vetting processes, the minister has to sign it off, the Governor-General has to sign it off and the Northern Territory makes the submission.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence!

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is entirely a matter for the opposition and Independent members which road they want to trot down, but I will not be dragged into it.

Administrator Appointment – Vetting Process – Supplementary Question

J DAVIS to CHIEF MINISTER

Will you make the submission to the Governor-General public?

Ms Uibo: Great question.

Madam SPEAKER: Chief Minister, you have the call and you will be heard in silence.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the submission to the Governor-General comes from the federal government.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: No; it is finished.

Mr PAECH: The Chief Minister said that she made a submission …

Madam SPEAKER: Sit down, please!

Justice System

Mr MACKAY to ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Territorians want to feel safe in their homes, on public transport, going shopping or in public places. They expect a justice system that responds quickly, fairly and consistently, with victims firmly at its centre instead of Labor's perpetrator-first mentality. After years of rising crime and declining community confidence, restoring law and order remains a clear priority for this government.

Can you update the Assembly on how the Finocchiaro CLP government is delivering its commitment to reduce crime, strengthening the justice system, backing victims, restoring confidence for Territorians across the Northern Territory and fixing Labor's mess?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Goyder speaks a lot to his rural constituents about crime because they too want us to have a safe community. When they are out and about, catching buses or hanging in public places in town or at Casuarina and whenever they travel across the Territory, they want to be safe.

Since coming to office the CLP has been clear about our priorities to reduce crime. We wanted consequences for offenders, to back victims first and to restore confidence in the justice system. The results are starting to show, and we are proud of this.

The number of victims of crime dropped by 9.2% compared with the same period last year. That is more than 2,200 fewer Territorians harmed in less than a year. Serious crime across the Territory is trending down, with assaults, house break-ins, commercial break-ins and motor vehicle theft all down. More than 5,800 individuals were refused bail under Declan's law. That is an increase of 22% compared with that under Labor.

We in this Chamber all know Samara Laverty well. She said, a year on from Declan's law, that his legacy is about leaving the Northern Territory a safer place, and we are beginning to see that. How true is that? Thank you, Samara. We cannot bring Declan back, but his name will be forever remembered, and his legacy will live on as saving people's lives.

We are also fixing the justice system with more investment, judges and support staff. The TIG-ER team (Targeted Intervention Group – Early Resolution Taskforce) has reviewed and finalised more than 600 cases in 10 months. That huge volume of cases was outstanding under Labor, and we fixed it. This means that matters are resolved earlier, reducing delays that retraumatise victims.

We are putting victims first. Through the Crime Victims Services Unit we have cleared hundreds of claims. We prioritised the most vulnerable, and we are improving processes so the support reaches people faster. We are proud of that.

There is so much more work to be done, but the tide is turning. We are starting to see real consequences for offenders, real support for victims and real progress in restoring confidence in a justice system that has been left in crisis for nearly a decade. As I have always said, we have more work to do, but this is a good start to rebuild the Territory.

In 2026 the work does not stop; we have so much more on the agenda. From the Attorney-General's perspective, I announced the sentencing laws today for DV murder, ensuring that is the strongest sentencing in the country, and further work is being done to support victims of crime.

Censure of the Chief Minister – Not Accepted

Ms UIBO to CHIEF MINISTER

Due to the Chief Minister's continued failure to answer direct questions, pursuant to Standing Order 67, I move that the Assembly censures the Chief Minister for gross incompetence due to her failure to conduct a thorough vetting process for a key Territory appointment.

The Chief Minister publicly claimed that she was unaware of serious and available issues related to a key Territory appointment. The Chief Minister did not make an explanation for this, but she made an admission. It shows either negligence, incompetence or an inability to do the job that Territorians entrusted her with. This is not about the individual; this is about the Chief Minister's lack of judgement on behalf of Territorians and her failure to ensure that even the most basic standards that Territorians expect of their government have been met.

Mr EDGINGTON: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: Take your seat, and let the Opposition Leader complete what she is proposing.

Ms UIBO: I demanded a full briefing with the Chief Minister on how a senior appointment was vetted, what checks and balances were undertaken and how these past public comments for a vetting process were dismissed. The response from the Chief Minister was inadequate. Why? Because there was no response at all. This is not what Territorians expect of their government. There was no briefing, explanation and accountability or even a single throwaway line dismissing the request for the important briefing on behalf of Territorians. There was no explanation to me or Territorians in general, just silence.

Territorians demand to know: was this a failure of process, leadership or both? Is the Chief Minister denying that she knew? This needs to be on public record. If she knew, it is incompetence and devious—deviously deceiving Territorians regarding information they have been asking for. This is far worse than any admission the Chief Minister is willing to show under her lack of leadership.

Territorians are entitled to ask whether Lia Finocchiaro, the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, actually and properly considered whether the appointment reflected the values, experience and understanding required to serve the entire Northern Territory population. The Chief Minister's silence is not leadership. Territorians deserve answers.

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, are you still reading the motion, or have you gone into debate?

Ms UIBO: This is the censure.

Madam SPEAKER: You have a written motion?

Ms UIBO: Yes. Sorry, I can table it.

Madam SPEAKER: And now you have proceeded into a debate? Sorry; I thought you were still reading the motion.

Members interjecting.

Mr Young: It is not funny.

Ms UIBO: I do not think this is a funny matter on behalf of Territorians. Why are you laughing?

Madam SPEAKER: My apologies, Opposition Leader, but the question is: does the government accept this censure motion?

Mr EDGINGTON: Madam Speaker, first up you need to make a ruling about this censure motion. It contains many imputations about His Honour the Administrator of the Northern Territory. You made a ruling this morning in regard to Standing Order 30; this censure motion is out of order and should be rejected.

Mr Paech: Then vote on it; say that you do not accept it.

Madam SPEAKER: Be quiet.

I disagree; I think it is not in breach of Standing Order 30, from what I heard, but I would like to read the motion. Is it being circulated? I will wait until I have read the motion, just to be sure that it is compliant, but from what I heard it is not in breach of Standing Order 30. The motion I heard is against the Chief Minister for a lack of due process.

Mr MALEY: Standing Order 67 says:

> *Once accepted, the motion will be moved and a copy circulated.*

We have not even accepted the motion, so it should not be circulated.

Madam SPEAKER: Sorry; you are right. Do you accept the censure motion, which I asked you originally?

Mr EDGINGTON: I asked you to make a ruling in regard to the appropriateness of this motion.

Madam SPEAKER: I have said that it is appropriate. Do you accept the censure motion?

Mr EDGINGTON: No.

Abandoned Vehicles

Mr O'GALLAGHER to MINISTER for LOGISTICS and INFRASTRUCTURE

Residents across the Territory, including many in my electorate of Karama, regularly raise concerns about abandoned burnt-out vehicles sitting on streets and footpaths and in public places. This includes abandoned

burnt-out vehicles regularly seen on McMillans Road, Vanderlin Drive, Kalymnos Drive and Applegum Drive, to name a few. They create safety risks, damage community pride and leave a poor impression on visitors. These issues have lingered for years.

Can you update the Assembly on what action the CLP government has taken to finally deal with abandoned vehicles and give authorities the certainty they need to act quickly and restore pride in our communities?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Karama always advocates to have vehicles removed, whether they be on government or council roads within his electorate.

I do not think there are any members in this Chamber who have not seen this scourge across our community. All Territorians are sick of seeing burnt-out, vandalised and abandoned cars dumped on our streets, across our footpaths and on our verges in front of our homes, schools and businesses.

They are not just unsightly; these things are dangerous. They attract crime and antisocial behaviour as well.

For the residents of Alice Springs, these wrecks are not few and far between; they sit near homes, in front of shops and on our tourist routes. They shape how locals and visitors see our town and communities across the Territory.

From 21 January our new laws came into effect to give certainty, clarity and real power to act fast on abandoned vehicles. We have cut the time a vehicle can sit abandoned from seven days to three. This means less danger and vandalism and quicker cleanup of our local streets. We expanded the definition of 'abandoned vehicle' so that authorities can act not just on roads, which was previously the case, but also in public places, including footpaths and verges. We removed outdated and expensive requirements like advertising in newspapers which slowed everything down and, of course, wasted public money. We modernised disposal values to reflect today's car market. We have given police and authorised officers the legal protection they need to move vehicles safely and lawfully, which they previously never had.

This is about empowering councils, police and the road authorities to do their job with certainty and clean up our roads and streets. This is a practical commonsense reform that puts community safety first.

We are backing it with a clear message to Territorians: if you see an abandoned vehicle, report it to the council or DLI. It will end up with the right authority to deal with that issue. The sooner authorities are notified the sooner action can be taken.

The mess on our streets did not appear overnight. Burnt-out cars are the physical trace of a burnt-out Labor government—churned leaders, neglect and abandonment, leaving wreckage behind for others to clean up.

This is another step forward to cutting red tape and restoring pride in our communities. We are putting the brakes on abandoned cars and delivering for Territorians. This has gone on for far too long. It was simple legislation, and we brought it in to clean up the streets of the Territory, which the previous government failed to do.

Government Policies

K McNAMARA to CHIEF MINISTER

We have heard you and others on your side today profess unity and respect for those of different backgrounds, but those words ring hollow when you are the same government that weakened anti-hate speech laws, making those diverse communities more unsafe in the Territory. Since you were elected we have seen you bring in a number of culture war policies: banning hormone therapy for young transgender people; directing trans women to be held with men in prison; and mandating the national anthem in schools where it was already being sung. You made a number of senior appointments which have caused public outcry for the divisive and disrespectful nature of their public communications.

Territorians are facing a housing crisis, a cost-of-living crisis and the worst educational outcomes in the country. Instead of real solutions, you are importing a tired right-wing playbook of punching down on vulnerable minorities to score cheap political points. When will you stop these divisive Trumpian distractions and start showing real leadership on the issues that matter to Territorians?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, we are proud to have strengthened the *Anti-Discrimination Act* to make sure that it is unlawful to incite hatred or serious contempt or severely ridicule someone. If the Member for Nightcliff disagrees with that she can face the consequences with her community.

As a government we have been clear that community safety and reducing crime are and will continue to be our number one priority. That is in every form, whether it is changes to the *Sentencing Act*, changes to the *Anti-Discrimination Act*, reforming youth justice or cleaning up busted-up cars on the side of the road. We are putting the rights of this community to be safe above everything else, and we make no apologies for that.

If the Member for Nightcliff wants to grab headlines, accuse me of all sorts of things and call me names, that is a matter for her.

We just launched our year ahead. We are getting on with the job because in 2025 we had significant reform across all three pillars of our promises to Territorians. On reducing crime, the number of victims is down by nearly 10%. On rebuilding the economy, we have gone from eighth to fourth place, which is the first time we have lifted from the bottom of the CommSec report in 10 years. The cruise industry is up by 13%. The Business Council of Australia Regulation Rumble marked us as the third-best place to do business in the country. On restoring our beautiful lifestyle, the *New York Times* told the world that the Northern Territory is the best place in this country to visit this year and the 14th best place to visit in the world.

We did a power of work in that little part of 2024 and across 2025. We are excited to build on the foundation that we established last year, just like in my previous answer to the Member for Fannie Bay about police public safety officers. We laid that groundwork with the legislation. We have 40 people champing at the bit to become a PPSO, and we will welcome 24 of them into our ranks at the end of this month.

We are focused on the job that Territorians gave us to do, and we will not apologise for doing it. We are together making sure that we deliver on every election commitment and that we stay focused on our plan to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore our lifestyle, because that is what we told people we would do. That is what we have shown them we will do, and throughout 2026 we will stay the course.

Community Safety – Frontline Security Services

Dr RAHMAN to MINISTER for TRADE, BUSINESS and ASIAN RELATIONS

Private security plays an important role in community safety. It is a key part of the Territory's small business sector, supporting safe town centres, events and, of course, local precincts. Over the Christmas period Territorians told me that they welcomed seeing an influx of additional security patrols on the ground working alongside our police, particularly at night, providing reassurance, visibility and a strong sense of safety for families, workers and businesses. Can you update the Assembly on the government's recent announcements to strengthen community safety and support frontline security services?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, controlling antisocial behaviour and making sure that streets are safe has been a major concern for the Member for Fong Lim. A number of these businesses are based in his electorate. Their continued ability to operate and provide support to community is really critical for the welfare of his electorate.

We recognise that behind every crime statistic is a person, family and community affected. Territorians expect and deserve practical action that makes our town centres, shopping precincts and entertainment areas safer places to live, work and trade in. We have taken a coordinated approach to safety that supports our local businesses by improving visibility, stability and confidence in public spaces.

I am pleased to report that the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations is working actively across the Territory to support the private security sector so that it can work alongside police and deliver in this area. Security services assist with education and compliance activities, and they look to see where we can improve the support we provide.

One of the best examples was the introduction in April last year of our Public Order Response Unit, which is working collaboratively with police in the CBD area and surrounding suburbs where it has tip-out powers. I am delighted to report that in the first three quarters of its operation it has tipped out a massive 3,256 litres of alcohol being consumed in public spaces where they should not be consumed, making a much safer

environment for our residents and businesses to operate, and making sure that our frontline police can focus on frontline policing rather than trying to curb bad behaviour in our public spaces.

Territorians deserve to always feel safe, and businesses deserve environments where staff and customers can operate with confidence. That is why we have doubled down with security personnel and extended patrol coverage, and this proactive and visible presence is having a profound effect. In my electorate, particularly the CBD, the feedback from residents and businesses about the changes this has solicited for them is phenomenal. We will continue to meet these obligations, expand these services and make sure Territorians have the safety that they deserve.

Puberty Blockers

Mr YOUNG to MINISTER for HEALTH

Last December AMA NT expressed concerns about your decision to cease public funding for puberty blockers and gender-affirming care for children, describing the move as politically motivated and not backed by science. President Dr John Zorbas stated:

> *We are witnessing a dangerous precedent where this government wants to enter the examination room, invade your privacy, and tell you what you can and cannot do with your own health care …*

Do you believe the Territory government has the right to dictate treatment discussions between a Territorian and their health professional?

Madam SPEAKER: Minister for Health, you have been asked for an opinion—'Do you believe?'—but it is up to you how you answer it.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I was about to comment on that. I can provide the Assembly with actual facts, and I will refrain from providing opinions, like the Member for Daly would like to hear.

As of 21 December 2025 the NT Government ceased public health access to new requests for stage 1 and 2 pharmacological treatments for gender dysphoria to those under 18 years of age. This decision is consistent with approaches taken in other jurisdictions, including Queensland, New Zealand and several European countries. The NT Government is acting to put the health and wellbeing of children first in what has been an area of significant uncertainty and varied changing and contested medical guidelines.

In January 2025 the Australian Government requested the National Health and Medical Research Council to develop new national clinical practice guidelines for the care of trans and gender-diverse people under 18 with gender dysphoria. Development of the gender guidelines is expected to take about three years.

The Vine review, released in Queensland on 21 December, found that the evidence base underlying the use of stage 1 and stage 2 hormone therapy for young people with gender dysphoria is limited and, further, there is a paucity of evidence about other long-term risks or benefits of these treatments.

The review also found:

> *This is a dynamic area of change in evidence and research across clinical practice, legal and social domains. There is a growing body of evidence about the presence and/or absence of both benefits and harms in relation to these treatments—just as there is growing public dialogue, including more questioning and scepticism about that evidence.*

In the Northern Territory a small number of young people have been accessing these drugs through the public health system, with fewer than 30 uses of stage 1 and stage 2 medications identified since 2017.

The Territory's public health priority will remain on adolescent mental health services, including the monthly adolescent gender care clinic run by NT Health and delivered in the northern suburbs, utilising the services of clinicians, psychologists and psychiatrists with experience in gender identity and dysphoria.

Like Queensland, we have chosen a cautious approach to these complex and difficult issues whilst providing appropriate supports to those who seek care and treatment.

School Attendance

Mr HOWE to MINISTER for EDUCATION and TRAINING

Last week we saw Territory children return to school full of hope and potential, ready to begin another year of learning. For families across the Northern Territory the return to school is a moment of optimism and opportunity, and our government understands the responsibility that comes with that. Can you update the Assembly on how this government is strengthening attendance and delivering better outcomes for Territory students so that every child has the chance to reach their full potential?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Drysdale is a strong advocate for schools in his electorate. I have been to and looked through many schools with him. It was great to see his children here, getting a different education this morning with the opening of parliament. That is quite acceptable today.

I acknowledge the hard work. Approximately 32,000 students last week went back to school across our 153 government schools. Attendance officers and engagement officers worked across the school holidays, not just in the school term, through school holiday programs and with sporting groups. Getting closer to the return to school they were in shopping centres letting parents and students know about the importance of getting back to school.

This year we are delivering the Boosting Literacy and Numeracy plan. We had teachers at PD days learning about the explicit teaching approach. The previous government clearly did not care about literacy and numeracy. The results were so bad across the Territory that on coming to government we made sure that our key commitments were to boost literacy and numeracy and the attendance levels at schools, ensuring we get kids to school.

We saw the secret list of students that the previous government hid from us. Those students were kept off the attendance lists. Of the 1,600 students who were on that list when we first came to government 16 short months ago, 500 have been welcomed back to schools. It is important to note that there needs to be a pathway in schools to support those children and families to work through the concerns they were having and the reasons they were not going to school. Unless we address those, we will be unable to get those children into the prolonged education which will lead them to a better life and a meaningful job.

It has been a busy start to the school year. There has been a lot going on. Teachers have been going onto permanent contracts. We have seen a huge influx of 130 new teachers into the Territory. I have to say that a lot of them have come from Victoria. They are coming to the Territory because we are the world of opportunities with our great lifestyle. With the reduction in crime that is happening, there will be more people coming to the Territory.

Public Sector – Special Measures

Mr PAECH to MINISTER for PUBLIC SERVICE

Increasing opportunities for Aboriginal Territorians to participate in the economy and provide economic pathways is crucial. Can you confirm whether the Northern Territory Government has made changes to special measures within the public service and whether those special measures have been removed from particular classifications within the public service?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, special measures was brought in under the Giles government to boost Aboriginal employment throughout our public service.

I give a big shout-out to all the people in the public service whom we value each day for helping to run this Territory.

I have been to a couple of Aboriginal forums. The feedback I get from the staff who go to those forums about the knowledge they get that helps them address things in their day-to-day work across the Territory is great.

We have not made any changes to special measures. Special measures are given out by the CEs of departments. It is up to them who they apply the special measures to. We welcome all people into the public service.

We want to make sure that Aboriginal students are getting to school. We have brought in attendance officers and engagement officers to work with families across the Territory to make sure that the students who were on that intensive list under the previous government—which had four Education ministers who all had a teaching background and saw attendance levels drop to lows—return to school. We make sure that those attendance officers and engagement officers are working with students across the Territory.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; it is a direct question. Minister, can you confirm, to your knowledge, whether there have been any changes to special measures across the Northern Territory public service?

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, you have the call.

Mrs HERSEY: I have answered the question. I am trying to explain a little further the importance of the work of the attendance team and the engagement team to get children—it does not matter whether they are Aboriginal children or non-Aboriginal children—to school so that they can get on a pathway to a meaningful job. If they are Aboriginal children, whether they are in Wadeye, Nhulunbuy, Tennant Creek or my community of Katherine …

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; I am appreciative of the minister's response, but I simply seek clarification to the second part—have there been any changes to the Northern Territory public service special measures classifications? I do not want to verbal the minister, but I note she said that is a matter for the CEOs. Have there been changes?

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, you have the call.

Mrs HERSEY: I have answered the question.

Public Housing Reform

Mr KERLE to MINISTER for HOUSING, LOCAL GOVERNMENT and COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

One of the priorities of the Finocchiaro CLP government is to reduce crime and restore the Territory lifestyle. Labor weakened accountability for public housing tenants and let them accrue huge numbers of Red Cards and complaints of antisocial behaviour with few repercussions. Examples included a tenancy with 63 Red Card demerit points. This government has announced public housing reform to tackle antisocial behaviour and claw back millions in rent arrears. Can you update Territorians on how the CLP is delivering our promises to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour in and around public housing?

Mr Paech: Do not forget the boarded-up houses.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Gwoja, silence!

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Blain for his advocacy on behalf of residents in his electorate. Across Palmerston and the northern suburbs our members have been advocating for changes to public housing.

I will update the Assembly on the firm action we have taken since March last year. I spoke about the need to restore firm action and accountability in public housing, with a focus on strengthening policy to fast-track pathways to eviction, empowering our staff to deal with antisocial behaviour and reviewing our legislative powers to strengthen tenant accountability and align with our community's expectations. We promised no more slaps on the wrist and that there would be consequences, particularly for repeat offenders.

Although the work continues, I am pleased to say that we are delivering. We have strengthened tenant accountability for basic responsibilities. We want people to pay rent, look after their house and be a good neighbour.

Thanks to our reforms, in the greater Darwin area 25 tenants who were constantly—I mean constantly—doing the wrong thing like causing disturbances, and we heard the Red Cards example, have been evicted or have handed back their keys, as many of them have done, as termination actions commenced.

A further 76 actions have already commenced. These are strong actions which make clear that when lease conditions are breached and neighbours are disrupted by bad or sometimes criminal behaviour, there will be consequences. We promised that there would be consequences for those who constantly do the wrong thing in public housing.

The CLP has brought in clear rent compliance rules for all tenants and prompt follow-up action is taken when rental arrears arise. In urban areas tenants in 72 houses have cleared their debt and are no longer in arrears. People in more than 250 homes have agreements to pay in place to reduce arrears.

We have extended the work being done to recover rent in public housing. Those opposite wrote off many tens of millions dollars in rent, yet at the same time they complain that there are no funds to properly look after damage being caused to urban housing.

We have also tried new approaches, including seeking alcohol restrictions to make houses restricted premises, and 27 homes are now declared restricted premises. We increased our joint patrols with NT Police and partner agencies.

It is critical that antisocial behaviour is addressed, reported and acted upon for the benefit of all tenants in the Northern Territory. I encourage everybody to report that action.

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I ask that further questions be placed on the Written Question Paper.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 1; did we start Question Time at 2.15 pm and therefore the 60 minutes would take us to 3.15 pm?

Madam SPEAKER: I do not recall. It is not a precise time; it is up to the Leader of Government Business. It was about 2.15 pm or 2.11 pm—give or take a few minutes.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION
Member for Nightcliff

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I rise to give a personal statement, pursuant to Standing Order 26, regarding my referral to the Privileges Committee in October 2025.

Madam SPEAKER: Please proceed.

K McNAMARA: The Privileges Committee has asked that I apologise to the Assembly for the matter for which I was referred to the committee. I therefore say to this Assembly that I apologise for allowing the NT Greens to use my electorate community room for a casual information session.

I am genuinely committed to transparency and integrity in this role. I reassure this Assembly and the public that this was simply an administrative error, and I have implemented measures to ensure it does not happen again.

I am pleased that the committee agreed with me that this allegation did not amount to a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct. It is also important to state that, despite the Leader of Government Business' false and misleading statement that he released about me on 23 October 2025, I was not in attendance at that information session.

Once again I apologise for this administrative oversight. I am pleased that this matter has helped clarify the application of these provisions. I trust that the Assembly will maintain consistency in upholding these standards for all members.

CARE AND PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AMENDMENT (WORKER SCREENING) BILL
Serial 49

Continued from 26 November 2025.

Ms CAHILL (Child Protection): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a second time.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, this Bill amends the working with children clearance scheme to allow for interjurisdictional information sharing and mutual recognition of negative notices across states and territories. At its core this Bill is about closing loopholes and strengthening child safety.

Under these amendments a person who is prohibited from working with children in another state or territory will no longer be able to obtain a working with children clearance in the Northern Territory. Put simply: banned in one, banned in all. Territory Labor supports that principle.

