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Madam Speaker Lambley took the Chair at 10 am.

POLICE ADMINISTRATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 16

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Police): Madam Speaker, I present a Bill titled the Police Administration Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, Serial 16, and table the explanatory statement.

I move that the Bill be now read a first time.

The Bill will address two limitations identified surrounding the operation of police powers. The first amendment overcomes a constraint on police in relation to arrest powers. Currently, police are prevented from entering private premises to effect the arrest of a person who is in breach of their parole conditions or whose parole has been revoked.

Section 5G of the *Parole Act 1971* empowers police without a warrant to arrest a person who is in breach of their parole conditions or whose parole has been revoked. However, unlike some arrest powers there is no applicable power of entry in order to effect an arrest on private property. Further, the ability for a warrant to be obtained under the *Parole Act* is only applicable for parolees located outside of the Northern Territory.

In practice this means that when a parolee is on private property police will not enter the property to effect a parole arrest. However, if there has also been the commission of an offence police can enter and arrest the person for the offence and bring the person before the court for both the offence and the parole breach or revocation.

This legislative anomaly impedes the ability for police to arrest people who have breached their parole or had their parole revoked. This is clearly contrary to the intent of the parole regime, as persons who are on parole are subject to apprehension if they breach or have their parole revoked. Further, it would be the expectation of the community that the police have the powers necessary to apprehend those persons no matter where they are located.

The Bill inserts a new section 126AB into the *Police Administration Act 1978* which specifically provides police with the power to enter a place to effect the arrest of a person who is reasonably believed to be in breach of their parole conditions or whose parole has been revoked. In line with similar powers to enter for an arrest police will be able to enter to effect a parole arrest at any time, with the use of reasonable force and with any assistance necessary.

This amendment ensures that police have the powers necessary to maintain community safety by making it clear that police can enter places to effect the arrest of a person who is in violation of their parole or who has had their parole revoked. The amendment will greatly improve police efficiency.

The second amendment concerns police's ability to conduct proactive operations to ensure compliance with the conditions of a domestic violence order. DVOs routinely include conditions prohibiting a respondent from being in the presence of a protected person, or at a location where the protected person resides or is at, while intoxicated.

These DVOs will also include a condition for the respondent to submit to drug and/or alcohol testing (compliance testing) when required by police. These conditions are utilised when there is an identifiable link between the respondent being intoxicated and the commission of domestic violence by the respondent against the protected person.

The purpose of these conditions is to prevent future harm from occurring by requiring the respondent to stay away from that protected person unless they are sober. The practical effect of non-intoxication conditions is that the respondent cannot drink with the protected person, cannot drink at the home where the protected person lives and also cannot return to that home while still intoxicated.

Domestic violence rates in the Northern Territory are unacceptable, and a primary focus of the police force is the prevention of domestic violence. One way that police can do this is by proactively monitoring compliance with domestic violence orders to identify breaches of non-intoxication conditions before a situation escalates to harm.

Efforts to conduct proactive compliance checking have been hampered by a limitation under trespass laws identified by the High Court. This decision prevents police from attending a private residence for the sole

purpose of requiring a person to submit to a coercive power, such as a compliance test, unless there is an express power for police to do so.

The Bill addresses the High Court's decision of *Roy v O'Neill [2020] HCA 45* by inserting new section 126E of the *Police Administration Act* to authorise police to enter onto property in order to locate a respondent to a domestic violence order and require them to comply with compliance test. This power is specific for the purpose of domestic violence order compliance checking.

Entry will be limited to places where police reasonably suspect the respondent may be—for example, the respondent's residence, the protected person's residence, other family residences that the respondent is known to frequent and residences where family tell the police they can likely find the respondent. In practice, police may need to attend multiple locations, and the provision is carefully drafted to ensure the power will permit this.

Police will be permitted to enter onto private property but not to enter a private residential dwelling without the consent of the occupier. Entry into a home where there is no indication of wrongdoing will not be permitted; rather, police will be allowed to enter the property and speak to occupants to determine if the respondent is present and, if so, require the respondent to submit to a compliance test in accordance with their domestic violence order conditions.

I stress that this power has been carefully drafted to allow police to enter any outdoor parts of the property, such as yards, driveways, carports or verandahs, as well as common areas in unit or apartment complexes, such as common hallways and stairwells. Further, it will allow police to remain on the property for such time as is reasonably necessary to verify whether the respondent is present and, if so, to conduct that compliance test.

Where a respondent is compliant and there is no indication of wrongdoing or harm, police will be required to leave. This ensures the power is balanced and limited to achieve its intent.

While there are limitations imposed on this new power it does not preclude police from exercising any of their other relevant powers if circumstances warrant, such as the power to enter a premises for the purpose of arresting a person for an offence, including a breach of DVO under section 126A of the *Police Administration Act* and the power to enter for the purpose of protecting a person from another person who is contravening a domestic violence order under section 126B(1)(b) of the *Police Administration Act*.

This will provide police with a practical ability to proactively target and monitor DVO respondents in the community and their compliance with non-intoxication conditions.

As intoxication is a significant contributing factor to the prevalence of domestic and family violence, the ability to proactively monitor DVO compliance in the community will allow police to more actively address domestic violence by identifying and addressing risk factors associated with intoxication at its early stage, and in order to ensure that the DVO conditions are maintained.

These are straightforward and practical solutions that will enhance police operations and enable them to do their job more effectively and efficiently.

I thank the Northern Territory Police Association and its president, Nathan Finn, who has welcomed this legislation. The Police Association is an important partner in making our community safe. It represents the vast majority of Northern Territory police and the concerns that police have. I quote Mr Finn from an article published by the ABC's Matt Garrick on 12 February:

> *It gives us a proactive power to enter the [property] and make sure they're complying with the conditions of those DVOs and make sure the protected persons on those DVOs are obviously protected …*

He went on to say:

> *We need to be able to have those powers to be able to do our job—and proactively do our job—to make sure the vulnerable people in our community are being protected by police.*

Much has been said publicly and in this parliament about family and domestic violence. Yesterday the Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence made it clear about funding arrangements and the expenditure of the $36m in the coming year to make sure we are doing everything we can. Our government has a firm

commitment on the table for that ongoing funding. We have made a clear commitment to spend that money properly, and that does not involve rubberstamping whatever Labor did in the past. We know that under Labor, domestic violence went up by 82%.

These laws today provide a tangible opportunity to make change. It is these types of changes that are not usually the ones called for loudly in the media by the sector. They are always calling for more money, and that is fine; that is their prerogative. As the Minister for Police, I emphatically stress that laws—and the enforcement of laws, more importantly—play a big role in driving down crime, specifically family and domestic violence.

It is not the whole story to talk about more money needed; a big part of the story is better laws and better police powers. This is often overlooked in public commentary, much to my despair, because a big part of what can be done rests with us in this parliament. It is stuff that requires what I like to call the stroke of a pen.

There is no money required to make the changes we are proposing today. There is no begging for federal funding needed to secure any deals to do this. There is no resourcing allocation required within our police to effect this change. It is the political will of those who come to parliament, drafting appropriate laws and passing them through parliament. That is the journey that this will now take over the next month, as people can read the Bill, and it will come back for passage in March.

This legislation—this simple power of entry—will mean that police can ensure compliance. We know that alcohol plays a big role in domestic violence. We know that if someone has a domestic violence order one of the best things we can do is make sure we support our police to enforce it. There is no point having laws if they are not enforced.

We are seeing a huge impact of the laws we have done, even with our family responsibility agreements and our school attendance officers, in different policy areas because compliance is our focus. Accountability of the individual is our focus, so we are seeing the individual take more responsibility. That is what compliance and enforcement of laws does. It acts as a deterrent.

We are hearing stories from families who now understand they must send their kids to school. We are starting to get some traction on that in just five months. We have much more work to do; it is not job done. My point is that since August last year we have stood up more than 47 school attendance officers across the Territory, and word is out on the street that you will be fined if you do not send your kids to school. As a result, people are sending their kids to school. That is my point.

When I talk to the youth workers in Alice Springs I ask them how the family responsibility agreements are going, of which we have more than 40 on the boil. They say that parents understand they have to look after their kids better, so it is having a positive impact.

This is exactly the same. Powers like the one that I have just introduced allow our police to open a gate, walk around the backyard, ask questions and test someone for what is a legal requirement they have, as the court has clearly determined that this individual is a risk and threat to what is usually a woman or child and has determined that person must never be drunk in their presence; they must have certain rules to follow. By giving our police the powers to see that through to the end, word will get out and people will change their behaviour. When they do not, the men and women in our police force will be there to make sure that the consequences are dealt to that individual so that the woman or child does not have to suffer. That is the power of legislative reform.

That is off the back of our reducing-crime package which, in just six weeks of coming to government, we passed through the October sittings on urgency. These are precedented levels of reform to put the rights of people to be safe above the rights of the offender.

With Declan's law, which we are so proud of—I spoke to Samara Laverty the other day, for Declan's birthday—we know that repeat domestic violence offenders are not having the luxury they had under Labor. Why should we afford the luxury of freedom to a repeat domestic violence perpetrator? We should not and we will not, unlike Labor which removed mandatory sentencing and made bail a total joke—a spinning door out the front of the court. That is over. If you are a repeat domestic violence offender you will go to court on the back foot. We make no apologies for that—none whatsoever.

Those laws we passed in conjunction with this, giving better powers to our police, were part of our promise to them. The first day of coming to government I looked the Police Commissioner in the eye and said, 'We have your back and will back your police. Please tell them we will do whatever it takes to make them feel

supported and to make sure they have the powers they need. Together we can reduce crime.' That is what we are doing.

I have been across the Territory with the front line, learning so much. The number of laws and improvements that they have given to me, which we are now working through to bring to this parliament to make law, is really exciting. They are feeling empowered, they are feeling heard and they are ready.

We have put an additional 500 people in prison since August, and that policing intensity will continue because people's right to be safe comes first. You cannot have a strong economy, kids going to school and less domestic violence unless you put people's right to be safe first. That means we need stronger laws and better consequences.

I commend the Police Administration Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 to honourable members. I urge them all to read this legislation which gives more power to our police to support less crime and less family and domestic violence, delivers consequences to perpetrators, enforces important laws and is designed to keep people safe. This is proactive policing at its best, which is something our police could not do under Labor because crime was so out of control; it was react, react, react. We are starting to be able to ease that pressure ever so slightly on our police and move into a phase over time where we are proactively policing, stopping crime before it happens.

I am proud of this legislation. There is much more to come in this parliament this year.

We are proud to stand with the men and women who wake up every day and pull on that blue uniform, leaving their families to go and protect ours. I thank them for their hard work, service and dedication to our community. We stand with you, and we look forward to giving you the powers you need to continue to make our community safe.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a first time.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Police): Madam Speaker, I move that the second reading of the Bill be made an order of the day for the first Assembly meeting after 28 days have elapsed.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, I move that the motion be amended by deleting all words after 'that' and inserting instead 'the Bill be referred to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee for a report by the March sittings'.

The Chief Minister spoke about these changes and the implications they will have on many people in our community. It is vital that we afford the opportunity for consultation with the sector. We heard the Chief Minister talk about the DV sector always just wanting money. I dispute that; people in the sector want substantive reform and changes. They have seen that in a number of areas. The accusation that the DV sector just wants money and that is its prerogative is unfair.

These *Police Administration Act* changes will have implications for the domestic, family and sexual violence sector in the Northern Territory, so it is important that it is afforded the opportunity to have input into the Bill. It is important that this legislation be referred to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee so that people in the sector can have a say.

The amendment has been worded in such a way that it will not stifle debate in this parliament. The report would be ready by the March sittings when it is anticipated, as the Chief Minister highlighted, that debate will happen.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Police): Madam Speaker, it is not lost on us that politics is being played in regard to referrals to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee, which the CLP government created after Labor failed to have one, so I think it is a bit cute.

We will not support this Bill going to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee because we have other legislation that is about to be referred to it. This represents a minor amendment; it is not technical.

I will be clear with the sector and the community that when legislation does not go to the scrutiny committee that does not mean it is not being consulted on. The ordinary passage of a Bill is that it is introduced and becomes public; everyone can then engage on it, including the sector, with people having meetings with ministers and people putting forward their opinions; and it sits on the table until the next sittings. As was the practice under Labor for more than four years—when there was no opportunity for a Legislative Scrutiny

Committee because Labor scrapped it as it did not want scrutiny—this Bill will still go through the normal passage-of-legislation process. It has not been introduced on urgency.

We very much welcome feedback that people have, but make no mistake: we are here to deliver better powers for our police, and we will stop at nothing to achieve that. There are some things money can do and there are other things legislation can do. This is about providing police the powers they need. Compliance is our number one priority so that we can proactively police the Territory and stop crime before it happens, which means women and children will be safer.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I support the amendment. I want the Bill to go before the Legislative Scrutiny Committee. If this is the best legislation, great; the scrutiny committee can tell us that. It is in everyone's best interests to make the best laws possible, so I want us to utilise the mechanism that we have.

Madam SPEAKER: The question is that the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 7	Noes 17
Mr Brown	Ms Boothby
J Davis	Mr Burgoyne
Mr Guyula	Ms Cahill
K McNamara	Mrs Carlson
Mr Paech	Mr Charls
Ms Uibo	Mr Edgington
Mr Young	Mrs Finocchiaro
	Mrs Hersey
	Mr Howe
	Mr Kerle
	Mr Mackay
	Mr Maley
	Mr O'Gallagher
	Mr Patel
	Dr Rahman
	Mr Yan
	Mrs Zio

Amendment not agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

DEFAMATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 13

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, I present a Bill titled the Defamation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, Serial 13, and table the explanatory statement.

I move that the Bill be now read a first time.

The purpose of this Bill is to amend the *Defamation Act 2006* and the *Limitation Act 1981* to fulfil the Northern Territory's commitment to implement nationally agreed reforms to the laws of defamation based on the model laws developed at a national level.

The Bill also makes an amendment to section 131A of the *Local Court (Criminal Procedure) Act 1928* to include the offence of unlawful publication of defamatory matter at section 204 of the Criminal Code in the list of assault and harm offences that may be dealt with summarily. This will allow the defence to be dealt with in the Local Court rather than requiring a Supreme Court trial. The amendment is unrelated to the model laws, but is otherwise related to defamation.

The *Defamation Act 2006* was introduced almost 20 years ago, implementing the model defamation provisions, upholding the Northern Territory's commitment to uniform defamation laws across Australia. Defamation is a cross-jurisdictional issue, as it is common for the same matter to be published in multiple jurisdictions. This makes achieving and maintaining uniformity in defamation law across Australia essential

for reducing the potential for forum shopping, where parties might otherwise choose jurisdictions based on the perceived advantages of their laws for their claims or defences, and removing the need to navigate varying defamation laws across states and territories. Consistency in the defamation laws help ensure a fair and predictable legal environment, preventing disparities in the handling of defamation cases across different regions.

Since the introduction of the model defamation provisions in each state and territory the rapid development of the digital age has broadened the media landscape, with ordinary individuals now able to publish content widely via social media. A 2018 report by the University of Technology Sydney highlighted that defamation cases involving digital publications had surged, reflecting the broader shift towards online platforms.

This raised the need for a review of the defamation laws to consider their continued suitability in achieving their aims of promoting speedy and non-litigious methods of dispute resolution and striking an appropriate balance between protecting freedom of expression, in particular for matters of public interest, whilst still ensuring the protection of a person's reputation from harm using effective and fair remedies.

A review of defamation laws was undertaken in two stages and amendments proposed to address issues identified with the model laws.

Stage 1 recommended amendments centred on issues of:

- modernisation of the defamation laws to adapt to the increasing prevalence of digital communications
- the increasing use of defamation law for trivial matters such as neighbour disputes
- insufficient incentives to engage in non-litigious dispute resolution
- protection of publications regarding matters of public interest and education
- ensuring the current provisions were operating as originally intended.

Stage 2 recommended amendments gave further consideration to the:

- liability of digital intermediaries, such as internet service providers and social media platforms, when third parties use their services to publish defamatory content
- extension of the defence of absolute privilege to defamatory statements made to Australian police and other complaint-handling bodies.

Both stages involved an extensive review process, with multiple rounds of public consultation, stakeholder roundtables, the engagement of expert panels and the development of discussion papers and exposure drafts at a national level.

The Bill I introduce today reflects the stage 1 and stage 2 recommended amendments. Some of the more key amendments provided in the Bill include:

- the introduction of a serious harm element
- changes to pre-litigation processes
- new defences relating to public interest and peer-reviewed material published in academic or scientific journals
- clarification of awards for non-economic loss
- the introduction of a single publication rule
- conditional exemption from defamation liability for conduit, caching and storage services and for search engines in relation to organic search results
- the requirement for courts to consider balancing factors when making preliminary discovery orders against digital intermediaries

- a new innocent dissemination defence for digital intermediaries
- a specific power for courts to make non-party orders against digital intermediaries to prevent access to defamatory matter online
- the extension of the defence of absolute privilege to matter published to police, along with guiding principles.

Overall, this Bill is a critical step towards maintaining uniformity, refining and modernising Australian defamation law, and ensures its continued relevance and effectiveness.

I turn to the key provisions of the Bill.

A significant change to the defamation laws is the introduction of a serious harm threshold as a new element of the cause of action. This reform, detailed in proposed new section 9A of the *Defamation Act 2006*, requires plaintiffs to prove that the publication of defamatory material has caused or is likely to cause serious harm to their reputation. For corporations the threshold includes demonstrating serious financial loss. By imposing this threshold the Bill aims to filter out trivial, minor or frivolous defamation claims early in the litigation process.

This change is intended to reduce the burden on courts, limit unwarranted legal costs for businesses and individuals and promote early resolution of disputes. The defence of triviality—which involves establishing that the plaintiff was unlikely to suffer harm—will be repealed, as this serious harm threshold will render it unnecessary.

The Bill also introduces several key reforms to the pre-litigation process in defamation cases to encourage early resolution and reduce the burden on courts.

The new provisions will make it mandatory for an aggrieved person to issue a written concerns notice detailing the specifics of the complaint and serve a waiting period before commencing court action. If the initial concerns notice is insufficient the publisher can request further details.

This requirement aims to provide the publisher with enough information to make a reasonable offer, encourage meaningful negotiation and settlement before formal court action is commenced and ensure that the plaintiff has considered the serious harm threshold before proceeding.

The Bill also proposes several refinements to the offer-to-make-amends procedure, including that the offer be made as soon as reasonably practicable after receiving the concerns notice with the offer remaining open for at least 28 days.

The offers to make amends have also been broadened beyond an offer to publish a reasonable correction of the defamatory matter to include an order to publish a clarification of or additional information about the matter, accommodating situations where a factual correction is not applicable but additional context or information is necessary. An offer to include an apology or remove the defamatory material from a website can also be included. The defence for reasonable offers may also be relied on if the publisher remains willing to comply with the offer during the trial.

For digital publications an offer to make amends may also include an offer to take access prevention steps—for example, removing, blocking or disabling access—instead of or in addition to the other available offers, as posting a clarification or correction may not be possible, such as for search engine providers.

These refinements aim to encourage quicker, early and non-litigious resolution of defamation disputes; streamline and modernise the process of making and responding to offers to make amends; and reduce the burden on the court system. By enhancing clarity and providing more structured procedures, the Bill seeks to make the process more efficient and equitable for all parties involved.

The Bill provides an additional significant shift in defamation law via the introduction and amendments of a number of defences.

Current section 27 of the *Defamation Act 2006* provides a defence of qualified privilege where there is a legal or moral duty to make potentially defamatory statements. However, this defence has been critiqued for not adequately covering broader media publications as it is challenging to prove a general public interest in the information.

The new public interest defence addresses this critique by introducing new section 26A to protect journalists and media organisations publishing matters of public interest in order to ensure the protection of freedom of expression and public debate on matters of significant public concern.

The defence requires the defendant to prove the statement was on a matter of public interest and that they reasonably believed the publication was in the public interest at the time. A non-exhaustive list of factors is also outlined for consideration by the courts. These factors are not intended to form a mandatory checklist, but rather may be used by the courts in evaluating the circumstances of each case.

The defence of qualified privilege is retained, but amended to reduce overlap with the new public interest defence by removing or altering factors more relevant to the new defence. These changes are designed to better reflect contemporary media practices and ensure that defamation laws do not unduly inhibit important public discourse.