The Bill introduces a number of new definitions to support this reform, including 'corresponding law' in other jurisdictions, 'interstate screening authority' and 'mutual recognition negative notice'.

These notices cover decisions made elsewhere to refuse, revoke, cancel, suspend or terminate a person's ability to work with children, including temporary bars and prohibitions. Importantly, the amendments require applicants to disclose if they are subject to such notice and strengthen the ability of the NT screening authority to request and share information with other jurisdictions, employers and regulatory bodies, including the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission.

The legislation also makes it clear that individuals who are subject to a recognised negative notice cannot seek a review of that decision in the Northern Territory. Any review must occur under the laws of the jurisdiction where the original decision was made.

Territory Labor supports this legislation. These changes are necessary to strengthen child safety, particularly in early childhood education and care settings, schools and other child-related services. The Northern Territory should be a place where families and communities have confidence that children are safe when they are with adults who work with them.

The Bill also reflects commitments made by Australian states and territories in 2025 to move towards a nationally consistent approach to working with children checks. Minimising gaps between jurisdictions is critical because child safety should never depend on a postcode or borders.

Decisions that enhance child safety and prevent harm are an investment in the Territory's future. They help build a workforce that is trusted, skilled and can provide safe supportive environments where children can grow and thrive.

Territory Labor also recognises that streamlining administration, improving interstate cooperation and moving towards nationally consistent standards is welcomed by the sector. Educators and workers want confidence in the systems they operate under. They want confidence in their colleagues and the integrity of their workplaces. The opposition will back reforms that help child-related workforces do their job well and safely.

Territory Labor understands that the care and protection of children is paramount. It is fundamental to building a strong and prosperous Territory. We support measures that provide stronger protections and close loopholes that individuals may exploit to gain access to children and cause harm.

We also value the thousands of educators, carers and workers who do the right thing every day. The vast majority are deeply committed to children's safety and best practice. Reforms like this protect not only children but also the integrity of the sector and the workforce itself.

This Bill is a positive step, but it is not the end of the task before us all. There is still no nationally consistent working with children check system. Despite recommendations made by the 2017 royal commission, there are still no nationally consistent legislative reportable conduct schemes. Child safety standards aligned with the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations are yet to be fully embedded. There is no real-time national police database that flags relevant changes and intelligence across jurisdictions. Critically, we still need targeted investment in early childhood education and sector care to strengthen service delivery, improve pay and conditions, lift accountability and ensure regulatory compliance.

Territory Labor will support the legislation, policies and investment that strengthen essential services and workforce standards. It is the right thing because it reduces harm, builds trust and avoids a far greater cost to the community down the track.

Child safety is not negotiable. It requires diligence, cooperation and the political will to act early and properly.

Territory Labor supports the Bill, and we will continue to push for the reforms still needed to ensure child safety and wellbeing for young people across the Northern Territory.

Mrs HERSEY (Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I support the Care and Protection of Children Amendment (Worker Screening) Bill and make it clear that protecting children is a top priority of our government. The safety of children is not negotiable and should not be political, nor is it something we can afford to get wrong.

Last year Australians were horrified by the revelations of Joshua Brown, with 156 offences of child sexual abuse committed across multiple Melbourne childcare centres involving 12 innocent children. These were heinous crimes, and they shocked our nation to its core. These incidents in Victoria have further demonstrated the real-world consequences of fragmented systems, consequences borne by children and families. Five jurisdictions have already moved to recognise interstate negative notices, and the NT must not be left behind.

This Bill delivers our government's clear commitment to protect vulnerable children and strengthen child safety systems in the Northern Territory. It does so by closing dangerous gaps, aligning with national reforms and putting the wellbeing of children ahead of administrative convenience.

For too long Labor ignored Territory children. In coming to government, we saw many early childcare centres with safety laws lapsed. Waiver after waiver was handed out in early childhood settings. Proper scrutiny was abandoned, and people refused clearance in other jurisdictions could walk straight into the Northern Territory without adequate interjurisdictional checks. That is unacceptable and will not be tolerated, and our government is taking action. We are committed to real child safety reforms, and I support these legislative changes.

At its heart this legislation is about one simple non-negotiable principle: if someone is not safe to work with children in one jurisdiction they should not be able to come to the Northern Territory and start again. This is about protecting our children, our most vulnerable, not making excuses, which is why this Bill adopts the principle of 'banned in one, banned in all'.

In August 2025 every Australian jurisdiction agreed through the Standing Council of Attorneys-General that working with children checks must be nationally consistent. This Bill ensures the Northern Territory meets that commitment and, more importantly, that we do our part to keep our children safe. Under this legislation negative working with children check notices issued anywhere in Australia will be recognised in the Northern Territory.

Individuals who have been assessed as posing an unacceptable risk to children will no longer be able to evade scrutiny by crossing borders. Today that loophole closes, and the need for this reform is clear.

In 2024 and 2025 SAFE NT processed more than 47,000 working with children check applications. This is a system under pressure and must be strengthened by modern laws. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was unequivocal: Australia needs a nationally consistent approach to screening those who work with children.

This Bill strengthens SAFE NT's ability to do its job. It empowers SAFE NT to formally recognise negative notices issued interstate. It enables access to the National Reference System administered by the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, which records adverse working with children check decisions nationwide and strengthens information-sharing arrangements between NT agencies, regulators and interstate authorities. These changes mean better decisions, faster responses and fewer opportunities for individuals to exploit jurisdictional gaps.

Importantly, procedural fairness is preserved. Anyone who wishes to challenge a negative notice must do so in the jurisdiction where that decision was made. If that decision is overturned, they retain the right to reapply for an Ochre Card in the Northern Territory.

Privacy protections also remain firmly in place. Information sharing will occur only for suitability assessments and will continue to be governed by the *Information Act 2002*. This is targeted proportionate reform, not overreach.

For current working with children check holders in the Northern Territory this Bill ensures that if an interstate negative notice exists, SAFE NT can reassess and, when necessary, revoke a clearance to prevent unacceptable risk. That is not only reasonable; it is essential.

The existing Act is too narrow. It limits information sharing and creates unnecessary administrative burden, and this Bill fixes these deficiencies. It strengthens child protection safeguards, delivers on the CLP government's commitment to reduce crime and enhances community confidence in the systems designed to protect our youngest and most vulnerable Territorians. Most importantly, it sends a clear message: the safety of children must come first every time and in every jurisdiction.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I support the Care and Protection of Children Amendment (Worker Screening) Bill. It is heartening to speak on Bills like this which clearly have multi-party support for enacting positive reforms that will ensure children are safer and we have better social outcomes.

My electorate of Fong Lim contains a number of childcare centres, so I speak in support of this Bill, recognising that those childcare centres want better governance and oversight in these businesses. Childcare centres in Stuart Park, Woolner and Berrimah—I could point to a number of them specifically.

The bottom line is that this Bill is not entirely reactive; it is the consequence of things that happened over the last few years which shone a light on the fact that we need to do more to maintain consistency and harmonisation in regulating these spaces and ensuring that only fit and proper persons work in childcare. It is an important area to work in. We struggle to find labour supply, but that cannot be an excuse for letting just anyone work in childcare willy-nilly and/or for us to drop the ball and allow people who should not be in the space to work in the sector.

This Bill delivers on the CLP government's commitment to strengthen child safety and protect vulnerable children. Neither the Member for Port Darwin nor the Member for Katherine, both relevant ministers in this area, are new to being advocates in this space. This is not a case of just pushing through reforms because it is in their wheelhouse; these ministers are genuinely committed to their core on issues related to childcare, learning and child safety.

This government is to be lauded for the efforts it consistently makes to improve child safety and ensure that future generations have a leg up. There are lots of structural deficits in the Northern Territory's socioeconomic set-up, and I speak about them regularly regarding public health, housing, education and infrastructure.

All of those, ultimately, lead people to think that we are trying to provide opportunity for only adults when, in actual fact, at all times we on this side of the House are thinking about opportunity for children, the next generation, and setting up people for positive outcomes and success. Our government got it right in making this a key area of focus. Whether it is school attendance or safety, we made it a front-and-centre concern of government.

Our concern aligns with the national reforms that were agreed in August 2025 by the Standing Council of Attorneys-General at the meeting to ensure consistency in working with children checks. Australians are rightly horrified that this area has been a net with holes in it—a tapestry of arrangements without clarity. It has been easier to circumnavigate the systems in some places than others. No-one Australia-wide wants us lagging in this area.

Key features such as providing mutual recognition of negative working with children clearances across all Australian jurisdictions are important, as is, as a general principle and specific outcome, enhanced information sharing between NT agencies, regulatory bodies and interstate screening authorities. It will ensure that people who are refused the capacity to work in the sector elsewhere are also denied clearance to work in the Northern Territory.

Thankfully, we have not had some of the egregious heinous incidents we know to have occurred, particularly as reported in Victoria over the last year. However, that is all the more reason for us to support the principle of 'banned in one, banned in all', which is what we are seeking to do with this Bill.

There is a significant body of checks in this space already. SAFE NT processed almost 50,000 applications in 2024–25. Five jurisdictions have already recognised interstate negative notices, and the NT will also be legislated to meet the national commitments made on the back of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, particularly the recommendation for a nationally consistent approach to working with children clearances.

Operationally, this will have a small but discernible and significant impact. SAFE NT will formally recognise negative notices issued elsewhere. It will access the National Reference System to exchange critical information. That reference system, administered by the ACIC, records adverse decisions nationwide and will ensure consistent child safety decision-making across jurisdictions, which we are all hoping for.

We need to manage inconsistencies. This legislation will help us to do that. Mutual recognition ensures bans apply equally across jurisdictions. Individuals must appeal negative notices through the original jurisdiction.

I take on notice that more could be done in this space, and the NT will continue to work on further reforms to align with Standing Council of Attorneys-General agreements. The aforementioned relevant ministers will continue to work in this space so that we have not just 'one and done' it, but will have an ongoing process to ensure there is ongoing opportunity for young people and older people in the Northern Territory.

The current Act's provisions are narrow and insufficient for national information sharing; that is widely agreed and uncontested. This Bill will strengthen that information-sharing power by reducing the administrative burden and preventing forum shopping.

Forum shopping is one of these ideas that can be a throwaway when we are talking about things in legal nomenclature, but think about what forum shopping constitutes in this kind of space. You cannot have people forum shopping who are unfit for purpose and unsafe to be working in the sector, so it is important that we close loopholes, empower SAFE NT to recognise interstate negative notices and strengthen information sharing and a framework of cross-agency collaboration, which we currently do not have entirely.

Negative interstate notices will terminate NT applications. Current NT working with children clearance holders with interstate negative notices will be reassessed. This will be forward looking and contemporaneous. SAFE NT will revoke clearances when individuals pose unacceptable risks.

Regarding procedural fairness, it is important that we maintain standards of legal tests. Appeals will be made through the jurisdiction that issued the negative notice and if overturned, individuals will be able to reapply for an Ochre Card in the NT.

SAFE NT will be authorised to share and request information relevant to these clearances. That includes criminal history, court orders and identifiers. That does not, as the minister pointed out, abrogate privacy protections under the *Information Act 2002*.

In a nutshell harmonisation, consistency and alignment with the national legal framework are the outcomes of this Bill in pursuit of providing a safer landscape for our youngest constituents. As a general principle, as everyone knows, I am an advocate for aligning with national standards and finding commonality where we can. This is an area where federal, state and territory governments of all stripes have come together to say, sensibly, that we must do something in this space as a matter of urgency, priority and decency. On that basis this Bill strengthens child protection safeguards in the NT prima facie, and I am happy to support it. I am glad that we are moving forward on this at pace, ahead of some other states and territories.

This Bill delivers on the CLP government's commitment to reduce crime, which of course encompasses protecting children and addressing the possibility of crime. Ultimately, it ensures national consistency, closes our legislative loopholes and enhances community safety.

On the basis of all the above, I am happy to commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Mr PATEL (Casuarina): Madam Speaker, I support the Bill, which delivers on a clear commitment to strengthen child safety and better protect vulnerable children in the Northern Territory. I will speak about it in plain and simple language because the principle behind this Bill is simple: if you are not safe to work with children in one part of Australia, you should not be able to work with children anywhere else in Australia. That is what families expect, and this Bill delivers that.

Before I go further, I commend Minister Cahill for bringing forward this important reform.

The Territory can be proud of this Bill because it shows that we are serious about preventing harm, learning from national experience and getting the basics right for our children's safety.

The Territory is a unique place. We have a mobile workforce. We rely on people coming from interstate to fill important roles in schools. Minister Hersey said that we have 230 new teachers from interstate.

We rely on people coming from interstate to fill important roles in schools, early learning centres, health services, youth services, disability support and community organisations. We also have a big volunteering culture. Parents coaching sport, elders supporting culture programs and community members helping with school events and excursions. They are strengths of the Northern Territory, but that also means we must have strong safeguards because people can move quickly between jurisdictions and risk can travel just as quickly as good intentions.

This Bill aligns the Territory with the national reforms agreed at the August 2025 meeting of the Standing Council of Attorneys-General to ensure greater consistency in working with children checks. When screening systems are inconsistent, gaps appear. When gaps appear, children can be put at risk. Across Australia we have seen that failures in child-related screening and oversight had devastating consequences.

There are three core improvements in this Bill. Firstly, it creates mutual recognition of negative notices across jurisdictions, meaning that if you are refused a clearance in another state or territory the Northern Territory can recognise that decision. Secondly, it strengthens information sharing between Territory agencies, regulatory bodies and interstate screening authorities, meaning that decisions here can be made with better information, not in isolation. Lastly, it shuts down forum shopping—or jurisdiction shopping, you could say—whereby someone tries to move jurisdictions looking for the weakest system.

This Bill strengthens information-sharing powers, reduces the administrative burden and prevents forum shopping. All of that supports the principle that Territorians understand instantly: if you are banned in one, you are banned in all.

As a parliament we should be proud of this because it says clearly that the Territory will not be a back door, we will not tolerate loopholes and the safety of our children comes before anything else.

For most people this reform changes nothing day to day because most workers and volunteers are good people doing the right thing. For families it increases confidence. When a parent drops off a child at childcare they should not have to wonder whether the system has a blind spot. When a teacher welcomes students into a classroom they should know that the school's processes are supported by strong screening. When a coach runs training or a youth worker runs an after-hours program the community should know that the safeguards are not different depending on which side of the border someone comes from.

This is about strengthening trust. Trust is essential to participation in the varied services that support children. Last year SAFE NT processed more than 47,000 applications. That shows how many Territorians volunteer or work in roles connected to our children and how important it is that SAFE NT has the tools to make strong decisions efficiently and consistently. This Bill provides those tools.

This Bill strengthens child protection safeguards in the Northern Territory. Once again, I commend Minister Cahill for progressing this reform. This is the kind of practical protective legislation that makes a real difference. This Assembly and the Territory can be proud of it because, at the end of the day, the message is clear: if you are banned in one state or territory, you are banned in all. Children cannot choose the adults around them; they rely on us to put in place strong safeguards. This Bill does that.

I commend this Bill to the Assembly.

Mrs ZIO (Fannie Bay): Madam Speaker, the Care and Protection of Children Amendment (Worker Screening) Bill 2025 is significant and goes to the heart of what our government is working for—keeping our children safe, protecting the vulnerable and ensuring that those who seek to harm or exploit children are stopped not just in the Northern Territory but anywhere in Australia.

This Bill delivers on the CLP government's promise to strengthen child safety, close dangerous loopholes and bring the Northern Territory into step with national reforms agreed to by every Attorney-General at last year's Standing Council of Attorneys-General.

As stated many times in this Chamber, at its core this Bill is about one simple powerful principle: if you are banned in one jurisdiction, you are banned in all. That is well overdue. The days of predators being able to skip between borders, shopping for the weakest system or the most forgiving bureaucracy, are over. The community expects when a government says that a person cannot work with children that means everywhere, not just within a single postcode or a state border. This Bill ensures that is the case.

The reforms in this Bill align the Northern Territory's working with children check—our Ochre Card system—with the model being implemented across the country. It provides for mutual recognition of negative working

with children check notices across all Australian jurisdictions and embeds enhanced information sharing between SAFE NT, regulatory bodies and interstate screening authorities. In short, this Bill stops people who have failed a check in one state from seeking a back door into child-related work in the Territory. It closes the cracks, seals the gaps and puts child safety front and centre.

SAFE NT processed more than 47,000 working with children check applications in the last financial year. This was 47,000 decisions that directly affect the wellbeing and safety of our young people. That is 47,000 opportunities for us to make the right call and prevent harm, but even with the best systems cracks can appear when information does not flow freely across borders. That is what this Bill fixes.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse made it crystal clear that Australia needed a nationally consistent approach to working with children checks. The commission heard heartbreaking accounts of how offenders could move between jurisdictions and start again because one state system did not talk to another. That must never happen again.

Recent events in Victoria served as sobering reminders that information gaps can have devastating consequences. When a person with a history of misconduct can simply apply for work in a different jurisdiction and slip back into child-related work, children are placed at risk.

The national response has been urgent and united. Five jurisdictions have already taken action. This Bill ensures that the Northern Territory joins them, fully committed, aligned and accountable under the principle of national mutual recognition.

Through this Bill SAFE NT will formally recognise negative notices issued elsewhere and will connect directly with the National Reference System administered by the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission. The National Reference System is the backbone of Australia's child safety screening network. It records adverse working with children check decisions across every jurisdiction, allowing instant access to critical information when an application is lodged anywhere in the country. This ensures that decisions are consistent, evidence based and fast because when it comes to children's safety, delays can be dangerous.

Regarding addressing loopholes and information barriers, our current Act was strong for its time but is no longer sufficient. The provisions were too narrow, limiting the ability of SAFE NT to share or receive relevant information.

The reality is that offenders have become more sophisticated in exploiting the system's weaknesses. Some even move interstate deliberately when refused a clearance, hoping that another jurisdiction will not have access to that decision. I am happy to say that ends now. This Bill gives SAFE NT the tools and legislative backing it needs to prevent that behaviour, deny applications when there is an interstate negative notice, revoke an existing Ochre Card if risk new information comes to light and share information across agencies without delay.

I emphasise that although this Bill is strong, it is also fair. Individuals who wish to appeal a negative notice will continue to do so in the jurisdiction where the original decision was made. If that decision is overturned, they will be able to reapply for an Ochre Card. This ensures consistency, transparency and procedural fairness across all states and territories.

At the same time, privacy protections remain robust. Information sharing will include only what is relevant to determining a person's suitability, such as criminal history, court orders and identifying details, all managed under the safeguards of the *Information Act 2002*. This is not about punishing people needlessly; it is about ensuring we have the facts to make the right call when children's welfare is on the line.

Every parent, carer and teacher expects the government to protect children wherever they are—in classrooms, on sports fields, in youth programs and in care settings. That is our most sacred responsibility as legislators, and this Bill upholds that.

This Bill strengthens collaboration between regulators, aligns our laws with national standards and backs the professionals at SAFE NT who work tirelessly behind the scenes to keep our kids safe. These are not bureaucratic tweaks; they are lifesaving measures. Every clearance refused to the wrong person can prevent a tragedy—one that can never be undone.

The Care and Protection of Children Amendment (Worker Screening) Bill represents a decisive, responsible and forward-looking step in building a safer Northern Territory. It closes loopholes, strengthens powers, aligns us with the rest of the nation and ensures that those who pose an unacceptable risk to children cannot simply

move jurisdictions and find another opportunity. Above all it sends a clear message: the NT will never compromise on child safety.

Our children deserve nothing less than consistency, clarity and the strongest protections we can provide. This Bill delivers that.

I commend this Bill to the Assembly.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, I support this Bill which is an important brick in the framework of child protection. There are many other parts and, like many masonry constructions, they all have to work together. This is an important one that fixes a gap which, unfortunately, was left there when this framework was first instituted more than 15 years ago.

I have a bit of experience with SAFE NT from my previous life. I will share with the Assembly some things that happen in the current system and where this legislation will have practical impacts on the safety of children.

You may not know that when you put in an application for a working with children check, it is the same infrastructure behind the scenes as for a criminal history check. The National Police Reference System is managed and administered by the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission in Canberra. It used to be the AFP, but it restructured some years ago. That system gets a feed of all convictions recorded—basically, criminal histories—in every jurisdiction in the country.

When someone at the Local Court has a conviction recorded against them, it is recorded in the criminal history database in the Northern Territory. That is shipped to the National Police Reference System, as it is from every state and territory jurisdiction. That database maintains a list of every conviction recorded against a person in the country.

The NT did not have a few things for many years. We could not pick up on domestic violence orders. I believe that has now been fixed. When you put in for a working with children card check or a criminal history check with SAFE NT you go online and fill out all the forms and hit ‘submit’. That goes into SAFE NT and goes up in a data batch every day to the NPRS, which performs an amazing set of matching. You may not realise that matching people is incredibly hard. You would think it would be easy, but there are misspellings and typos and people change their names. That is why people have to include their last five years’ worth of addresses for that check. The matching algorithm takes place, and the next day a data feed comes back from the NPRS to SAFE NT which includes any hits that might have occurred.

If you are what is called a cleanskin—there are no hits, which means you have no disclosable court outcomes in any jurisdiction around the country—as far as SAFE NT knows, you are fine and have no convictions recorded. It is then approved to issue the card which is printed and mailed to you, so off you go—happy days.

Once that card is issued in the Northern Territory there is a clever set-up whereby the police have a process—I will not go into the details of it—to every day check the list of anyone who is arrested to be charged with an offence against the list of working with children card owners. This ensures that information about anyone in the Northern Territory who has a working with children card and has an interaction with police, which could jeopardise them holding that card, goes to the screening authority—which has a representative from SAFE NT and other appropriate people—which will then consider it.

If the arrest for the purpose of charging is such that the screening authority makes a determination that someone is no longer a fit and proper person to hold a working with children card, the authority has the power to effectively suspend that card. It notifies the interested parties that this person had something happen and they should probably consider that.

However, there is a gap because the national system considers only convictions. If someone did something inappropriate in another jurisdiction and was arrested, charged and bailed, but that charge had not proceeded to a conviction, they could travel to another jurisdiction and apply for work. When the check took place we would not know about the charge because it was not a disclosable court outcome; it was not a conviction. We would not know about it until later when a conviction came through, and that may not have triggered our process. Therefore, this legislation is an important step to strengthen the child protection framework in the Northern Territory by ensuring that if someone does the wrong thing in one jurisdiction they cannot just run away to another state and keep going for up to two years without consequence. The negative notices will definitely prevent that.

I shout out to the hardworking IT staff in the Department of Corporate and Digital Development who will implement this. I am sure they are all looking forward to another integration project with the feds because those projects are always fun. It is on the public record that the National Police Reference System is being replaced by the National Criminal Intelligence System (NCIS). It is difficult to google that because of all the TV shows with the same name. The IT staff will have a lot of work ahead of them with the integration and building a whole new framework to manage the negative notices, but it is important work because it will help to keep Northern Territory children safe.

I am sure they will come up with something that works in close to real time so that a negative notice once lodged in a different jurisdiction will flow into SAFE NT and trigger a flag which will trigger an action. If a negative notice in another jurisdiction appears for a person with a working with children card in the NT, they will be in trouble straightaway. If a negative notice is lodged for someone in another jurisdiction and they try to apply for a working with children card here, they will be out of luck—do not pass go; do not collect $200; do not go anywhere near Northern Territory children. They will have to go back to the jurisdiction where the notice was lodged, sort it out there and face the consequences. It is important that we keep Territory children safe.