The new defence of peer-reviewed scientific and academic journal publications is introduced in new section 27A of the *Defamation Act 2006*. The defence applies to defamatory statements related to scientific or academic issues published in a journal that has undergone peer review by an independent expert or editor, and extends to fair reports of the peer-reviewed statements and any assessments of these statements within the same journal.

The peer review must be conducted by someone with expertise in the relevant scientific or academic field. However, the defence can be defeated if the plaintiff proves that the statement or assessment was not published honestly for the public's information or the advancement of education.

Existing defences such as section 26 provide some protection for academic and scientific publications, particularly those that are fair reports of public proceedings or relate to public concern. However, these existing defences may not fully address the nuances of academic peer review. New section 27A aims to offer clearer and more robust protection for peer-reviewed publications, recognising their role in advancing knowledge and scholarly debate. This is crucial for the advancement of knowledge and the integrity of scholarly communication.

Various other defences have also been amended, such as the defence of contextual truth under the current section 23 of the *Defamation Act 2006*, which allows the defendant to argue that the substantial truth of contextual imputations in a publication renders specific defamatory imputations less harmful. The Bill revises section 23 to clarify that defendants can plead back imputations raised by the plaintiff. This change ensures that defendants can fully present the context of the statements in question.

Section 28, Defences of honest opinion, currently provides a defence for expressions of opinion that are based on proper material and are in the public interest. The requirement for the opinion to be based on proper material and for that material to be set out clearly has faced criticism for being outdated, especially in the context of digital communications.

The Bill proposes amendments to update how proper material should be presented, including being set out either in specific terms within the publication or in general terms that are accessible. Proper material can also be notorious (widely known) or accessible through references, links or other access points included in the publication—for example, hyperlinks on webpages. The proper material must be apparent from the context of the publication, making it easier for readers to understand the basis of the opinion.

The defence of innocent dissemination, under section 29 of the *Defamation Act 2006*, provides a defence to subordinate distributors who can prove they neither knew, nor ought reasonably to have known, the matter was defamatory, and their lack of knowledge was not due to negligence on their part.

For digital intermediaries, including forum administrators, issues arise in relation to this defence as it currently applies where online platforms are monitored and unlawful content removed. There is a lack of clarity regarding whether having this ability to exercise editorial control means the digital intermediary could be considered an originator of the content. The requirement to prove a lack of knowledge of the defamatory content may also discourage digital intermediaries from monitoring these platforms in order to avoid knowledge of defamatory publications.

To address these issues new section 28A provides a defence for publications involving digital intermediaries, such as social media platforms and forum administrators, where they have an accessible complaints mechanism which the plaintiff has used to provide a written complaint, and the digital intermediary has taken

reasonable access prevention steps, within seven days of the complaint being made, to remove, block or disable the content.

However, the defence does not apply if the digital intermediary was motivated by malice in providing the online service. By requiring a complaints mechanism and timely action, the defence encourages digital intermediaries to adopt and maintain procedures for handling defamatory content. It also acknowledges that not all digital intermediaries have the same level of control or ability to act on complaints, ensuring that those who act responsibly are protected from undue liability.

A key reform is the extension of the absolute privilege defence to matters published to police, which is intended to encourage the report of serious offences and alleviate the concerns that reporting could lead to defamation claims.

Section 24 of the *Defamation Act 2006* provides the defence of absolute privilege, which is a complete immunity for matter published in proceedings of a parliamentary body or an Australian court or tribunal.

Section 27 also provides a defence of qualified privilege, which could be used to protect reports to police and other complaint-handling bodies. Currently, this defence would need to be established by the defendant and would be defeated if the plaintiff proves the publication was actuated by malice. This would mean in cases where a victim–survivor has made a report to police, the defendant could make a claim for defamation and assert they were lying, constituting malice, potentially deterring victim–survivors from reporting serious offences.

The Bill proposes to extend the defence of absolute privilege to protect any communications made to an official of state, Territory or Commonwealth police forces or services at all levels, including informal reports, emails and online submissions. This recognises that there are certain communications which are deemed to be more important than a plaintiff's right to protect their reputation.

By providing absolute immunity from defamation claims for statements made to police the reform also seeks to remove barriers that might deter victims from reporting crimes. This is especially relevant for sensitive matters, such as sexual violence, where fear of legal repercussions can inhibit reporting. Additionally, accountability for false statements is not diminished as it remains an offence to provide false information to the police, ensuring that the reform does not shield malicious reporting.

This reform is a significant step towards improving access to justice for individuals reporting crimes, particularly in sensitive areas such as sexual violence and harassment, and aligns with ongoing efforts to ensure that defamation laws do not act as a barrier to reporting serious criminal conduct.

The effectiveness of these new defences will likely be assessed over time through judicial interpretation and application in various cases, ensuring they adequately balance public interest and individual rights.

The proposed amendments to section 32 of the *Defamation Act 2006* are designed to address several key issues related to the cap on damages for non-economic loss in defamation proceedings. This cap is adjusted annually and is intended to ensure proportional compensation while avoiding excessive awards.

Under the existing law courts may award aggravated damages for particularly harmful conduct in addition to the capped amount for non-economic loss. However, there has been confusion and inconsistency in how these awards are applied. Recent cases have interpreted section 32 in ways that deviate from its intended purpose. Some courts have allowed aggravated damages to effectively exceed the cap on non-economic loss, contrary to the original intent of the legislation.

The Bill amends section 32 to clarify that the cap should be interpreted as a scale or range of damages for non-economic loss. The maximum amount represents the highest end of this scale, meant to apply only in the most serious cases of defamation.

The Bill stipulates that awards for aggravated damages must be made separately from the damages for non-economic loss. This ensures that the cap on non-economic damages remains intact even if aggravated damages are warranted.

In order to prevent attempts to circumvent this cap the Bill also introduces restrictions on the filing of multiple lawsuits by requiring plaintiffs to seek court approval to bring further proceedings against the same or associated defendants regarding the same publication.

These amendments will uphold the original intent of the cap and provide a more predictable and consistent framework for damages, benefiting both plaintiffs and defendants, and ensuring the damages are proportionate to the harm suffered. The restrictions on multiple proceedings will also help streamline litigation and prevent abuse of the legal process by promoting more efficient and fair handling of defamation claims.

The introduction of the single publication rule represents a significant update to address the challenges posed by digital media. The single publication rule aims to address issues with the multiple publication rule that currently applies to defamation cases. Under the multiple publication rule, every download or access of a defamatory online publication is treated as a new instance of publication, potentially extending the limitation period indefinitely.

The single publication rules specify that the one-year limitation period for defamation action starts from the date of the first publication and does not reset with subsequent access or downloads. If a subsequent publication is materially different from the first, the limitation period may start anew. This includes changes in the manner of publication, such as a different platform or substantial modification content.

The court can also extend the limitation period up to three years from the first publication date if the plaintiff can demonstrate that it is just and reasonable under the circumstances. This provides flexibility for cases where the plaintiff may not have been aware of the defamatory material immediately.

The Bill responds to concerns about the multiple publication rule creating unfairly extended limitation periods and evidentiary difficulties for publishers. The single publication rule aims to balance the interests of plaintiffs and defendants while reflecting modern digital realities.

In summary, the introduction of the single publication rule and related amendments aims to modernise defamation law by addressing issues specific to digital media, providing clearer and fairer limitation periods and enhancing the efficiency of the dispute resolution process.

Clause 33 of the Bill introduces conditional statutory exemptions from defamation liability for certain digital intermediaries to reflect their passive role in content publication. Some digital intermediaries, such as caching services, conduit services and storage services, do not actively contribute to the publication of defamatory matter, so the Bill proposes to provide a protection to such services regardless of whether they knew, or ought to reasonably have known, the digital matter was defamatory.

This reform does not substantially change the law. These digital intermediaries are generally not the subject of defamation claims and are unlikely to be considered publishers under the common-law test. The intention here is to provide clarity and certainty. The exception also only applies very narrowly with specific conditions that must be met to ensure this exemption does not apply if any of these services actively participate in the publication of defamatory content.

A further conditional exemption is provided for search engine providers in relation to organic search results. This recognises that search engine providers operate via an automated process providing access to third-party content; they have no interest in the content itself or any relationship with the author; and are unable to remove the content, only block it. The exemption applies to search results and hyperlinks generated by automated processes, not to sponsored results or content actively managed by the search engine provider. The exemption also does not cover autocomplete suggestions or AI-generated responses.

The Bill establishes a process for courts to determine whether these exemptions apply before a trial begins, aiming to reduce unnecessary legal costs and delays.

These reforms are intended to clarify the role of digital intermediaries and ensure they are not unjustly held liable for third-party content, while maintaining the integrity of defamation law in a digital context.

When bringing defamation proceedings a plaintiff is required to identify the author. This is difficult where people post online anonymously. Currently, a court can issue a preliminary discovery order to help identify an anonymous poster and may take into account a number of factors, including the proportionality, privacy and the risk of abuse of process in exercising this discretion.

However, concerns have been raised regarding how this process may be abused—for example, against domestic violence victims or other vulnerable members of society. Therefore, the Bill makes it mandatory for a court to consider the objectives of the *Defamation Act*, including providing fair and effective remedies and promoting speedy, non-litigious resolution, and any privacy, safety and other public interest concerns that might arise from the order.

This change aims to ensure that courts balance the need to identify individuals for legal proceedings with protecting privacy and preventing potential abuse of the process. It seeks to promote consistency across jurisdictions and protect vulnerable individuals, such as victims of domestic violence. The requirement to consider these factors is intended to enhance the fairness and effectiveness of the preliminary discovery process without creating new avenues for such orders.

The Bill introduces a further significant amendment to the *Defamation Act*, granting courts the power to make orders against non-party digital intermediaries. This provision aims to enhance the enforcement of defamation judgements, particularly in cases where the defamatory matter has spread widely or the original poster is uncooperative.

New section 36A provides courts with the power to issue orders requiring non-party digital intermediaries to take access prevention steps to prevent or limit access to defamatory content online. This includes intermediaries who are not directly involved in the defamation proceedings but facilitate access to the content.

These orders can only be made if the plaintiff has obtained a judgement for defamation against the original defendant, or a court has granted a temporary or final injunction preventing the defendant from publishing or republishing the defamatory matter. The court must provide the non-party digital intermediary an opportunity to be heard about the appropriateness of the order. This allows intermediaries to present arguments about their capacity to comply and the feasibility of the requested actions.

In urgent cases where immediate action is required to prevent further harm the court can issue temporary orders without first providing the non-party digital intermediary the opportunity to be heard. This exception ensures that urgent situations can be addressed promptly.

The new provision applies to all digital intermediaries, including those eligible for statutory exemptions from defamation liability. This ensures that even intermediaries who are not legally liable for the defamatory content can be ordered to assist in preventing further dissemination of the matter.

This reform aims to address the challenges associated with online defamation, particularly in the digital age where content can spread rapidly and where original posters may be difficult to hold accountable. By empowering courts to issue orders against non-party digital intermediaries, the Bill seeks to improve the effectiveness of defamation remedies and provide a more comprehensive approach to dealing with online defamatory content.

The proposed Bill also introduces several minor amendments to refine the operation of existing provisions in the *Defamation Act 2006*. These changes aim to clarify legal concepts and ensure that the law functions as intended.

Section 8 excludes corporations from suing for defamation, except for certain small or not-for-profit organisations. However, the definition of ‘employee’ previously did not include independent contractors or others heavily involved in daily operations. The Bill updates the definition of ‘employee’ to include individuals engaged in the day-to-day operations of a corporation, regardless of their formal employment status. This change prevents larger corporations from circumventing the prohibition on defamation claims by structuring their workforce with independent contractors.

Section 8 is further amended in relation to whether a corporation is related to another, as based on section 50 of the Commonwealth *Corporations Act 2001*, and which can be overly restrictive. The Bill replaces the term ‘related to another corporation’ with ‘associated entity’, aligning it with definitions used in section 50AAA of the *Corporations Act*. This broader definition better reflects the relationships between entities in modern business structures.

A number of procedural aspects have also been amended, including:

- broadening the criteria for determining if a corporation is small enough to qualify as an excluded corporation for defamation claims

- allowing the court to determine costs if a defamation case ends due to the death of a party, addressing a gap in the current law and ensuring fairness and clarity

- modernising the provisions for the giving of notices and other documents, such as using email, messaging or other electronic communication indicated by the recipient, to better align with contemporary communication practices.

The amendments in the Bill are designed to refine and clarify the operation of existing provisions in the *Defamation Act 2006*. By addressing technical issues, updating definitions and streamlining procedural rules, the Bill seeks to ensure that the Act functions as intended, providing a balanced approach to defamation claims while adapting to contemporary legal and digital environments.

This is an important Bill. It implements the nationally agreed model defamation amendments and fulfils the Northern Territory's commitment. This Bill modernises the *Defamation Act 2006* and ensures continued uniformity with defamation legislation around Australia.

I am pleased to commend the Bill to honourable members.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a first time.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be referred to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee for report by 12 March 2025.

Motion agreed to.

EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 14

Mrs HERSEY (Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I present a Bill titled the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, Serial 14, and table the explanatory statement.

I move that the Bill be now read a first time.

In August last year the CLP government was elected with a strong mandate from Territorians to reduce crime, including to address the root causes of crime. One of these root causes is a failure to ensure our young Territorians receive a quality education.

The purpose of this Bill is to amend the *Education Act 2015* and Education Regulations 2015 to introduce measures that will strengthen school attendance. This reform will achieve this by enshrining the role of school attendance officer in the legislation; streamlining and improving existing enforcement processes; and prescribing the identity management information required to be collected by schools in order to support the national rollout of the schools identifier in 2027.

School attendance is mandatory for all children between the ages of six and 17 in the Northern Territory. There are existing compliance measures in the Act already. These measures are aimed at enforcing the obligations that parents have to send their kids to school. However, the last eight years has seen a steady decline in attendance at Northern Territory Government schools across all regions of the Territory. For example, from 2016 until 2023 Barkly dropped from 62.8% to 46.2%; Big Rivers from 71.1% to 58.9%; Central from 75.9% to 66.3%; East Arnhem from 59.9% to 54.6%; Top End from 83.6% to 78.3%; and Darwin from 88.8% to 83.8%.

The August 2023 Age Grade Census told us there were 32,652 students enrolled in government schools, with the average annual attendance at 74.5%, a drop from 80.8% in 2016. The 2023 data showed that the Territory's attendance rate of 74.5% was the lowest in Australia and significantly lower than the national average of 87.5%.

This decline has coincided with a reduction in applying the compliance measures that are already available under the Act. For example, in 2016 a total of 1,580 compliance notices were issued compared with only 454 in 2023, a reduction of 73.4%. Further to this, only 38 infringement notices were issued in 2023 compared with 365 in 2016, a reduction of almost 90%.

Staying in school is closely associated with reducing crime rates through several interrelated mechanisms, such as increased employment opportunities; development of social skills and networks; improved critical thinking and decision-making; access to resources; and learning in an environment that fosters a sense of purpose and direction.

These compliance measures exist in the Act for a reason; that is, to enforce the law by ensuring that parents are aware of their obligations to send their kids to school and understand that there are consequences if they do not.

This reform does not implement new provisions that enforce a parent's obligation to send their kids to school; these powers are already available to department officers who are appointed as authorised persons by the CEO of the Department of Education and Training. The issue is that the powers were underutilised due to the many classes of department officer appointed as authorised persons, with none of them having a focus on compliance and enforcement. For example, student engagement advisers, school-based engagement officers, court officers and staff employed in corporate positions within the department are all appointed as authorised persons under the Act.

While all of these positions have the power to undertake enforcement action as authorised persons, enforcement is not a core function of these roles. Under this structure, student engagement advisers were primarily responsible for issuing enforcement notices and infringement notices; however, this role also performs the important function of providing supportive case management to chronically disengaged students and providing support to families and young people to overcome the barriers that perpetuate non-attendance. In this role the combination of therapeutic case management and enforcement functions created a conflict, and enforcement measures were only relied upon as a measure of last resort.

In fact, the Northern Territory Government delivered on its election commitment to bring back truancy officers in Term 4 2024 by establishing school attendance officers as authorised persons under the Act. School attendance officers commenced their patrols in Term 4 last year, and until 13 December 2024 issued 476 compliance notices and 38 infringement notices. In one term our newly established school attendance officers issued more compliance notices than were issued in a year, in 2023, and equalled the number of infringement notices issued.

What these reforms will do is enshrine the role of the school attendance officer into legislation so that a dedicated position with a focus on enforcement will continue to exist as part of government's overall attendance and engagement strategy. The school attendance officer will be a key component of a broader strategy for increasing and maintaining school attendance rates.

The ability for the CEO to appoint authorised officers under the Act is maintained, reinforcing that a multifaceted system of support factoring in a range of roles, methods and tools is required to address disengagement, truancy and absenteeism.

This reform creates a balanced approach to increasing and maintaining high attendance rates by separating out supportive and enforcement functions, enabling an increased focus on enforcement to occur without neglecting the requirement to provide intensive case management and support.

More specifically, these amendments create a new section in the Act that prescribes the functions and powers of the school attendance officer by combining the powers of the CEO that are associated with enforcement actions under sections 171 to 173 with the powers of an authorised person to manage truancy under sections 174 to 176 and regulation 44.

Put simply, school attendance officers will have the power to:

- request information by issuing an information notice
- issue a compliance notice
- direct a person to attend a compulsory conference
- approach a school-age person in a public place and ask questions—for example, name, address and why they are not in school—and accompany the child back to school or to their home
- call at an address given to them and require any person over 14 to give information about school-age children who reside at the address
- direct the enrolment of a child in a school
- issue infringement notices
- monitor and enforce compliance with the provisions of the Act relating to school attendance
- conduct education awareness programs and provide information and advice about school attendance.

This Bill also addresses an existing issue that hinders the efficient giving of notices associated with monitoring and enforcing school attendance. Currently under section 168(4) of the Act, an authorised person must present their identity card for inspection to the person when exercising any power in relation to that person under the Act. The department has legal advice that this provision may imply that an authorised person may only exercise a power in relation to a person when the person is physically present. The giving of notices by an authorised person, including a school attendance officer, via any other means than in person may be invalidated by a court if challenged. The amendment rectifies this anomaly.

The amendment clarifies that an authorised person is only required to produce their identity card for inspection to a person when exercising a power of performing a function under the Act in the physical presence of that person. This reform is aimed at making the issuing of notices more efficient in situations where the parent or young person is unable to be located, or where it is unsafe to approach a parent or young person, or where it would otherwise be more efficient to issue an infringement or other notice via mail.

This amendment does not remove the requirement for an authorised person to be issued an identity card in order to exercise a power under the Act.

Finally, this reform will see the Northern Territory satisfy its national commitment under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement to ensure the Territory is ready to support the rollout of the national schools identifier in 2027.

In November 2024 the Better and Fairer Schools (Information Management) Bill 2024 passed through the Australian Parliament. The purpose of that Bill was to amend the Commonwealth *Student Identifiers Act 2014* to extend the system of unique identifiers that currently exist for vocational education and training and higher education students to school students.

The unique schools identifier, when implemented, will enable the tracking of students across jurisdictions and provide a safeguard for students at risk of disengagement from education.

The Commonwealth legislation includes provisions that define the identity management information that schools must collect in order to inform the generation of schools identifiers. The Commonwealth legislation also includes provisions that support the sharing of sensitive data across borders for the purpose of applying for or verifying a schools identifier.

Under the schools identifier operating model all primary and secondary school students who do not already have a unique identifier will receive a schools identifier. The schools identifier will be generated using data collected at the time of school enrolment. For students who already have a unique identifier, enrolment data will be used to locate their existing unique identifier.

From 2027 both government and non-government schools across Australia will be responsible for collecting the information required to inform schools identifiers. To ensure Territory schools are collecting the data required an amendment is proposed to update the regulations which already prescribe data that is required for enrolment purposes for both government and non-government schools.

As the schools identifier is not due to commence until 2027 the Bill proposes a delayed commencement for these provisions. The delayed commencement will enable both the Northern Territory and Australian Governments to work with government and non-government schooling sectors respectively to ensure systems and processes to support the collection of the required additional data are established.