There are many things that schools and childcare centres do to keep our children safe. This is part of what we call the negative framework, which makes sure that people who have done bad things cannot come up here to work. There is also a large positive framework, which is a framework of positive actions.

I have seen that in the childcare centres and schools in my electorate. For example, Kentish Early Learning Centre in Moulden has a good set of practices and procedures. No educator is allowed to be alone with a child out of sight; there are always two. It has a comprehensive system of security cameras that cover all aspects of the centre except, obviously, the toilets. There is no way an educator can take a child away and be by themselves. There is always someone watching and a video record. That is a positive framework in place to positively keep our children safe.

I congratulate the Attorney-General and the Minister for Child Protection for drafting this Bill and bringing it to the House.

Good luck to all the IT people in DCDD who will work on this project implementation. I miss you all, and I would love to work on this meaningful project, as it will be a great challenge. Unfortunately, I have been called to a different location, and I must serve in this Assembly.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Mr HOWE (Drydale): Mr Deputy Speaker, the people of Drysdale wholeheartedly support this Bill.

I thank the minister for her work in this area, which will be a large area of reform. I cannot think of a better person to be driving this. I think this would be the first time in a long time that a minister has a genuine desire to put the child at the centre. With children's safety, it is ludicrous to do anything other than putting the child as the first priority. I thank the minister for her leadership in this space, her work on the reform she is doing and the impact it will have on the children of Drysdale.

It should be noted and I thank the Member for Gwoja for his input and providing support across the floor in what will be a great step forward for not only the Territory but also the country. It is important we see mutual respect across the floor for this law and throughout the country to ensure its integrity so that it has the trust and confidence of parents all over Australia.

Child safety is indivisible. What I mean by that is if an individual is deemed unsafe to work with a child in one state or territory, the risk does not dissolve at any border. We aim to mitigate that risk with this Bill.

The Member for Fong Lim discussed the loopholes that are available and jurisdiction shopping, which is the idea of going to the easiest possible place or another jurisdiction. These practices happen, and a number of cases throughout the country show that. I thank him for his input highlighting those issues.

We are trying to take a proactive step with child safety. The negative notice is a risk-finding tool. It is not a punishment; it is an administrative safeguard based on risk. It is not a criminal sanction. The Member for Fong Lim touched on the fact that if an individual anywhere in the country is issued a negative notice, they can appeal that decision, which preserves natural justice. It is important that part is kept so that individuals who receive a negative notice, if unjustified, can appeal that decision in the state of issuance.

Ultimately, the lowest-risk principle must prevail. This ensures that across the country the most protective outcome will prevail. With child safety, that rule has to always apply. We can discuss many areas of policy in which you would aim for more risk appetite, perhaps in economic policy and that kind of thing, but regarding child safety I am confident to say on behalf of every child in Drysdale, 'We are opting for the lowest-risk option'. That is important and speaks to why this Bill is necessary and why the NT is taking this step. We are ensuring the lowest-risk principle prevails when it comes to our children.

This harmonisation across the country ensures confidence. It gives me personal confidence as a father to know that this Bill will be passed so that when my daughters go to school, sport or any number of extracurricular activities everyone working with them will have a working with children card that will be checked across all states and territories. That gives me a lot of confidence as a father, and I believe it will give the same confidence to parents throughout the electorate of Drysdale and the Northern Territory. For that reason as well I support the Bill.

I will not go into the cases, but, as discussed, by not doing this we would allow the loophole to continue whereby offenders can go jurisdiction shopping, and that would simply leave our kids at greater risk. I can see no logical or moral reason to keep that risk open. By ensuring we stop the mobility of offenders within the country we make Territory kids safer when they leave the home.

There is a clear community expectation of the actions this Assembly should take regarding child safety, and the cross-support shows it. Parents, no matter where they are in the Northern Territory, expect the administrative system that issues a working with children card will do the best it can to protect their child. That is our job, so I strongly support the minister and this Bill because I want to face every parent in my electorate and, more importantly, every child and let them know that we are doing everything we can to make children's interactions with adults as safe as possible. There is a clear community expectation throughout the Territory and the electorate of Drysdale that we take this action.

Ultimately, the state has many duties, and safeguarding the future has to be one of the greatest of them. I have spoken in this Chamber many times about my personal belief in the importance of education, the empowerment of education and what it gives to a child who will be a future citizen. When it comes to their safety that duty of this Assembly becomes paramount. If we cannot protect our youths and children, we are without a doubt failing, and no other area is of any meaning if we cannot truly protect the children who should sit at the centre of the decisions we make.

Our government has shown a strong willingness to ensure a better future for children, such as through what we have done on crime. We have done a huge number of reforms, and a big part of that for me is making sure that the children of Drysdale are safer to enjoy Drysdale when they walk to school, ride their bikes, go to the markets or go to the shopping centre on the weekend with their parents. We have a hard focus on crime for a good reason, and a big part of that for me is the future generations—our children. We said that we would not let this continue and would not have our children raised in this kind of environment, and we took decisive action. We will still take decisive action throughout this year. As the Chief Minister discussed, the focus on crime remains steadfast.

That idea fully moves into this Bill. The security of our people remains paramount. We are ensuring that every child can go to school safely and interact with adults in the safest way we can ensure the system works. By doing that we give confidence to parents to say goodbye at the school drop-off, whether it be at Driver Primary School, Gray Primary School or Good Shepherd Lutheran College. I want any parent dropping off their child at primary school to have the fullest confidence in the safety of their child there.

It goes much further. When you drop off your child at sport, parents will be interacting with them. At extracurricular activities, be it music, singing or dance classes, soccer—you can tell I have all daughters from my list—swimming, boxing or whatever your child is into, you need to have full confidence in their safety. Then you can relax more and enjoy your child's growth and watch their skills develop. We are ensuring that we achieve the baseline level of safety that is required, so this is an important Bill.

Minister Cahill continues to advocate strongly for the children of the Northern Territory. I look forward to the minister's year because I know there is a lot more coming for child safety.

We have a difficult history at times. There are predators in society; that is simply the case. It is painful, and I find the topic extremely difficult as a father. All of us have to do the best we can to provide the environment we want for our children and make sure that is extended to all children. At the heart of it I think about what I want for my children and extrapolate that to every child in the Northern Territory.

I again thank the Member for Gwoja for his input. I thank all my colleagues in the CLP team who contributed to this debate.

It is a good Bill. The country and the Territory will be stronger for it. Importantly, every parent in Driver, Gunn and Gray can have a bit more confidence in the system for our children. I will be happy to look every parent in the eye following this and tell them we passed this Bill and that there is a safer system for their children.

I commend this Bill to the Assembly.

Mr CHARLS (People, Sport and Culture): Mr Deputy Speaker, the Care and Protection of Children Amendment (Working Screening) Bill delivers on the CLP government's commitment to strengthen child safety and protect vulnerable children in the Northern Territory. It aligns with the national reforms agreed at the August 2025 Standing Council of Attorneys-General meeting to ensure consistency in working with children checks.

This is one of the most important checks and balances in place in the Northern Territory to make sure the right individuals do the right jobs. When it comes to the uncertainty about what an individual might have done in another jurisdiction, having a blind spot regarding that individual is an alarm bell. I commend the minister for bringing this Bill to the Assembly to make sure that we can protect our children. Children are vulnerable at their age, so we need to have the right individuals around them to provide support. Whether it is in education, health or extracurricular activities such as sports, arts and other activities we want to ensure that the right individuals support our children whilst they are growing up.

This Bill will give jurisdictions across Australia the opportunity to share information if there are negative notices—which is technically an alarm bell—for an individual. This will give us confidence that the agencies responsible for working with children checks have all the right information available to them before someone is cleared to work in the Northern Territory.

SAFE NT processed more than 47,000 applications in 2024–25, which is a significant number. That includes new applications as well as the renewals that need to happen every couple of years. When we issue a new card to an individual we need to ensure that they are the right person to have that clearance certificate which is mandatory in order to obtain a job or volunteer in child-related activities.

The recent incident in Victoria highlighted the urgency of this reform, so it is good that the NT is making sure we are in line with other jurisdictions by providing these changes to the legislation. This means that the public servants doing this job can do the right thing.

SAFE NT will be empowered to recognise interstate negative notices. The Bill will also strengthen the information-sharing framework for cross-agency collaboration.

Once the new system is in place if there are negative notices in any other jurisdiction, the NT application will be terminated. That is a good thing. We are making sure that our children are protected.

As the Member for Drysdale mentioned, it is a worry for many parents when they take their children to different activities. This will give them peace of mind. When things happen in other jurisdictions, parents worry. We have seen many incidents in different jurisdictions and we do not want that to continue.

This Bill provides certainty. It will make sure that the system has checks and balances in place to identify alarm bells about a risk to a child in one jurisdiction and carry them across to other jurisdictions. That will equally apply to anyone who has a negative notice in the Northern Territory and goes to another jurisdiction to get a clearance for working with children.

SAFE NT will be authorised to share and request information relevant to working with children clearance suitability. This includes criminal history, court orders and identifiers. Privacy protections under the *Information Act 2002* will remain in place.

Overall, I strongly believe this is a good additional protection layer that we are applying to our Act. We are making sure that we look after our next generation and that no individuals are working with our children who should not be with them.

This Bill strengthens the child protection safeguards in the NT. It delivers on our government's commitment to reduce crime and protect children. It also ensures national consistency, closes legislative loopholes and enhances community safety. It demonstrates how the Northern Territory Government is working with the

federal government and other state and territory governments to make sure that, as a country, we are working together to protect our children.

I commend this Bill to the Assembly.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Mr Deputy Speaker, I commend the Minister for Child Protection and the opposition for agreeing to the passage of this Bill. It is a nice thing to do. This is about keeping Territory kids safe. I am proud to be part of a government and an Assembly that recognises that we need to protect our children.

What this Bill will enable our agencies to do has already been spoken of, such as how negative notices can travel between states and territories. It is about making sure that when people send their children—or, hopefully, grandchildren for you soon, Mr Deputy Speaker—to school or sport they will interact with people who have the right clearances and are safe to be around children. That is what it is all about.

I back this Bill 100% and commend it to the Assembly.

Ms CAHILL (Child Protection)(in reply): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Assembly for its support of the Care and Protection of Children Amendment (Worker Screening) Bill 2025.

This legislation reflects national consensus on protecting children, and I am proud that the Territory is playing its part. This Bill delivers a necessary and proportionate strengthening of the Northern Territory's working with children clearance scheme. It closes long-recognised loopholes and ensures that individuals who are barred from working with children in any Australian jurisdiction cannot avoid those safeguards by seeking or retaining an Ochre Card in the Territory. In doing so, the Bill gives effect to nationally agreed reforms endorsed by Attorneys-General across Australia.

I thank my colleague the Attorney-General for the work that she has undertaken in this space.

This Bill ensures that the Northern Territory is fully aligned with a consistent and coordinated national worker screening framework. The reforms will enable Safe NT to recognise and act on negative clearance decisions issued interstate. It will prevent the practice of forum shopping between jurisdictions; strengthen information sharing with national databases, employers and relevant regulatory bodies; and support system integration with the National Reference System to improve real-time identification and risk management.

Importantly, these risk reforms preserve fundamental principles of natural justice. Individuals retain their right to appeal adverse decisions through the original jurisdiction in which those decisions were made, ensuring fairness, transparency and procedural integrity.

With more than 47,000 clearance applications processed in the last financial year alone, this Bill also supports a more efficient and credible scheme—one that reduces unnecessary administrative burden while maintaining rigorous protections for children and young people.

This legislation reinforces community confidence in our worker screening system. It sends a clear message that the safety and wellbeing of children in the Northern Territory is not negotiable.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a second time.

Ms CAHILL (Child Protection)(by leave): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a third time.

PAPER TABLED

Speaker's Determination LAPPA 1 of 2025 – Revocation of Speaker's Determination DLA04 of 2023

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable members, I table the Speaker's Determination LAPPA 1 of 2025, Revocation of Speaker's Determination DLA04 of 2023.

RESPONSE TO PETITION
Petition No 18 – Stop Amendments to the Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Act

The CLERK: The following response from the Attorney-General to Petition Number 18, praying for the Northern Territory Government to stop plans to amend the Northern Territory *Anti-Discrimination Act*, has been received and forwarded to the Member for Johnston for distribution to the petitioners:

As required by Standing Order 123, I am responding to Petition No. 18 'Stop Amendments to the Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Act' (the Petition), regarding certain amendments contained in the Anti-Discrimination Amendment Bill 2025 (the Bill). The Petition was read in the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory on 22 October 2025, with a response required from me within 12 meeting days of the Legislative Assembly, being 18 March 2026.

The Petition was signed by 1523 people across Australia and it was presented to the Legislative Assembly by Ms Justine Davis MLA, Member for Johnston.

I note that the subject matters in the Petition were considered in the Legislative Assembly through the course of debate and subsequent passage of the Bill on 16 October 2025. Of the matters raised in the Petition, it is noted that there was consultation on the proposals to reform the Anti-Discrimination Act 1992 *in the lead up to the Bill being considered in the Legislative Assembly.*

The Bill was subject to due process through the Legislative Assembly, with vigorous debate, prior to the passage of the Bill and subsequent enactment of the Anti-Discrimination Amendment Act 2025 *(Act No. 27 of 2025).*

I thank the petitioners for expressing their views, and the Member for Johnston for bringing this petition to the attention of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Northern Territory Maternity Services

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have received correspondence from the Member for Arnhem as follows:

I propose for discussion this day the following definite matter of public importance:

The ongoing erosion of choice and continuity of care in the Northern Territory maternity services.

The letter is signed by the Member for Arnhem. Is discussion supported? Discussion is supported.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Mr Deputy Speaker, maternity services in Darwin have descended into chaos. The situation is unacceptable for women, families and our newest Territorians, babies, who have been left without choice or continuity of care in important maternity services. They deserve much better.

Let me be clear: this is in no way a reflection on our amazing qualified professionals who work in maternity health—our nurses, midwives, obstetricians, specialist support staff and administrative officers. All these professionals continue to do an incredible job in the most difficult circumstances. Just like Territory women and families, our professionals have also been casualties of this litany of stuff-ups, dithering, missed opportunities and poor decision-making by the CLP government.

It has been almost 12 months since Healthscope announced that it was closing the doors on its private maternity service in Darwin. In that time the situation has gone from bad to worse.

This is where we are at, and there is no way the Minister for Health can deny the following facts:

- We now have no private obstetricians operating in Darwin, the capital of the Northern Territory. These professionals have been forced to shut up shop because they are concerned, given the current circumstances of NT Health, that they cannot provide Territory women and their families with the care they deserve.

- A $1.1m contract for private midwifery services is on hold indefinitely because of concerns about the service provider. The CLP's luxury retreat model has been slammed as unsafe by medical professionals who are concerned about the low levels of care that Territory women are receiving under this arrangement

the CLP concocted. There is no 24/7 onsite care, putting women and their babies at risk should complications arise. When they do, women have to get in an ambulance to go back to hospital to receive that vital care.

- The public maternity ward is under enormous pressure, with our Health staff working overtime to deal with the demand and at times struggling to find safe private spaces for women to have their babies.

- The home birthing unit is understaffed, forcing women who have chosen the homebirth option to now have their babies in the public health system in hospital and, in some circumstances, when they are already in labour.

- Despite this situation, the CLP cannot get its act together to provide a plan to the federal government for the $10m that has been committed to the Territory for infrastructure upgrades meant to address the gaps in maternity services at Royal Darwin Hospital (RDH).

The situation is unacceptable for any woman, their family and their expected babies. I challenge the Health minister to refute these facts, but I do not want him to waste time defending the indefensible. Instead, I urge the Health minister to focus on fixing this horrendous situation for the sake of Territory women, their families and, importantly, their babies. He needs to do it urgently.

At the start of this year we had two professional and highly competent obstetricians operating in Darwin; now we have none—zero. Both had to make the difficult decision to close their obstetrics practices because of their concerns about the state of maternity care and unacceptable handling of this situation by the CLP government.

Dr Alia Vemuri, a born-and-bred Territorian, reluctantly closed her doors because she felt she could not give her patients the care they deserved without a functioning private maternity unit. For months she has been sending her patients interstate to have their babies.

Dr Jenny Mitchell has been an obstetrician in Darwin for more than 20 years and has delivered thousands of Territory babies. She was my obstetrician when I had my daughter. Dr Mitchell says that she was not told about the closure of Healthscope's private maternity ward until the day it was announced. The CLP government knew about it—it knew what was coming—but it did not have the decency to let Dr Mitchell know; nor did the CLP government sit down with Dr Mitchell or Dr Vemuri to work through the different models of care that could be provided in keeping a private maternity service operating in Darwin. I understand that a proposal was presented to the CLP, and it was knocked back. The CLP was not interested in a professional solution.

Today there are two birthing suites sitting virtually unused. They could be used as a private birthing option with a few minor upgrades. This is all because of the CLP's failure to deliver a plan to the federal Labor government for that $10m. This was put to the government, but it was not interested. It beggars belief.

In the meantime the CLP government forged on, awarding a $1.1m contract to a private midwifery service to operate within its flawed luxury retreat model. That private midwifery contract is on hold because the government ignored serious concerns about that service, despite what I understand were repeated warnings. That operator was not allowed to provide services without supervision, a licence condition imposed by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia.

There are serious questions about the procurement process used to award this $1.1m contract, which the CLP has refused to answer, instead hiding behind a commercial-in-confidence line and not doing what it said would do—be transparent and open with Territorians.

The CLP government had been in discussions with that particular private midwifery service well before the private maternity ward was closed. We believe the Health minister needs to answer why his CLP government was negotiating a $1.1m contract with the private midwifery service over a year ago, before the private maternity ward was closed, and without first putting it out to a proper tender process. It seems to be an unfortunate and bad habit of the CLP not to go through proper process.

The Health minister needs to explain why he refused to enter into discussions with Dr Mitchell and Dr Vemuri about supporting them to safely and effectively continue their obstetrics services in Darwin.

May I add, these are not my questions; these are questions that medical professionals and concerned mothers have about this situation that remain unanswered, which they have charged us with asking the government.

Meanwhile the CLP, by its own admission, still has not provided to the federal government the plan for infrastructure upgrades at the hospital in Darwin that are largely aimed at improving the capacity of our public maternity ward and the stretched resources being experienced at Royal Darwin Hospital. We talk about timelines; this federal government offer of $10m has been on the table for months, and the CLP has done nothing to unlock this critical funding.

Meanwhile, the government's home birthing unit remains understaffed. Homebirths should be an option available for women who are confident that they can birth safely at home, and the professionals who support that go through a lengthy process to allow that to happen. Home birthing is a legitimate option for some women in the Territory, and it keeps pressure off hospitals. We hear stories of women who have chosen to have a homebirth being forced into the public maternity ward to have their baby because the specialist midwives are not available to assist them at home because they are understaffed. Again, the CLP has failed to adequately resource or support a legitimate and important birthing choice for Territory women, their families and their babies.

The situation for mothers as it stands is: no private obstetricians operating in Darwin; no private midwifery service; an understaffed home birthing unit; and no progress on upgrades to the public maternity ward, which is under more pressure than ever.

It is a situation of pure and utter negligence by the CLP government, failing to provide the most basic care services to women and their families in the Northern Territory. Our women have been left without choice in their maternity care and without continuity of care, which is a significant risk to a safe pregnancy and birth.

When women and their families should be experiencing one of the happiest times of their lives, they are being left with anxiety, confusion and fear about the level of care that they will receive in the current chaotic system. Again, this is not being critical of our incredible health staff; it is because the CLP government has failed to act and provide certainty, security and care to Territory women. It has put staff in an incredibly difficult and stressful situation many times over.

Territory women are having to make the choice to go interstate to have their babies. Families are making the decision to pack up and leave the Territory because they have no faith in the system. The CLP government talks about lifestyle as one of its commitments to the NT and about growing the population, but this debacle demonstrates that the CLP is incapable of backing its words with action that matters.

There are many things the CLP needs to do to resolve this fiasco. I offer three things it should address. Our team is focused on this issue as a matter of urgency to restore choice and continuity of care to expectant mothers in the NT. I call on the CLP government to:

1. immediately provide a plan to the federal government for upgrades to the public maternity ward to unlock the $10m that has been on the table since last year

2. immediately repurpose some of the $1.1m set aside for the stalled private midwifery contract so that the birthing suites sitting vacant in the private hospital can be upgraded and used by private obstetricians for Territory births

3. properly staff the home birthing unit so that this choice is available to women with a high degree of confidence and will relieve some of the pressure being experienced by our hospital.

These three things that my team and I offer to the government would immediately restore maternity care choice to women and take pressure off our public health system, which is under enormous stress.

We have been seeking answers to questions about this situation on behalf of Territorians for more than 12 months. Medical professionals, mothers, their families and friends have been seeking answers from the CLP government for more than 12 months. It is well and truly past the time for the Health minister and his team to give answers to those questions and act on this unacceptable situation.

Sadly, the CLP is so hell-bent on playing politics that it has forgotten its job is to serve the people of the Northern Territory. It is high time that the Health minister got off Facebook and started doing his job on behalf of Territory women, families and babies because they deserve much better than what they are getting from the CLP.

The Territory Labor team has raised this matter of public importance to demand answers and, more importantly, action from the CLP to do the job it has been elected to do.

Mr EDGINGTON (Health): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing on this matter of public importance.

I have spoken before about the range of maternity services across the Territory. As a member living in a remote part of the Northern Territory I know that these issues do not end at the Berrimah Line. There is more to maternity services than the Leader of the Opposition wants people to believe. I make it clear that there are services in four hospitals: Alice Springs Hospital; Gove District Hospital; Katherine Hospital; and Royal Darwin Hospital.

There are about 2,000 births at RDH and more than 600 births at Alice Springs Hospital every year. For approximately 2,000 births per year, the Australasian Health Facility Guidelines recommend five birthing rooms plus one assessment room. Royal Darwin Hospital exceeds this recommendation, with six delivery suites, one day pregnancy assessment area and two suites within the birth centre. This capacity has been assessed as sufficient to meet current birthing activity and the increase following the closure of the Darwin Private Hospital maternity service.

We should note that there is only one tertiary-level hospital for thousands of kilometres—Royal Darwin Hospital—and that is the escalation point for the Territory and beyond. It provides vital last-resort supports and services for the whole of the NT and the broader region. This includes when Darwin Private Hospital had complex and traumatic births and emergency support and escalated levels of care were required for private patients in the private system.

It is important to recognise that people outside of Darwin might not have alternatives to using our public maternity services, nor readily and easily accessible services nearby.

Our team at NT Health—doctors, nurses, midwives and other service providers—do an outstanding job. They have done amazing work for many years, servicing the needs of all Northern Territory residents who use the services.

In our remote areas, expectant mothers receive pregnancy care at their local clinic until they are 37 weeks' pregnant, at which time they will be brought into a hospital for birthing. After birthing, when mum and baby are well enough, remote families return home and continue to be cared for by the community nurse and midwife in their local clinic.

RDH also offers a postnatal home visiting service. A midwife visits parents and babies at home to provide breastfeeding support and postnatal care to new mothers.

The maternity teams and midwifery services at our four birthing hospitals, including remote midwives and nurses who help mums in pregnancy and birthing—including homebirths—deserve every bit of praise and recognition for the hard work they do.

In regard to some of the comments made by the Opposition Leader, Dr Alia Vemuri made a commercial decision to shut her private obstetrics business. Like everybody I am extremely disappointed that a private obstetrician has decided to close in the Northern Territory.

We all recognise that Healthscope's decision to close Darwin's private maternity and birthing service in June caused widespread concern, disrupting care for pregnant women and placing added pressure on families. Frankly, it has been incredibly frustrating for me as the minister, residents and the families who have been paying for private health insurance and expected to be able to use a private birthing service in the Northern Territory.