Once the national schools identifier is established we will be able to track and support students at risk of disengagement from education—for example, students who unenrol from a school but fail to re-enrol in another, including across borders. This is particularly relevant for the Territory, considering the number of students from remote communities who attend interstate boarding schools.

The schools identifier may also assist with gaining a better understanding of student pathways, enabling the targeting of additional supports and programs where required, to better support young people at risk of disengaging from education.

As I have mentioned, staying in school and receiving a quality education is closely associated with reducing crime. The proposed reforms constitute a clear measure by the Northern Territory Government to encourage regular attendance in compulsory education and reduce disengagement.

For the last four years in opposition I spoke about the importance of education. We have the lowest rates of literacy, numeracy and attendance. We must get our kids to school for a better future for them and so we have more people accessing jobs in the future.

We need parents to understand the importance of education. I have been out with numerous school attendance officers across the Territory and have seen the great work that they do on the ground. The word is definitely getting out to families. Families are now better understanding the importance of their child's education. They are understanding that it is the law to send their child to school and that there will be accountability and consequences in the way of a fine if they do not.

I thank the department and all the school engagement officers across the Territory, who are doing a fantastic job, for the hard work that they are doing.

I am pleased to commend the Education Legislation Amendment Bill to honourable members.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a first time.

Mrs HERSEY (Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I move that the second reading of the Bill be made an order of the day for the first Assembly meeting after 28 days have elapsed.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I move that the motion be amended by deleting all the words after 'the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2025' and inserting 'the Bill be referred to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee'.

This issue is of great concern to many of my constituents. They have contacted me many times with concerns about the changes. It needs to be open to the committee to investigate.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, I support the Member for Johnston's request for referral to the scrutiny committee. We have heard numerous radio interviews with education experts about having greater input in the development of this Bill. This is important, as the government has claimed to be transparent and open.

There are amazing education organisations and associations across the Territory that have expressed an interest in being involved. They have not been critical or supportive; they have simply expressed ideas for further input and consideration. It is an important process for the committee to consider whether further action is required or to call for public submissions. It is a great way for the community to be involved in an area as important as education.

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, we clearly oppose the amendment put forward by the Member for Johnston.

This was a commitment that we raised with Territorians before the election. We made it clear that we would be returning school attendance officers across the Northern Territory.

This is an area where Labor has failed Territorians. As the Member for Katherine highlighted, school attendance significantly dropped over the years under Labor because of the lack of holding parents accountable to get their kids to school.

School attendance officers are in place. This legislation will essentially enshrine the role of the school attendance officers.

School attendance is down—to 46% in my electorate—and literacy and numeracy levels have dropped in the Northern Territory.

This is important legislation, and I commend the Minister for Education and Training for bringing it forward. There has been sufficient scrutiny; it was called the Territory election, and that happened in August 2024. School attendance officers are clearly making a difference already.

We oppose the amendment.

Madam SPEAKER: The question is that the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 7	Noes 17
Mr Brown	Ms Boothby
J Davis	Mr Burgoyne
Mr Guyula	Ms Cahill
K McNamara	Mrs Carlson
Mr Guyula	Mr Charls
Ms Uibo	Mr Edgington
Mr Young	Mrs Finocchiaro
	Mrs Hersey
	Mr Howe
	Mr Kerle
	Mr Mackay
	Mr Maley
	Mr O'Gallagher
	Mr Patel
	Dr Rahman
	Mr Yan
	Mrs Zio

Amendment not agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL REPORT
Update on NT Corrections

Mr MALEY (Corrections): Madam Speaker, I deliver the ministerial report on the update on NT Corrections, notified yesterday.

The CLP came to office approximately five months ago. We were elected on a mandate to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore our lifestyle. I got to work on immediately finalising and implementing the Corrections Infrastructure Master Plan, due to the lack of action by the previous Labor government. We took decisive action to address the urgent need to increase correctional capacity while committing to long-term infrastructure solutions.

Since the August election the prison population has risen by approximately 500 to an unprecedented 2,700. The Northern Territory has the highest imprisonment rate in Australia at just over 1,100 prisoners per …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I noticed the clock—that is okay; it has gone back on. It was black.

Madam SPEAKER: Okay; please continue, minister.

Ms Uibo: I will make sure you are on time.

Mr MALEY: Thank you.

The Northern Territory has the highest recidivism rate, with 58.2% of people returning to custody within two years.

The imprisonment rate in the Northern Territory is not something we should be proud of. It is something that all of us in this Chamber should be working to improve. This is something I am committed to changing, and the CLP government will be striving to change it. This is not the legacy that our government wants to leave.

Under the former CLP government the imprisonment rate in 2015 was 885 per 100,000 people; clearly it went up over the last eight years. In 2016 Labor stripped funding from Corrections, crippling the prison industries program and creating a Corrections system under pressure with the worst imprisonment rate in Australia.

We acknowledge the pressure the surge in prisoner numbers is putting on our Corrections system. We are working to provide relief through expanding infrastructure and strengthening the workforce.

We will not apologise for keeping criminals off the street and keeping the community safe, no matter where people live. That is what Territorians expect and it is what they deserve after eight years of gaslighting and neglect by the previous Labor government.

Although we have seen a significant increase in numbers, the overcrowding in our prison system is a legacy issue. It was years in the making under the failed previous government. Members of the former government ignored the mounting pressure, despite seeing evidence in front of them. The former government has left us to deal with the crime crisis that it caused.

Prisoner numbers in the Northern Territory have exceeded the available bed capacity at the correctional centres, so prisoners are being held in police cells for an extended period. This started under the previous Labor government.

The Department of Corrections is dealing with significant challenges due to the substantial increase in the prisoner population. This rapidly increased from day one of the Labor government in 2016. There will be some who say that this problem was caused by the CLP in its push to reduce crime. However, the people of the Northern Territory were clear when they voted for a government that has the will and commitment to address this issue. Crime is the number one factor across the Northern Territory, and the CLP is committed to reducing that crime level. We want people and families to live in the Northern Territory and enjoy it.

We have been left with a mess. There were early warning signs of this mess. In December 2022 it was reported that prison officers were placing prisoners on mattresses on the floor to make space and were warning us that the mental health and safety of staff were at risk due to due to the prisons' overcrowding. This is simply inexcusable. Holding prisoners in police watch houses is not our preference, but the former government sat back and watched numbers grow year by year and ignored the warnings and predictions, which has left us in this situation.

How did we get to this position? The warnings were there. Eight long years of inaction created this crisis. I will take you back to the early days of the Gunner Labor government. In August 2016 one of the first things that happened was that the standalone Department of Correctional Services was pushed back under the Attorney-General and Justice department.

Pulling funding from the industries program was short-sighted, but there were other warning signs that the former Labor government ignored time and again. As far back as October 2017 the ABC reported that the Darwin prison population had reached a record high of 99.7% of capacity, and the government did nothing. The funding previously allocated by the former Country Liberal Party government for the development of the Northern Territory correctional industries was stripped away and the position of prison director of employment was made redundant in 2018.

In 2017 Corrective Services NSW published an evaluation of prisoner employment and vocational training in custody. One of the findings was that over a longer-term period, offenders who worked in correctional industries were 24% less likely to reoffend. Correctional industries are the welding shop, the woodwork shop and prisoners being out helping the community. This gives them meaningful tasks to do. They are not just sitting in a cell doing nothing; they are learning skills.

It is obvious that the former Labor government had no interest in prisoner employment programs, training or skills that would have given many prisoners a level of skill that would have assisted them to gain employment on their release. It is about breaking the cycle of reoffending and giving prisoners skills so that they can go into the community and be better people.

On Thursday 19 April 2018 the ABC headline was 'Prison overcrowding prompts push to abolish mandatory sentencing in the Northern Territory'. The news article reported:

> *Darwin's prison population has reached record levels of overcrowding, with jails in the Top End and Alice Springs consistently overcapacity.*

In May 2020 a riot at the Holtze correctional centre caused tens of millions of dollars worth of damage. Three years later Labor released a heavily redacted report by an interstate Corrections expert who said that there was little excuse for the Northern Territory Government not to understand how to successfully manage a riot that caused $30m damage at the Holtze centre. In true Labor style the former government maintained that the report was Cabinet-in-confidence and exempt from freedom of information laws. Of course the former government wanted to keep the report secret; it exposed all its failures.

On Thursday 18 February 2021 the ABC report 'Overcrowded prisons "at critical tipping point", NT parole board chair calls for "coherent" action' said:

> *The prison system in the Northern Territory is at a 'critical tipping point', with facilities running consistently over capacity and inadequate resources for rehabilitation, according to the head of the parole board.*

You would like to think that a warning sign from one of our most respected Supreme Court judges, the then head of the NT Parole Board, would have been heard, or at least some action or planning undertaken.

The then Attorney-General—the current Leader of the Opposition—said that Corrections funding would be considered at budget time. There was no action and no response; it was left to be considered at budget time and filed in the too-hard basket.

A Justice Reform Initiative media release in September 2022 stated that the Northern Territory was a world leader in imprisoning its citizens and:

> *… imprisonment rates in the Northern Territory are one of the highest in the world and more than four times the Australian average.*

However, there was no action.

On Monday 5 December 2022 the ABC article headlined 'Northern Territory prisons facing "unprecedented pressures" and record inmate numbers' reported that the number of prisoners in NT facilities reached a record high on 19 November 2022, but again no action was taken.

This is some of the evidence that this crisis has been ongoing and was ignored by the previous Labor government. You would have thought with the evidence that prisoner numbers were going through the roof something would have been done—some sort of training or rehabilitation—but, no, Labor cut the funding.

You would have thought after all the media reports that something would have happened, but it was the opposite; Labor members buried their heads in the sand and did nothing. It shows that they were not interested in rehabilitation or training and getting these people back into the community as better people.

I recall that even you, Madam Speaker, raised warnings in 2022 that the Corrections system was full to the brim, with the Alice Springs and Darwin prisons operating well above design capacity, yet still nothing was done.

On 26 March 2023 the *NT News* report 'NT Corrections break records for prison population, police watch houses used for overflow' stated:

> *The NT's prison population surged to an all-time record high, with one per cent of the entire Territory population behind bars …*

This was the answer for the failed Labor government: instead of spending money on prison infrastructure, just put prisoners in the watch houses. Labor members have the audacity to complain now, but it was their idea. Unlike them, the CLP has a plan to get prisoners out.

On 11 January 2024 ABC News reported:

> *The Northern Territory corrections system is 'in a serious crisis' and there are growing human rights concerns for prisoners, advocates say, as inmate numbers soar to unprecedented levels with no long-term solution in sight.*

All these reports say that there is no action and no long-term solution. The former Labor government's action was to put prisoners in watch houses. Disgraceful!

In January 2024 there was a serious incident outside the Alice Springs Correctional Centre that caused damage to prison dormitories. Had those opposite been listening or heeded your warnings, Madam Speaker, maybe this incident would not have occurred. The inaction by the previous Labor government exposed our correctional staff to danger and strained correctional facilities under extreme pressure. It is fortunate that there were no injuries from that incident.

Had the previous failed Labor government taken an interest it would have noticed the extreme issues confronting the Corrections Commissioner and his staff. Had Labor addressed the rising prisoner numbers we would not have this crisis. A prison cannot just be popped up; it takes planning and is expensive. The previous failed government did nothing. Its solution was to let out the prisoners or put them in watch houses.

Our Corrections officers and Community Corrections officers are doing an outstanding job under difficult circumstances that were caused by the inaction of the previous Labor government. However, they should be asking their union why the prisoner numbers and overcrowding were not highlighted to the government in 2017, 2018 or 2022. Why now? This has been an ongoing problem, mounting for many years, and the pressure has been building with no relief provided by the previous failed government. Corrections have had to use police watch houses to manage these numbers since 2013. I am determined to change this situation.

It is inexcusable to hold prisoners in police watch houses, and it is not our preference. The former government sat back and watched the numbers grow year after year. It ignored the warnings and predictions and left us with an overcrowded, broken Corrections system.

Turning around the crime crisis created by Labor will take time, but we are already taking action, as we promised. Unlike those opposite, we have a plan; this government will fix the mess those opposite left us. It will take time—but not eight years—because there is no quick fix.

The CLP is committed to the infrastructure master plan, which will enable the capacity to expand to ensure we meet immediate and future demand. We are ahead of schedule. We are committed to supporting staff planning and building a mature, professional workforce to address repeat offenders.

I have directed that an independent review of the prison classification process be done to ensure that any future development of and expenditure on facilities that accommodate prisoners have been classified so that prisoners are held in facilities with the appropriate levels of security.

The Department of Corrections, and the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure and its sub-partner contractors, have done an outstanding job bringing the old Berrimah prison back to life. That facility now accommodates 164 prisoners, months ahead of the original plan. I congratulate them for doing a wonderful job.

I stress that this is an interim solution, and we have been clear about that. Our plan is to move prisoners to Holtze and make that the prison precinct; however, opening the Berrimah prison is our crisis response to a crisis situation. The Corrections Commissioner is ensuring that this facility is secure and operational. By the end of the month another accommodation block will be ready for a further 48 prisoners. By the end of March 2025 the prison will be able to hold more than 300 prisoners. Corrections and DLI are, as we speak, adding beds to Berrimah to enable the movement of prisoners from the Palmerston Police Station. One of our plans is to give the watch houses back to police.

In just five months we have already started to address the failure and invest in much-needed infrastructure to create new beds. There is much more to do. It has been our priority to empty watch houses, particularly Palmerston, and move the prisoners back to a dedicated facility.

We have a plan for Alice Springs. We know that the 96 additional beds that the Labor government planned to introduce were more than $10m over budget and, of course, overdue. We are preparing the Barkly supported bail accommodation to open.

Youth offenders were to be accommodated at Holtze. The Holtze facility has been operational since late 2024—not to mention the $70m in overspend and the two-year delay. Imagine the rehabilitation that could have occurred in two years and the extra prison officers or the facility we could have had with that $70m, but the failed Labor government wasted taxpayers' money and overspent, with blowout after blowout and delay after delay. That harmed these young offenders, and Labor did not care. The former government did not care about the young offenders; it did not invest, and now we are left with a crisis.

Moving the young offenders to Holtze will make a significant saving, while we maintain the quality intervention with these young offenders.

Having a single youth detention centre has helped to solve other problems by creating extra space for adult prisoners and, importantly, getting women out of the men's prison. This is a critical part of our plan. I do not want to be in a situation where female prisoners are missing opportunities because they cannot move around inside a male prison. I have been to Holtze prison and seen the abuse that the female prisoners get.

The planning by this failed Labor government was unbelievable—what a mess. The previous Labor government promised to give back the police watch houses last July, but guess what? It was another broken promise, because the watch houses are full. This is not ideal, and we are working on that plan to get prisoners out of watch houses as quickly as we can.

We are looking at all options to reduce the overall imprisonment rate and provide alternatives to custody. We want the prison industries back up and running. The lawnmowing service has been cut because of the crisis caused by the failed Labor government. Labor failed to plan, which is why we are here.

Today we outline our plan and move on with legislation to give the commissioner more resources. I note that no-one will lose their job. This is about giving the commissioner more resources to provide a flexible workforce to ensure that this crisis is managed correctly, safely and within a reasonable budget.

The resulting community harm of having these people return to the prison system is immeasurable. We have had to cut education and rehabilitation programs while we manage the facilities we have because the previous government failed to invest. The previous government failed those people. There were millions of dollars being wasted without any accountability or meaningful results. We need to make sure that programs work so that our prisoners are better people when they return to the community. We need to break the cycle of reoffending. The previous Labor government clearly failed to do that because prisoner numbers went through the roof. It failed to invest in infrastructure and the workforce. The results are showing now.

I am clear: if you commit a crime, we will find you a bed. Community safety is our number one priority. We need to ensure that we keep Territorians safe. We will keep the staff safe so that they can go home to their loved ones each night.

I move that the report be noted.

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the debate be adjourned.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I wish to speak on this motion.

Madam SPEAKER: Sorry, the minister has moved a motion.

Mr PAECH: The question has not been put, so you might want to reprioritise your understanding of parliamentary process.

Madam SPEAKER: Please be seated. The Leader of Government Business moved that the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to; debate adjourned.

CORRECTIONAL SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 12

Continued from 12 February 2025.

Mr MALEY (Corrections): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a second time.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, this is an important debate. We just heard the Corrections minister's update, which he refused to allow any other member to speak to. What we heard from his update, which many people have spoken about, is that this government …

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: We have important business to conduct this morning in the 10 minutes remaining before lunch, and it will be done in silence.

Mr PAECH: This is an important Bill because it affects our hardworking Northern Territory Corrections officers and the amazing work they do every day in a difficult environment.

The Corrections minister tried to claim credit for all this work. He cannot claim credit for it because it is the work of the Northern Territory Corrections officers, which they advocated for, stood up for and acted upon. The Corrections minister claimed this and that, but we have seen no budget appropriations from the Country

Liberals. All the investments the government talks about are previous investments, previous money and previous plans that were consulted on with the Northern Territory Corrections officers and their union.

The 96-bed accommodation facility in Alice Springs has nothing to do with the CLP. It had been consulted on and worked on by the former government. Most importantly, it had input from the Northern Territory Corrections officers and their union to make sure there were plans in place for safe staffing models.

What I have heard from Northern Territory Corrections officers this week, last week and since the election is, 'Chansey, this smells like a Ken Middlebrook special'. Bugger me dead; I walked in yesterday to be briefed by none other than Ken Middlebrook, the real man behind the scenes. The Minister for Corrections, Gerard Maley, is nothing but a puppet, and Ken Middlebrook is the puppetmaster. Everything you see here now is a Ken Middlebrook special.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Gwoja, I advise that naming staff and public servants is rarely a good thing. I urge caution in how you proceed if your intention is to denigrate public servants.

Mr PAECH: The former Norther Territory Corrections Commissioner is now the senior adviser for the Corrections minister. How that is not a conflict of interest, I do not know …

Mr Maley: You do not care for anyone but yourself. You make money out of misery. How are your shares in liquor going? Money out of misery; you should be embarrassed.

Mr PAECH: I will speak about the Bill and emphasise what this means for Territorians. Let us be clear: the Northern Territory …

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 20; we continue to hear the Deputy Chief Minister interject. I am trying to listen to this debate.

Madam SPEAKER: You have made your point. There have been interjections on both sides over the last couple of minutes. Let us listen to the Member for Gwoja in silence, please.

Mr PAECH: The Country Liberal Party has been in government for about 170 days; that is five months. It went to the election saying that it had a clear plan and would not rush its good plan. However, I am standing in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly speaking on a Bill that the government said is on urgency. It is rushing the Bill through and not taking it to a scrutiny committee to give Corrections officers and other people the opportunity to have a say about it. That is not good policymaking.

Government members talk about a plan, yet there is nothing in that plan that is innovative or new other than privatising Corrections by stealth, as we heard today. That is what you get under the CLP; a process whereby it removes from public hands this important part of the Corrections family and puts it into private hands. It is appalling.

We have extremely hardworking Northern Territory Corrections professional staff. People do not just wake up one morning and get sworn in as a Corrections officer; they need to undertake extensive training. People work through Corrections during the course of a year to get the relevant qualifications to fulfil the role. People work hard to get where they are in Northern Territory Corrections.

This legislation is a disgrace because it erodes the integrity and recognition of those hardworking Northern Territory Corrections officers by saying, 'We think we can just put in people to do your job with limited to no experience or prior training. She'll be right, mate, you can do your training over the year.' Nowhere in this Bill does it strengthen the compliance of these private companies to make sure that their staff have maintained their certification and qualifications to fulfil the role of being a Northern Territory Corrections officer. Nowhere in the legislation does it clearly articulate how our hardworking Corrections officers can be guaranteed that the people who work alongside them from a private company have the relevant qualifications and skills to do the job. This has undermined the whole process.

The government had an opportunity to introduce this legislation last year and leave it on the notice paper for rigorous consultation over Christmas until these sittings. It had the opportunity to introduce it in these sittings and debate it in a few weeks' time in March to allow people to have a conversation.

Furthermore, the minister said that he supports Corrections officers, when he does not. If he supported them he would not be a coward shying away from meeting with Corrections officers.

His office was contacted by Corrections officers who wanted to meet with him—sit around the table to have an important conversation—and he was too afraid to do so. He flicked it off to the Northern Territory Corrections Commissioner, saying, 'He can deal with you because I do not want to'. However, he has the audacity to stand in parliament and say, 'I support Corrections officers, but I do not want to listen to what they have to say because I might not like what I hear from them'. That happened, because he has not met with one of them. He did not come out the front and meet the 50-plus Corrections officers who will be directly impacted by this. He left them out there high and dry.

Ms Uibo: Coward.

Mr PAECH: That is what you are getting.

Mr HOWE: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I ask the Opposition Leader to withdraw her comment of 'coward'. I find that disorderly.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! He did not produce a standing order …

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Daly, take your seat. We will deal with the Member for Drysdale's point of order first. Have you finished what you wanted to say?

Mr HOWE: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 31; disorderly words. She referred to the deputy leader as a coward. I ask her to withdraw.

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, did you say that? I thought I heard …

Ms UIBO: Yes, Madam Speaker. I did not know it was disorderly, for the Member for Drysdale.

Madam SPEAKER: Yes, you did say that. For the sake of harmony, getting along and not offending each other, would you withdraw, please?

Ms UIBO: I withdraw the comment.

Mr PAECH: The Northern Territory …

Ms Uibo: I did not know they were so precious.

Mr MACKAY: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 31; I find the Opposition Leader's comments that she made after she sat down to be disorderly.

Madam SPEAKER: They were not disorderly at all.

Let us move on. We have a few minutes until lunchtime, and then we can all take a deep breath.

Mr PAECH: It is clear from their constant interjections, trying to stall time for the debate, that the CLP members do not like what I have to say. Guess what? I am not going anywhere; I will take my full time to speak on this important issue of Corrections officers.

I make no apology for standing up for Northern Territory Corrections officers. During my time as Correctional Services minister I singlehandedly delivered record investment into Northern Territory Correctional Services. I did that based on the recommendations and the fierce advocacy of Northern Territory Correctional Services officers.

Based on consultations with them and their advice we brought in the good provisions for our hardworking Northern Territory Correctional Services officers not to have to justify PTSD when they are exposed to extreme conditions. Our government did that, based on what we heard from our hardworking Correctional Services officers.

Record investment in Northern Territory Correctional Services infrastructure upgrades was imperative. That was done under my tenure as Correctional Services minister. The upgrade and full refurbishment of G Block in Alice Springs was a direct result of talking to Correctional Services officers and hearing what they wanted. I will not apologise for listening to them and acting on that.

I instructed the commissioner to do a review to get prison industries back up and running, bigger and better than ever before, and not to be pulled down because a CLP mate who was running a business was in competition with it. I told the commissioner to go full steam ahead because we wanted to get people working, but it needed to be based on what the Corrections prison industries officers think is best. That review had started.

The accommodation options were our government's plan. They have been taken by the CLP government, which is rolling them out as its own. The 96-bed accommodation in Alice Springs; the expansion of the Holtze prison; and the Paperbark and Stringybark standalone women's facility in Darwin with a cost of $32m, so that women were not in the Holtze prison, are all plans that were introduced by Labor.

The CLP government is more spin than you get from a throw from Shane Warne. Under this government we are getting spin after spin after spin.

Debate suspended.

The Assembly suspended.

VISITOR
Rufus McNamara

Madam SPEAKER: I acknowledge Rufus McNamara who is in the gallery this afternoon. Rufus is the son of the Member for Nightcliff.

Members: Hear, hear!

NOTICES

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I shall move that the NT Legislative Assembly:

- acknowledges that gambling and pokies cause significant harm in our community
- recognises that the financial and social costs to our economy and community from gambling and pokies far outweigh any benefits from the Community Benefit Fund
- recognises that the current taxation on gambling profits is woefully inadequate
- calls on the CLP government to:
  - minimise harm from pokies by:
    - introducing pre-commitment systems to all venues with pokies, including casinos
    - reducing the load-up limit for pokies to $100
  - increase transparency on the gambling industry by:
    - reintroducing mandatory publishing of venue earnings/taxation
    - publishing monthly venue-specific data in line with other jurisdictions
    - releasing the publicly funded NT Gambling Prevalence and Wellbeing Survey Report within a month of receipt
  - increase revenue for the NT and make online gambling companies pay their fair share of tax by:
    - increasing the tax on gambling corporations using NT bookmaker/betting exchange licences
    - removing the cap on this tax.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I shall move that the NT Legislative Assembly:

- recognises the rising cost-of-living pressures upon Territorians, particularly renters who often face housing insecurity
- acknowledges that renters in the NT face frequent and unreasonable rent increases
- urges the CLP government to improve protections for renters under the *Residential Tenancies Act* by:
    - introducing a two-year rent freeze
    - limiting rental increases to 2% every two years after the end of the rent freeze
    - establishing an independent bond board and minimum standards for rental premises, including energy efficiency and heating/cooling requirements
    - abolishing no-grounds evictions
    - protecting tenants against discrimination
    - modernising the Act to reflect the realities of renting, including specific protections for renters living in share houses
    - strengthening accountability for landlord obligations.

QUESTION TIME

Police – Retention Bonus

Ms UIBO to MINISTER for POLICE

You promised Northern Territory Police you would back them no matter what. You promised all police a retention bonus to reward their hard work and keep more officers on the front line. Can you confirm that you will honour your commitment to the following police bonuses: $10,000 for 10 years of service; $15,000 for 15 years of service; $20,000 for 20 years of service; $25,000 for 25 years of service; and $30,000 for 30 years of service? Will you back our police and honour these bonuses? When will the police see these bonuses?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I welcome the question from the Opposition Leader because we took to the election a commitment to have a police retention bonus after the Northern Territory Police Association had put that forward as a meaningful and important strategy to keep our police in the force for longer. That was off the back of years of Labor neglecting our police. We saw attrition rates grow to up to 11% I think. It is sitting at about 7% now; we have the best attrition rates since 2019. That is important work we continue to do.

Backing our police is much more than just talking about it; it is part of everything we do. We created our reducing-crime laws, put new laws on the table today and continue to work with our frontline police, like the traffic police I have worked with on new laws coming forward. Strike Force Trident wants some new laws as part of our *Youth Justice Act* rewrite. We are listening to the front line on that.

It is also about ensuring police have the resources they need and that we are backing them to do their job. For example, I fought for and secured the CASA exemption for drone operations in Alice Springs, so we are seeing this incredible capability in Alice Springs that is redefining how policing is done in that town.

We are making sure their conditions are where they need to be. There is an EBA negotiation this year, which we go into with good faith.

We developed the police infrastructure master plan because remote policing continues to be a major issue. We have seen remote infrastructure, the old federal government's Themis stations, falling apart. We need a proper plan that backs our police so that disasters like the $12.7m Nightcliff Police Station never happen again. We do not want politically motivated …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. The question asked specifically when our police will see these bonuses.

Madam SPEAKER: Chief Minister, you can answer it.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am getting to that.

We do not want to see politically motivated police spending in areas that do not help our front line. That is our commitment.

On top of the remote policing infrastructure plan there are incentives like the police retention bonus. We have been clear that we do not want that to be tied up in the EBA; we want it to be above and beyond.

We put out a proposal prior to the election about amounts of pay per years of service, remembering that this bonus is designed to keep people in the force for longer. Many drafts have been talked about between me, the Police Commissioner, the police and the Northern Territory Police Association.

I have not seen the final version of what it looks like, but we made a clear commitment that it will start on 1 July. It still needs to go into the budget process.

We are determined to support our police. I think the retention bonus will keep more police in the job longer.

Police – Support

Mr HOWE to CHIEF MINISTER

As you just stated, on this side of the House we support our police. Whether it is through delivering better police powers, new laws or making their job more efficient and safer, our CLP team supports the men and women in blue.

In my electorate of Drysdale I have been impressed by the leadership and professionalism of the staff at the Palmerston Police Station, who continue to demonstrate a high level of engagement with me and the local community and a willingness to go above and beyond.

Can you please explain how our government will further support and back our police in 2025?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I know how important community safety is to the member's electorate. I know the Member for Drysdale is out every day seeing what is going on and making sure he has strong engagement with the team at Palmerston Police—who do an exceptional job—being a voice for his community and hearing the concerns of local businesses. As a previous Member for Drysdale I know there is a lot of work to do, but we are on the right track.

It is about making sure, as I said in my previous answer, that we are supporting our police holistically. There are many parts to that dynamic.

I spoke about ensuring we have an infrastructure plan for policing across the Territory so that we do not have politically motivated police stations popping up, like the $12.7m wasted by Natasha Fyles on Nightcliff Police Station. That was a disgrace. We need stations where we can support better policing. That is important. It is one part of it.

The other is ensuring we have incentives like the police retention bonus, which—whilst it is being finalised—wherever it lands, is designed to keep people in the force for longer. We will look at the data about where our police are leaving, what years they are leaving at and how we can support them to stay longer. We will monitor that incentive to see whether it is delivering an outcome. That important work is being undertaken, ready to hit the ground running on 1 July.

It is also about holding other agencies to account. Police for a long time were the go-to for the Labor government for everything, and that is not fair. They cannot be all things to all people. Police are there to catch bad guys, as I always say; that is what police do. We need to free them up to do that. They are not a taxi service, counsellors, nutritionists or marriage counsellors; they are police, employed to enforce the law and hold people accountable.

The things we have done, such as employing school attendance officers and having our care and protection workers out on the street with the Circuit Breaker Program—allowing them, not the police, to deal with young people—is all making a difference. Even our laws that will be debated this afternoon to bring in additional people for the Corrections space for prisoner transfers will support our police to go back on the front line. Currently, our police are taxiing prisoners back and forth from court, using up their time and paddy wagon space on a job that someone else can be better placed to do so that our police can be on the front line.

I was at a police station yesterday welcoming our new recruits. We will swear in 30 new constables on Friday, which is exciting. We have three squads of constables at the college, with the first 30 graduating on 7 March, and 11 of them will go to Alice Springs. It is a great time in policing.

Registrable Interests

Ms UIBO to MINISTER for EDUCATION and TRAINING

Yesterday you said that you had integrity. Why did it take you six months to divest your shares? Why did you not declare your private jet flight to a champagne brunch?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, as I said yesterday I divested my shares. The Opposition Leader said that it takes six months, and that is how long it took to divest those shares. The process started at the election. From the moment that money hit the bank, which was on 14 January, I had 28 days to put it on the register. I did so in that time.

I carry myself with the utmost morals and integrity. It was a personal flight I took with a longstanding personal friend. I know that you, as the Member for Arnhem, took flights with that company many times. It had a contract with the previous government …

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! Silence, please.

Ms Uibo: We did not get freebies to champagne brunches.

Madam SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, you are on a warning.

Mrs HERSEY: The *Legislative Assembly (Disclosure of Interests) Act 2008* states:

> *… a gift received by a member or a related person from a family member or personal friend in a purely personal capacity is not a registrable interest unless the member judges that an appearance of conflict of interest may be seen to exist*

I did not see that it was a perceived conflict of interest. Public perception sees that it was, and I put it on my register of interests.

Ms Uibo: After you got caught out by the NT Independent.

Madam SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, quiet!

Mrs HERSEY: As I said, the flight I took was for a personal event with a longstanding personal friend on a Saturday purely in a personal capacity.

I will have you know, Madam Speaker, that with morals and integrity I will never use taxpayer funds, unlike members on the other side who used taxpayer funds to run around the countryside on their holidays interstate …

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Take your seat, minister.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 38; the inference and offences made by the Member for Katherine. What is her evidence, and can she please supply that? If she will make a statement to the House and reflect on members …

Madam SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, sit down. There is no point of order, if you do not have anything prepared to prove that yourself.

Ms Uibo: How pathetic.

Mrs HERSEY: I note that the Opposition Leader calls me pathetic, but what is pathetic is using taxpayer funds to drive around the countryside—on the public purse—which members of the opposition, the then government, did.

Ms Uibo: To do our job as bush members. You have no clue; that is a shame.

Mrs HERSEY: I pick up on the constant interjections from the Opposition Leader, who asked me the question and does not have the decency to listen in silence to my answer. I will explain to her—if she cares to stop talking—that no taxpayer money was spent. That is the bottom line. No taxpayer …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. The question was: why did the minister not declare that jet flight?

Madam SPEAKER: She has answered the question, and she has 16 seconds to go.

Mrs HERSEY: For the third time, no taxpayer money was spent. This was a flight with a personal friend in a personal capacity, so no taxpayer money was spent during that time.

Territory Economy – Update

Dr RAHMAN to TREASURER

Last week you travelled across the Territory to update Territorians on the state of our economy. You told Territorians that under Labor's watch cost blowouts were in the hundreds of millions and that basic operational costs went unbudgeted whilst NT debt kept piling up. You also shared with Territorians that after eight years, seven budgets and $46.5bn spent, Labor had nothing to show for it.

Can you give the Assembly examples of Labor's budget mismanagement that have come to light and assure Territorians that this government will not make the same mistakes?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, since I became Treasurer I have been looking over the books closely. The closer I look, the bigger Labor's mess gets. It was eight years, eight budgets, $2bn of debt at the start and $11.6bn when it finished, with $2bn in the last 18 months.

Listening to the Leader of the Opposition's address on Tuesday, I cannot help but think the past is a foreign country to the Leader of the Opposition, who sat in the Cabinet subcommittee overseeing budgets. She cannot escape culpability, and her colleagues must be wondering what she really knows. Labor cannot escape its legacy of disregard for public finances and inability to deliver projects on time and on budget, yet it continues to gaslight Territorians by pretending the budget was not a disaster under its governance.

I am here to expose how incompetent Labor members were as managers of the Territory's finances. They might sit there and shake their heads, but they should be hanging their heads in shame. Labor's legacy after eight years is blowout after blowout, with unfunded liabilities worth hundreds of millions of dollars and fiscal deception, all so that it did not have to reveal its budget blowouts and breach of the debt ceiling. The more we work through the data, the more staggering it becomes. I will reveal some of that.

This is a preview of the list of blowouts of completed and projected works over the past years and into the future:

- the upgrading of Richardson Park—a 454% cost blowout, an additional $13.2m
- the third floor of the new build at Royal Darwin Hospital—a 360% cost blowout, an additional $28.8m

- Richardson Drive access and extension—a 350% cost blowout, an additional $2.1m
- the drain extensions for the Ludmilla and Kulaluk trunk—a 312% cost blowout, an additional $10m
- construction of the new Tennant Creek watch house—a 238% blowout, an additional $10m
- the design of student boarding accommodation—a 200% cost blowout, an additional $8.1m
- the upgrade of the fire system of Gove District Hospital—a 169% blowout, an additional $13.2m.

It goes on; I have a list of more than $1.1bn in cost blowouts.

That does not even begin to scrape the surface because not only did Labor fail to stick to its budget, it forgot to include some of the costs ongoing. With these project failures, Labor resorted to burdening Territorians with more than $11bn in debt.

This is my promise to Territorians: we will continue to spend public money wisely, ensuring we spend it where it matters and for the benefit of all Territorians.

Environmental Organisations – Support

Mr PAECH to MINISTER for LANDS, PLANNING and ENVIRONMENT

My question is to the Territory's least green-credentialled member.

Members interjecting.

Mr PAECH: I am just waiting for the government to listen to the question.

Are you still gardening alongside the Alice Springs residents you have described as environmental vandals and activists, and are you still on the ALEC-led community garden in Alice Springs? Why are you trying to downplay your funding of environmental organisations and accountability measures?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I am a proud member of the Alice Springs Community Garden. Over my time in Alice Springs I do a range of community work. As it relates to the community garden, some people need a bit of a history lesson.

ALEC members initiated the community garden in 2010, and since 2013 it has operated a garden committee. It is one thing I have enjoyed doing over a long time, but it does not stop there.

Out the front of my office there is a roundabout. When the previous government did some of the Revitalising Alice Springs roadworks it failed to put in any irrigation for that roundabout. For the past six months, whilst the inept former Labor government could not even get water to the plants, I have been getting up every morning and watering them to ensure that they survive.

[A member claps.]

Madam SPEAKER: No clapping.

Mr BURGOYNE: Along with that, there are many community groups that use green spaces in my area. The Alice Springs Town Council is often too busy to get to them, so I, along with other learned colleagues, mow these green spaces so that people can utilise them in a safe manner. I am always there after cracker night cleaning up these green spaces and ensuring that our area is clean for our children and families. I put the 'conserve' into conservative, and I am proud of that.

I also take part in cleanup days throughout the community. Not once have I seen the Member for Gwoja at any of them; maybe he does not care about the river or cleaning up. He cares more about his shares in alcohol …

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! That is enough.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. I am in my electorate where I should be. The question is not about the minister and his handyman skills. Why is he describing his community garden members as vandals and extremists?

Madam SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Mr BURGOYNE: One of my favourite things to do, which I spoke about yesterday, is deliver mail on my electric bike to the community. A lot of people do not realise that saves tens of thousands of dollars on postage. That money is then invested in community groups and sponsorship of local community members. I am proud of that.

Let us be clear: when I put out the media release that spoke about economic vandalism, that is what we were talking about in this place. When a community organisation that is funded by this government takes it upon itself to essentially delay and disrupt the operations of proponents who want to come to the Northern Territory and invest and ensure there are jobs in communities in remote areas—there are people who are ideologically opposed to that—our government will not be funding those organisations in the future.

We will be funding real action—action not activism—on the ground. I am proud to say that I have been speaking with Landcare groups and other organisations about where that money can be better spent.

Meningococcal B Vaccine

Mr PATEL to CHIEF MINISTER

Our government is supporting families with the cost of living. We know that every dollar helps. I was happy to join you in my electorate of Casuarina at the Casuarina community health clinic to launch our free meningococcal B vaccination program. The nurses were fantastic. Little baby William was brave, only crying a bit, when he received his men B vaccine. It has been only six weeks, but already we have seen many families get their free vaccination. Can you update the Assembly on how this important program is going?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, it was great to get out to Casuarina health clinic with the Member for Casuarina not that long ago. Yes, baby William was brave—he is only 14 weeks old—in receiving his first meningococcal B vaccine.

This gives families an opportunity to protect their children. Across the Territory there will be 4,200 babies just like William and 18,500 teenagers who can access this vaccine. From 1 January we have seen an enormous take-up, which makes us proud.

This program delivers on our promise to give Territorians the opportunity not to have to choose between putting food on the table or vaccinating their children against a deadly disease. This is an expensive vaccine.

I must say that no-one understands the importance of this vaccine more than the Lawrence family. In 2017 Sally and Ash tragically lost their daughter Skylar to meningococcal B when she was only two years old. It happened within hours. Since then they have run a fearless fight and campaign to make sure that no other family in the Territory has to endure the torture and grief they have at losing their daughter to a disease that they did not even know about. Their campaign helped me be a better mother; I thank them so much for their courage. It is a disease that so many people did not and still do not know about.

It was previously available for free to Aboriginal children and people with specific medical conditions, but everyone else was paying hundreds of dollars per dose. With babies needing three doses, you can imagine the cost to families.

Thanks to the Lawrence family we have now been able to deliver free vaccines since 1 January. We have had almost 1,300 young Territorians vaccinated, which makes me so unbelievably proud. That is 1,300 kids in six weeks. It includes 1,193 infants aged between six weeks and two years old and 105 adolescents aged between 14 and 19.

That statistic is important because it means that 105 families proactively took their teenager to a health clinic to be vaccinated. That is ahead of the vaccine schedule we are running in schools. This shows how many

families want to take this opportunity. They are getting ahead of the school vaccination schedule for teenagers and proactively getting their kids vaccinated at this additional vulnerable time in their lives.

We encourage everyone who wants to take up this opportunity. You can access it free from your GP, participating pharmacies, community health centres and remote health services.

We thank the Lawrences for their fearless advocacy.

Casuarina Youth Hub

Mr BROWN to MINISTER for YOUTH, SENIORS and EQUALITY

The Casuarina youth hub is a critical initiative that will provide a safe and supportive place for young people Darwin's northern suburbs. Can you confirm whether this government is committed to delivering the youth hub, and when will it open?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, this government will support youths in the northern suburbs. There are some issues that were raised with us during the election, and the location of this youth hub was one.