Our government stepped in when Healthscope stepped out. We made a concerted effort to provide a safe birthing experience for private patients before the doors closed and since. Our government has been actively engaged in working through solutions to ensure private care options continue to be available for expectant mothers in Darwin.

Last year Minister Butler said:

> *The Northern Territory government under Minister Steve Edgington has been doing a terrific job, working with insurers to pick up the slack that Healthscope is going to leave, having withdrawn their maternity services.*

The federal minister said that at the time we found out that Healthscope was closing. We stepped in when it stepped out to ensure that the services which could be provided, were provided.

At an operational level, NT Health continues working extremely hard to ensure the transition to Royal Darwin Hospital is managed with the highest levels of care. Although these options do not replicate the model at Darwin Private Hospital, they provide a comprehensive, safe and supportive maternity experience for private patients.

As of 2 February 2026, 75 families have embraced the private maternity options—36 through the maternity hotel retreat and 39 under the return-home-sooner model. I have previously said that it is reassuring that many families have expressed appreciation to NT Health staff, praising the midwives, lactation consultants and support teams for going above and beyond to provide care and a positive experience. A few patients described their experience at Royal Darwin Hospital as very positive, particularly the midwifery and domiciliary support provided throughout.

Comments received from the private maternity families who stayed at the Mercure Darwin Airport Resort were that it provided a valuable opportunity for rest and time with family. Many families expressed satisfaction with the public–private hybrid model, suggesting that it was innovative and should be considered for continuation in Darwin.

I had the wonderful opportunity to meet with several mothers with their babies from the Our Birth, Our Voice group to discuss this important matter, and I look forward to meeting with them again. NT Health has ensured it meets regularly with the Our Birth, Our Voice group and attends any forums held. The voices of these mums are important, and we value their advocacy. We acknowledge everyone's lived experience and story, whether they are directly or indirectly impacted. I hear their concerns, and I stand with them.

Engagement with the Commonwealth at the official level regarding the provision of private maternity services in the Northern Territory continues. Separately, an infrastructure funding request has been sent to the Commonwealth to enable upgrades to existing maternity infrastructure to improve services more generally. Although we are in discussions with the Commonwealth about funding and private maternity services, we will always make sure public maternity services are there for Territorians who need them.

We continue to engage with the Commonwealth on the sale of Healthscope to make sure Territorians keep real choice between public and private healthcare. I will be meeting with the receivers next week to find out where things are up to and to try to find a solution for these unresolved issues. Over a number of months we have been calling on the federal government and the Healthscope receivers to step up and provide Territorians with clarity on the future of Darwin Private Hospital. We supported the national approach led by the Commonwealth Health minister, Mark Butler, following the owners of Darwin Private Hospital entering into receivership. We need to make clear that is what happened: the owners of Darwin Private Hospital entered into receivership.

We have been acting in the best interests of Territorians. All last year we were told by the federal government and the appointed receivers that an announcement of a new operator was hopeful by the year's end. That has not been delivered. It has left patients, staff and the broader health system facing ongoing uncertainty about the future of that critical facility. We have worked with the receivers and confirmed that once the new operator is known, we will engage directly with them and fight for the return of private maternity services.

On top of that was the recent announcement that Healthscope's Gold Coast Private Hospital has been sold, so it is time for those in the know to let Territorians know what is going on. It looks like there has been another opportunity missed. We need an update to find out where things are at from the Commonwealth and the receivers so that we can inform Territorians. This latest sale means that five of Healthscope's hospitals have been sold, but there is no update on the sale of Darwin Private Hospital and, sadly, no update for Territorians.

The Territory cannot keep being treated as an afterthought by the Albanese federal government. When it comes to healthcare, Territorians deserve better. Darwin should not stand alone as the only capital city without private maternity services, and it is in the national interest that this be put right. The CLP government believes it is vital that as part of the resolution of the Healthscope sale process, privately run and managed maternity services to meet the needs of Territorians with private health insurance must be restored at Darwin Private Hospital under whatever new ownership is established.

I will briefly talk about federal funding because it is all in some way relevant. I commend the Chief Minister who signed a landmark deal with the federal government and state leaders to deliver $25bn for public hospitals, which includes $1bn for the Northern Territory. This funding over five years provides certainty for

patients, and I thank the federal government for working with us and recognising the challenges of being a smaller jurisdiction.

This five-year funding agreement locks in the single biggest contribution by the federal government to the Territory's hospitals. The Territory will come home with an historic deal. Although we would like more, it represents a significant increase that will go a long way to delivering better healthcare for Territorians. We will continue to work with the federal government to improve our position, which has traditionally trailed behind the rest of the nation.

I have spoken about this before. We are still $200m short for the necessary healthcare services and facilities that the Commonwealth is directly responsible for.

Aeromedical services in the Top End cost our health system $51m a year.

I have spoken about aged-care patients; there are 60 to 80 in our hospitals per day. The federal government needs to provide dignified care for aged people. The announcement of a new facility being built is welcomed, but in the meantime it is costing the Northern Territory $40m per year to deliver a service that is the responsibility of the federal government, yet the federal government refuses to pay that $40m.

We are underfunded by $95m in remote primary healthcare.

Altogether this is almost $200m that we are still short of in health funding. The National Health Reform Agreement is a big step in the right direction, and it will go a long way to supporting a stronger health system for all Territorians.

We welcome the long overdue announcement of the aged-care facility in the Northern Territory. We thank the federal government for that announcement which the Prime Minister made while in the Top End. It is good to see that it is finally delivering on its promise, which I believe was made in April last year, roughly nine months ago. We have contributed land and headworks. We have offered the land and will complete the headworks near the Palmerston hospital to ensure that Ozcare can deliver the facility that has been discussed. In the meantime, 80 aged-care patients are occupying beds in our hospitals. Clearly, this bed block ripples through the system, causing longer waits in emergency departments and putting pressure on the health system overall. Once built, the aged-care facility will take some pressure off the health system.

In my budget speech last year to the parliament and in past questions for the opposition I have highlighted the dire state of the Northern Territory health budget and the mess that Territory Labor left us in the funding of health services. Upon coming to office, we found that health budget spending had exceeded the allocation of funds by about $300m per annum for at least two years—a time that I know the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Health.

Last year we acted to provide additional base funding as part of the health budget, which was another $100m per annum. It is not a one-off, because more needs to be done to improve healthcare in the Northern Territory.

Labor had eight years to upgrade maternity services at Royal Darwin Hospital, but what did it do? Nothing. It came into government in 2016 and had 19 years in government overall, but failed to invest in maternity services. Even when Labor's Chief Minister Natasha Fyles was the Minister for Health from 2016 to 2023 it had no plans or major investments to upgrade maternity services. The now Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Health after that, from Christmas 2023 to August 2024 when Territorians unceremoniously voted Labor out. Crickets—that is what we heard about improving maternity services when she was minister. I flagged previously that Labor failed in its promise when it opened Palmerston Regional Hospital that babies could be delivered there.

In an ABC article from 27 September 2017 former Chief Minister Natasha Fyles, who was the Health minister at the time, said:

> *As the hospital progresses, when it's appropriate, in a clinical plan, women will be able to deliver at Palmerston.*

The ABC reported:

> *Ms Fyles did not provide a timeframe for the full rollout.*

What happened to Labor's plan to roll out a plan for women to deliver at Palmerston? Did the now Opposition Leader take on the plan and deliver it? Did she follow through with the plan? Obviously not.

Another ABC story from 3 June 2021 stated:

> *… Natasha Fyles says the government is looking at returning birthing facilities to remote and regional locations, and hopes to do so within the next decade.*
>
> *…*
>
> *Ms Fyles said investing in birthing on country services was a 'priority' …*

Again, there was nothing.

I have still been unable to find anything. Even AI could not make up any of Labor's action on maternity. Labor is all about platitudes and unfulfilled promises, not priorities.

We are frustrated by Healthscope's decision to end private maternity services. We will meet with the receivers to ensure that when the new Darwin Private Hospital provider is identified, we are at the forefront of advocating on behalf of all Territorians for the return of maternity services at the private hospital. We have made it clear that the restoration of private maternity services is an essential element of private hospital ownership in the Northern Territory. I look forward to meeting with the receivers and the federal minister next week.

Listening to the Opposition Leader concerned me. As is typical of the opposition, there are lots of complaints about what has not been done. Opposition members have a short memory; they did not do much when they were in government.

Rather than sit around and whinge and complain, why do you not get on board and start advocating with us for an increase in private maternity services in Darwin? Why do you not ask the federal government to provide the $40m for aged-care services that we are delivering on behalf of the Commonwealth, the $95m for remote primary care and the $51m to deliver CareFlight services? Why do you not start supporting Territorians and start advocating for money for us so that we can improve services across the board?

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Mr Deputy Speaker, we have heard important contributions on the matter critical to Territory women and families—the circumstances surrounding maternity services. The key concern is the erosion of choice and continuity of care for Territory women and their families. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for raising the topic. It is vital that we address any issues arising with the seriousness and urgency they deserve. Territory women and healthcare professionals are watching this debate. Women and clinicians have consistently and courageously raised their concerns because they care deeply about the safety and wellbeing of mothers and babies across the Territory. They are looking for answers from the Health minister and, more importantly, solutions.

This conversation is not limited to the loss of private maternity care in the Northern Territory; it extends to pressures within the public system and the growing uncertainty faced by women across all models of care. As I said in October last year in my speech on the state of maternity services in the Northern Territory:

> *… when you are having a baby or visiting a friend who has just had a baby, it should be one of the most beautiful, positive experiences you can have.*

This should be true, whether you are birthing in a hospital or at home.

Amid this discussion I make one point clear: the uncertainty in maternity care is not the fault of our healthcare professionals. They work hard under difficult circumstances to deliver the best care possible to Territory mothers and babies in Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine and Nhulunbuy.

Territory women and families know that something is not right with maternity services in the Northern Territory. Since February 2025 ongoing issues and what can only be described as sluggish action from this government have resulted in the erosion of choice and continuity of care in maternity services.

Healthscope announced the closure of its private maternity services in February 2025, rocking expectant mothers and healthcare staff. The Health minister, Steve Edgington, admitted the same day that he was made aware this would happen in September 2024. He told ABC news on Friday 21 February last year:

I was certainly made aware that Healthscope were having some difficulties here in Darwin …

Twelve months after that announcement there are no private obstetricians operating in Darwin. This leaves the Territory as the only jurisdiction in the country without private obstetricians or continuity of care for Territory women who want it.

Twelve months on, the public maternity ward is under enormous pressure, with our incredible healthcare staff working overtime to deal with demand and at times struggling to find safe private spaces for women to have their babies.

Twelve months on, the homebirth program continues to face staffing challenges. Women are being told when they are in labour that they are unable to give birth at home. Being informed during labour that a transfer is required as a result of staff unavailability is profoundly anxiety provoking and undermines a woman's sense of safety and trust in her chosen model of care.

Twelve months on, the CLP's luxury retreat model has been criticised as unsafe by medical professionals concerned about the low levels of care women are receiving under the arrangement.

Twelve months on, the Health minister has not secured additional funding from the federal government to make necessary upgrades to maternity infrastructure at Royal Darwin Hospital.

Twelve months on, there is still a number of Territory women and healthcare professionals coming forward with horror stories about how this anxiety-inducing inaction is impacting on them or forcing them to go interstate. These stories include a mother labouring in a tearoom, because there was no place for her to go. Mothers are telling each other to bring fans with them because the maternity ward is so hot.

We need to take the concerns about maternity service capacity in the Top End—especially in Darwin—seriously, because it is women, their families and the Territory overall that suffers. As widely reported, families are leaving the Territory to access maternity care. Defence families are choosing not to be posted here or are leaving altogether if they plan to start a family. That impacts population growth, workforce stability and our economy. Without choice and continuity of care, Territory women go interstate to ensure that they have a private medical professional who knows their medical history, their risk and, importantly, their name. Is that the best the CLP can offer—leave the Territory?

Territory women are paying top dollar for private insurance but without choice or continuity of care; they are paying for a Medicare card with a ribbon wrapped around it. Choice equals safety. Without choice and continuity of care, pressure on the public system intensifies.

Our public obstetricians, who do exceptional work, are stretched even further, limiting their capacity to care for Aboriginal women who can face higher rates of pregnancy and birth complexities. The barometer of safety in maternity services is obstetricians. If the public obstetricians are speaking to the Health minister, he needs to take it seriously. As we have now lost our private obstetricians, immense pressure has transferred to our public obstetricians. What will happen when they cannot take it anymore?

These concerns are not imagined. They are grounded in lived experience and backed by sustained advocacy. It is important to recognise the ongoing advocacy efforts and the commitment of various groups, including Our Birth, Our Voice; healthcare professionals such as Dr Jenny Mitchell and Dr Alia; healthcare organisations; and unions. Their advocacy offers hope to Territory women that their voices are being heard and that a better future for maternity services is possible. The Territory Labor opposition alongside the crossbench will continue to work with these advocates to amplify their voices and to hold this government to account on an issue that Territorians repeatedly tell us matters deeply to them.

I acknowledge the fantastic advocacy of the mothers behind the Our Birth, Our Voice forums. Their advocacy is borne from traumatic and heartbreaking experiences, yet their efforts have ensured that these issues remain front and centre and that women's voices are not ignored.

They have serious and responsible questions for the Health minister. They have asked for details on how NT Health is implementing the woman-centred care strategy and where it is not a framework with implementation timeframes. They ask:

- Will there be forward planning to ensure appropriate cover is arranged during known leave periods, including the use of agency staff when no other cover is available?

- Can the minister ensure the home birthing unit moves to transparent timely communication with women during periods when the program is understaffed, providing as much notice as possible that there is an increased likelihood of having to transfer?

- Can the minister confirm whether the new mental health building at RDH includes a dedicated mother and baby room?

- What policy is in place to specifically reduce the perinatal death rate in circumstances when perinatal loss is disproportionately affecting NT women and what additional supports are in place to support mothers who suffer loss?

- What consideration is being, or can be, given to expanding the early pregnancy clinic to see high-risk mothers earlier than at 16 to 18 weeks, particularly in light of the lack of private maternity options for these women?

- Can additional funding be made available to upskill local GPs to provide early and targeted pregnancy support for women who cannot access the early pregnancy clinic? Targeted treatment such as progesterone support and additional scans is often required well before 16 weeks.

- Can a woman who is potentially suffering a miscarriage be immediately transferred to level 8 at RDH for an ultrasound to determine whether there has been a loss rather than waiting in ED for extended periods?

- Can confirmation be provided that once the new mental health ward is online, the room currently being used for mental health patients will be returned for use by women suffering early loss?

These are not political questions; they are questions asked by Territory mothers, families and clinicians seeking safety, dignity and certainty. I say to those opposite: think carefully before criticising these questions. To dismiss them is not to criticise the opposition; it is to dismiss the lived experience of Territory women and healthcare professionals who have come together repeatedly to propose solutions to a problem that remains unsolved. I ask the Health minister to work with all parties to address this issue with the seriousness it deserves.

I acknowledge that the federal Labor government has stepped up and delivered additional health funding for the Northern Territory, but this is a Territory responsibility that requires Territory leadership. The minister must immediately provide the Commonwealth with a clear plan to upgrade the public maternity ward at Royal Darwin Hospital to unlock the $10m that has been on the table since last year. The government should repurpose the $1.1m allocated to the stalled private midwifery contract to upgrade unused birthing suites at the private hospital so that they can be utilised by private obstetricians. The home birthing unit must be properly staffed so that women can choose this model of care with confidence and certainty. Above all, the government must listen to Territory women, their families and the healthcare professionals who care for them every day.

I again thank the Territory women who stand up and add their voice to this issue. I thank the Our Birth, Our Voice group for its ongoing and strong advocacy. I thank Dr Jenny and Dr Alia for their years of work delivering many young Territorians and helping Territory women. I also thank the people in our health workforce, who continue to deliver every day.

Territory women have done their part, as have the health professionals. It is time this government did its part.

Mrs HERSEY (Education and Training): Mr Deputy Speaker, I pick up on a couple of things that the Member for Daly spoke about. He said that it was the Minister for Health's job to advocate for health.

The minister did a great job of explaining the downfalls of the previous Labor government in advocating for more funding for health services, so I think it is a bit rich to come in with an MPI and blame it all on us. The Opposition Leader was the Health minister at the time. The Member for Daly said on the radio the other day that it is up to the Chief Minister to advocate to the federal government. It was actually up to the Opposition Leader when she was the Health minister to advocate. Thankfully, we have a strong Chief Minister who advocated for an extra $1bn for health in the Territory. That should be applauded rather than snipes from those on the other side who are still trying to find their relevance in opposition. I digress.

I am proud to speak on this matter of public importance—and it is a matter of public importance. The Minister for Health spoke of the failures that we inherited from the previous Labor government in regard to health services. If anyone has advocated more strongly, it has been the Health minister. He outlined the lack of

support and advocacy as well as the lack of importance that the Opposition Leader, the then Health minister, placed on the health system. That was negligent.

She did not advocate to her mates in Canberra for a better deal for the Northern Territory. It took the Chief Minister to go there during National Cabinet to advocate and put forward our best case to receive an extra $1bn of funding for the Northern Territory. I thank the Health minister for continuing to advocate for more funding to top up our shortfall from the federal government.

Last year I met with the group Birth and Beyond, on behalf of the Health minister. It was a sobering gathering, listening to parents and parents-to-be about their birthing stories in Darwin. I have to say, as a mother, some of those stories were heart-wrenching, but it was good to be there on behalf of the Health minister, also joined by CEO Chris Hosking and other staff from maternity services and the Health department, to listen to those mothers advocating for health and maternity services.

I speak as a mother of three children who received the services of our public health system at Katherine Hospital for my birthing experiences. I put on the record how fortunate we are in Katherine to have such a wonderful maternity department. I truly mean that. The services we have at Katherine Hospital, in a regional centre, are remarkable. The midwives are long-term local staff. Those ladies had their own babies at our hospital, and they give the best of care. I cannot speak highly enough of the maternity services in Katherine that mothers receive, whether they live in town or come in from out bush prior to having their baby. The ladies who come in from remote communities receive a high level of care from not only the midwives but also other staff in the annexe that joins the hospital which houses and supports them while they wait to give birth.

Over the years Katherine Hospital has been fortunate to have had, and continues to have, amazing doctors who have been private but have attended to public patients at the hospital. I acknowledge the tireless work of Dr Scattini, who has passed away—rest in peace—and after whom the maternity ward is named; Dr Brummitt; Dr King; and Dr Short. They were the long-term doctors when I arrived in Katherine 36 years ago. They ran the private Kintore clinic, but also supported our hospital with many hours of unpaid work, as they believed that was what being a ruralist GP was all about. They gave back to our community. I am sure I can say for those of us who have lived in town long enough that we miss them all.

My first child was born four weeks early under the care of Dr Sally 29 years ago, along with the help of midwives. The level of care afterwards was amazing. As a new mum, I was like a deer in the headlights. I am sure other mothers in the House can reflect on when they gave birth to their first child—anxiety overload. After eight hours of labour I was handed this tiny baby who weighed five pounds five ounces. I do not mean it disrespectfully, but he looked like a pinkie joey—he was very premature. He was so tiny and fragile, not that you would know it now as he is quite tall and big these days. He went into a humidicrib, suffered from jaundice and cried and fed constantly. I am sure I suffered postnatal depression. I think I am still getting over it, and he is 29. He still pushes my buttons.

My week after, as a new mum, in the care of dedicated midwives was second to none. I was confident we were receiving the same care as you would have in a private hospital elsewhere. In fact, I would say that we received better care as the dedicated team of midwives at Katherine Hospital were there to help at the press of a buzzer, no matter what time of the day or night. Those midwives were supportive. They took your baby when you needed a rest. The nappies were taken away and washed; it was cloth nappies then. The meals were served up to you. Apart from a baby who fed far too often, the hospital experience was all positive.

When it was time to have my daughter, I only had the support of midwives during my birthing experience. They, again, were incredible with their level of care and attending to my needs.

Coming back to the hospital for the third child, I was back to having one of our amazing doctors, Dr Brummitt. Unfortunately, he has retired now. Alongside him was the incredible Iana McLellan. She is a midwife who has been at the hospital for as long as I have lived in Katherine. Her support is second to none. Everyone should have a midwife like Iana alongside them through their labour. There was nothing that Iana did not get for me, even the strange request for a Crunchie bar mid-labour. She was there delivering anything I needed.

These days Iana's daughter works as a midwife as well. The team of mostly long-term local staff continue to give 100% care to all the mums who deliver their precious cargo at Katherine Hospital.

Our maternity ward has eight beds and a room with a double bed for families to use for their comfort after they have delivered their baby in one of the hospital's three birthing suites. If you choose to have a water birth, no problems; at Katherine Hospital we have a birthing pool also.

I am confident that these birthing services are still second to none. My daughter is waiting to have her baby. She is four days overdue and is not happy about that. She has attended birthing classes run by dedicated staff. A student midwife has gone through the whole experience by her side for her continuity of care, along with our dedicated midwives, to complete her birthing experience. The student midwife has been a support to Hannah throughout her pregnancy that, fortunately for her, has been smooth along the whole way.

I send a big shout-out to all midwives across the Territory who provide much-needed care to new mothers, but mostly to those in Katherine under the leadership of Renae Daniel at Katherine Hospital. I feel so lucky to be in a regional town with a hospital that provides the best care, whether you are at the emergency department or having a baby in our maternity section which delivers the very best of care to our new mums.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, I am delighted to jump up to speak about the importance of health and maternity services across the Northern Territory because maternity services affect every one of us—our families directly and our constituents. Ensuring every Territorian has access to quality maternity services should be a priority for everyone in this Chamber, let alone the CLP government. It does not matter where you are from or who you are, you deserve access to outstanding maternity services across the Northern Territory. We have heard from many people in this Chamber about the importance of maternity services.

I support Territory families having the choice to determine which maternity service they will access. I make it clear that it is part of Labor Party DNA that we back public health. We love the public health system, and we are always there for it.

Members interjecting.

Mr PAECH: We support Territorians to have the choice to access private health services. They are entitled to have that choice. Every jurisdiction should have high-functioning, well-resourced public health services.

I have been horrified to hear stories from across the Territory of women being told that they can check into the Darwin Airport hotel to have a baby.

Mrs Hersey: It happens Australia-wide.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence!

Mr PAECH: They have said that it is alarming …

Mr YOUNG: Point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 20; the government members keep interfering while the Member for Gwoja is trying to speak on this important matter. They had their opportunity to speak, and I ask that we respectfully listen to each other, considering the sensitivity of this.

Madam SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Daly; I agree. The member will be heard in silence.

Mr PAECH: I hear alarming stories of Territory mothers being told that it is an option to check in to a hotel. I pick up on the interjection from the Member for Katherine saying that is fabulous and great, but that is not her decision to make; it is the decision of Territory parents. Fathers and mums get to make the choice of where they have their child and about the access and the quality of services.

I have heard stories—I think it was in Nhulunbuy or Groote Eylandt during a cyclone—that a mother was flown to Queensland to give birth; that is not right. We have great services in the Northern Territory. We should have outstanding private health services that this CLP government should have got behind and backed every step of the way, but it did not. That is what we are here to discuss. There should be these options for people in the Northern Territory to have access to these quality services.

I acknowledge the hard work not by the government, but by the people on the ground and in the community who support Territory mothers each day. I shout out to Tess—who is in the gallery—from Our Birth, Our Voice, who has been a strong advocate in making sure that there are quality services for Territory mothers to give birth the way that they want in the environment that they want and rightfully deserve. Birth and Beyond in Central Australia is another amazing group which stands up for Territory mothers and for expecting parents. That is what we should be doing.