The department is looking into it and doing consultation. At this point I cannot confirm where it will be, but I can confirm that it will be in the northern suburbs. We will give further information to the public so that there is an opportunity for people to have their say. It could be in Casuarina; it could be anywhere else in the northern suburbs. We will go to the community for consultation, then we will make a decision on how we go forward with the youth hub.

Biosecurity – Border Protection

Mr KERLE to MINISTER for AGRICULTURE and FISHERIES

Protecting our border is of utmost importance. Security and prosperity depend on robust border protections. In the last few months numerous foreign boats have been intercepted in Australian waters, slipping through to reach our local communities. We have all seen photos and the video of illegal fishermen brazenly walking along the beach in Maningrida on traditional lands. We have all seen the photos of illegal boats hidden in the mangroves. These shameless acts have occurred in communities in the Member for Arafura's electorate, yet silence from the member opposite shows yet again that Labor does not care for Territorians or the Territory.

Can you outline how you have fought for the Territory, and what steps have since been put in place to combat this issue and protect Territorians?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Blain loves the Territory. He was born here, and he has some land and cows. This is important to anyone in the agriculture industry. Protecting the Territory and local communities from illegal fishing activities and the biosecurity threats that come with that is the number one priority for our government.

We have had eight years of inaction from the failed Labor government. Labor was running 'Operation Porous', with holes everywhere in relation to boats arriving and people walking into Aboriginal communities. You can imagine the biosecurity threat of that, let alone the threat of strangers walking onto our country.

Imagine if they brought a chicken with them. If H5—bird flu, which is across the world except Australia—arrives here, there would be catastrophic effects for people with chickens. The minister for Planning loves his chicken and I have chickens. It would have a catastrophic effect across the Northern Territory, not to mention that it would travel down through Alice Springs and into the eastern states. The birds fly up and down there. If we get H5 it will be really bad, not to mention that if foot-and-mouth disease or lumpy skin get here the cattle industry will be on its knees.

I have fought hard and met with many agencies to try to get priority action in relation to that because protecting our northern communities and our fish stock is the number one priority.

I have expressed my concern directly with the Commissioner for Australian Border Force. Together we are working as a team to make this our number one priority. Unlike the failed Labor government I am not afraid to stand my ground and stand up for the Northern Territory.

I have also met with federal government Minister Burke to push and fight. I told him how much of a threat this is to our community. We have a large area of land with a small number of people. We need more help. I acknowledge the sea rangers and Aboriginal communities doing what they do because they are the first port of call, essentially. They help us.

I spoke to those two people and asked them to make sure of the communication to the people out there and the people who need to know because we cannot afford to have people walking up and down the beach for any period, let alone an extended time. That communication bridge is super important.

Because of our action the newest multi-agency taskforce, Operation Lunar, has stood up. It is basically more resources and energy poured into protecting the Northern Territory agriculture and bird industries. We know that if some of those diseases arrive in Australia it will make a massive dent in our economy. We cannot afford this because of what the failed Labor government did to our economy, leaving us in such a huge debt.

Schools – Swimming Lessons

Mr BROWN to MINISTER for EDUCATION and TRAINING

Can you confirm you are forcing schools to pay up to $11,000 for their portable pools or for kids to get a charter plane to swimming lessons to meet your ill-conceived swimming lessons commitment?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, it is quite a strange question about swimming in schools. We have the highest rates of drowning in the Territory. An election commitment was that all children in Years 1 to 6 would get access to free swimming lessons.

This is being rolled out across the Territory. Some schools have starting swimming lessons, as the school year has just started. Our government committed $3m to fund Territory schools to deliver these lessons across the Territory.

Swimming is an essential part of life for our lifestyle. People have backyard pools. They go to billabongs and rivers across the Territory. It is essential for all children to learn to swim.

These swimming lessons are being provided by the Education department. We are looking at exactly how those swimming lessons will be provided to schools like Shepherdson College at Elcho Island. We know that to bring those children in will be extremely expensive.

There are other options being looked at. None of those options will be at the cost of the school or the families at all. That will all be provided by the department. There are some amazing …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. Can the minister confirm that schools are being forced to pay up to $11,000 if they were to put a portable swimming pool into their school to access the swimming lessons?

Madam SPEAKER: The minister is answering the question, I think.

Mrs HERSEY: I find it interesting that such a good initiative that we have rolled out as an election commitment and are in the process of doing is something that the opposition—which is trying to find relevance in some way in the world we are in now. Those opposite received a huge message at the last election, and we are doing great things which the opposition could not do when in government over the last eight years.

We have seen literacy, numeracy and attendance rates …

Members interjecting.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: Take your seat, minister.

This is not an opportunity to debate. If it is not a point of order, please take your seat.

Ms UIBO: It is Standing Order 110; relevance. The specifics of the question included if schools will have to pay up to $11,000 for a portable swimming pool.

Madam SPEAKER: There will be no more chatter or debating across the Chamber. Minister, you have 40 seconds.

Mrs HERSEY: The Opposition Leader might need to get the cloth out of her ears so that she can hear that the $3m election commitment from this government—which has the best interests of all children in the Territory at heart—means students from Years 1 to 6 will receive swimming lessons for free.

There are communities now having swimming lessons …

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. I appreciate the minister has stated that in the budget she has put aside money for swimming lessons …

Madam SPEAKER: If you appreciate that, then you can take your seat.

Mrs HERSEY: Our government is committed to boosting literacy and numeracy, getting kids back to school and making sure that our kids can swim.

Acacia Health System – Update

Mrs CARLSON to MINISTER for HEALTH

Rebuilding the Territory economy remains a key focus of our government. Previously, you advised the Assembly on the former Labor government's unprecedented Health budget overspend, which left a $280m deficit in one year. As the assistant minister for Treasury and Finance, I find this unforgiveable.

Recent media commentary regarding the state of the NT Health Acacia IT system highlighted cost blowouts and delays that will be of great concern to Territory residents, including those in the electorate of Wanguri. Can you update the Assembly on what you have discovered is the true state of the Acacia program and how badly it was managed by the former Labor government?

Mr Maley: You do not have an hour, though, Steve.

ANSWER

Yes, I have only three minutes.

Madam Speaker, I have discovered that the rollout of the Acacia patient health record system under Labor was a shemozzle. The total budget for the project ballooned from $259m to $320m under the watch of the former Labor government—a staggering $61m blowout. This disastrous mismanagement of the Acacia project is yet another example of the failed former Labor government's incompetence and demonstrates its lack of regard for taxpayers' money.

The Opposition Leader was the Minister for Health and the Minister for Corporate and Digital Development when the decision was made to pause the rollout to the Royal Darwin Hospital emergency department due to risks to patient safety. In her Cabinet role she was directly responsible for the Acacia system from a health and IT perspective.

We know that she was made aware of Acacia's critical flaws over a year ago. She was sent a confidential brief on the serious issues surrounding the Acacia system in January 2024 when emergency doctors reported that the failed system was putting lives at risk. I repeat: it was putting patient lives at risk under the Opposition Leader's watch.

Despite lives being on the line, Labor failed to act. For eight long months while patients' safety hung in the balance, the Opposition Leader did nothing to sort out this issue prior to Labor being turfed out of office.

To this day, the Acacia system still has not been rolled out in Royal Darwin Hospital and Palmerston Regional Hospital, while the $259m system is enhanced. All Labor did was leave us with a $280m overspend in the

Health budget, further straining the services Territorians rely on. This is yet another mess the CLP is cleaning up from the previous Labor government.

Unlike the previous government, which was asleep at the wheel, we will ensure that the departments responsible for the Acacia system will be held accountable to ensure that no lives are put at risk while the system is enhanced.

The truth about the $61m blowout for the Acacia system is out, and we are working tirelessly to clean up the mess from the previous Labor government. In the interests of good governance and our commitment to transparency and integrity, we will refer the Acacia cost blowout to the Public Accounts Committee. Territorians deserve a government that cares about them. That is what we are doing.

Domestic Violence – Circuit Breaker Program

J DAVIS to MINISTER for PREVENTION of DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

I have been contacted by many people asking me to repeat my question from Tuesday; that is, when will the $180m be rolled out that the government has committed to? When will frontline services, women and children see this money? The only money referenced in your answer on Tuesday was the Circuit Breaker Program. This was committed before your announcement that money would be rolling out. Is this money coming from the $180m?

It is good to see that money is being spent on child protection and youth justice, and it is not just about locking up kids, but the Circuit Breaker Program is not a domestic violence program. Domestic violence is not mentioned in any of the program descriptions. Young people need early intervention to address domestic violence, but this program is not designed to address it. Why is it being funded from the DV money if it is being funding from that money? Why are DV specialists in the NGO and Aboriginal community-controlled sectors who are already working on this not being funded?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I am delighted to once again explain clearly exactly what is happening in this space. There is no $180m. There is now $36m every year that we need it. We have committed to fund domestic, family and sexual violence services every year ongoing until we see results that show a reduction in the harm that has been caused in our community and, more importantly, that we have programs in place that address the root causes of domestic violence. I have explained on several occasions that this is the fundamental foundation of the Circuit Breaker Program.

The Coroner said that we need to get to youths before they go down this path, before they become perpetrators. We need to get to them before they start to think that attacking each other, being aggressive in their relationships and violence is the answer to everything. We need to address it before they reach that point. That is exactly what the Circuit Breaker Program is designed to do.

It has been welcomed on the ground by families, youth workers, service delivery agents and frontline workers. I am not sure what you think our youth workers are, Member for Johnston. They are frontline workers. They are there at 2 am. They are alongside our police and our families. They are working with our children to show them what the better alternative is. They are showing them that we can do this better. They are there working with families to get those kids to school.

J DAVIS: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. Is the Circuit Breaker Program being funded out of the $36m, and is there evaluation that shows that this contributes to preventing DV?

Ms CAHILL: It is a critical program that addresses recommendations 7 and 15 of the Coroner's recent recommendations in her findings from the tragic death of four Aboriginal women. We have put this program in place so that we can work to address root causes. Yes, it is a valid use of funding in the DV space, because it is about prevention.

In addition to that, the funding we are rolling out every year until we see improvement in this space is there for our frontline workers. It is there to help our families, to keep our children on track and to see a reduction in the horrendous 82% increase over the last eight years.

Anindilyakwa Healing Centre

Mrs ZIO to ATTORNEY-GENERAL

The CLP government is committed to tackling crime with real practical solutions, unlike the previous government which ignored serious issues for years, leaving Territorians in the relentless and long-endured crime crisis where people do not feel safe. I too doorknocked my entire electorate twice, and a common phrase was that we cannot afford to wait for the so-called generational change that the Labor government spoke of repeatedly. This government has already passed urgent laws to ensure real consequences for offenders.

Can you update the Assembly on other solutions this government is delivering to address the root causes of crime?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I was with the Member for Fannie Bay in her electorate over the election period and she is right: her community wants to see the root causes of crime addressed, which is what our CLP government is doing.

We are serious about tackling crime because we need to make sure our streets are safe and consequences are there for offenders. However, we also recognise that rehabilitation is key to reducing repeat offending. It is about holding offenders to account so that they have a chance to turn around their lives.

A real-life demonstration of this approach is with Drug & Alcohol Services Australia (DASA), which operates the alternative-to-custody facility on Groote Eylandt—the Anindilyakwa Healing Centre. Thanks to the action of this government we could begin full operations of this facility which under the previous Labor government took an eternity to get up and running. Originally that facility had 16 beds. It has now been expanded to 32 beds.

Despite being ready to go a number of years ago, it was unable to function at full capacity. It had been calling for the government to release the funds available for vehicles so that staff could get to and from the facility, which is about an hour from the mainland of Groote Eylandt. After just one meeting with DASA, as Attorney-General I directed the department to release the funding for the vehicles. The facility will be fully operational with 32 beds. That is real action and beds for people who desperately them.

People want to get back on track with good rehab, and this will now happen on Groote Eylandt. This will break the cycle of reoffending.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence, please.

Ms BOOTHBY: These are the root causes. Instead of being held up by red tape and Labor's inaction, this is the action needed. For years DASA pleaded for this assistance, but its calls were ignored. Shamefully, this was in Minister Uibo's Arnhem electorate; she failed and ignored it. The centre was not set up with 32 beds—beds that are desperately needed.

This is beyond just getting people into beds and rehabilitated. The facility creates jobs on Groote Eylandt, employs additional staff in the community and provides long-term support for people seeking to change their lives. This is real action, not empty promises, delivering real solutions to real problems.

Public Housing Waitlist

K McNAMARA to MINISTER for HOUSING, LOCAL GOVERNMENT and COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The most recent report from the Australian Government Productivity Commission reveals that it takes the NT Government an average of 126 days to fill public housing with new tenants, with these houses sitting vacant in that time. This is 86 days more than the national average. I understand what happened with housing under Labor, so I would appreciate just an answer to this question. What is the CLP's plan to reduce the number of days a property is vacant between tenants in order to shorten the public housing waitlist?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Nightcliff quoted 126 days to fill vacant houses. I am not sure of the date of the Productivity Commission report, but clearly it goes back to the time under Labor.

As I said yesterday, there is much chaos in the housing sector. I spoke about the increasing levels of antisocial behaviour and crime, which is linked to the damage being caused to many houses in urban and remote areas.

The Productivity Commission report said that it takes 126 days to fill a public house in the Northern Territory, but there is a range of issues. There have been many examples of Labor failing to take the necessary action to deal with tenants who have been causing trouble for their neighbours, damaging properties and causing chaos not only in some suburbs in Darwin but also across the Northern Territory. I gave the example yesterday of a tenant who had 62 Red Cards under Labor. Nothing was done with that tenant in the public house.

The Northern Territory had a waitlist of eight to 10 years under Labor. That is what we are trying to deal with. We signed a $4bn housing agreement and are working closely with the department to ensure that houses are filled as quickly as possible. We are facing a long-lasting legacy of inaction by the former Labor government. We are dealing with this across the Northern Territory. We are trying to fix the issues and the broken system we have been left with by Labor.

When it comes to antisocial behaviour we will not only change the policy, we will fix the legislation to ensure that those who are causing damage are evicted in a timely way.

I give a shout-out to the department because it is the people fixing houses who are out there doing the hard yards, trying to deal with Labor's legacy. They were not supported to deal with antisocial behaviour, but we will support the department. When the department wants to take action we will support it. This goes back to fixing houses so that they come online as quickly as possible because we want to ensure that children get the best start in life, and that means getting a roof over their heads.

Seniors Schemes

Mr O'GALLAGHER to MINISTER for YOUTH, SENIORS and EQUALITY

I am acutely aware of the financial mess Labor left us with in the budget. Territorians are rightly concerned about what impacts this may have on our community, particularly our cherished senior Territorians. A number of constituents have asked me about the impact our financial situation will have on them, including at our joint electorate Christmas party attended by 130 seniors. Can you provide an update to the Assembly that may bring comfort to our senior Territorians at this time?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Karama is committed to his community, particularly the seniors in his electorate. It was great to have a joint seniors Christmas party. The Member for Karama mentioned that we had more than 130 seniors attend, including the Opposition Leader's father, I believe. It was a great event with all the community representation. With our close electorates we often get those opportunities, like the opportunity that I mentioned. Along with the CLP team I met friends and residents from the Karama community there.

This government needs to give assurance to seniors that we will not take away any of the current schemes for seniors. That is a guarantee that the CLP put forward. I had conversations with the Treasurer and the Chief Minister, who both gave assurance that we will not cut any senior schemes. That includes the NT Seniors Recognition Scheme, the NT Concession Scheme and the Seniors Card scheme. Those schemes all originated with previous Country Liberal Party governments many years ago. We will continue those schemes in the coming years.

In the 2024 census we had an estimated 24,000 Northern Territory residents who are aged 65 years or over who are eligible for these schemes. The department is assisting the seniors so that they can get this support. They can use these concessions on council rates, electricity, water and sewerage, drivers' licences, registration and even glasses.

Ultimately it alleviates some of the cost-of-living pressures for this special group of Territorians. When I was listening to the answer the Treasurer provided about the $1.1bn cost blowout that happened during the previous Labor government, I wished that I could get at least 10% of that cost blowout for my department, which means that I could support all these different communities like seniors, people with disabilities, veterans group, youths and all the people who need it. It is a real shame that we are in this financial mess. I will continue to work with the Treasurer and the Chief Minister to ensure that we are supporting all the communities, including the seniors living in the Northern Territory.

Last week I met with senior Territorian Christopher Renehan and artist Dawn Beasley, who was the 2024 Portrait of a Senior Territorian Award winner for her portrait of Chris. I inform the Chamber that as of yesterday the 27th Portrait of a Senior Territorian Award celebrating our seniors is open and the submissions can go in.

Domestic Violence – Circuit Breaker Program

Mr PAECH to MINISTER for PREVENTION of DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

You mentioned there is no longer the $180m. Can you confirm that the $36m is in addition to the already annually appropriated money for the DV sector? Furthermore, can you advise the Assembly where the evaluation is that shows the Circuit Breaker Program contributes to the prevention of domestic and family violence? What DV expertise and experience is being incorporated into that program?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I am astonished that anybody would have any issue with any program being rolled out that is intended to break that vicious cycle that we live with every day, not just in our community but across the country.

The Coroner's findings in the inquest of those four women said clearly that as well as looking at dealing with the ramifications of years of neglect in this space, we have to break the cycle. We have to look at what we can do to change the behaviour of our young people to help them understand that violence is not the answer.

The Circuit Breaker Program has been in place for two-and-a-half months. Yes, an evaluation will be undertaken. In the two-and-a-half months that it has been operating we have had 75 children, 45% of whom are under the age of 12, be an ongoing part of that program.

Fifty-five of their families have joined us to work together to give their kids a better life and opportunity by engaging in parental family responsibility agreements, where we work to see why they are not at home, but are out on the street doing the wrong things. We work with the families to address what might be happening in the home—sometimes alcohol, violence or both and sometimes neither. Sometimes we just have kids who catch up with the wrong people and get in the wrong crowd and find themselves on the wrong side of the law.

The $36m that was committed over five years—the $180m that everybody keeps referring to—has now been dedicated funding that will be given every year, not just over five years but every year. Programs and frontline services that were initially looked on as short-term funding projects—the Treasurer called these out in his presentation recently where funding was not …

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; I am appreciative, thank you, minister. I want to further understand whether the $36m you mentioned is no longer over a five-year period indefinitely is on top of the existing budget appropriations?

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, you have some time left.

Ms CAHILL: The allocation of the money is going through the budget process. It is on top of the small amount of about $8m—maybe closer to $12m—that was allocated previously. There is $36m on top of what was happening ongoing so that we can break this vicious cycle of violence in our community and help our kids get on the right path.

Pet Crocodiles

Mr MACKAY to MINISTER for PARKS and WILDLIFE

Restoring the Territory's lifestyle is a key priority of the CLP government. That includes reversing unnecessary restrictions that ignore the wishes of Territorians. Last year Labor stripped away the right for

responsible individuals and proud Territorians to own a pet crocodile, despite strong community opposition and without proper consultation. Many residents in my electorate, the Member for Daly's electorate and the rural area love pet crocodiles. I am proud to be a member of the CLP government that is taking action to restore the right of Territorians to own a pet crocodile.

Can you update the Assembly on how the CLP government is restoring Territorians' rights and delivering a balanced approach to crocodile ownership?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I know many of the Member for Goyder's constituents love crocodiles; they love to look at them and have them as pets.

This is all about restoring the unique Territory lifestyle. Crocodiles are an iconic part of the Northern Territory, not just in the wild but in our culture, tourism and, for some, even as pets.

As the Member for Goyder said, Territorians were blindsided when Labor, without telling anyone what was happening, scrapped the permit to have a crocodile in the Northern Territory. This decision ignored crocodile enthusiasts and those in the industry who understand the importance of responsible ownership.

Unlike Labor, the CLP government listened to Territorians. That is why we took action straightaway to reinstate the right to own a pet crocodile.

This is about our unique lifestyle; it allows passionate Territorians to own a crocodile. We know how much this means to locals like Tommy Hayes—whom the Member for Goyder would know—a long-time crocodile enthusiast who was devastated when Labor took away his right to own a crocodile. His story is not unique. Territorians choose to live here because of the opportunities that come with our unique environment and lifestyle. Territorians love our unique lifestyle. I keep saying it because it is so true. As the Chief Minister said, if you cannot own a pet croc in the Territory then where can you?

Mrs Finocchiaro: Nowhere.

Ms BOOTHBY: Exactly.

Th CLP government is standing up for Territorians and is restoring the freedoms that make the Territory the best place in the world to live.

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

PAPER TABLED
Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption
Investigation Report – Operation Jupiter

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I table the Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption's Investigation Report – Operation Jupiter.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Chief Minister)(by leave): Madam Speaker, as minister responsible for the ICAC I have received the Operation Jupiter part two report.

The May 2024 Operation Jupiter report part one, which made seven recommendations, saw changes made to the Ministerial Staff Code of Conduct by former Chief Minister Eva Lawler.

Today's Operation Jupiter report part two, which made four recommendations, has been tabled. I now table an updated Ministerial Staff Code of Conduct to reflect the recommendations in the part two report.

It is important to note that the ICAC's recommendations apply to not only ministerial staff—which includes staff in the Leader of the Opposition's office—but also staff of all Members of the Legislative Assembly. I encourage all members of the Assembly to read the ICAC's report and pay particular attention to the recommendations.

The Ministerial Staff Code of Conduct only binds staff for ministers and the Leader of the Opposition. As a result, I will provide a copy of the ICAC's report to the Remuneration Tribunal, which the Clerk has advised is the relevant agency responsible for setting the code of practice and guidelines for all electorate staff.

I will address how the government has adopted the part two recommendations and incorporated them into the code of conduct that I have just tabled.

To address recommendation 1, I can inform the House that the Ministerial Staff Code of Conduct has been updated to provide specific examples of the types of tasks that are and are not prohibited to be undertaken by a ministerial staff member during ordinary business hours. Staff training was received by ministerial staff on the previous code of conduct which included the recommendations from Operation Jupiter report part one. Staff training will be provided to all staff again, following these updates and will continue as standard for all new staff. The same external training will be made available to the staff of the Leader of the Opposition.

To address recommendation 2, I can inform the House that the existing ministerial staff induction training package will be updated, and training is administered by the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

Regarding recommendations 3 and 4, I can inform the House that the Ministerial Staff Code of Conduct was updated in March 2024 by former Chief Minister Eva Lawler ahead of ICAC's Operation Jupiter part one report. The changes made clearly outline the differences between public duties and political activities, and it has now been further updated to include specific examples of acceptable and unacceptable conduct to make clear the difference between those two activities.

Further, the Ministerial Staff Code of Conduct now mandates that a ministerial staffer may only participate in political activities during ordinary business hours when a period of appropriately approved and diarised recreational leave has been taken. What a staff member does on their weekend or outside of their ordinary business hours is their private business, and an employer cannot impose conditions on how they spend their spare time. However, we can enforce clear lines between the two.

As I stated previously, the Ministerial Staff Code of Conduct addresses the four recommendations in this part two report.

This has been a long and drawn-out saga. The report has uncovered the depth of the secret tactics the Labor Party used to win and gain unfair advantage in the 2020 election. To your face Labor preaches integrity, as we have seen over the last couple of days. Territorians have been waiting for this report for years, and neither report 1 nor report 2 made findings against any individuals, which I have no doubt Territorians will find incredibly disappointing.

CORRECTIONAL SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 12

Continued from earlier this day.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, as I was saying before the lunch suspension, these changes brought forward by the Minister for Corrections and his team are ill conceived and have impacts across the Northern Territory's Corrections environment. These changes, as Corrections officers said, smelled like the former Northern Territory Correctional Services Commissioner's making. Then, as I said, bugger me, I walked into the briefing and the former Northern Territory Correctional Services Commissioner was there—the puppetmaster for the Corrections minister, Gerard Maley, pulling the strings telling him what to do and how to do it.

Mr MALEY: A point of order, Madam Speaker! He is referring to me by my personal name. It is against the standing orders.

Madam SPEAKER: Yes, you are correct. Can we keep this formal.

Mr YOUNG: Madam Speaker, speaking to that point of order, it was not a personal attack on the member; it is not offensive at all.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Daly, that is for me to decide.

Ms UIBO: Madam Speaker, speaking to the point of order, under Standing Order 34, a full name can be addressed by a member or the full title.

Madam SPEAKER: Standing Order 34 states:

A member must refer to other Members by their title of office or by the name of their electorate.

That is not what the member said, so …

Mr PAECH: I am happy to withdraw, but I ask that two-and-a-half minutes be reinstated on the clock, as it has been ticking.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Gwoja, it was two of your members who spoke …

Mr PAECH: It does not matter.

Madam SPEAKER: We will wind it back a couple of minutes.

Can we keep this formal and use the correct titles.

Mr PAECH: These changes smell like the former Northern Territory Correctional Services Commissioner's making. He is pulling the strings of the Minister for Corrections who does not have an idea of what he is doing. He has been led by his puppetmaster, the former commissioner. It shows what kind of plan the CLP has.

Let us remember what happened the last time the CLP was in charge and the carnage that was caused in the Northern Territory Corrections space. It resulted in the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory. That is what we get under this government because it brings back the very people who were involved. The puppet over there, whose strings are being pulled by the puppetmaster, has no understanding of what he is doing.

The CLP has rushed this through and not allowed the Corrections union or Corrections officers to have a say. The Corrections minister is too afraid to speak to Corrections officers, because when they approached his office for a briefing he fobbed them off to the Northern Territory Corrections Commissioner. The minister was too afraid to meet with the officers and too afraid of what they had to say, so he dismissed them. What does that say about a minister who is supposed to have your back and stand up fight for your protection and the safety of your workplace? It erodes any credibility that the CLP has in this space, when its members refuse to meet with the hardworking Northern Territory Corrections staff.

Our hardworking custodial officers, probation and parole officers and non-custodial staff all do an incredible job. I know how hard they work because I was the Northern Territory Correctional Services minister and an employee of the Northern Territory Correctional Services as a civilian staff member. I saw firsthand the hard work of our Corrections workers, who every day went above and beyond to look after people inside the prison. I thank Corrections workers for their hard work and getting up every day to do that important job.

It is not fair that this government, which has been in office for 170 days—five months—said that it had a plan. The only plan the CLP had was to bring back the former Northern Territory Correctional Services Commissioner; he is pulling out all his old tricks. The government is bringing in this measure so that when the EBA negotiations come up this year it can bring in privatised staff when the hardworking Corrections officers take protected action—if that is what they choose—to defend their rights and entitlements and to bargain.

The government is removing that provision. The government said sneakily to the public that this is about medical and court escorts. At our briefing we were told that anyone who is sworn in as a private contractor by the Northern Territory Corrections Commissioner could work inside the prisons in any position as long as they have been sworn in under the powers that have been introduced for the Corrections minister.

The government is coming for the privatisation of not only hospital escorts but also the hardworking Corrections officers who are inside the correctional centres, and our probation and parole officers. Privatising the system is what the government is talking about. The CLP government likes to say that it has a mandate whenever it comes to the slightest hint of criticism of its actions, but surely it is hard for the government to justify having a mandate for actions that put Territory workers at risk. This is exactly what this rushed poorly thought-out legislation is likely to do, and the government refuses to send this Bill to the scrutiny committee.

The conditions in our prisons and watch houses are unacceptable for Corrections officers, inmates and the Northern Territory police force. Anyone doing the wrong thing should face the consequences—that has never

been and never is in dispute—but knowingly and deliberately housing people in squalid unsafe conditions is irresponsible and potentially dangerous.

We have heard reports of people waiting hours to get a glass of water or have access to a toilet in privacy. It is not just 'those people'; they are our people—Territorians. People from across the Northern Territory, even people who voted for the CLP, have been in touch to object to the appalling conditions in the watch houses. We hear stories of 20 women crammed into one cell, sleeping on mattresses under fluoro lights 24 hours a day, with no privacy to go to the bathroom and taking a shower only every four or five days. By any standard it is unacceptable for anyone to be living and working in these conditions.

How do we expect prisoners to undergo rehabilitation and come out of jail without mental health or social issues when the capacity for the service to deliver it is not there? It is utterly counterproductive.

This has the hallmark of a government that has lost control of its own agenda and never had a real plan in the first place. It made big promises to the electorate about making the community safer. Has that come to pass? Those opposite have their talking points about the extra 500 people they have put in jail. They have admitted that most of these people already had warrants for their arrest. Therefore, we are talking about people who had committed crimes in the past and who would always be picked up by the police.

The story the government is trying to spin of somehow preventing or reducing crime in our communities is nonsense. The Northern Territory crime statistics pretty well bear that out. If you have a good look at the most recent statistics, you see that there has been little discernible reduction in crime rates across the Northern Territory since the CLP came to power. There are, of course, fluctuations from month to month, but it appears that the CLP has hardly made a dent despite all its promises, press releases and glossy social media posts.

It has been six months since the government's bail laws and other law-and-order measures have been in place, but it is disputable that Territorians are any safer. I looked at the statistics on the police website. For the whole of the Northern Territory in December 2023 there was a total of 1,072 offences against the person and 1,996 property offences—too high, of course. In July 2024, just before the election, offences against the person were sitting at 1,124 and property offences were at 1,650.

In November 2024, a number of months into the CLP's first term, the number of offences against the person was sitting at 1,138 and property offences were back up to 1,835. The fine print on the police website also notes that the November 2024 data is likely to increase by a further 10% to 15% in future months as the data analysis is finalised. That puts the crime statistics in November higher than those for December 2023—hardly the sharp reduction in crime that the CLP promised.

I know how hard it is for the CLP to hear this, given its entire reputation and identity are wrapped up in its tough-on-crime rhetoric because its members have glass jaws. Accountability means being able to admit when your big words have proven to be not much more than hot air. We have said all along that the CLP's big shiny policies would put more people in jail, but it would do nothing to prevent or reduce crime in the first place. That is coming to pass, and we are starting to see the impacts of this punitive-only approach.

The CLP, though, seems to have been caught by surprise. This legislation is evidence of that. It is a desperate scrambling move that clearly demonstrates the CLP's failed plan and failure to foresee that these simplistic policies would always have complex and problematic flow-on consequences. We now have dangerously full watch houses and unsafe working conditions. This is a desperate move by the CLP to bolster staff resources by using underqualified contractors from interstate, effectively putting another bandaid on the situation.

Last year the CLP made a big fuss about some new offences it introduced for assaulting workers. It appears that the CLP's concern for workers' safety does not extend to the Corrections workers who work tens of thousands of hours' overtime in horrendous and dangerous conditions. Corrections officers are effectively the sacrificial lambs in the CLP's desperate efforts to look like it is doing something to improve community safety.

On behalf of Territory Labor I say to the Corrections officers that we see you, we hear you and we will work with you and act on that. We know that you are bearing the brunt of a party that is playing politics and getting caught out by the consequences of its expedient decisions.

I agree with the CLP in one area; the situation it is leading us into is unsustainable. After failing to predict or plan for this set of circumstances the government has put itself in the position where it needs to act. However, handing over a contract to an interstate private security firm is not the solution. Staffing our prisons with

underqualified and inappropriately trained private contractors brings even greater safety and wellbeing risks to everyone in our Corrections system.

We understand that it will be up to the contractor to ensure that its employees, those individual staff, have the required qualification to undertake this work. It is not clear; nor is there anything in the legislation to ensure this will be monitored and complied with. It is one of many loopholes in this flawed rushed legislation.

The CLP would have us believe that these private contractors will be used only for prisoner transfers and will not be staffing watch houses or correctional facilities. That is simply untrue. The legislation is worded in such a way that it allows for the commissioner to have enormous latitude to put those security contractors wherever they like in the system, regardless of the contractors' level of training or ability.

There are other answers for the problem of overflowing correctional facilities, but the CLP refuses to sit down and talk to anyone to discuss possible solutions. It is ignoring its own Corrections officers. The government continually turns its back on people with expertise and experience who could help it find sensible, smarter and safer solutions to resolve these difficult problems. The government could not even meet with Corrections staff in parliament on Tuesday.

This we-know-better attitude is becoming another hallmark of the CLP government. The government has an aversion to genuine consultation or information sharing. We are seeing pronouncements via media releases containing more spin than a Shane Warne delivery and less substance than a Bianca Censori dress at the Grammys.

We hear from many sectors of our community and stakeholders across the Territory that they were caught by surprise by a CLP announcement that directly impacts their work, community, homes and livelihoods. Stakeholders might be given 24 hours' notice or warning of a briefing, or they are not briefed at all, about significant changes. It utterly flies in the face of the CLP's promise to be transparent and accountable.

This was the case with the interstate private security contractor announcement. Corrections officers and the union that represents them were give no advance notice of this significant change that will have a massive impact on the system. We are talking about underqualified, undertrained individuals with no understanding of the Northern Territory's unique context. They will be thrown into our prisons and expected to keep them safe and secure for inmates and staff alike. I do not in any way throw shade on these individuals, but I have grave concerns about the situations that we will be throwing them into without adequate and proper training.

Even more concerning is that there are underutilised Corrections facilities that could be opened now which are much more suited to managing the current prisoner population, keeping staff safe and costs down. There are better solutions to the problem of the CLP's making. It should start deploying them.

I spoke about the CLP's propensity for spin. I note the Corrections narrative, which CLP members repeat ad nauseum, as though saying it over and again will make it true. They will do anything to deflect from their lack of planning or understanding of the consequences of their actions.

Labor had short, long and medium-term plans for Corrections, and our investment matched. Budget 2024 introduced an additional $191m for Corrections, which included $37m for a standalone therapeutic women's prison in Alice Springs and Darwin; $20m for an interim training centre for male prisoners in Darwin; $93m for custodial services to increase the workforce and expand programs to break the cycle of reoffending, which is not something the CLP prioritises; and full plans to upgrade and refurbish G block in Alice Springs—the maximum-security division.

This investment was on top of a $95m package in the previous year, which allowed for more Corrections staff to be recruited to meet increased demand. We did the work and made the investment to bring on an extra 96 beds in Alice Springs, which the CLP now gammons and claims credit for. When I was the Correctional Services minister for the remaining two years of our term in office, I fully understood the challenges our dedicated Corrections officers were facing. I made it a priority to meet with them regularly, take decisive and defensive action for them and share their concerns.

One of the key initiatives I spearheaded was the opening of the Northern Territory's first-ever bail support accommodation facilities in Alice Springs and Darwin, which have proven to be a tremendous success and continue to make a significant impact.

Additionally, we forged a partnership with Charles Darwin University through a memorandum of understanding to provide essential training and certificate qualifications, equipping our officers and Corrections inmates with skills they need to thrive.

I instructed the Corrections Commissioner to begin a comprehensive review into prison industries and develop a plan to restart these critical services. I know firsthand how important these industries are.

We began work to reform the delivery of health services, with the prison system considering moving to a 24-hour rostered care system and telehealth.

Under my leadership we developed and implemented additional alternatives to custody, built on from the former Corrections minister, Minister Uibo. This achieved impressive outcomes across the Northern Territory. This model is one that the current Corrections minister and Attorney-General should be visiting and expanding to further strengthen our Corrections system.

I heard the Attorney-General claim credit for the expansion of the women's alternative-to-custody facility; that is nonsense. That process was already embarked on under the former government.

The CLP upended a range of well-thought-out areas for improvement to Corrections facilities that were not just about locking up people. They were also about ensuring people in our system had access to support services to help turn around their lives and reduce reoffending. That is all out the window now.

Prisoners are now being held in substandard conditions, with remand inmates in with sentenced inmates. Young people are being taken away from their country and shipped to Darwin, which will set back their chances for rehabilitation. I am interested in whether the Education minister will pay the fines for young children who are held in detention whose educational opportunities have been removed. Aboriginal women, many of whom are suffering from extreme trauma, are stuck in conditions that offer none of the therapeutic supports that they desperately need to get their lives back on track.

As I said in my opening remarks, the CLP has made a big claim on its mandate, and it has claimed to be voted in on a law-and-order mandate. There is no evidence and no data anywhere in the world that suggests holding people in squalid conditions without the mental, social and medical assistance they need will see them return to our community as model citizens. Equally, the situation is deeply unacceptable for our Corrections officers.

Instead of focusing on plans that will ensure safe standards in our Corrections facilities, the CLP is focused on doubling down on a bad idea. CLP members do not listen or consult. They think they know best, and they continue to roll ahead time and again without including people in the community.

Today we heard from the Northern Territory Corrections minister. Those of us who have been in this parliament for a while with the Corrections minister and the Treasurer will ask an important question. They are in a government that claims it needs to lock up more people. The Corrections minister and the Treasurer are on the record as saying jailing is failing, yet everything they are doing is to jail more people. They are aware and, by their own admission, they are further perpetuating their own failures.

I acknowledge the Northern Territory Corrections workforce and the prison association for all the great work they do. The work and advocacy they do drives positive and progressive change. It was changes they came up with that enabled the previous government to make changes in WorkSafe to ensure that Corrections staff were afforded the same protection as other frontline workers when it came to the recognition of PTSD. They do not need to be pulled kicking and screaming to find the hard examples of when they experienced something that gave them post-traumatic stress disorder. That was an important change.

Changes we have seen, including the 96-bed prison accommodation and the G Block upgrade in Alice Springs, came directly from Northern Territory Corrections officers because I, as the minister, was not afraid to meet with them. I will never be afraid to meet with a bunch of individuals and the associations who care about the people of the Northern Territory. I will always meet with the United Workers Union that represents our hardworking prison officers because it is crucial to listen to what it has to say.

Government members say that a lot of their evidence comes from what they have heard on the doors. Why not listen to what the prison officers have to say? They are hardworking Territorians on the front line who have said day-in and day-out that they do not want their industry privatised. They do not want their public sector jobs given away to private industry. They want to be valued and seen. They want the government to

understand that a person cannot just walk into a prison and become a prison officer. That person needs to undergo training by existing officers.

To become a prison officer people have 12 months to complete the relevant training, such as a Certificate III in security and a first aid certificate. There is quality assurance and an evaluation with key performance indicators within Northern Territory Corrections to monitor, evaluate and ensure people achieve those competencies to do it.

The Corrections minister has brought in legislation that is weak because nowhere does it hold the private companies to account to make sure that their contractors have completed the training. There is no mechanism for Northern Territory Corrections to follow up and make sure, apart from being told by the contractor, 'Yeah, mate, she'll be right; she has done it.' That is not okay. It is not being accountable and transparent. It is eroding the profession of being a Northern Territory Corrections worker, a job that many people across the Northern Territory have had great pride in doing for a number of years. It has been a career for many people to work their way up the ranks in the Corrections sector and take on important roles.

This says that the government has no respect for the custodial nature of Corrections. If the government starts doing this now, what is next? Will it be removing superintendents as Corrections officers and bringing in private administration companies to manage the prisons? This is a dark day for Northern Territory Corrections workers because this is the beginning of the erosion of an important workforce, which has said time and again outside this building and in the public domain, 'We have the answers and the solutions. We know how you can improve this system. Listen to us. Give us the opportunity to shape Northern Territory Corrections into the future.'

Let us be under no illusion: Corrections is a big area in the Territory, and it will be an area that needs a lot of reform now and well into the future, However, if you do not include the people who work there in this reform it will not be fit for purpose and deliver the desired outcomes. It is important that we listen to them, respond and act.

Yes, there are things that the government may consider that I will support when appropriate. Minister for Corrections, if you want to bring back prison industries, please talk to the commissioner about the work we started on beefing up and doing a review into industries. I will support that because it is a great idea, but privatising is not okay. There are loopholes around the tort liability of a private Corrections contractor. Could they ignore the advice of the Corrections Commissioner once they are working? If something happens to them in a prison, what will be the process? How will it be measured? These are all issues that we have not been told about.

The government dropped the Bill in this Chamber, then as the minister was speaking sent an email offering a briefing in an hour and 20 minutes' time. How is that being open, transparent and accountable? How does that afford everyone the opportunity to have a say? It does not.

We need to do more because they deserve us to do more. We need to think outside the box. We need to look at the expansion of alternatives to custody. We need to potentially look at, Member for Barkly, having an alternative bail support accommodation facility in the Barkly region. Katherine was always an area where I wanted to see bail support accommodation and look at establishing an alternative to custody or a work camp. It is important stuff.

I say to the Corrections officers in Alice Springs, the Barkly Work Camp, Datjala, the Darwin Correctional Centre and the other staff who are working at the old Berrimah prison: I see you, I hear you and we will work with you on ideas and suggestions that can shape a better Corrections system.