The Northern Territory has had private health services in various areas. I come from the magical land of Central Australia. In Mparntwe (Alice Springs) we do not have a private hospital, but we have an amazing

public health system. I shout out to every health professional who offers support during women's pregnancies, because they are the heroes whom we need to get behind and continue to support every day.

I want this government to put its money where its mouth is. I want women in Tennant Creek to be able to give birth in Tennant Creek. I want women in remote communities across the Northern Territory to give birth on country. That is what we need to aspire to.

Does the CLP have it right? No. Did Labor get it right last time? No. Did the CLP get it right the time before that? No. Therefore, let us all learn from history and not do the same thing again. Let us get the recipe right; let us put women first when it comes to maternity services in the Northern Territory. Let us make sure we are listening to their aspirations, ideas and choices on the way they give birth. That is what we need to do. They need to be front and centre and leading the decisions about their bodies and their choices. They should get to have their baby where they choose. That is important, and it is what we are discussing today.

People shared their stories, and that is great, but we need to ensure the stories of expectant mothers are elevated and that they can give birth where they want to. No-one should be giving birth in a hotel room unless that is their choice. People interjecting said that they do in other states, but we are not other states; we are the Northern Territory, and we can do much better. We can deliver quality health services, whether that is private or public.

I look forward to working with the Member for Barkly. He is probably not a bad bloke. I do not mind him; I think he is all right, considering the lot he is sitting with. I want to work with him because we share the Territory's largest electorate. I am bigger than him.

We want women in Canteen Creek, Elliott, Tennant Creek, Yuendumu, Papunya, Docker River and Mutitjulu to be able to give birth on country or in amazing health centres if that is what they choose to do. It is a long journey for an expectant mum, particularly if it is their first child, to travel to a larger regional centre and leave behind family. Think about remote settings. There are large families. My mob love kids and we love to have big families. Some of our family members do not get to see their new brother, sister or grandbaby for months because they cannot afford to come into the larger towns to see them there.

Let us have a conversation about how we can extend maternity services across the Territory so that we are not putting strain on families and dragging them into town. I have never had a baby and never will, but I know the pressure it puts on families when they have to make that journey. If there are complications and they have to stay in town longer, that puts big pressure on the extended family in communities across the Northern Territory.

Health professionals do a great job. Yes, there is a resourcing piece. Yes, we need to do more. However, let us acknowledge that Anthony Albanese, the Prime Minister leading the great Australian Labor Party, has brought an additional $1bn into the Northern Territory to help deliver quality health services, because it is in the DNA of the Labor Party to back health. This is a great announcement.

Let us shout out to the Charles Darwin University medical school. It now has its first intake. A number of outstanding Territorians have decided to study medicine in the NT. That is an amazing achievement. They are the future leaders who will help the next generation of Territorians to be born in the Territory.

This is an important MPI. The contributions so far have been respectful.

I acknowledge that since the inception of self-government we have probably never delivered the best quality of care that we wanted to, so let us all do better to make sure Territory women get a quality maternity service. There is a range of ways people can choose to give birth—a homebirth, a water birth or a birth in a private or public hospital. Some mothers give birth on country, and that is magical and special. We should support people to have that choice.

A member before me spoke about the importance of our healthcare providers. I give a shout-out to all the amazing midwives in the Northern Territory who do a bloody good job in supporting young mums and bubs; Birth and Beyond; and the Our Birth, Our Voice group. I acknowledge the mums and bubs programs that are delivered by places like Danila Dilba and Alukura at Congress to help young expecting mums learn how to be a mum—because for some people it is scary and daunting and they do not know or understand—and about aftercare.

The Member for Katherine spoke about postnatal depression. We need to make sure we are there to support mums. Maternity care and services do not stop when you walk out the front door with your baby; we need continuous care to provide support. That is what we all need to do.

This is an important motion; I enjoyed hearing members' contributions.

I leave people with this message: we should do everything in our power to make sure that Territory mums—the women of the Northern Territory—are the ones who have a say about their body, choice and birth. Where they want to have their baby should be up to them, and we should support them every step of the way to have their babies, the future leaders of the Northern Territory.

Mrs ZIO (Fannie Bay): Madam Speaker, although we in this Chamber disagree on some points, I am sure we all agree that every woman across the Northern Territory should be able to give birth safely, with confidence and with care that is personal, continuous and culturally safe.

This issue is deeply personal to me. Member for Gwoja, I have had babies—three of them. My first was born in Alice Springs Hospital in 1999, and my next two were born at Darwin Private Hospital in 2004 and 2008. In 2003 I was based in Tennant Creek and suffered a miscarriage. I hoped to utilise the resources at Tennant Creek Hospital, but we had to go to Alice Springs to resolve that issue. As a mother, when you are giving birth—whether it is a miscarriage or whatever it may be—you do what you need to for the safety of your baby and for your own health. Most women know that.

Eight months ago my family celebrated the arrival of my first grandchild, a beautiful little girl born safely under the care of the amazing staff at Royal Darwin Hospital. That is one of the reasons I have taken the time to meet with women in our community who are living through this experience. On two occasions I have sat down with one of the coordinators of the Birth Stories NT Facebook group to discuss maternity services. We have had amazing chats.

Birth Stories NT is a remarkable community where mothers share their experiences, offer advice and advocate for better maternity care in the Territory. The conversations posted are candid, heartfelt and sometimes confronting. They are also valuable and remind us that behind every policy and announcement, there are real women and families who are navigating these systems, sometimes struggling but always hoping for the best outcome.

The opposition has described what is happening as an erosion of choice and continuity of care. I disagree; Territorians deserve facts, not fear. I will talk about responsibility because the opposition does not. What we are seeing is not erosion; it is a transformation under pressure driven by geography and workforce realities. We are a government that is responding and not just complaining from the sidelines.

If anyone listening thinks that all these problems have come to fruition since the CLP came to government just over a year ago, I can wholeheartedly tell them that is not the case. The Opposition Leader was the Minister for Health; she knew trouble was brewing in this sector and did nothing about it. The state we are in did not happen overnight; it has been growing for many years.

If anybody thinks that we would deliberately sabotage the care and safety of women who are giving birth, shame on you. Feel free to have a chat to me at any time; I will make myself available for you. I can talk this through at any point.

Our government is working hard to rebuild and modernise maternity services across an enormous and challenging landscape. As I said, it has been eroding for a long time. This work includes strengthening workforce retention.

We will always work to partner with Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations to deliver birthing-on-country programs that respect culture, connection to land and language. The Miwatj Health birthing-on-country model in East Arnhem is a great example of this. When we empower local women and communities, the results speak for themselves.

Let us be clear that when temporary service closures or changes have occurred, those opposite know that the decisions to restrict those services are clinical, not political. It is dishonest to pretend that it is a result of neglect. Those clinical decisions are made for one reason only—safety. Nobody wants services to be reduced, but safety must always come first. No minister, clinician or government worth its salt will risk unsafe births in under-resourced settings. That is the reality.

That said—the Minister for Health touched on this in his contribution—there are broader systemic issues that fall outside of Territory hands. Workforce shortages in health and the ongoing struggle to secure specialist obstetric staff are national problems, not local failings. It is time that the federal Labor government took serious responsibility for addressing these shortages, rather than leaving smaller jurisdictions like ours to stretch scarce resources even further.

I must say that other than playing the blame game, we have heard far too little from the Labor opposition on this front. If opposition members are looking for someone to blame, they should cast their eyes south-east towards their friends in Canberra, because the truth is the federal Labor government has done little to help the Territory secure the workforce we so desperately need. Yes, we just got $1bn, but it is a bit too late. Five or 10 years ago it would have been amazing. It has been delayed multiple times—and now we have a saviour.

Those opposite talk endlessly about equity, closing the gap and regional support, yet the federal government cut back on key health programs and left small jurisdictions like ours to fight over dwindling staff. We cannot keep upping the ante as far as payroll goes, fighting with other jurisdictions over who pays better. There is not an endless bucket of money.

The NT Labor opposition sits utterly silent. There has not been one word of advocacy or one call for Canberra to step up. Instead, we get empty speeches designed to paint local midwives and hospital staff as if they are part of a failing system. They are not. They are the heroes who keep Territory families safe under enormous strain, and they deserve our respect, not political pointscoring from those opposite.

Our government continues to act. We will continue to work on strengthening continuity of care, improve choices and ensure that every expectant mother can rely on safe respectful services close to home.

I have seen maternity care in both the public and private systems. I know what excellent care looks like, and I have seen the comfort it gives families. My daughter experienced that confidence when she gave birth just months ago in Darwin's public hospital. What we want for every mother is consistent quality care that supports them from pregnancy through to those first precious moments after birth.

To the opposition: if you truly care about continuity and choice for Territory women, stop blaming this government for national workforce failures and start demanding action from your friends in Canberra. In the Territory we are already getting on with the job. Whilst you are talking down our system, we are busy trying to make it stronger. We are investing in people, clinics and communities because Territory families deserve nothing less.

When I hold my granddaughter in my arms I am reminded of what this debate is really about. It is not political; it is about families, love and trust in the care provided to the women who bring new Territorians into this world. It is about giving babies of Territory women the best possible start in life.

Mrs CARLSON (Wanguri): Madam Speaker, as the smallest mother in the Chamber I can attest, Member for Gwoja, I had a baby—one only, though.

This matter of public importance is about choice in maternity care for Territorians, particularly for women and their families. I am a child of a family with eight daughters. Seven used the public system, and only one used the private maternity facility. We had a lot of children in our family.

As we all appreciate, Healthscope's decision to close the Darwin Private Hospital maternity and birthing services in June caused significant disruption and uncertainty for pregnant women and their families. For many this was not only a change in hospital but also a sudden loss of choice at one of the most important moments in their lives. It has been deeply disappointing and immensely frustrating for Territory women who have paid private health insurance premiums and expect those private services.

From the outset the focus has clearly been to ensure that every woman in the Territory continues to receive safe, high-quality, compassionate maternity care and that a level of private service remains an available option in Darwin.

At an operational level NT Health worked extraordinarily hard to manage a transition to Royal Darwin Hospital. This has not been easy and has required flexibility, commitment and that professionalism from all staff across the system. I place on the record my sincere thanks to the midwives, nurses, doctors, lactation consultants, allied health professionals and support staff who rose to this challenge.

Although the private maternity options we established do not replicate the former Darwin Private Hospital model, they provide a comprehensive, safe and supportive maternity experience for private patients. As of 2 February, 75 families have embraced these private maternity options—36 through the maternity hotel retreat and 39 under the return-home-sooner model. That is not an abstract number; 75 families who welcomed new life into this world during that time of uncertainty were supported by our wonderful NT Health staff who went above and beyond.

Families who stayed at the Mercure Darwin Airport Resort told us that it offered a valuable opportunity for the rest and recovery they needed and the time together needed. Several described that public–private hybrid model as innovative and something that should be considered for continuation in Darwin. These experiences matter. They remind us that the public maternity service in the Territory is not a second-best option; it is strong, safe and deeply valued.

I also speak personally about the quality of our public maternity services, as I had the privilege of seeing firsthand the professionalism, warmth and dedication of NT Health midwives, although it was 25 years ago I had my son at Royal Darwin Hospital. I can attest that the care was of the highest standard.

I was born at the old Darwin Hospital on Myilly Point 50 years ago. The story is that my mother was going into labour on the Friday and, unfortunately, she turned up to the hospital and the midwives told her that they had already delivered a Helwend baby. She asked them, 'What am I? I am pregnant with a baby ready to be delivered.' They had not realised that there were two Helwend mothers expecting in the system. Five days earlier, my niece was born—my sister's daughter is five days older than me—so there was some confusion at the hospital. With the highest care I was delivered, and my father was visiting his child and his grandchild at the same time.

Across the Territory in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Gove and remote communities, public maternity services are the backbone of our care. I can attest to that as I have visited the Gove hospital and been through that maternity ward. Throughout that ward are many photos of the wonderful babies born there. Each year there is a montage put on the wall of all the families and their babies, and you can walk through and see the timeline of all the babies born in Gove District Hospital.

In many of these regions private maternity services do not exist. Public hospitals deliver hundreds—in some cases thousands—of babies each year, meeting routine and complex maternity needs with professionalism and care. This is why the loss of private maternity services at Darwin Private Hospital matters, but it is also why the Territory response matters even more.

Engagement with the community has been ongoing. The Minister for Health has met with the Our Birth, Our Voice group to hear directly from mothers and families about their concerns. NT Health has also met with this group regularly, ensuring voices are heard and concerns are addressed.

At the same time, this government continues to engage with the Commonwealth and discussions are still underway regarding infrastructure funding to improve maternity services. Minister Edgington will be meeting again with the federal Health minister to continue constructive discussions about Commonwealth support for our Territory. We are also working closely with the Commonwealth on the Healthscope sale process to ensure Territorians retain real choice between public and private healthcare.

This government supported the national approach led by the Commonwealth Health minister when Healthscope entered receivership. The government did so in good faith and the best interests of Territorians. Throughout last year we were told that new operator announcements were hoped for by the end of the year, but this has not been delivered. This ongoing uncertainty affects patients, families, staff and the broader health system. Once a new operator is known, we will engage directly with them and fight for the return of maternity services for our female Territorians.

Territorians deserve better, and the minister has been advocating for this. The CLP government firmly believes that as part of the resolution for the Healthscope sale process, privately run and managed maternity services must be restored at Darwin Private Hospital under whatever new ownership is established.

Until that happens, we will continue to ensure that public maternity services are strong, well supported and responsive. We will continue to back our midwives, invest in safe care models and fight for choice. Choice of maternity care is not a luxury; it is a fundamental part of dignity, autonomy and healthcare for our female Territorians.

Mr PATEL (Casuarina): Madam Speaker, this is an important conversation because maternity care is about families at their most vulnerable and women, babies and loved ones relying on the care, skill and compassion of our health system during some of the most important moments of their lives.

I commend the maternity services at Royal Darwin Hospital for the exceptional care they provide to families across the community.

Too often in this place health is discussed only when something goes wrong. Today I recognise when things go right and the outstanding work being done every day by NT Health staff.

A Darwin mother recently shared her story with me. She has given birth four times—twice interstate and twice in Darwin. Her interstate experiences at large and well-known hospitals were deeply distressing. She felt rushed, unheard and unsupported at a time when she was already anxious and vulnerable. Her experiences at Royal Darwin Hospital, however, were different.

Each of her pregnancies here came with different needs. Her first pregnancy in Darwin was complex and she began that journey feeling understandably anxious, yet the care she received throughout her pregnancy, during the birth and in the postnatal period was unlike anything she had experienced before. Even when she faced serious challenges, including heart complications for herself after birth and feeding difficulties for her baby, she recalls turning to her husband and saying, 'I could have another 10 babies here'. She described the follow-up care at Royal Darwin Hospital as exceptional. She felt supported, listened to and genuinely cared for every step of the way. When she returned to Royal Darwin Hospital three years later to welcome another baby, she told me that the experience was even better the second time around.

That is the impact of quality maternity care. That is the difference made by skilled midwives, compassionate nurses and dedicated doctors and support staff who put families first.

I can speak from personal experience. Both of my beautiful children were born at Royal Darwin Hospital. Even though my family had private health insurance we relied on the public maternity system, and our experience was extremely positive.

With our first child, things did not go as planned. Shortly after birth, our baby needed to be admitted to the intensive care unit and spent the first week of her life there. Any parent who has been through that experience will understand the fear and anxiety that comes with it. Those first days should be filled with joy, but for us they were filled with worry, long hours beside an ICU cot and a constant sense of uncertainty for almost a week. What carried us through that week was the extraordinary care and dedication of Royal Darwin Hospital staff.

The doctors, nurses, midwives and ICU staff were there around the clock, not just doing their jobs but also genuinely caring for our child and supporting us as parents. Every hour, every minute, someone was checking, monitoring, explaining and reassuring us. They took the time to walk us through what was happening because it was the first time for us. They answered our questions patiently, even when fear meant we asked the same questions more than once. They never made us feel rushed or dismissed. Even in the middle of the night, there was always someone watching, responding and making sure our baby was safe. The level of attention, professionalism and compassion shown during that week was truly remarkable. It was not just clinical care; it was human care. That experience stays with you for life.

When our second child was born at Royal Darwin Hospital, the experience was again incredibly positive. There was the same professionalism, kindness and reassurance that our family was in good hands. Do we know why? It is because the Royal Darwin Hospital staff earned our trust. This is why I speak so strongly in praise of them, particularly our midwives, nurses and doctors.

Midwives are there at the beginning of life. They support women through pregnancy, birth and the critical days after. They form trusted relationships with families at moments of joy, anxiety and sometimes great fear. They do this work under pressure. They do it despite workforce shortages and in a system that has been underfunded for far too long.

As the minister has consistently stressed since coming into the government, NT Health has faced long-term underfunding, placing real strain on services and staff across the Territory. Despite that, our maternity teams continue to deliver high-quality compassionate care for Territory families, and they deserve our respect and gratitude.

It is also important to acknowledge the disruption caused by Healthscope's decision to close Darwin Private Hospital's private maternity and birthing services. This was a commercial decision taken outside the control of Territory families and frontline staff. It caused understandable disappointment and frustration, particularly for women who pay private health insurance premiums and expected to access private maternity care in Darwin.

However, it must be recognised that NT Health stepped in when Healthscope stepped out. At an operational level, NT Health worked extremely hard to ensure the transition of private maternity patients to Royal Darwin Hospital was managed safely and to the highest standard of care.

Although these arrangements could not fully replicate the previous private model, they provided comprehensive, safe and supportive options for families during an uncertain time. Many families have expressed appreciation for NT Health staff, particularly praising midwives, lactation consultants and domiciliary support teams for going above and beyond to provide care.

I highlight the importance of the Midwifery Group Practice and homebirth services operating across the Territory. The Midwifery Group Practice provides continuity of care, which women deeply value. It supports women with complex pregnancies, women travelling from remote communities to give birth and women with normal-risk pregnancies planning homebirths. This model improves outcomes for families and supports sustainable working conditions for midwives. Homebirth services in Darwin and Alice Springs also continue to operate, with safety always the priority. Where staffing pressures exist, NT Health ensures women are supported through hospital birth centres.

Maternity care in the Northern Territory extends far beyond Darwin. In Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Gove and our remote communities, public hospitals are the backbone of our maternity services. In many parts of the Territory private maternity care has never existed, and NT Health has safely supported families for generations. Royal Darwin Hospital alone delivers more than 2,000 babies each year, and it has the expertise and capacity to safely manage increased demand.

We all agree that choice in maternity care matters, and private maternity services play an important role alongside a strong public system. That is why I make a genuine call in this House to recommend that the government and the opposition work together in a bipartisan way to advocate for stronger Commonwealth support for Northern Territory health services, particularly maternity care. This should not be about politics; it should be about outcomes, as the Member for Gwoja said. If we speak with one voice, work constructively and advocate strongly in Canberra, we can secure better funding, better workforce support and long-term certainty for Territory families.

Royal Darwin Hospital's maternity services continue to support mothers and newborns with compassion, professionalism and specialised care when it is needed most.

On behalf of my family and families across our community, I thank every midwife, nurse, doctor and support worker for the vital work they do and the difference they make in the lives of Territory families at such an important time.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, I was not going to speak on this topic, but having listened to a number of stories from other members across the Chamber I have been inspired to say a few words.

From my perspective, the birth of a child is a special occasion. It is a transformative event for new families and new parents. It is something that I do not forget, as I have been blessed. My son was born in Darwin 30 years ago under the private health system. We were blessed. I recall that my wife had to have a caesarean to help deliver. She was worn out and tired, and she was very well cared for.

Someone said to us, 'You know what, Brian and Marylou? When you have a child, you have to learn to live tired. You can put aside all of that.' A child is, in some ways, the most selfish little being in the world because it is all about them, and so it should be. They want to be fed and changed, and they will let you know all about it. They will crap their nappies when they want to, and you have to deal with it.

I was also blessed with the birth of my grandchild seven years ago, also in the private health system. That was a special moment with my daughter. The Members for Katherine and Fannie Bay have grandchildren, and that is another special moment.

The topic of this MPI is important for all of us; it is about giving parents a choice. The Member for Casuarina accentuated that the public system is good; however, sometimes people want choice, particularly if they have

private health insurance. I share the frustration with these new mothers who wish to go into the private system but cannot get access.

Let us be honest: what brought this about? It was the private owners going into receivership, as the minister said. When you have a private health system, it is the private sector that runs it, not the government as such. If the private sector finds that it is not commercial, it will make a decision along the lines where it will go out the back door somewhere. We have to deal with that.

We are looking to get new owners. I hear from the minister that he is lobbying the receivers to say that when we get new owners, we want them to reinstate private health services here. That is a good thing to do, but he does not control that; he has to lobby for it. It would be good if the opposition members lobbied their federal counterparts and others to support the services. Let us do this in a unified way because we all want the same outcome.

I want people to have choice, but we have to accept that, unfortunately, it was a private commercial decision to shut down the service, not the government's decision. We have to deal with it and move forward.

I wish everyone the best. I share the frustration of those mothers who wish to have choice and cannot. I wish we could turn it over in one day, but I cannot say that we can do that. Our prayers are with you. We have a very good public health system. Again, I wish everyone the best.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Madam Speaker, I ask the government to do more for Territorians when it comes to maternity services.

Healthcare access should not depend on where you live, yet across the Territory, whether we live in town or in the bush, too many people are missing out on services. In our urban centres a clear example of this pressure is in the maternity services. Mothers in our towns and regional centres are finding it harder to access maternity services, and many fly in from remote centres. For many families, pregnancy and birth have become stressful experiences, not because of complications but because of the system they struggle to cope in. Having a baby should be safe, supported and close to home.

I remember when my partner and I were flown in from Maningrida in the middle of the Wet to have our first son. We stayed at the Daisy Yarmirr Hostel—the Aboriginal hostel close to the hospital—and I was panicking as my partner's water broke in the hostel, and I did not know who to get. I understand this rolls on to families who have to fly in and have to find their way around and how it all works, especially the new mums.

When maternity services are under-resourced it affects everyone—mothers, babies, families and health workers who are doing their best in difficult conditions. Maternity care is not an optional extra; it gives babies the best possible start in life and supports women during one of the most important times they will experience.

The CLP cannot abandon maternity services in the Territory. The impact will be felt for years to come if the solution is not found soon. I advocated to go to Canberra with the Health minister. I was on the radio with Gerard Maley when I said this.

I thank the health professionals and workers, as the Member for Casuarina expressed, across the Territory for their hard work and for going above and beyond to look after the health and wellbeing of Territorians.

I do not want to double-down on the important messages my colleagues have brought up already. When it comes to maternity services, the Health minister knows what he needs to do; he has known since he took the role 18 months ago. Territory mothers are simply waiting for him to make a deal and act, which I hope happens sooner rather than later.

Maternity services are not the only health services the CLP is not treating in the Northern Territory; it is letting down frontline health services in remote communities. Remote communities across the Northern Territory face a chronic lack of health services and health workers. Clinics are often short-staffed, services are limited and people are going for long periods without seeing specialised doctors, such as dentists and rheumatic heart specialists.

Too often, care depends on fly-in fly-out workers, meaning there is little consistency and lack of rapport built between health services and the community. Trust is a big player in remote communities.

When people cannot access basic healthcare early, small problems turn into big ones, chronic disease goes unmanaged, mental health issues worsen and preventable conditions become emergencies. This knock-on

effect results in overcrowding in our hospitals, major regional centres and towns. This puts enormous pressure on emergency departments and hospital staff, leaving people feeling like the system is failing them.