I implore the government to consider using Stringybark and Paperbark as alternative correctional facilities in the interim. One of the things I was passionate about in my limited time working with Corrections and as the minister was that I did not want women inside the Darwin Correctional Centre because they are surrounded by custodial divisions that house men. They are in the middle. It is not right. Planning had started on looking at alternative options because we needed to do it. Stringybark was an appropriate option in the interim—until further master planning was done—where women could have children and babies with them and could engage in therapeutic responses. We could develop prison industries for women, because that is important.

The design of correctional facilities across the Territory has fluctuated over the years. The Alice Springs Correctional Centre was built based on the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, with dorm-style rooms. The Darwin Correctional Centre is different. There are different responses in both facilities because the climate is different.

I give a shout-out to the staff, not just the Corrections workers and custodial staff but all the people in Northern Territory Corrections for all the work they do.

A point of order, Madam Speaker! Pursuant to Standing Order 43, I move an extension of time to continue my remarks.

Motion agreed to.

Mr PAECH: I acknowledge Northern Territory Corrections employees across the whole community, because there are outstanding people doing good work in planning and getting everything ready to support the system. Keeping prisons open is a mammoth task.

When we talk about Corrections officers, it is not only about the officers who are following and watching people in the prisons but also the officers who run the horticulture programs, the kitchen and the laundry and who feed inmates every day. Thousands of meals a day are pumped out through Northern Territory Corrections. They also help when natural disasters hit, setting up safety camps for and giving meals to evacuees. Let us acknowledge them.

I know many people listening to this are doing it hard. I want them to know that it is difficult, but a Territory Labor government, when re-elected, will right the wrong that the CLP is doing today. This is unjust and unnecessary.

I acknowledge the teams who worked on the successful recruitment drives that were undertaken when I was the minister. We worked hard to get the Darwin Correctional Centre staffing up and running. From what I have heard, it is looking pretty good.

Alice Springs has always been a challenge. I know there is good work, and I give a shout-out to the Corrections teams who have done the work feeding into recruitment. There was interstate and international travel to encourage people to consider a career in Northern Territory Corrections, and we had a good success rate from that. It needs to continue.

A lot of that work came from listening to Corrections officers and the unions in regard to targeting groups that we could potentially work with to get them into Northern Territory Correctional Services. This is a good time to acknowledge the contribution they make.

Work has been undertaken through the MOU with Charles Darwin University to train people so that they have the right qualifications to get work when they are released from prison.

Today we are seeing the start of privatisation. You can say what you want about it and how it is not privatising, but it is. Bringing private security firms into prisons to do that job is privatisation.

There has been no consultation with Northern Territory hospitals about the private company employees who will now be sitting outside the room of an inmate who had to go to hospital. We are hearing from the health organisations about that. There were no conversations with any of the local law firms in our communities about the escorts to court.

We also heard that the way this legislation has been worded will provide the opportunity for these contractors to go into the general population of Corrections officers and be in the Corrections environment.

These are areas of great concern about which the government needs to take a long, hard look at itself. We know that will not happen because the Corrections minister has no clue about what he is doing. You do not have to believe me; you can listen to Katie Woolf and the ABC and read the *NT News* and NT Independent about when they spoke to him and he said, ‘We have a plan. We are working on a plan. There is a plan somewhere. I cannot tell you yet about the plan.’ It was because he had not been told what to say by his puppetmaster, the former Northern Territory Correctional Services Commissioner. That is the type of minister the government has—a puppet who does not know what to say until he is told.

Labor will oppose this Bill. Labor will stand with the workers to make sure that this important profession is recognised, valued and is fixed in the future.

Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak on this important debate. I hope many people will take the opportunity to speak on this. I encourage many of you when you leave this parliament not to be

cowardly like the Minister for Corrections; get out and talk to a Northern Territory Corrections worker and the Northern Territory unions …

Mr Maley: You are an embarrassment. You are irrelevant.

Mr PAECH: The Health minister has spoken to the unions. He is probably the only comrade we have on that side. Get out and talk to the people who defend the worker every day …

Mr Maley: Get a little violin out; poor little me.

Mr PAECH: I have hit a nerve—the interjections from the puppet, the Corrections minister. I can see that the strings are being pulled. Yes, he knows what to say. Yes, there he goes …

Mr Maley: I have a little tear for you. You are irrelevant.

Madam SPEAKER: That is enough.

Mr PAECH: Do not be afraid of a Corrections worker. They might look big, strong and tough—they are—but they have a heart and care about people, their work and Territorians and they want you to value them as well. Value them. Talk about it …

Mr Maley: You failed them for eight years.

Mr PAECH: Minister, be honest with your plans. We have heard time and again on Katie Woolf and the ABC and have read on the wonderful NT Independent site that you say, 'I think we have a plan. There is a plan somewhere. I did not bring the plan. Oh, wait, we are working on the plan.'

The government has a plan for a plan, 'We will plan to do a plan. Oh, hang on, I will ring my old mate, "Come back to the Territory. I cannot give you the commissioner's role yet, but come back and we will roll out your plan because your plan under the CLP got us into the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Young People in the Northern Territory".'

We have heard that under a CLP government there will be …

Mr Maley: Under your watch. You were the government—the ALP government. You cannot rewrite history.

Madam SPEAKER: Cease the interjections, please.

Mr PAECH: We have heard loud and clear from concerned residents and family members who have tried to visit a prison and from our union and the Corrections officers that there will be a death in custody because of the conditions the CLP are exposing Territorians to. That only intensifies when you bring in an unqualified workforce to do the job of a hardworking Corrections officer.

Go home, look in the mirror and remind yourself who you represent and what you are here to do. Do not be afraid to reach out when a Corrections officer walks into your electorate office. Do not gammon make out you have a meeting or you are busy, and do not send them off to the Commissioner for Corrections—as you did with the union and now the workers—meet with them and hear what they have to say about their lived experience every day. That is the experience that matters.

You talk about wanting to have things in line with community expectations. People expect to go to work and not have their job undermined. People expect you to value their profession. People expect it to be safe for them to go work and not to work alongside an unqualified workforce that has no accountability. Those private officers cannot even answer questions about whether they have finished their qualifications and have the right qualifications; they do not have to. There is nowhere in the legislation which says that accountability measure must be addressed, other than the Corrections Commissioner asking for it. There is nothing that will compel the commissioner to do so unless it is in the contract, which we will never see.

It is an important conversation to have. Do not be ashamed, be game, and meet with the Corrections staff and the union because they can help reform Corrections.

[A member claps.]

Madam SPEAKER: No clapping. We will have no clapping.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I pick up on the clapping and I want it noted for *Hansard* that was the Corrections Services minister clapping at my speech because he thinks it is so good.

Madam SPEAKER: No, sit down. That is out of order, Member for Gwoja.

Mr PATEL (Casuarina): Madam Speaker, I support the Correctional Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, which is a crucial step in addressing the growing challenges faced by the Corrections system in the Northern Territory. This Bill is not about privatising Corrections; it is about providing the Corrections Commissioner with the necessary tools and flexibility to effectively manage increasing prisoner numbers and ensure the safety and security of our correctional facilities.

Over the past few years we have seen a significant rise in prisoner numbers, putting pressure on our Corrections personnel and resources. Our frontline Corrections officers work tirelessly under demanding conditions to maintain law and order within our facilities. However, as numbers increase so too does the burden on these officers, making it clear that additional support mechanisms are needed.

The Correctional Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 addresses these concerns by introducing special correctional services officers, a new category of trained personnel who can be appointed by the commissioner to assist in the operations of our Corrections system. These officers will include special correctional officers, who will provide additional support in custodial facilities to ensure that frontline officers are not overwhelmed, and special probation and parole officers, who will assist in managing community-based offenders to ensure better monitoring and rehabilitation outcomes.

Let us be clear that this is not a step towards privatising our correctional services. These special officers will be appointed based on their skills, qualifications and experience, and will operate under the direct authority of the commissioner. They are an extension of our Corrections workforce, not a replacement. Their role is to support, not supplant, our dedicated public Corrections officers.

The introduction of special correctional services officers is responsible and necessary reform to ensure that our Corrections staff remain focused on their primary duties inside the prisons, rather than being stretched thin by court appearances, hospital bed sitting and prisoner transfers.

These essential services will now be reinforced without compromising security or staff wellbeing. For example, consider a scenario when a sudden surge in prisoner numbers at a facility demands additional security personnel. Under the current system, as the Member for Gwoja said, it can take months to recruit and train new officers, leaving existing staff stretched thin. By allowing the commissioner to appoint special correctional officers on an as-needed basis we ensure our facilities remain secure and functional without unnecessary delays.

Furthermore, this Bill will ensure that our highly trained Corrections officers remain in prisons focusing on their core duties instead of being diverted to tasks like escorting prisoners to hospitals or court appearances. Currently, officers are often pulled away from their critical roles inside correctional facilities to handle these external duties, impacting security and operational efficiency. By appointing special correctional services officers we ensure that our frontline staff can concentrate on maintaining order within prisons.

A real-life example of this issue occurred recently when an urgent hospital transfer required multiple Corrections officers to leave their post, creating temporary staff shortages inside the facility. With the special correctional services officers in place such a situation will be managed effectively without compromising security within our prisons.

Additionally, this Bill will ease the burden on our overworked staff, ensuring that they are not overstretched or forced to work excessive hours which can lead to burnout. By providing additional personnel we are prioritising the health and safety of our Corrections staff, ensuring that they can perform their duties effectively without unnecessary stress or fatigue.

Our probation and parole services are crucial in reducing recidivism. Overworked officers struggle to provide the necessary oversight and rehabilitation guidance for offenders reintegrating into our society and communities. Special probation and parole officers will help fill these gaps, improving supervision and ensuring compliance with conditions, ultimately reducing reoffending rates.

This Bill will reflect our government's commitment to strengthening law and order. It aligns with our action 2025 plan, which is focused on providing certainty and safety for Territorians. As a government we have a duty to support our Corrections system and make the necessary changes to ensure its effectiveness. This

Bill is a clear demonstration of our proactive approach to reducing crime, reinforcing the importance of taking real action rather than standing idle.

We must assure Territorians that we are committed to their safety; that means making the necessary legislative changes to strengthen our Corrections system. This Bill is just one part of the broader strategy to tackle crime, ensure accountability and uphold community safety.

I acknowledge the concerns raised regarding privatisation. I reaffirm that this legislation is about enhancing public safety, not replacing our dedicated Corrections officers. We will continue to work closely with the United Workers Union, Corrections staff and all stakeholders to ensure that our workforce remains strong, supported and focused on delivering safe and effective correctional services.

I commend this Bill to the House and urge all members to support this essential reform for the safety of our communities and the effectiveness of our Corrections system.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I oppose the Correctional Services Legislation Amendment Bill that will allow untrained probationary Corrections officers to work in our prisons. In the brief time that has been available to try to understand this Bill, it appears to me that it is an utterly reckless proposal that will only serve to undermine the safety and security of our prisons and, more importantly, our whole community.

This Bill is being rushed through with urgency, bypassing the usual scrutiny and debate. There is a crucial distinction we must make in this House between addressing urgent issues and pushing motions through on urgency. Yes, the issues we face in our prison system are urgent, and it is our duty to confront them with the seriousness they deserve. However, the concept of urgency should never be confused with rushing decisions. Moving motions through on urgency means bypassing the critical processes that ensure that the laws we pass are well considered, effective and in the best interests of our people. Urgency should not be about cutting corners or circumventing proper deliberation.

When we do that we risk making decisions that may have unintended or foreseeable negative consequences or, worse, laws that fail to address the root causes of our issues. Addressing issues requires time, consultation with experts and careful evaluation of the potential impacts of our decisions. This is not something that we can afford to rush.

We are expected to make a critical decision about the safety of our prison system, yet we are not being given the time or opportunity to properly evaluate its potential consequences. The government is presenting this legislation as part of a Corrections master plan, but make no mistake: there is no real plan here. We are seeing a hasty attempt to patch a system in crisis without addressing the root causes of the problems that we face.

As the minister said this morning, the Northern Territory prison system is in crisis. Overcrowding, understaffing and inadequate facilities have led to a situation where prisoners are being held in conditions that are unfit for human beings. Reports indicate that up to 80 individuals are being held in police watch houses, using makeshift cells that do not meet the basic requirements for humane detention.

Instead of addressing these critical issues, the government's response is to introduce untrained Corrections officers into the system. This is not a solution; it is an unsafe gamble. By allowing probationary officers with no proper training to be deployed in prisons, the government is creating a situation where both inmates and staff are at greater risk.

This Bill is one of the broadest pieces of legislation I have ever seen. I note again that I saw this Bill for the first time yesterday morning. With the totally inadequate time that has been available I make the following comments.

Under this Bill it is entirely at the discretion of the commissioner to allow private security guards with no minimum qualifications to work in our prison system. It is entirely at the discretion of the commissioner whether they appoint a person. They must be satisfied that this person has the qualifications, skills or experience, but this is a subjective assessment by one person. There is no preset standard that the commissioner needs to apply. There is no transparency of how the appropriate qualifications will be determined.

The minister said that these officers will be providing a taxi service, but there is no limit on what they will be doing. Private contractors will be able to hold any correctional officer role in the system, including parole

officers in the community. In fact, under this Bill there are huge powers bestowed on these untrained private contractors.

The commissioner can exempt special probationary officers from critical requirements concerning the use of force. This exemption could lead to a situation where there are no meaningful protections in place for prisoners regarding humane treatment, effectively undermining basic safety principles of dignity and respect, including the use of physical force, restraints and weapons. We cannot take this lightly.

It appears that the contractors will have all the powers but none of the accountability of normal Corrections officers. Private providers are not subject to the same transparency and accountability mechanisms as government departments. How will we be keeping these people accountable?

I am concerned that this could open the door to serious human rights violations, as it will allow people in these positions of authority to make arbitrary decisions that will directly impact on the wellbeing and safety of incarcerated individuals. There is no clarity provided on how complaints can be made about these Corrections officers. This is highly alarming.

The union representing these workers has not been consulted, and workers are deeply concerned about the risks this creates for themselves and the prisoners for whom they are responsible. The workers are so concerned that they came to Parliament House because the minister had not gone to them.

Untrained officers cannot be expected to manage the complexities of prison life, which include de-escalating volatile situations, identifying mental health concerns and enforcing regulations that ensure safety for everyone.

This proposal is not a reform; it is a cost-cutting measure that puts everyone at risk and will ultimately make our prisons and our whole community less secure, not more secure.

Even more concerning is the lack of a comprehensive plan. The so-called Corrections master plan seems to be nothing more than a set of half-baked proposals that fail to address the core issues facing our Corrections system. We need a proper strategy to tackle overcrowding, improve prison conditions and address severe staff shortages. We do not need legislation that dilutes training standards and puts unqualified individuals into an already volatile environment.

The government's approach shows a fundamental failure to recognise that prisons are not just places for punishment; they are also places for rehabilitation. The role of a Corrections officer is to not only manage security but also help facilitate rehabilitation, maintain order and ensure that individuals who are incarcerated are treated humanely.

If we are serious about addressing the root causes of crime and improving community safety—as I have heard the CLP say, and which I welcome—we need well-trained professionals, not an influx of unqualified individuals who have not been adequately prepared for the challenges that they will face.

We must consider the consequences of this decision carefully. In an environment as fraught with tension and risk as a prison, the presence of untrained officers will only escalate the potential for violence towards inmates and other staff members. The chaos and potential for harm that this move will introduce cannot be understated, as this system already struggles with overcrowding and insufficient resources. Moreover, this move undermines the professionalism of Corrections officers, devaluing the important work they do.

Like others in this Chamber, I express my great appreciation for the work that our hardworking Corrections staff do. I recognise that they are stretched, and we need to do whatever we can do to support them.

Corrections officers are not simply security guards; they are trained professionals who play a vital role in looking after the people in our care. This Bill will strip away the standards that ensure Corrections officers are equipped to carry out this difficult and often dangerous work.

This Bill is not a solution to the crisis in our Corrections system; it is a hasty and dangerous shortcut that risks the safety of everyone involved—staff, inmates and the public. The lack of a real plan from the government is clear. If we were truly serious about addressing the issues in NT Corrections, we would be focusing on meaningful reform, improving training, addressing overcrowding, ensuring humane conditions and creating pathways for rehabilitation.

I urge this Assembly to reject this Bill and to demand a comprehensive and thoughtful approach to Corrections reform that prioritises the safety of everyone—those locked up in our prison system, those who

work in our prison system and our whole community. We cannot afford to rush this through without considering the consequences.

The Member for Mulka is unable to speak on this Bill this afternoon, so he asked that I read some of his speech on his behalf. He says:

'This Bill places a lot of pressure and responsibility on the Corrections Commissioner and essentially gives one person the power to make decisions about what training Corrections, probation and parole officers can have in the workplace. I do not believe this is good enough.

'Corrections officers hold a lot of power in their positions. They are allowed to use physical force, restraints and weapons.

'There should be clear requirements in these roles for the training and qualifications that people hold. There should be clear requirements for working with people who have mental health issues, FASD and other issues. Cross-cultural training should be given. Much of the prisoner population are First Nations people from many different cultures, and the majority of prisoners may speak an Aboriginal language as their first language. There should be de-escalation and harmony training. I believe that the current Corrections officers are expected to have a Certificate III or IV in Correctional Practice.

'I am worried about the condition of the Corrections facilities. We hear terrible things about people who are being held for months in watch houses where they cannot leave their cell. They are not allowed outside in the fresh air.

'The *NT News* reported the story from Alice Springs where women were fed three Weet-Bix and six sugars to be mixed with water from the tap above the cistern on the toilet—a toilet that was being used by 20 people and could hardly be clean.

'The conditions that we are hearing about are human rights abuses. The Chief Minister said in the media last week:

> *We won't be putting air conditioning in or making it a luxurious destination …*

'No-one expects a luxurious destination, but we expect it to be humane. When 20 people are stuck in a cell together during rolling lockdowns and heatwaves, I expect that there will be some relief from the heat. I expect, as the Ombudsman recommended in 2022, air conditioning to be provided in cells.

'The Chief Minister also said:

> *This is a prison for people who have done the wrong thing.*

'That is not correct. The answer to Written Question 40 show that almost 50% of people are being detained on remand awaiting their court hearings; they have not been convicted of a crime. They are waiting for over six months in poor conditions to have their case heard and, at that point, their case may be thrown out or they may be found not guilty. Even if they are found guilty, they may have exceeded the time in jail that they would be sentenced to.

'The answer to Written Question 40 also states that 89% of people in prison on 8 January were Aboriginal people.

'The members of government need to note that not since the federal intervention have we seen such poor laws and policies for Aboriginal people.

'The criminals people see on our streets now are the children of the intervention. We want a pathway that leads them out of the darkness that the intervention brought; a movement towards self-determination and a pathway that gives them hope so that they can find out who they really are and become that person. Instead, with the current government policies they will become the incarcerated generation.

'I note that today is Sorry Day, a day when we remember the Stolen Generation. We remember the damage that was done to First Nations people by the government policy of child removal.

'What will this government be known for? What will its legacy be? Will it be equally as racist and inhumane as the Stolen Generation legacy or will it be a legacy of partnership and respect for self-determination, a pathway that brings hope for our future?

'We want to work together. This is what treaty is all about. It is a diplomatic space where we can make a plan for the future together.

'The standards and conditions of the jails are in decline and it is a human rights abuse. This law will also allow for a further decline in conditions for detainees and workers. It opens the potential to have poorly trained officers in the facilities. This is unsafe for the current employees and the detainees.

'It also creates questions about where the commissioner will find these new special officers. What will be the cost of these special officers? How will they be held accountable? If they are not NT Government employees, what is the discipline process? What is the complaint process against a special officer? None of these questions have been answered, and it sounds as though these things are being made up on the spot.

'This government has created a crisis. It is blaming the former government. I agree that all former governments have contributed to this problem. However, this government holds all the power; it has the decision-making power and resources to improve the current situation.

'I want more effort put into alternative programs to prison, such as programs on country and rehabilitation. I am not saying that there should be no consequences for unlawful behaviour. I come from a culture that holds a *Makarrata* ceremony to ensure there is justice when an individual and the community have been wronged. I believe in holding people accountable, but this government is not getting it right.