We often say that health is the foundation of strong community; I believe that when healthcare is working many other problems become easier to manage. The CLP government cannot afford to be lazy about healthcare. If the government wants safer communities and better outcomes it needs to invest in health. We are happy on this side to advocate with the government for that. In maternity services in our towns and clinics out bush, it is the workers who keep the system running.

Healthcare is not a privilege; it is a basic responsibility of government. If this government is serious about building a safer, stronger and healthier community, it must start by making sure that Territorians can access healthcare whenever and wherever they can, and out in the remote communities as well.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mr MALEY (Nelson): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the passing of a much-loved member of our community, Mr Ernie Rayner, and pay tribute to a life that made a genuine and lasting difference to so many across the seat of Nelson and the Northern Territory. Ernie was the kind of person you could rely on; he was steady and hardworking. His passing has left a deep sense of loss for his family, his friends and many people whose lives he touched over the years.

Ernie's story in the Northern Territory began in 1959 when he arrived at Coolibah Station. Coolibah back then was known as remote rough country, and this is where he met his wife, Pauline. Ernie took many roles across the Northern Territory from stockman at VRD to head stockman at Willeroo, AIB stock inspector, horse breaker, bush mechanic and jack of all trades. Ernie was a proud Territorian through and through.

When I did my roadsides and Ernie and Pauline drove past, Ernie would always beep and wave in his later years. I always knew who he was because he would have his hand out waving.

He believed strongly in community, lending a hand and looking out for you and your neighbours. Whether it was through his work, his friendships or the quiet way he supported others, Ernie embodied the practical down-to-earth spirit that the Northern Territory and the rural area are built on. What stands out most, however, is not just the achievements but the character of the person behind them. As Ernie's son so beautifully shared in his eulogy:

'Over the years dad became the sort of man people relied on—the one who knew how to get things done, who did not panic when things went wrong and always found a solution, even if it meant improvising with 8-gauge wire and a couple of cob-n-coes, a hammer and sheer determination or frustration, depending on the day.

'Dad loved his family in the same quiet, strong, independent way he did everything—steady, loyal and without needing to draw attention to it. He was not a man who bragged or talked himself up; he was a man who showed up.'

Ernie also had a deep interest in Northern Territory history and heritage. After being recommended for a project to help uncover items of historical significance for the NT Museum, he travelled along remote pioneer trails and through the bush to carefully record the locations of heritage items. That work led to a partnership with bush author Annie Ingham which ultimately resulted in Ernie authoring the book *Wild Cattle, Wild Country*. For a humble man like Ernie it was a tremendous achievement, and one that he and his wife were incredibly proud of.

In the rural areas of the Northern Territory people like Ernie are the backbone of everyday life. They are the quiet contributors, volunteers, helpers and steady hands. They do not seek recognition, but their absence is deeply felt when they are gone.

On behalf of this Assembly, I extend my sincere condolences to Ernie's wife, Pauline, family and loved ones through this difficult time. I hope they take comfort in knowing how respected he was and how many lives he made better simply by being part of them.

Vale, Ernie Rayner, and thank you for everything you gave to the Territory.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the 2025 Northern Territory Order of Merit winners, a program delivered under the Northern Territory State Order of Merit framework administered through Golf Australia. This annual program brings together Territory golfers into an aggregated ranking system recognising consistency and performance across an entire season. Since its introduction in 2021 the Northern Territory Order of Merit has become an important pathway and benchmark for golfers competing at all levels.

The success of the program relies on the commitment of clubs, volunteers and administrators who deliver competitions week-in and week-out, as well as the support of our sponsors who invest in Territory sport. I acknowledge the contribution of SEM.NT, along with Jacks of All Golf Carts and Darwin Mazda, whose support of local competitions and stroke events helps sustain the program.

I turn to the 2025 Order of Merit recipients. In the men's division, Mal Roney of the Katherine Golf Club claimed both the scratch and nett titles, finishing the season with the highest points totals across both categories. In the women's division Sophie Minchinton of the Darwin Golf Club also achieved a double result, securing the leading position in both the scratch and nett standings.

I acknowledge the Senior Order of Merit winners from 2025. Brian O'Gallagher—no, I am joking; you wish! John Robins of the Darwin Golf Club was awarded the senior men's title. Robyn Levick, also of the Darwin Golf Club, claimed the senior women's title, recognising consistent performance across the season.

I also recognise the Junior Order of Merit winners. Sophie Minchinton again features, taking out the junior girls' title. Jacob Rawlings of the Palmerston Golf Club was awarded the junior boys' title. Their results reflect the strength of junior development within Territory golf.

I congratulate all five recipients of the 2025 Northern Territory Order of Merit awards and thank them, along with their clubs, officials and sponsors, for their contribution to golf in the Northern Territory. The Territory's wonderful outdoor lifestyle is reflected in such activities, and it is always good to celebrate these milestones.

The Australia Day Honours are special, and the Territorians who received them are exceptional. Their outstanding contributions to our community, dedication and service inspire us all.

Appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in the general division were Cecil Black for significant service to local government, the legal profession and the community; Bill Yidumduma Harney for significant service to the Indigenous community of the Northern Territory; and John McLaren for significant service to the community.

Awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the general division were Kerry Ambrose-Pearce; brothers Casey, Frankie and Donald Akemarr; Frank Shadforth; Paul Sweeney; Donald Lockley; Francis Ahmat; Dr Felix Ho Lam Ho; Daniel Tellam; the late Dr Kevin Guyurruyurru Rogers; Dr Stephen Davis; Margaret Mickan; and the Honourable Anthony Graham.

Awarded the Public Service Medal were Health CEO Chris Hosking and Attorney-General's Department CEO Gemma Lake. Awarded the Australian Police Medal were Detective Superintendent Lee Morgan and Senior Constable Josef Hart. Beverley Shuker was awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal; Aaron Brooks was awarded the Ambulance Service Medal; and Mark Cunnington was awarded the Emergency Service Medal.

These wonderful amazing Territorians have made the Territory a better place. They have served with distinction and passion. I thank them for all they have done for our community. We are richer and better for their contributions. Heartiest congratulations to all.

I acknowledge the remarkable achievements of Glen Scholz, a Territorian whose commitment to sport and service deserves recognition. Glen is a two-time cancer survivor who has turned personal adversity into purpose, using his passion for cycling to inspire others and support lifesaving cancer research.

He has continued to compete at a national level in cycling. In January this year he competed at the AusCycling Road and Esports 2026 Road National Championships in the para transplant category. There he claimed a bronze medal in the individual time trial and secured two podium finishes across two events, adding to his record of national championship performances.

To stand on a national championship podium after everything his body has endured is a remarkable achievement. Glen has spoken about what this moment represents: not taking a single start line for granted, and riding alongside others who have also fought extraordinary battles for their lives.

Beyond competition, Glen continues to contribute through Tour de Cure Australia, raising funds for cancer research and volunteering as a bike mechanic on tour. In March this year he will undertake a 1,400-kilometre ride from Canberra to Hobart in further support of this cause.

Glen Scholz is a committed member of the community, devoted husband, proud father, all-round good human being and great Territorian. His story is one of not only sporting success but also resilience, service and compassion. I congratulate him on his national championship bronze medal wins and thank him for his ongoing contribution to cancer research and to sport in the Northern Territory. Glen is a powerful reminder of what can be achieved with perseverance and purpose.

I pay tribute to an elite sportsman whom we will claim as one of our own, cricketer Kane Richardson. Kane spent much of his childhood in the Northern Territory, playing junior cricket and excelling. He was born in South Australia, but I think it is safe to say the Territory is where his skills were nurtured. He owes everything to us—right? He played for Waratah Cricket Club and PINT before representing the NT at the under-15 and under-17 national championships.

I want to do his first-class career justice, so I will put on the record the words of NT Cricket:

> *The right arm fast bowler made his first-class debut for South Australia in 2011 before going on to develop into a world class short format player, culminating in 25 One Day Internationals … and 36 T20 Internationals … for Australia including being part of the victorious 2021 T20 World Cup winning team.*
>
> *Richardson's best international bowling figures of 5/68 earning him Player of the Match honours in an ODI against India in Canberra in 2016 where he dismissed Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Ajinkya Rahane.*

He is known as a highly skilled death bowler and he played 34 first-class, 98 List A and more than 200 T20 matches for South Australia. As he said in announcing his retirement from professional cricket:

> *… I feel like I have squeezed every drop out of myself and it is the right time to finish such an enjoyable part of my life.*
>
> *…*
>
> *… I had dreamt about being a cricketer since I was a kid in Darwin.*

As NT Cricket CEO Gavin Dovey said:

> *Kane is one of the four best players to ever come through the NT player pathway. He's been a fantastic ambassador for the Territory and he is a great role model for regional and country kids who may need to take the road less travelled to achieve their dreams.*

Congratulations, Kane Richardson. You will always be a Territorian to us.

We are active in encouraging a healthy outdoor lifestyle for all Territorians, particularly young Territorians. Our government is proud to have delivered our promise to implement free swimming lessons to school-age children. As well as teaching safe practices around the water and empowering young Territorians, there are obvious health benefits to swimming and then there are those who develop a deep passion for the sport.

I pay tribute to the achievements of Sean Deutsch, a class of 2025 Darwin High School graduate who recently represented the Northern Territory at the Victorian State Championships held at the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre. Sean competed as a member of the Northern Territory Swimming representative team, following selection based on qualification in five or more events. Sean qualified in an impressive 11 individual events, meeting and exceeding the selection criteria.

The championships attracted strong interstate and international competition, including athletes from China, New Zealand, Japan, South Africa, South Australia and Tasmania.

Across the championships, Sean competed in 11 individual events and two relay events, recording 11 personal best performances. He concluded the meet with a total of 13 medals, comprising three gold, six silver and four bronze. Sean also achieved three new national open qualifying times in the 50-metre backstroke, 100-metre backstroke and 200-metre individual medley. Notably, he set a new Australian record in the 100-metre butterfly, which is an outstanding achievement at this level of competition. Sean's results

reflect a high standard of preparation and performance and are a credit to him, his coaches and the Northern Territory swimming program.

I congratulate Sean Deutsch on his achievements and thank him for representing the Northern Territory with distinction. All the best wishes to you, Sean, for the future. I think you will be one to watch.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Madam Speaker, Jabiru Airport is critical infrastructure in the Northern Territory. The CLP and federal governments must work together on a long-term solution to ensure this airport remains operational.

With Jabiru Airport scheduled for demolition in October this year as part of the Rio Tinto Energy Resources of Australia rehabilitation of the Ranger mine, community members and stakeholders across West Arnhem have been raising serious concerns for months about the devastating consequences it will bring. I have spoken directly with stakeholders on the ground in Jabiru, Kakadu Air, the West Arnhem Regional Council, the Northern Land Council, Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation, ranger groups, traditional owners and multiple tourism operators who are united in their call regarding the ripple effects that the airport's closure will have in the region. I believe that the Kakadu Air mob met with Ms Boothby recently and said that we are all onboard that the airport should not be closed.

Jabiru Airport is essential for health services, healthcare access, emergency services, employment, tourism and connection to the rest of the Territory. I was there last week talking to the Kakadu Air mob which runs Jabiru Airport. It has been sending food to Gunbalanya—500 boxes of Weet-Bix and all that—because Cahills Crossing is flooded, and it does not look like it is slowing down.

Communities such as Warruwi, Gunbalanya, Kabulwarnamyo, Manmoyi in the rock country and Mamadawerre rely on Jabiru Airport as their only source—and the cheaper option—to bring out food and medication and to fuel up on the way to Darwin. If Jabiru Airport is lost and with it the services that it supports, Gunbalanya—the main community in the region—will be cut off by road for about six months of the year. This will have a serious impact on the region. Without reliable air access, there will be no guaranteed supply of fresh food, no timely access to medical treatment and no emergency evacuation capability except that from Darwin. If it comes directly from Darwin the issue is that there will be less freight and more fuel needed. Jabiru Airport is also important because it has a fuelling dock.

This is not an acceptable outcome in any part of the Northern Territory. The NT and Commonwealth Governments must find a permanent solution to keep the airport running and operational, and we have only six months left to do it. The people of Jabiru and West Arnhem deserve clear answers, especially those with businesses who are still asking questions. Hopefully we will find a solution in the near future.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I have been thinking about the year ahead and speaking to my constituents about 2026.

In light of many tragic events around the country and across the world, I know that many in our community are feeling despair. I often have people tell me that they are struggling with despair—despair at the state of the Territory under this government; despair watching right-wing governments around the world, including this one, inflict harm on the vulnerable while calling it good governance; and despair at tragic events unfolding here and across the world that feel preventable and unstoppable. It is exhausting and isolating, and I understand it completely, but I also know that despair is a luxury we cannot afford. It is exactly what those in power are counting on.

Recently I asked people in our community, 'What are your wishes for 2026? What do you hope for? What are you fighting for? What would a better world look like to you?' I promised that I would bring those wishes to parliament and put them on the record.

In 2026 Sam wants to see the development of a Darwin region conservation reserve network that includes values like biodiversity, recreation, culture and traditional use.

Georgie wishes that in 2026 DHA will be made to hand back Lee Point to the Larrakia people once and for all.

Richie wrote that he wants to see hospitals at full strength to support schools to keep First Nations children in education and to change the age of arrest to match the international law on the rights of the child. He also wrote that he wants remote communities to have proper running water and power and the housing charges to be equitable and realistic.

Sandra said that she would like the media-fuelled polarisation of society to stop. She wishes for people to regain the middle ground and come together as a community to support each other, noting that it seems to be the political class and big business that wants the polarisation to continue, but that it is not in the best interests of Territorians.

Sarah wishes that in 2026 we see the end of interstate investors pricing first-time local homebuyers out of the market. Alongside this, she wants a stricter watch on contracts for mates and nepotism in government and big business. She also wishes to see the overturning of NDIS funding cuts and to see real support for people living with disabilities.

Vic wishes for a dedicated soup kitchen set up for members of our community who are homeless.

Tom hopes for a restart of the NT treaty process and a federal treaty.

Eliza dreams for 2026 that the CLP government would stop glorifying militarisation and punitive justice. She wishes it would listen to the experts and humbly recognise that whilst the current approach to crime might feel good as it is action, we are only increasing cycles of violence and incarceration. She wishes that our leaders had a more long-term vision for the Territory and would begin long-term investments in education, housing and social support so that we can see all people thrive, not just the white and wealthy.

Oliver wishes that Lia Finocchiaro would engage with people even if they did not vote for her.

Michelle wrote that in 2026 she would like to see better facilities for the disabled and older people. Brad wants to see a small and rapid shuttle bus service so that vulnerable and less able people can get from housing precincts to the shops and back safely.

Some had achievable hopes, like Joe who simply wishes for a bin at the Darwin Trailer Boat Club ramp. Joe, I love an achievable dream; good luck with that, and I am sorry it is not in my electorate.

Harriet had quite a wish list for 2026. She wants to cancel the Singleton Station water licence; make it illegal for anyone to sell or plant buffel grass; abolish youth prisons and empty the watch houses; ban corporate political donations, especially from fossil fuels, gambling and the military; cancel AUKUS and get the US military out of the NT; less funding for police and prisons and more funding for community-led alternatives; and make gas exporters pay their fair share of tax so that we can start to meaningfully address poverty and inequality in the NT. It is quite a list. They also added that they hope the CLP government will start listening to people with expertise and lived experience when it is making decisions, and they hope for some humility from our leaders.

I am a person of my word, so I am letting you know that Alan hopes the Greens will disappear into political oblivion. Sorry to disappoint you, Alan, but it will not happen. I am sure there are people in here who would agree with that, but I said I would read it out, and I did.

Here are some of my wishes for 2026. I wish people understood that our economy is simply a human creation—it is a human system that could be changed for the better by those in charge any time they wished—but the ecological boundaries of our planet are real, and there is no changing them. I wish to God that leaders would start listening to scientists when they say that we are crossing ecological boundaries that we cannot come back from and every bit of carbon dioxide and methane we pump into our life support system is killing that life support system.

I wish that in 2026 all Australians would feel the same visceral horror watching children being pulled from the rubble in Gaza as they do watching other footage of white Western children in distress. I wish they would understand that our government's complicity is not abstract; it is our tax dollars. Our silence and our both-sides rhetoric is material support for a genocide. I wish that we would stop pretending it is complicated when it is simple: you either oppose the mass killing of children or you do not.

I wish that in 2026 we will recognise that no-one should be able to own their seventh investment property while someone else cannot afford their first home to live in and that we will be as outraged by empty investment properties as we are by rough sleepers and understand those two things are directly connected.

I wish that in 2026 settlers like me would do the uncomfortable work of understanding that we live on stolen land, not as a guilt-inducing abstract concept but as a material reality that shapes every day of our lives. I wish that we would listen to First Nations people about sovereignty, not because it makes us feel good about ourselves but because it is the literal truth of this place.

In 2026 I wish we would stop treating vulnerability as a personal failure and start recognising it as a universal human condition. Every one of us will be dependent on others at multiple points in our lives. The way we abandon people who need care is not just cruel; it is a wilful denial that we will all eventually need the same care.

I wish that in 2026 people would understand that when every major media outlet is owned by three billionaires, you are not getting the news; you are getting the perspective that serves billionaires. I wish that people would ask themselves why the Murdoch papers are invested in making them afraid of refugees, unions and climate activists but never of landlords, mining executives or wage theft.

I put on the record these wishes and hopes from the people who sent them to me because holding hope for a fundamentally different world—not a slightly improved version of this one, but something genuinely new and better—is a radical act. It rejects everything about the status quo that tells us that this is as good as it gets. My community and I refuse to accept that. We deserve better in 2026.

Over the last 18 months I have been approached by many people from inside and outside my electorate who have said to me, 'I never felt represented in parliament before. We have these two status quo parties, and we are sick of the status quo.' What they are seeing now is a government that rejects that people like me and the communities I am in even exist. We do not have a right to be here, apparently. We do not have a right to protest. We do not have a right to be here if we do not agree with the government; the Chief Minister has said, 'Get out of the Territory'.

I assure those people that you have a right to be here. I have a diverse community, but I try hard to bring in all their voices. Even though your voices are ignored by the status quo, they are important voices. The dreams we have matter. The wishes and the radical things we want to change for the world, for the better, matter. I will stand up for that.

Ms BOOTHBY (Brennan): Madam Speaker, I was excited on Australia Day to attend the Palmerston Australia Day Awards and citizenship ceremony, which recognises individuals and groups who have made significant and lasting contributions to the Palmerston community and acknowledges their outstanding service, leadership and commitment.

I pay tribute to the nominees and winners of each category. They were nominated by other Palmerston members.

Citizen of the Year went to Balachander Mohanraj. Bala, as we call him, was recognised for his outstanding volunteer contributions to the Palmerston community over the last 15 years. He has led the annual Good Friday Walk; supported the St Vincent de Paul Society; organised Christmas and Boxing Day gatherings; and coached youth cricket. His cultural leadership includes lifetime memberships and active involvement in organisations such as the Tamil Society, Telugu associations and the Indian Cultural Society, where he promotes inclusivity and celebrates diversity—and he knows how to put on a party.

I will talk about the nominees for that category. Christopher Kimani was nominated for his exceptional contribution as a founding member and coach of the Greater Palmerston United Football Club. Named the *NT News* Best Coach of the Year in 2024, Chris continues to champion the growth of the club and strives for ongoing improvement, with a vision to see it become the leading football club in the Palmerston and Darwin region.

Mr Darrell Ashby was recognised for his ongoing dedication to community service through his volunteer work with St Vincent de Paul. He takes pride in ensuring donation bins are kept clean, safe and well maintained for public use. Darrell was also acknowledged for his contributions to the Palmerston and Litchfield Seniors Association and the 50+ club, where he is well known for his strong sense of community.

Janette Ashby was acknowledged for her volunteer work with the Palmerston and Litchfield Seniors Association and the Palmerston 50+ club. These organisations provide a broad range of programs that bring seniors together and support their mental, social and physical wellbeing.

Jennie Copley was recognised as an active contributor to the Palmerston community through multiple voluntary roles and ongoing community-building initiatives. For more than five years Jennie maintained a street library in Rosebery whilst volunteering at Darwin Casuarina Lions Club and the Bali Pink Ribbon Foundation. Jennie also organises home-based fundraising for local and health charities. Her long-term commitment reflects sustained and meaningful community-building efforts that continue year after year.

Valerie Wilkie's dedicated and inspiring volunteer contributions were recognised with her service with the Rotary Club of Litchfield and Palmerston. As club secretary and project coordinator for Lift the Lid, she led the inaugural event raising awareness and funds for children's mental health. She also coordinated Rotary's Eat Up Sandwich Making Sunday Sesh, helping prepare thousands of lunches for schoolchildren in need. Valerie also welcomes international school students into her home, offering a safe and supportive environment.

Yvonne Coleman was nominated for her exceptional level of service across a wide range of community organisations and events in the Palmerston community. Her contributions with STEPS Training Group, her involvement in International Women's Day, Diversity Day and NAIDOC Week and her ongoing care for the community garden at Harvest Corner reflect her dedication to the community.

Nicolle Shoobridge was nominated for demonstrating an unwavering, long-term commitment to the Palmerston community through her volunteer service with St John Ambulance NT since 2018. Over the past seven years she has been supporting, mentoring and nurturing young people through the Farrar youth division. She leads engaging inclusive training sessions for youths aged eight to 17 and personally cooks a meal for the group, ensuring they are cared for in every sense. Nicolle also supports fundraising for St John, the Cancer Council and other local causes.

Jacob Brant was recognised for his outstanding service and dedication as President of the Palmerston Rugby Union Club. His commitment to the sport extends beyond playing and coaching. Under his guidance the club has seen improvements to facilities, including Moulden Oval which he ensures is safe and accessible to players all year round. His leadership strengthens the club and inspires others to volunteer and contribute.

Young Citizen of the Year went to Joshua Harrington. Joshua was nominated and won for his dedication volunteering with St John Ambulance since 2019. Now a senior youth member of the Farrar Division, he provides high-quality first aid at public events, supports youth training and mentors young cadets with care and professionalism. Joshua's leadership is evident in his role as Secretariat for the St John NT Youth Round Table, ensuring youth voices are heard across the organisation. He played a key role in securing victory at the 2024 National St John Youth Championships and regularly steps up to support youths and adults during camps and events. His calm reliable presence and inclusive leadership have made a lasting impact on Palmerston's safety, youth development and volunteer culture.

Tomika Sariago was also nominated. She was recognised for her consistent and impactful contributions to Riding for the Disabled Top End over the last three years. Her commitment has seen her grow into a supervisory role where she now supports and educates new volunteers, fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment. Tomiko plays a key role in building confidence and skills in children and adults living with intellectual, physical, sensory and learning disabilities. Her compassionate approach makes a meaningful difference to the lives of the participants.

Nominees for the Community Event or Group of the Year were St John Ambulance NT, Riding for the Disabled Association Top End, Palmerston Carpet Bowls, the Gujarati Cultural Association of Darwin Inc for the Navrati Festival, and the winner which was the Tamil Society of the Northern Territory for its Indian Food Festival. I congratulate all those nominees and the winner.

On 18 December 2025 Darrell and Janette Ashby celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. Darrell and Janette were married in 1965 at St John's Church, Moss Vale, New South Wales. Darrell and Janette are long-term local residents in my electorate and committed members of the Palmerston community.

Janette is a social butterfly and committee member. She is the Vice President of the Palmerston and Litchfield Seniors Association and the secretary of the Palmerston 50+ club. Janette was nominated for the Palmerston Australia Day Awards 2026 Citizen of the Year for her volunteering work with these groups. Darrell Ashby is also a committed member of the community, volunteering regularly for St Vincent de Paul. He was also nominated for the Palmerston Australia Day Awards 2026 Citizen of the Year.

I congratulate both of them on their huge success in being married 60 years. What a milestone. They are amazing people.

The Satellite City BMX Club committee was announced in January when it had its meeting. I make special mention of the 2026 team at the Satellite City BMX Club: President Dale Egan who does a fantastic job; vice president, Aaron Scott; treasurer, Melita Eassie; secretary, Jenna Smith; and general committee members Dave Woodbury, Sharon Miller, Indi Simpson, Michael Ralph, Sean Tiedeman and Phil Ballard.

Satellite City's 2026 training calendar is now available. Its annual Come'N'Try Day is on 7 March. I am sure all the past and new riders are keen to get back into it for the year. You never know, it might still be raining in March, but either way it will be an exciting event. I encourage everybody to get out and have a look.

The Northern Sharks Rugby League Club held its AGM in December and elected the committee members for 2026: president, Gordon Hounslow; vice president, Ayesha Kay; secretary, Taylie Pulman; registrar, Kezia Tilley; public officer, Kalani Zio; coaching coordinator, Euan McKillop; junior coordinator, Heather Criddle; senior coordinator, Kalani Zio; social media gurus Dee Gunn and Ayesha Kay; apparel, Aaron Tilley; grants and sponsorship coordinator, Gordon Hounslow; and general committee members Hildegard Hounslow, Nigel Doyle and Ben Pulman. The club is still looking for a treasurer, so if you know anyone get in touch with the club.

The Northern Sharks is a fantastic family club, and the rivals of the Palmerston Raiders. I support both clubs, so it is fun to decide which shirt I will wear; usually I just wear my own shirt. I wish them all the best in season 2026.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, I honour the life and legacy of Kwementyaye Shaw, a well-respected elder, veteran and community leader whose life helped shape Aboriginal self-determination in Central Australia and the Northern Territory.

I extend my respect to the many family members, friends and colleagues of Kwementyaye Shaw who came to mourn his passing. The number of people who gathered to farewell him speaks to the deep respect in which he was held. I hope this brings comfort to his family and loved ones as they farewell a man who leaves an extraordinary legacy. To his family, thank you for sharing him with the Territory and for allowing us to have so much of him.

Kwementyaye was born in Mparntwe on the banks of the Todd River on Christmas Eve. A proud Kaytetye and Arrernte man his life took him many places, but Central Australia was always home. He loved nothing more than sitting on the verandah of his Mount Nancy home, surrounded by family, telling stories, sharing wisdom and having a cheeky laugh and a cup of tea and sometimes a wine.

At 18 Kwementyaye enlisted in the Australian Army. He served in Malaya with the 4th Battalion and completed two tours in Vietnam with the 2nd RAR. After a battlefield injury he continued to serve with the 9th Battalion as a section commander and acting platoon sergeant.

When he returned home in 1970 he was confronted by the same harsh conditions he had left behind. He once said that he came back to places where there was one tap for 60 people, living in humpies and makeshift shelters. That injustice fuelled a lifelong commitment to improving the lives of Aboriginal people in Central Australia, particularly those living in the fringe camps around Alice Springs.

Kwementyaye was there at the beginning of Aboriginal community control in this region. In the early 1970s he worked alongside Arrernte elders to help establish the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress and Central Australian Legal Aid service. He later served as President of the Congress Cabinet. He participated in the landmark meetings following the Woodward inquiries and helped establish the Central Land Council, serving from its inception until 2006, including as Deputy Chair, always grounded in the rights and responsibilities of traditional owners.

He carried the voice of Central Australia nationally as the first Central Australian Commissioner of the former ATSIC, ensuring this region was no longer ignored.

Living at Mount Nancy, then an unofficial town camp, Kwementyaye saw firsthand how town camp residents were excluded from services and decision-making. As he said, 'Us town campers never had a voice', so he helped create one. Alongside other leaders he formed Tangentyere, which went on to secure housing, leases, services and recognition for thousands of Territorians living on town camps.

Long before self-determination became a buzzword or government language, Kwementyaye was living it. He was a principled and fearless advocate.

In 1993 he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia. This was an honour he never sought, but one he deeply deserved.

Even in later years his leadership never faded. In 2018 he carried the Aboriginal flag with pride up Anzac Hill during NAIDOC for its first raising there—a powerful moment of truth, service and pride. During COVID he again led from the front, publicly encouraging vaccination to protect our community.

When I reflect on Kwementyaye's life, it is clear that his legacy is not found in buildings or titles but in the lives he changed, the voices he strengthened and the pathways he opened for others. Kwementyaye Shaw is woven into the lives of Territorians through stronger land rights, town camps finally having a voice and the principle that Aboriginal people must lead decisions about their own lives.

The responsibility now sits with parliament. To honour Kwementyaye we must back self-determination in practice, not just in words. We must fix housing and overcrowding in town camps, properly fund community-controlled organisations, respect land rights and listen deeply to Aboriginal people and their leaders.

I place on record my deep disappointment in the Country Liberal Party government. Kwementyaye's family asked whether I would support them in asking for a state funeral for Kwementyaye Shaw in recognition of his extraordinary life and service and as a Vietnam veteran, a recipient of the Order of Australia and a respected leader of Central Australia whose contribution reached far beyond his own community. That request was refused. The government could have made allowances. It could have shown leadership and honoured a man who gave his life to service to his country, his people and his beloved Northern Territory. It chose not to. Worse still, not one member of the Northern Territory CLP government attended the funeral. That speaks volumes. It says a great deal about those lives who are valued and the contributions that are recognised and whose history this government chooses to acknowledge and whose it does not.

I place on record my sincere thanks and appreciation to those leaders who attended and showed respect. I thank Senator for the Northern Territory, Malarndirri McCarthy; the Member for Lingiari, Marion Scrymgour; the Honourable Speaker of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, the Independent Member for Araluen, Robyn Lambley; and the many leaders of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations who showed up to pay their respects and were willing to stand with family in a time of grief. Your presence mattered; it was noticed, and it will not be forgotten. That is how we carry the legacy forward.

I will miss his wisdom, his stories and that cheeky glint in his eye. He was strong, blak and deadly.

To my family, my Aunty Eileen, my Aunty Valentine, my Uncle Bully, my Aunty Ginny, my Uncle Walter, my Uncle Joseph, thank you for sharing your dad with us. He leaves behind an enormous legacy, and he will live on through his wonderful children.

Rest in power, my uncle. I love you.

Ms CAHILL (Port Darwin): Mr Deputy Speaker, I celebrate some of the youngest residents of the Port Darwin electorate who were the recipients of my annual citizenship awards for 2025.

Congratulations to Larrakeyah Primary School's Nameerah Jahan and Percy Peters for consistently displaying the school values throughout the year.

Congratulations to St Mary's Catholic Primary School's Alinne Tavares Green for all her contributions to her school community throughout the year; and Wang Shu (Matthew) Ma for his contributions throughout 2025.

I also recognise Caspar Beaumont from Larrakeyah Primary School who won the school writing award for the Santa Christmas short story.

Congratulations to the upper primary Wet Season netball competition Years 3/4 and Years 5/6 teams who demonstrated excellent sportsmanship and improvement over seven weeks. A special thank you goes to the coaches who made it all possible for those netballers, Eloise Sherry, Sienna Fryer and Lexi Dorrian.

I make special mention of the winner of my Christmas colouring-in competition, Senara Goonewardena, who is age seven and did an excellent job.

I also give a shout-out to the 2026 Community Pharmacist of the Year in the Pharmacy Guild Northern Territory National Pharmacy Awards, Claire Ross, who works at Blooms Chemist Darwin Plaza.

Earlier the Chief Minister went through the recipients of Australia Day Awards and the Order of Australia Awards. I add a special congratulations to Mr Kerry Ambrose-Pearce—who is a dear friend and a member of the Port Darwin community—for receiving his Medal of the Order of Australia. That is well-deserved

recognition for a person who has contributed so much to our community over many years. I look forward to celebrating with him in person.

Congratulations to Hriday Nayyar who marked the first anniversary of the publication of his book, *Life Chronicles: Experiences and Challenges*, which details his journey as a migrant to Australia on an international student journey. Hriday made the decision to become a teacher, and it has been a delight getting to know him over the past 18 months as he completed that journey through CDU's teaching program, which culminated in his recent graduation as a qualified teacher. He is starting his teaching career at Driver Secondary School this week. Hriday is a wonderful example of the contribution that international students make to our Northern Territory, and I cannot wait to see where his journey takes him into the future.

Mrs HERSEY (Katherine): Mr Deputy Speaker, I put on the record our Australia Day and citizenship ceremonies held recently in Katherine. These people lead our communities, and I commend their leadership and dedication to better our community of Katherine.

On the Friday night prior to Australia Day I was invited by council to share in the festivities for all the nominees at a dinner at the Contour Hotel. The nominees for Citizen of the Year were Simmone Croft; Tamara Willcox; Fran Angus; Andrea Read; David Reed; and Nicolle Gadd.

The nominees for Community Event of the Year were the Govies Gala; Kalano community fun day; Godinymayin for the Balang TE Lewis amphitheatre opening and 50th Katherine Prize; Katherine Community Projects Association for Christmas Lights; Ringers Rugby 7s; Katherine Show and Rodeo 2025; and the Big Rivers Festival of Youth.

The nominees for Young Citizen of the Year were Kate McTaggart and Taitt Green.

I thank Mayor Joanna Holden, Deputy Mayor Mel Doyle and the councillors and staff who worked tirelessly to provide our citizenship ceremony to our community on Australia Day after the dinner to celebrate everyone.

We are fortunate with all our incredible nominees who volunteer for many events across Katherine. Thank you for putting up your hands and making our town better. Your contributions make for a connected, vibrant and strong community.

The winners of our Australia Day awards were Citizen of the Year, Simmone Croft; Young Citizen of the Year, Kate McTaggart; and Event of the Year, KCPA (Katherine Community Projects Association) for our Christmas lights. Anyone who has not seen the Christmas lights celebration in Katherine needs to get on the association's Facebook page and have a look. It was fantastic.

We were also fortunate to have members of our community head to Canberra to take part in the national awards for Australia Day. What an honour for them to represent not only Katherine but also the Northern Territory. The nominees were as follows:

- 2026 NT Senior Australian of the Year, Jenny Duggan OAM, was recognised for her environmental work along the Katherine River. Jenny, along with her dogs can always be seen walking the banks of the river, keeping it clean of rubbish so that it is not left to float down the river in times of flooding, like we have seen lately. She has been doing this for many years and also supporting Keep Australia Beautiful and Clean Up Australia with our council.

- 2026 Northern Territory Local Hero, Ron Green, is a teacher at St Joseph's Catholic College. Ron takes part with emergency services, RAAF cadets and volunteers for the ambulance.

- 2026 Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) recipient Dr Felix Ho, is a former Katherinite, but we gladly acknowledge him because his partner is a resident of Katherine, so we claim him. Dr Felix Ho was recognised for community health.

None of these people won their section, but their nomination and representation of their community is to be commended. They did well to represent us and put Katherine on the map at the national awards.

Australia Day in Katherine started at the Katherine Club with an exhibition of old cars put on by the Katherine Vehicle Enthusiasts Club. Everyone enjoyed a breakfast cooked by the club staff.

After the citizenship ceremony I attended the pool party put on by the Katherine Town Council. The pool reopening has been a game changer for our town. Many people enjoyed the festivities, music, barbecue,

sandwiches and fruit supplied by council members and volunteers. I thank the Katherine Town Council for putting on such a great celebration for our national day, with members taking part in many of the activities.

Last week was the first week of school for our Territory children for 2026. Approximately 32,000 students returned to the 153 Northern Territory Government schools, with 230 new teachers in the Northern Territory this year. I spent the first day of the school year in regional and remote schools to highlight the Finocchiaro CLP government's commitment to regional and remote education outcomes.

In the morning I joined the Principal of Katherine High School, Nick Lovering, to welcome back students followed by an assembly in the gym. Principal Lovering laid the law for the year ahead about respect for teachers and peers, singing the national anthem at school assemblies and our firm no phones in schools policy. You guessed it—we sang the national anthem, both verses.

Following the assembly I had a meeting with Principal Lovering, Sean Gordon and Andrew Lloyd from the Yadha Muru Foundation. The Yadha Muru Foundation runs city–country partnerships between remote and city schools as a way for schools to learn from each other, take immersion trips and have staff exchanges. We discussed opportunities for the partnership and how we can engage disengaged high-school-age students through job opportunities, such as school-based apprenticeships and traineeships.

Later in the morning and into the afternoon I visited Barunga School with Principal Malcolm Hales. Mr Hales highlighted the barriers some students face in getting to school, especially during peak Wet Season—which it was the day we went out there; the Central Arnhem Highway had flooding across most of the crossings. It was not that we could not get through, but the amount of water was incredible. It is to be expected in the Wet Season and was spectacular to see.

At Barunga School I met a couple of new teachers who have moved north from Victoria. I am pleased to report that we have only 55 teacher vacancies across the Territory, which is the lowest number of vacancies, down from 130 this time last year. Every child in every classroom will have a teacher in front of them this year. I attribute this strong rebound to the Finocchiaro CLP government under which we are seeing a decrease in the number of victims of crime, a flurry of strong economic activity and a lifestyle that keeps getting better.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Mr Deputy Speaker, I will speak about the 27 January announcement by the minister for Education regarding the singing of our national anthem in NT public schools, specifically about it being utilised at assemblies and special events to encourage people to stand and sing in English two verses as codified in Australian practice.

The policy goal that was specified when this was discussed was to boost national pride and create consistency. Generally speaking, there is no compulsion on this issue around the country, whether in educational or other settings. There was no punitive aspect to this announcement or a suggestion that it would be a heavy-handed mandate; it was more a suggestion that we could create consistency and do something constructive in our school space to encourage kids to have a sense of pride in the national anthem.

This did not seem like a particularly controversial idea to most people, including the federal Education minister, Jason Clare, who said that the singing of the anthem already happens a lot in lots of schools around Australia. He said, and I quote from a report:

> *'I never knew the second verse until I became a pollie, but you go to schools across the country, and kids sing the first verse and the second verse,' he told Channel 7's Sunrise program.*
>
> *'There's a great line in the second verse which says "with courage let us all combine to Advance Australia Fair" … if kids are singing that in the NT and in other parts of the country I reckon that's a good thing.'*

I thought so too. I did not think it was a controversial wedge policy, which is why I was shocked to discover that it received a mixed response and a polarised one at that. Unconstructive things were said about this, and there was lots of outright hostility and vitriol surrounding this issue. Sure, there were some people who made cheeky remarks about the timing of announcements. Newsflash—people announce things when they are convenient to time, and after Australia Day was not a particularly bad choice regarding singing the national anthem.

What were the concerns we received? These concerns were not about authoritarianism, personal liberty or violating freedom of expression; they were basically polarised responses in relation to whether this would

achieve anything useful at all. I have zero interest, as most of you know, in prosecuting idiotic culture wars in the Northern Territory or in conflating a specific policy with a wider discussion about nationalism, so I chose to speak seriously in defence of the idea because I think it is a decent idea that is not getting a fair shake. This is not least because, I have to tell you in 18 months since starting this job, I am shocked at the number of people who are not familiar with the national anthem. Forget the second verse—I see people barely mumbling out the first verse, and that includes a whole lot of grown-ups.

Let us go back a step. First of all, our national anthem is not that old. It was written by a Scottish teacher in 1878. It was used in the Federation but was officially made our national anthem only in 1984 in spite of it winning a competition in 1974—ahead of *Waltzing Matilda* I might say—to be our national anthem.

A lot of people looked at the 2021 lyric change where we went from talking about being 'young and free' to being 'one and free' to try to represent a more inclusive Australia. The fact is it has been changing over a long time. In 1984 all four verses were looked at seriously, and we went from 'Australian sons let us rejoice'—to people being like, clearly not—to 'Australians all'. The point I am making is that it is not a static composition. It has never been a static composition; it is evolving, and it is a live work. Previously it referred to all sorts of things to do with British imperialism but it does not anymore.

Why is it that I think, generally speaking, this is a good idea for us to be doing? In a nutshell, civics and civics education. All of us should be mindful of the fact that there is a push to teach Australian students about civics. In 2025 a parliamentary inquiry recommended that civics and citizenship become a compulsory part of our education. That committee also recommended that we not just do it in Year 10 but also have mandatory citizenship courses in Years 11 and 12 to prepare young people to vote. This came about due to growing concern about misinformation on social media, increasing anti-Semitism and declining social cohesion. We need more civics education; it is widely recognised. At the moment civics education is not mandatory, and a lot of states do not even do it. In a lot of places primary schools have little engagement with civics education.

What does 'civics' mean? Basically, we are talking about covering how governments and democracy work, how laws work, the rights of individuals, diversity, national identity and how to critically evaluate sources of information.

ACARA, which does all the accreditation work and assesses curriculum, has done work since 2004 sampling Year 6 and Year 10 students on their knowledge of civics. The most recent results are not encouraging, with something like only 53% of Year 6 students at the national proficiency standard. Indeed, Year 10 results have been substantially declining over 20 years. This suggests that many young people are leaving school without the knowledge, skills and values to sustain our democracy. That is not something we want.

Australian and international studies have repeatedly shown that civics and citizenship education makes a positive difference in a young person's political participation, including increasing the likelihood that they will vote and increasing their understanding of democracy and support for democratic values.

What does good civics education look like? It has to be a separate subject. People say that it needs to be for junior and senior school students; it has to be relevant; kids have to be able to discuss it; things like school elections are great; and teachers need to be trained to talk about law and governance. However, these are longer-term goals. What can we do now? Start small with the national anthem. It ain't the worst idea in the world.

I did not speak on the condolence motion because of time constraints. I have a lot I would like to say. I thought it was heartening that everyone in this room talked a lot about social cohesion and wanting to improve it.

In that spirit, when the announcement was made I posted online, saying, 'With courage, let us all combine to advance Australia fair'. I said that this is a constructive initiative to foster unity and promote social cohesion. I am seriously shocked at the response I got. I do not edit anything on my page; you are welcome to have a look. I would love to have been more provocative and have said, 'For those who come across the seas we have boundless plains to share'. I have plenty to say about that, as you all know, but that is not what I was talking about.

This is a lowest common denominator thing we are pushing. Why does this matter? Does this really matter? It matters. I do not have the time to go into the detail, but I encourage you all to look at a book called *Patriotism and Nationalism in Music Education*, an edited work by Hebert and Kertz-Welzel, specifically chapter 3, Nationalism and School Music in Australia, by Jane Southcott. From that book you can learn about this in relation to Germany, Taiwan, Singapore, South Africa, Canada or the US, if you like.

Here is a tip: nationalism is a pervasive and often understated force in shaping educational systems. Patriotic songs and national anthems have been a staple of Australian school music activity since the inception of our modern school system from the late 19th century. It matters, and it has an effect. This is something small and simple that we can do that should not be polarising us. I honestly want to make clear that the Education minister's announcement in that regard was not a polarising announcement; it was a gentle nudge to say, 'We will encourage everyone to sing the national anthem from now on, the whole thing, so everyone knows it better'. It is not that controversial.

If you want to critique this policy or the national anthem on musical grounds, fair enough. It has a 17-semitone range that half the people cannot sing properly. A lot of people complain about the dirge-like quality. It was not composed by a Nobel laureate like some national anthems around the world. There might be better alternatives. I like singing, 'I am, you are, we are Australian' as well; maybe that will eventually get a guernsey. For now, we have a great national anthem that we should be proud of, can rally behind and, perhaps, collectively work on as a nation to improve over time.

At its core a national anthem is about facilitating unity and fostering a sense of pride, identity and shared belonging, so it is great that we are encouraging kids to sing the national anthem together. I wholly support Territory kids being nudged to lead the nation in knowing the words to our national anthem and having a shared ethic and musical accompaniment to guide them in their civics education.

We have to start somewhere and sometimes we have to start small. We have tonnes of big-ticket problems to solve and a lot of them will be unable to be solved unless we can build bigger bridges and work with people within this building and across the country. For now, I hope we can all find a way to at least, with gusto, collectively sing *Advance Australia Fair*.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Mr Deputy Speaker, in case anyone missed it, a major independent report was issued late last year and what it contained should alarm all of us in this Chamber. The Independence of the Australasian Auditors General Report 2025, released in November, ranks the Northern Territory as the worst jurisdiction in Australasia for Auditor-General independence. We are not only behind every other state and territory in Australia but also ranked behind Papua New Guinea and Fiji. Once again, in case you missed it, we are coming last.

This report confirmed what many in the community and all the major integrity organisations in Australia—although no-one in the CLP government—have been warning of for some time: the systems designed to scrutinise government in the Northern Territory are being steadily weakened. That should shock every Territorian. This is not a technical or abstract issue; it goes to the heart of whether public money, including the billions of dollars we receive from the Commonwealth every year, is being spent transparently, responsibly and in the public interest.

The report found that the NT Auditor-General lacks adequate protection from executive government influence and is denied fundamental powers that Auditors-General elsewhere take for granted. The NT Auditor-General does not have full access to performance audits and is restricted in access to Cabinet information.

These are not optional extras. Performance audits are basic accountability tools. They allow the public to know whether government programs are effective, whether risks are managed and whether public money is delivering value for money—is Territorians' money being spent properly? Without these powers, Territorians are left once again in the dark.

The findings of this report echo the serious concerns raised at our Community Scrutiny Forum on the Integrity Commissioner, when integrity experts from across Australia warned that recent reforms risk weakening oversight rather than strengthening it. Those experts were clear that independence must be real, not cosmetic, particularly in a small jurisdiction like the Northern Territory where power is concentrated and relationships are close. Instead, the new integrity model consolidates oversight bodies while introducing new risks. The Auditor-General position is now subject to discretionary oversight by the Integrity and Ethics Inspector, a change that further threatens independence rather than safeguarding it.

The Auditor-General must be able to scrutinise government freely and fearlessly. That includes the ability to properly examine major projects such as the Darwin ship lift, large infrastructure investments and programs involving significant public expenditure, without political direction, interference and restricted access to information.

We hear a lot in this Chamber about the debt we are carrying and mudslinging about whose fault it is. Territorians have every right to expect strong independent scrutiny of how we got here and whether decisions being made today are delivering value for money or compounding our long-term risk.

On behalf of all Territorians, I must ask: where is all our needs-based funding going? Will it meet the needs it is intended for? Is the government using the funding it receives to deliver effective programs, efficient services and better outcomes for Territorians? Is public money being spent in a way that is responsible and aligned with need, or is it being absorbed by inefficient governance? The uncomfortable truth is that we do not know. One of the key reasons we do not know is that the Northern Territory has the weakest Auditor-General powers in Australasia.

I am here to be part of looking forward and creating the Northern Territory that everyone in the Territory deserves, one which is financially robust and has mechanisms in place to ensure that scrutiny is strong enough to hold power to account when it matters most.

This is not a party politics issue. The previous Auditor-General under Labor called for a rewrite of the *Audit Act* to restore genuine independence, strengthen powers and bring the Northern Territory into line with national and international best practice. Our current Auditor-General has done the same. Now, with clear information that we are in fact going backwards, not forwards, this is more urgent than ever.

I have a question for my colleagues: do you think that Territorians deserve the same protections and integrity standards as every other Australian? We do not have them. Everywhere else in Australia, governments are more accountable to their constituents than the Northern Territory Government is to Territorians, and people's lives are better off for it.

We do not have to accept this. Strengthening the independence of the Auditor-General is not radical; it is normal and achievable. Only those who benefit from opaque government spending would argue otherwise. If we are serious about transparency, fiscal responsibility and building public trust, strengthening the independence of the Auditor-General is not optional; it is essential.

Mr CHARLS (Sanderson): Mr Deputy Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to acknowledge many of the events I have attended in the past couple of months.

I spoke earlier about the multiple vigils I have attended since the horrific attack at Bondi, and I again share my sincere condolences with all those affected by this violent terrorist attack on Australian soil. I affirm that this terrorist attack does not reflect the values or character of our beautiful multicultural community in the Territory.

It was a pleasure to speak at the first Minister's Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs of the Finocchiaro Government on 11 December 2025, led by Chair, Professor Ram Vemuri. Our government proudly celebrates the Territory's multicultural strengths and the invaluable contributions migrants make to our social and economic life. I deeply value MACMA's honest insights, thoughtful guidance and continued education, and I look forward to working with it this year and beyond.

In late December we farewelled Sister Alicia MC at St Mary's Cathedral. She lived a long and dedicated life devoted to caring for others, leaving a legacy of compassion, service and kindness that improved the lives of many. I am deeply grateful for her tireless commitment to helping those most in need. Minister Boothby and the Members for Fannie Bay and Casuarina were also in attendance.

I congratulate Dr Shu Li, President of the Australia–China Friendship Society NT Chapter and her dedicated team of volunteers for delivering the Multicultural Dancing and Food Festival event that celebrated many cultural identities, community spirit and the richness of our multicultural Territory. It was wonderful to see the talent, creativity and hospitality of the performers and stallholders bringing the event to life. Our government supported this event through the Multicultural Grants Program. I sincerely thank the Australia–China Friendship Society for a joyful celebration to end the year. I thank Minister Boothby and the Member for Wanguri for their support of this community event.

I know Christmas already feels like a long time ago; however, I will speak about the multitude of Christmas functions I attended within the multicultural community.

In December the Tamil Society of Darwin had its Christmas celebration and Tamil Language School certificate presentation for students. Congratulations to all the students on their achievements. I give heartfelt thanks to the volunteers who make these important events possible though their dedication and hard work. Congratulations to President Kavithasan Vivekananthan, Vice President Sambavi Dinesh and the new

leadership team. My sincere thanks go to Narayanan and his leadership team for their outstanding service to the Tamil Society over the past few years. I thank Minister Cahill and the Members for Wanguri and Casuarina for being there and supporting the event.

I joined Minister Cahill and the Member for Wanguri at the Committee of the Indonesian Community Christmas Celebration at Harmony Hall. It was a joyful family event with music and singing. I thank Winda for the kind invitation.

It was a pleasure to join in the NT Timorese Chinese Darwin Christmas celebration, alongside the Member for Wanguri, to see that community come together in such a warm and festive spirit. I thank President Tim, Kivi, Stella and the committee for coordinating another wonderful community event. I was also pleased to donate a lucky draw prize as the Member for Sanderson and to share in the joy it brought to the celebration.

I thank the Chung Wah Society Darwin for the warm invitation to attend the Children's Christmas Party and share in such a joyful community celebration. It was lovely to watch the children joining in and singing Christmas carols and enjoying the visit from Santa.

It was a pleasure to join the Chief Minister and my northern suburbs CLP colleagues the Members for Wanguri and Casuarina at the Darwin Malayalee Association Christmas celebration. Congratulations to Monsi Thomas and the entire team for hosting another wonderful celebration that truly brought the community together. It was heartening to see leaders from many different communities come together to share in the joy and spirit of Christmas.

Those were the Christmas mentions—now for the new year celebrations. It was great to join the Deputy Chief Minister at the Portuguese and Timorese Social Club to celebrate New Year's Eve with the community. Thank you to the Portuguese and Timorese Club Committee for organising a wonderful celebration and for bringing people together in such a joyful way.

In addition, it was wonderful to be joined by the Deputy Chief Minister again, along with the Members for Wanguri and Casuarina, at the New Year's Eve celebrations with the Cyprus Community of the Northern Territory. I thank Alexandra Magriplis and her team for organising another fantastic celebration that brought people together in the spirit of friendship, culture and joy.

I thank the team at the Australian Red Cross Northern Territory, particularly Bill Daw and Sabeeha Nihad, for hosting a wonderful end-of-year celebration for the Connected Women and Their Families program. It was a pleasure to attend and see firsthand the impact of this community-led program which brings women and families from diverse backgrounds together in a safe, welcoming and empowering environment. I was pleased to note that the program has already supported more than 750 migrant and refugee women and their families from more than 45 nationalities. I thank Minister Cahill and the Member for Fannie Bay for being there and supporting this event.

It was great to meet with Melaleuca Australia's Chair, Ross Springolo, and CEO Kwame Selormey. Thank you for sharing the important work that Melaleuca Australia does across our community and providing a copy of the annual report. I appreciate the conversation and ongoing support that Melaleuca offers to people and families across the Northern Territory.

I continued to celebrate Christmas in January with the Serbian Orthodox community in Darwin. It was a joy to sit down for lunch with members of the St Sava Serbian Orthodox Church and the wider Orthodox Christian community to celebrate Christmas on a balmy Wet Season day in Malak. Serbian Orthodox Christmas is celebrated on 7 January following the Julian calendar. It was wonderful to be part of such a warm, festive and meaningful celebration.

It was also wonderful to join the Territory's Greek Orthodox community to mark the Epiphany with the traditional Blessing of the Waters. This occurred at Cullen Bay and the Waterfront. I joined the Members for Wanguri and Casuarina at the Cullen Bay event held by the St Savvas of Kalymnos Greek Orthodox Parish Northern Territory. It was a beautiful mix of the sacred and the celebratory. Father Christos led prayers for the community before releasing the doves and casting the cross into the water. The cross is retrieved in a joyful tradition, said to bring blessing and good fortune for the year ahead. There was a fantastic turnout, and it was a great way to begin the year.

Last weekend was all about the Year of the Horse. I attended two Lunar New Year events.

The first one was with Minister Boothby and the Vietnamese Community in Australia NT Chapter. I thank President Thien Le and Phuong Le for their kind invitation. Lunar New Year is the most important celebration of Vietnamese culture, which marks a time of renewal, family, unity and hope for the year ahead. It is a joyful occasion that brings people together. It was wonderful to share the beauty of our traditions and the richness of our Vietnamese heritage with the broader community at the Vietnamese Community Centre in Marrara. I was pleased to learn how to say 'Happy New Year' in Vietnamese—which still needs practice—it is *chúc mừng năm mới*.

I also attended the NT Timor Chinese Association Chinese New Year celebration in Berrimah with my colleagues Ministers Edgington and Hersey and the Members for Wanguri and Casuarina. It was great to see so many dignitaries present. Thank you to the committee, Tim, Kivi, Stella, Fiona and all the volunteers for their hard work and dedication in organising the event. It was a fun evening starting with the blessing of the Chung Wah lion dance troupe, a great band, delicious food and finishing with a dance on the floor, which I was dragged into. For the first time I was dancing on the floor; it was fun, but I will try to avoid that in future.

I thank Felix Matarazzo and Max Di Toro of the Italian Sports and Social Club for inviting me to the launch of the Italian language workshops for children and teens aged three to 17 years. This was an historic moment for the Italian community, as it was the first in 25 years that the Italian language programs were delivered at the Italian Club. These workshops aim to nurture cultural pride, strengthen language skills and inspire a lifelong love of learning across three age groups.

Mr PATEL (Casuarina): Mr Deputy Speaker, I acknowledge and give thanks to the Casuarina community.

Over the Christmas period while many Territorians enjoyed their time with family and friends, our emergency services continued working tirelessly to keep our community safe, supported and cared for. Emergencies, illness and crises do not pause for the holidays, and it is during these times that the dedication of our frontline workers is most evident. Their service often comes at the cost of time with their own loved ones, and that sacrifice deserves recognition.

I was pleased to join my colleagues Jinson Anto Charls, Oly Carlson and Brian O'Gallagher to deliver Christmas goodies and our thanks to the teams at the Northern Territory Police Force in Casuarina, St John NT Casuarina, the NT Fire and Rescue Service at Marrara and the Mental Health Access Team. Each of these services plays a vital role in our community, responding to emergencies, supporting people in crisis and ensuring public safety with professionalism and compassion. It was a privilege to thank them in person for the work they do every day.

I extend my sincere thanks to all doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and every staff member at Royal Darwin Hospital who provided care throughout the Christmas and new year period. Hospitals do not slow down over the holidays, and many staff spend Christmas Day caring for others rather than celebrating at home.

On Christmas Day I visited the paediatric ward at Royal Darwin Hospital to deliver gifts to children spending Christmas in hospital. Although no family wishes to be in that position, it was heartwarming to see many smiles, the positivity of the children and the extraordinary care shown by hospital staff. Moments like these highlight the strength and resilience of our community.

To all our essential workers—police, ambos, firefighters, health workers and support staff—thank you for your unwavering dedication and for keeping our community safe throughout the year.

I acknowledge the services of the Administrator of the Northern Territory, His Honour Professor the Honourable Hugh Heggie AO PSM. His Honour made a significant contribution to the Northern Territory during his term, and I extend my appreciation and best wishes to His Honour and Ms Ruth Jones for the future.

In December our office was proud to organise a Christmas event at Casuarina Village, which turned into a wonderful morning for local families. I thank Casuarina Village Coles for providing fresh fruit and water bottles, Queeny's cafe for the panda treats, Casuarina Village Hair Studio for donating a generous gift voucher and treatment pack and Toko Jo's for contributing a beautiful sarong to our raffle prizes. I thank the Village Shopping Centre Casuarina for assisting with set-up and support throughout the event.

Last week I met with General Manager Katy Chin from Amber NT to pass on the raffle funds in the form of gift cards. Amber NT does incredible work supporting Territory families grieving the loss of a child, and we are proud to contribute to such an important cause. I thank everyone who attended and supported the event.

In January I had the pleasure of hosting a seniors morning tea alongside the Member for Wanguri. It was a wonderful morning that reinforced the importance of connection, particularly for our seniors. It was great to see people mingling, meeting new friends and enjoying each other's company. I thank everyone who attended, Paul and Lindsey from Neighbourhood Watch NT, Paul and Peter Chandler for the entertainment and the team at Tracy Village Social & Sports Club for their excellent service. A special thank you goes to Jade and Christine for the morning tea, with the best scones in Darwin.

I congratulate all City of Darwin 2026 Australia Day Award recipients honoured at the Darwin Cenotaph. These awards celebrate the volunteers, leaders and quiet achievers who give so much to our community. I offer special congratulations to Jack Francis from Dripstone Secondary College, the recipient of the Student Citizen of the Year Award 2026. Jack's leadership and contribution are inspiring, and he should be incredibly proud.

I congratulate Sunsil Hair & Brow Studio on celebrating 15 years of service at Nakara. Small businesses like this are the backbone of our suburbs, and I thank the team for their longstanding contribution to the Nakara community.

I extend my thanks to Father Christos and the community at St Savvas of Kalymnos Greek Orthodox Parish NT for preserving important cultural and faith traditions. The Blessing of Waters, held in January, was a powerful reminder of faith and unity. I congratulate Manoli Loukataris on retrieving the cross again this year, and wish the community peace and blessings.

I extend my condolences on the passing of former Administrator of the Northern Territory Ted Egan AO. Ted Egan was a deeply respected Territorian whose contribution to our culture and public life will be long remembered.

In December the annual NO MORE march was held at Casuarina Square shopping centre, standing firmly against domestic and family violence. We honoured women who have lost their lives and recognised actions being progressed through The Stand. I thank CatholicCare NT's counselling team for providing support on the day and for their ongoing commitment.

These moments, from thanking essential workers to celebrating community achievements and standing together against violence, reflect the compassion, resilience and strength of our Territory community, and I am proud to represent it in this place.

Mr BURGOYNE (Braitling): Madam Speaker, wonderful celebrations were held on Australia Day 2026.

Every year Australia Day brings with it a range of activities and celebrations that I look forward to. It starts with the fun run in the morning, organised by the Alice Springs Town Council and supported by dedicated locals who ensure that the event is a success every year. Brendan and Sean Heenan, along with Bruce Joy, combined to put on a pancake breakfast after the event, which was enjoyed by all who attended.

Afterwards the citizenship ceremony got underway, with 85 people becoming Australian citizens. It truly was wonderful to see so many people excited and eager to join this country as citizens. Ever since I have been attending these ceremonies, even before becoming a member of parliament, I have enjoyed so much what it means to be an Australian and to see these people who have spent thousands of dollars, and in some cases taken many years, to become Australian citizens. It is what people are willing to do to ensure that they can call themselves Australian.

I say to all the citizens who were sworn in on Australia Day, thank you for making Alice Springs your home. I often say I feel lucky to have been born and able to grow up in Alice, but for you to have chosen Alice as your home makes it that much more special.

Along with the citizenship ceremony, the Australia Day Awards were also announced. Wendy Corkill received the Citizen of the Year Award; Senior Citizen of the Year went to Elaine Peckham; and Young Citizen of the Year went to Ben Russell. The Community Event of the Year was the Alice Springs Beanie Festival 2025. I thank Jo Nixon for her dedication to the event over 30 years. I look forward to meeting with Jo to discuss the future of the Beanie Festival. Congratulations to the awardees and the Beanie Festival organisers for their work in the Alice Springs community.

Finally, I dropped into the Alice Springs Aquatic and Leisure Centre to help out on the barbecue, as I have done for several years. The council staff who organise the barbecue are always happy to have someone to help. I am always happy to lend a hand and see the smiling faces on all the families enjoying the facilities.

A big thank you to Narelle, Kiwi, Dave and Jade, along with Councillors Ryan and Burton, who helped out on the day.

All in all it was a wonderful day enjoying the best of what it means to be Australian and live in the lucky country.

Ms UIBO (Arnhem): Madam Speaker, I thank the community of Mataranka for a fantastic event, the annual Australia Day breakfast on 26 January. I am excited to attend that event in my electorate, and it is one that my children also look forward to, every year.

The Mataranka community is inclusive and, as I said on that Monday, tight-knit. Community members celebrate the strength of the Never Never region and acknowledge that sometimes when things are tough, they band together and look after each other. I give a big thanks to the Roper Gulf Regional Council, which invited me to present the awards. It is always an honour to do that as the local member, and we heard some stories about that today in the Chamber.

I particularly thank Councillor Des Barritt. I am sure many people who have not met Des have probably heard of Councillor Des Barritt who is at the Little Roper Stock Camp. Often you will hear him calling in to chat and offer insights on ABC radio. He is active.

While I am thinking of Des, his family is running their boat across the Little Roper, which is flooded. That is the section in the springs area of that beautiful country in Elsey. Des is ferrying people back and forth. At the end of that road is the Mataranka Homestead. People live past the Little Roper towards the homestead. Des and his family have a few tinnies ferrying people across the Little Roper so that they can get into town safely. Thank you, Des and your family, for that.

I also place on the record my thanks to Councillor Sue Edwards. When we arrived she was in the back cooking up bacon, eggs, sausages, baked beans, toast and all the delicious things you want for a hot brekkie.

There was a huge volume of volunteers for a small town. People have a lot of heart in Mataranka.

Excitingly, the Citizen of the Year was Ms Telka Zotz-Wilson, who is the Principal of Mataranka School. Anyone who knows Telka knows that she is community-minded and an asset to the Mataranka community, particularly in supporting the school leadership and growing the young people in Mataranka and Mulggan Town Camp. The children from the Never Never region who attend that school are always looked after well with the guidance and leadership of Telka and her team.

Congratulations to the Event of the Year for 2025, which was awarded at the Australia Day event. That went to Mikey's Cup. It was great. I have never done it before, but there was a live feed video. One of the coordinators of Mikey's Cup was online on the phone and got to see it, and Helen from the school collected that award in person.

Congratulations for the work people do; it is a small town with a big heart.

Then the family fun games started. There were a lot of great games organised and run by families and community members with lots of cool prizes for the kids.

When they started doing the doughnut eating on a string, where they put their hands behind their back—something my daughter looks forward to—my kids were not interested; they would much rather sit in the water bobbing pallets that were left after all the kids did the apple bobbing. My kids were having a little bogey sitting there while everyone was eating doughnuts.

There was the famous ice-cream eating competition—again, no hands and no utensils, having to eat just with your mouth. I have done it in the past, but I have slowly been able to get out of it in the last couple of years. My son was quite distressed when we took the bowl of melted ice cream away from him. We had to give it back so that he would not crack it. It has become a favourite of the kids.

For the arrangements a big thanks goes to people like Loretta; Mick Mack, who is one of the great characters in Mataranka; and Toni Kutschki and Judy and all the prizes their family donates from the Mataranka grocery store.

Thanks again for allowing me to be part of that each year and for welcoming me and my family to those great local events.

There were interesting contributions this evening. Obviously, we always love celebrating what happens in and around our communities locally, but sometimes there is not necessarily open and forward thinking about the impact when announcements are made.

I thought a little about the contribution from the Member for Fong Lim about the CLP's announcement for schools to have mandated—compulsory—national anthem singing in the schools. A lot of my teacher friends said, 'Our schools all do it. We do it already. What are they trying to do?' The sceptic in me, now in opposition, thought it was a red herring to try to divert from other matters that were consuming a lot of interest in the Territory last week. One particular media outlet did its job and diverted all the attention from what was probably a tricky thing for the CLP to try to manage because it was desperately trying to get out of any kind of explanation.

I place on the record, particularly for a lot of schools in the Arnhem electorate that already sing the national anthem and do so proudly—one of my teacher friends alerted me to this on the weekend—the sneakiness of the CLP's announcement in mandating that it had to be sung in English. A lot of schools in my electorate have students who do not speak English as a first language. What those schools have done over many years, and proudly, is sing the national anthem in both English and the language of their community, and sometimes several languages that are based in their community, to honour their family and culture.

I said to my teacher friends, 'Your school already does that, and you sing verses in English and in language'. They said, 'No, the announcement says that kids can sing the anthem only in English'. I thought that was a bit sneaky. I do not appreciate that. People have gone out of their way, over many years, to honour the national anthem in both English and the first language of their community, ancestors and family to proudly do that and live two ways in both cultures. Some of our bilingual schools—I have a revitalisation language school in my electorate—are bringing back multiple languages in their region, honouring that. There is a lot of work and consideration going into those language programs.

If the idea behind this announcement was to unify Territorians, the CLP has done it again: it has divided and isolated; it has not talked to people who could offer a way to enhance that. If the seed of that idea was to truly grow pride in the national anthem, the CLP has missed the mark.

CLP members should have spoken to schools across the Northern Territory about the integration and preservation of language. Many multicultural communities often sing the national anthem in English and the national anthem of their other country in their first language at events throughout the Territory. Over the last couple of weeks I had the honour of attending many of the events that have been spoken about today. It is a beautiful way of seeing a marrying of and respect for cultures—more than one culture together.

The CLP has missed the mark on this. It has been disingenuous with the announcement by hiding the part that said it is mandated in English. If there is an opportunity this week for the Education minister to address that, it would be important because I will be writing about it. I thought it was important to flag today—no pun intended—the importance of the recognition in the Northern Territory of our many beautiful cultures and languages. How special the Northern Territory is was reflected on in different ways this morning in the condolence motion.

This has missed the mark. It is division that did not need to happen. Some schools and communities are hurt that they were not spoken to about how to enhance this concept. The CLP missed the mark and is not listening to our communities.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Arafura for speaking up for his community.

Recently I went to Batchelor for a meeting and realised that the general store, which has been part of the community for many years, unfortunately closed last year. The post office is part of that shop, so it meant the town lost its post office along with the store. Luckily, the Coomalie Council stepped in and provided PO box services, but it had limited hours.

The 'D shop' was originally run by Erwin and his wife, Gillian (Jill) Drewes. They retired, and it was taken over by Maree and Glen. Under the former government they unfortunately had years of horrendous break-ins that they had to deal with when they looked after that shop. For reasons I will not go into, they closed the shop in April last year. Due to the economic deterioration of Batchelor under the previous government's management there were no other proprietors ready to step up and take on that general store which meant the people of Batchelor lost their postal services, except for the limited PO boxes provide by the council.

I am happy to inform the Assembly that two new proprietors, Ricky and Ginny, who had been working at Gunbalanya for the last couple of years, took over the lease last September. They are renovating the property and are working with Australia Post to reopen in April. The town will once again have a functioning post office and a 24-hour PO box facility.

Batchelor is the gateway to Litchfield and has a bright future under a CLP government. Under this government tourism is expanding which means more people travelling through Batchelor and more opportunities for tourism providers in that town and the surrounds. I hope people go there to check out all Batchelor has to offer. It is not just a place to drive through; it is a place to stay for a few days and check out.

The Meneling abattoir is up and running, employing local staff who live in the town. With the cattle market only going from strength to strength, hopefully that will be expanding. The Rum Jungle rehab project is ramping up into stage 3 and will require more staff who hopefully will live locally in town. Perhaps one day the Browns project at the old mine site will reach commercial investment stage. If that kicks off, things will be unrecognisable in Batchelor; that place will be cooking.

I do not recall the Member for Daly speaking about the post office last year since it closed. I am happy to be proven wrong, but someone needs to speak up for it.

Moving on to my electorate, I will speak about Moulden Park School and the ACARA making a difference ranking. Congratulations to Moulden Park School for placing sixth in the *NT News* top 10 schools making a difference. I have seen how hard the staff work to get kids to school and engaged with learning, so it is great to see them recognised for all their hard work. Well done to Principal Sylvia Gregory, Assistant Principal Matt and all the teachers and staff at Moulden Park School.

I honour Senior Constable First Class Ghulam Abbas. Ghulam recently retired from the NT Police Force after 37 years of dedicated service. We farewelled him at the Palmerston Police Station training room. Ghulam moved to Australia from Pakistan in the 1980s and joined NT Police just six months later, in recruit squad 48 of 1988, alongside such luminaries as Paul Griggs, husband of the former Member for Solomon; Michael Schumacher, and I am not sure whether that is the race car driver; Daniel Bacon; and a little-known recruit constable by the name of Steven Edgington—small beginnings, great endings.

In his exceptional career spent serving and protecting Territorians, Ghulam has worked across Darwin and Casuarina Police Stations and for the past 20 years has been based at Palmerston Police Station, serving in general duties and predominantly in the social order response team. That was where I met Ghulam. Almost every Palmerston Markets he patrolled the stalls as part of the social order team, keeping us safe, even under a Labor government that did not keep Territorians safe. He always had a smile and a twinkle in his eye.

Ghulam also made an outstanding contribution to our multicultural community as Vice Chairman of the NT Islamic Council, representing the Territory nationally for the last 18 years. On behalf of Palmerston, former and serving police members and Territorians everywhere, Ghulam, I thank you for your service.

Congratulations to the NT Buffaloes baseball team, who went to Queensland in December 2025 to represent the Northern Territory. The team made it all the way to the semifinals, powering past North Queensland 21–6 to claim the bronze medal. Congratulations to Ms Liz and Ms Estreich from Moulden Park School who were a key part of the team and did Moulden Park proud. Congratulations to Amy Hetherington for being a key part of the team and chief morale officer, keeping everyone pepped up and in high spirits to get the bronze. Well done.

Val Gray from Rosebery Primary School taught for more than 60 years. You never know where the first steps in a career will lead. She began her teaching career as an 18-year-old in the far west corner of the Victorian mallee bush region at Werrimull Group School, and it was a sure sign her career would take her on the adventure of a lifetime. Miss Val says that she is grateful to everyone, the kids especially, for the love, learning and laughter they shared over 60 years. She will miss the noise of the playground always. My sons know Miss Val, and they only have great things to say about her.

Thank you, Miss Val, for a long and illustrious career and all the kids you have taught over those 60 years. I know you will not stay still and rest, but please enjoy your retirement. It is well earned.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.