'Many current detainees could be diverted to programs that would help them and immediately take the pressure off the Corrections system. The current situation of jailing everyone in poor conditions will not bring good outcomes for the community.

'I urge the government to rethink the way it is approaching the problems that our community faces. Employ qualified program workers, community peacekeepers, community mediators, social workers and case workers instead of correctional officers; put resources into remote communities; help elders and leaders to restore *raypirri* education programs; resource healing camps for people with addictions; and resource housing in homelands. Work with us for community-based solutions and this crisis will be alleviated.

'I will also comment on the minister's comments this week. He said, "If you do not want to go to jail, do not commit the crime; it is pretty simple." It is easy for members of parliament to say things like that, but until you address the underlying issues that lead to crime—such as poverty, inequity and the real issues we have experienced through government interventions that have ongoing impacts on our people—I think we can say that it is actually not simple.

'This government does not want to recognise systemic racism, but it is there in what is said in this Chamber and what is experienced in the real world.

'When the elders and leaders of our community are disempowered in an ongoing way and our people see this every day, there are side effects. How many elders said, 'Please bring truancy officers to our communities. Please bring people who do not speak our language or understand our culture to hand out fines'?

'What elders are really saying is, "Come sit with us. Let us work out these problems together." However, we must weather wave after wave of governments that say, "We know what is right for you". Most often, these waves of policies are damaging. Many people have become lost and turn to drugs, gambling and other issues.

'There are also many of us who try, despite the poverty and disempowerment, to lead our people. We stand up every day and encourage our people to be strong Yolngu, maintain self-discipline and be proud, but, sadly, many people have lost hope and they do not know what to do.

'This government needs to understand that we have done all the work. I speak English fluently, and I have come to government to work with you, but what have you done? Do you speak a First Nations language? Have you come to understand our law and culture?

'The process of jailing Aboriginal people is not "pretty simple"; it is a complicated issue because there are many layers that need to be looked at carefully so that we can truly fix crime by fixing the underlying issues.'

Mr EDGINGTON (Health): Mr Deputy Speaker, I support the amendments to the *Correctional Services Act*.

There has been a substantial increase in the adult prisoner population since we were elected, as we take action to get the Labor crisis under control. The crime crisis has been going on for the last eight years, prior to the CLP coming to government. It is worthwhile to look at past crime statistics to give us a sense of what went on before the CLP came into government. The year-on-year statistics from 2016 to 2024 give us an idea of the crime crisis we are talking about.

It is clear to me that Labor had no plan to deal with crime and genuinely had no idea what it was doing when it came to addressing crime. The Northern Territory-wide statistics over that eight-year period show alcohol-related assaults were up by 37.91%; domestic violence assaults, which we have spoken about a couple of times this week, were up by 82%; property damage offences were up by 35%; total property offences were up by 23%; house break-ins were up by 106%; commercial break-ins were up by 28%; total offences against the person were up by 59%; serious offences like robbery, extortion and related offences were up by 343%; homicide and related offences were up by 40%; acts intended to cause injury were up by 62%; sexual assaults were up by 17%; and dangerous or negligent acts were up by 45%. Territorians were faced with those statistics under eight years of the previous incompetent Labor government.

In Darwin alone the statistics show that over the eight-year period of Labor's mismanagement of the crime crisis domestic violence assaults were up by 97.62%; alcohol-related assaults were up by 30%; total assaults were up by 55%; house break-ins were up by 49%; and robbery and serious offences were up by 330%.

In Palmerston domestic violence assaults over eight years rose by 182%; alcohol-related assaults rose by 159%; total offences against the person were up by 124%; and serious offences like robbery and extortion were up by 350%. Everyone in the Chamber is starting to get a picture of the crime crisis we faced coming into government.

In Alice Springs over that eight-year period domestic violence assaults were up by 69%; total property offences were up by 64%; and house break-ins were up by a staggering 241%. This confirms that Labor members had no plan and genuinely no idea what they were doing when it came to crime.

In Katherine under that eight-year period of Labor government commercial break-ins were up by 167%; house break-ins were up by 201%; and serious offences such as robbery and extortion were up by 1,100%.

In Tennant Creek, where I live, alcohol-related assaults over that eight years were up by 57%; domestic violence assaults were up by 101%; total offences against the person were up by 80%; and house break-ins were up by 243%. These are staggering offence statistics.

The crime crisis has placed pressure on the Corrections system. It was interesting to listen to the Treasurer make a strong point during his roadshow—I think in parliament too—that if you invest 1% in police you need to invest 1.5% in the justice system. Clearly, Labor failed to invest in the justice system. We have been faced with a crime crisis, but at the same time Labor clearly failed to invest in the Corrections and justice system.

This paints a picture of where we are at now, with underinvestment not only in the Corrections system. There has been underinvestment in infrastructure and in the most key resource we need to run many systems in the Northern Territory—that is, the staff who operate these systems. Labor has truly let down Territorians and our hardworking Corrections officers.

Unlike Labor the CLP government is not soft on crime. We will continue to do whatever it takes to reduce crime and have Territorians feel safe in their homes. As the Deputy Chief Minister made clear, if you break the law we will find a bed for you.

The pressures that have increased prisoner numbers are having an impact on our hardworking Corrections staff. These changes to the Act have been introduced to provide support to Territory Corrections officers. We have heard of our staff working long hours doing overtime and call backs. To support our troops we need to bolster our resources on the ground to manage the increased prisoner numbers.

Although there has been an increase in numbers since we came to government, over the last eight years there was a gradual increase in prisoner numbers because of Labor's failure to address the crime crisis. As

the shadow minister for Corrections when we were in opposition, I have a good understanding of how this impacts on daily operations and how difficult it is for our Corrections officers to manage.

Despite what the Member for Gwoja spruiked, this government is committed to backing our Corrections officers and staff and ensuring their safety. These amendments to the legislation will provide the mechanism to appoint special correctional officers and special probation and parole officers to supplement, not replace, the existing workforce to meet operational needs and manage overcrowding. These changes to the Bill will give the Corrections Commissioner the ability to second Corrections staff from other states and territories, as well as engage with the private sector to deliver some of the services.

There has been criticism and indications that some of the staff coming in may not have skills or qualifications. However, new section 25B says:

> *The Commissioner may appoint a person to be a special correctional officer if the Commissioner is satisfied the person has the qualifications, skills or experience to properly perform the functions of a special correctional officer.*

If somebody on that side of the Chamber can tell me a better person to make that decision I will listen to them. However, there is no better-placed person than the commissioner in charge of the Corrections system to make the decision about whether a person has the qualifications, skills or experience to undertake that role.

People on the other side can criticise as much as they want. We know that they do not have confidence in the Commissioner for Corrections, but I can assure them that our government does. That is why he is in the position and why we are giving him additional powers and the authority to take on a person who has the qualifications, skills or experience to properly perform the functions of a special correctional officer. If those opposite have doubts about the commissioner, which they obviously do, why not step up and say it?

These secondments are not new. In fact, the Police Commissioner recently seconded officers from South Australia to assist police in Alice Springs, which realised unprecedented arrest results. In addition to seconding experienced correctional officers the operating model proposed for the Northern Territory will give the commissioner options to use private providers in the way that they are used elsewhere in Australia, such as Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales and Western Australia.

With these amendments Corrections will have the flexibility to manage any increase in prisoner numbers and, importantly, manage the high number of medical escorts required. Corrections has to rely on using staff on overtime to get prisoners to medical appointments and to hospital. I understand that 160,000 hours of overtime was incurred in undertaking medical and outpatient escorts in 2023–24. As prisoner numbers increase there will be greater demand for this type of activity because many of our prisoner cohort require a lot of medical care that cannot be delivered within correctional centres.

A lot of misinformation has been circulating, primarily from the United Workers Union and its secretary, Erina Early. I am a little confused because my colleague the Corrections minister told me that we are short of Corrections officers, yet Ms Early told Mix 104.9's Katie Woolf in a radio interview this week that there are plenty of staff in Darwin; it is a lack of Corrections infrastructure, as there are not enough beds in correctional facilities. If that is the case, why did the Department of Corrections incur nearly $22m in overtime in the last financial year? If there are plenty of staff, why are we spending so much money on overtime? It does not add up.

Ms Early said that it is not a lack of Corrections staff but a lack of beds in correctional facilities. If there are plenty of staff, why did Ms Early tell the Corrections minister on 11 November last year that Corrections was 20 to 30 staff short? When she spoke with Mix 104.9 she said that there are plenty of staff in Darwin. I do not know what this means. It must be that if Ms Early is right there has been a huge increase in the number of staff since she last spoke to the Corrections minister on 11 November 2024.

It seems to me that Ms Early, who is a former Labor Party president, has been peddling misinformation since the changes to the legislation were announced. That is disgraceful. There is no other way to describe it. She should be ashamed of herself.

We must ask: why was the United Workers Union not protesting about prisoner numbers in 2018, 2019, 2020 and so on? I have outlined the crime statistics, so we know that prisoner numbers were increasing over the eight years of Labor government. Crime rates in the Northern Territory are the highest they have ever been,

which has been reflected in the prison system. Why wait until this week—after the union asked the commissioner for relief for its members and a solution was offered—for the protest to begin?

Why are we surprised, given Ms Early is just another union thug backed by the Labor Party? To give an insight into how Ms Early operates, she sent an email to members in March 2023 regarding the enterprise agreement. In part, her email states, 'Thank you to all the members for your patience as the last few days have been a rollercoaster of swear words, hostile phone calls and Oscar-worthy tantrums'. Swear words, hostile phone calls and Oscar-worthy tantrums—there you have it, in her own words.

In the Chamber this week the Labor opposition tried to lecture us about integrity. As well as Erina Early's appalling behaviour, we know that the Labor opposition is more interested in sticking up posters in the men's toilets on the fifth floor of this building, rather than dealing with the Corrections crisis that Labor created over the last eight years. There is no place for Erina Early and the unions to act the way they have on such a serious issue.

Our government is here to support our incredibly hardworking Corrections officers. I can assure you that we will do it without any Oscar-worthy tantrums.

Ms Uibo: You will do it without meeting with them too. How will you do that?

Mr EDGINGTON: We have been supporting our Corrections officers. We value the work they do 24 hours a day, seven days a week, on the front line to deliver for Territorians.

Ms Uibo: But you will not meet with them.

Mr EDGINGTON: I thank every Corrections officer out there and acknowledge the hard work they are doing.

Ms Uibo: Maybe you should be the Attorney-General and Corrections minister.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, desist.

Mr EDGINGTON: You are being misled by Ms Erina Early and the Labor opposition. The crime stats speak for themselves; there was the failure of Labor to deliver the infrastructure over the last eight years.

The Member for Gwoja said that there are facilities we should simply open up. Member for Gwoja, where are the facilities that we should simply open up? You cannot make those statements without any evidence to back them up. This is just more ramble by Labor members trying to put together a scenario to suit their agenda. There are no facilities to simply open up.

We have come to government and taken over the mess that Labor left behind. We are trying to fix the Corrections system. We are trying to work with every staff member who was disadvantaged by the Labor government over the last eight years. We value the work that staff members do. We will support every Corrections officer and give them every opportunity to be supported by new staff.

I have full confidence in the commissioner, who Labor employed and is now critical of. We back him. He is the one who will make the decision about whether somebody has the experience, skills and ability to do the job. There is no better person in the Corrections system to do that than the commissioner. Not one person opposite has told me of a better person to make that decision.

Ms Uibo: We were worried you mob were going to sack him.

Mr EDGINGTON: If there is, who is it, Leader of the Opposition? You do not know and do not care. We back the commissioner. He will make the right decision on behalf of his staff and the Territorians who are being affected by the mess that you left behind after the last eight years.

Ms Uibo: The CLP will sack him; that is what your mob will do.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Direct your comments through the Chair, please.

Ms Uibo: Your mob will sack him. That is why we are worried.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, desist, please.

Mr EDGINGTON: The Member for Gwoja said that he wanted to establish an alternative-to-custody facility in the Barkly. Why did he not do that? He had eight years to establish facilities around the Territory, but he did nothing to build more facilities or employ more staff. He let down the Corrections system and our frontline workers. We are trying to fix the mess that was left behind by the incompetent Labor government.

The Member for Gwoja said that he wanted to build an alternative-to-custody facility in the Barkly. One of the initiatives in the Barkly Regional Deal signed on 13 April 2019 was to build an alternative-to-custody facility for young people. We are nearly six years down the track, and it still has not been built. Labor committed $5.5m to build this facility.

Since coming to government, the Corrections minister and I have visited that facility to ensure it is being fast-tracked to bring it online to support Territorians. It has taken the CLP to come into government to do that because of the incompetence and the failures since 13 April 2019 when the Barkly Regional Deal was signed. Today the Labor members are talking about what they wanted to do and what they might have done. All they did was set the Corrections system behind by eight years. They had the chance to do it when they came to government in 2016.

We are eight years behind, with crime out of control, more prisoners in custody and a former Labor government that failed to address the situation we find ourselves in. Labor failed; it had no plan and genuinely no idea what to do. That is why we are trying to support our frontline workers by giving them the resources and assistance they need to get on with the job.

It was not just the alternative-to-custody facility in the Barkly. On 13 April 2019 Labor said that it would build a new watch house in Tennant Creek. These are the facilities the Member for Gwoja said that he wanted to build. In April 2019 the former Labor government said that it would build a watch house …

Mr Maley: They built the Nightcliff Police Station.

Mr EDGINGTON: That is probably right; $12.7m went into the Nightcliff Police Station.

Eva Lawler was the Infrastructure minister in 2023. She announced in 2023 that Labor would build a watch house in Tennant Creek. It had already been announced on 13 April 2019, but she came out in 2023 and said, 'We will build a watch house'. I thought that was great. Twelve months later the same media release was rolled out by Eva Lawler, saying that she would build a watch house in Tennant Creek.

Labor announced three times that it would build a new watch house in Tennant Creek. Guess what? Not one shovel hit the ground, but we have a nice shiny building in Nightcliff that Labor calls a police station. It has no cells. How do we have operational police there when the facilities do not exist? It is just a shiny building with the word 'Police' put on it. It was nothing more than a stunt by the Labor government.

Imagine how the $12.7m committed to that project could have been spent. It could have been spent on increasing staff in Corrections. Labor members put their money into a shiny building that has been of no assistance to anybody in the Northern Territory and failed to invest in infrastructure for our Corrections staff. They also failed to invest in staff to support the Corrections staff who are overworked and doing many hours of overtime.

We have a solution to support those hardworking Corrections officers. We have put the responsibility on the commissioner, who was employed by Labor. We support the commissioner and have full confidence that he will employ the right people with the right experience, skills and ability to do the job. That is what this legislation is all about.

It is high time that Labor stopped playing politics. It is high time that the union got on with its job and stopped playing politics. It is the first time we have heard from the union since we came into government. Where was the union when the Labor government was causing the crime crisis that put pressure on the Corrections system and failing to invest in staff and infrastructure? The union was probably in a meeting with the now Opposition Leader talking about how to release prisoners from custody, causing more crime and chaos for Territorians.

The Labor government released prisoners rather than investing in infrastructure and staff. Its solution was to release prisoners, putting the safety of everyday Territorians at risk.

Today those opposite are doing nothing other than playing politics. Get on with it. This is about increasing staff and supporting staff on the front line. The opposition heard our Corrections plan. We are investing in

the infrastructure needed to move the Corrections system ahead. I urge the people on the other side to have a good think about what happened over the last eight years. Think about how we got to where we are and what this legislation will achieve. I urge the opposition to support this legislation.

I support this legislation and commend this Bill to the Assembly.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Mr Deputy Speaker, we are here due to decades of mismanagement, underfunding and a total failure by all governments to address the drivers of crime.

Protecting workers and ensuring their workplaces are safe should be a priority in this Assembly. We heard a lot about the United Workers Union today. That union has 100% membership. When you have a problem in a workplace or are trying to sort it out, where do you go first? The workers. Obviously, this can be difficult sometimes; in workplaces you may have two different unions that overlap, and some people may not be unionised. However, in this instance we have a workforce where every person is a member of one union. They have 100% support of their secretary.

Mr Maley: That is not true.

K McNAMARA: It is; it is a 100% unionised workforce.

Mr Maley: That is not true; check your facts. What about probation officers? What about Community Corrections?

A member: I know plenty of officers who are not members of the union.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Standing Order 20; the Deputy Chief Minister continues to interrupt the Member for Nightcliff.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is a valid point of order. Please desist, Deputy Chief Minister.

K McNAMARA: The Corrections officers—in here everyone keeps using their name and their safety for their own political points—say that they do not want these changes. They are seriously concerned by the threats to their own safety that these amendments pose. I have talked with the United Workers Union representatives and they told me that the Minister for Corrections did not consult with the union or the officers and have ignored their calls, emails and any attempts to contact him.

Ms Uibo: Shame.

K McNAMARA: This government has lied to our community, stating:

> *We have listened to the workforce, which is why we are making changes …*

Ms Uibo: Shame.

K McNAMARA: This is untrue …

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, stop interjecting, thank you.

K McNAMARA: The Minister for Corrections noted in a media release:

> *… the reality is that recruiting and training skilled corrections staff is a time-intensive process.*

It takes time to recruit appropriate staff and ensure they are appropriately trained for this challenging role. For some reason the minister believes that a pen stroke appointing untrained private security officers will solve the problem.

In the proposed amendments, section 25B(1) states:

> *The Commissioner may appoint a person to be a special correctional officer if the Commissioner is satisfied the person has the qualifications, skills or experience to properly perform the functions of a special correctional officer.*

There is no other guidance for the commissioner in determining what skills are considered satisfactory. Further, section 25B(3) states:

> *A special correctional officer is not a public sector employee by virtue of the officer's appointment as a special correctional officer.*

This betrays the public expectation that taxpayer-funded workers be required to act in the interests of the public, not to mention the commissioner's unfettered discretion to fire these workers whenever they want.

Knowing how to de-escalate situations, keep inmates safe, act in culturally appropriate ways and build a genuine and appropriate rapport with incarcerated people to assist in their rehabilitation is not something you can do without training. Without this training it creates a dangerous environment for all people in prisons, including the workers.

The Minister for Corrections has tried to downplay the roles that these untrained and unqualified private security guards will be playing, stating that they will be responsible for:

> *… prisoner transport, escort services between Correctional Centres, health and hospital appointments, electric monitoring, and compliance activities.*

However, the union has corrected the record, stating that many of these roles, especially the transportation ones, are the most risky and are usually reserved for senior experienced officers. This dangerous move by the CLP is endangering the lives of our community, including those incarcerated.

Section 25B(2) states:

> *A special correctional officer may exercise the powers and perform the functions of a correctional officer under this … Act …*

There is no guarantee in the Bill that the contractors will have the same qualifications as our Corrections officers, so even without the appropriate qualifications these officers would have the full powers of Corrections officers. This includes the ability to approved firearms, weapons or restraints as per section 139. The CLP has tried to act as though there will be restrictions upon these special correctional officers, yet they are allowed to have the full powers of a Corrections officer, with it being once again at the discretion of the commissioner whether there are any restrictions. This is entirely inappropriate.

Alongside this, the special correctional officers whilst having the powers of an actual Corrections officer could, under the commissioner's discretion, not be bound by the limitations outlined in the *Correctional Services Act*.

The United Workers Union, Corrections staff and I are deeply concerned that this is the first step towards the privatisation of our prisons. The Queensland Crime and Corruption Commission strongly criticised similar moves by the Queensland Government in 2018, stating:

> *This marketised approach, where prisons are operated by private, profit-driven organisations, disconnects the State from direct responsibility for the delivery of privately operated prisons.*

We all know that the Northern Territory has a terrible history and continuing legacy of abuse and neglect in our prisons. This move towards privatising our prisons is clearly the government's attempt to wash its hands of this responsibility and to allow abuse to run rampant in the Territory.

Further concerns include the fact that in the proposed amendments there are no limitations on the number of non-public sector employees without proper training in our prisons. I am sure the Minister for Corrections is aware that the Corrections officer enterprise agreement expires in December this year. This means that should officers attempt to negotiate any wage increases or improved working conditions the department could refuse and turn entirely to this private workforce. To say that the government is doing this to support workers while its knows this to be the case is a disgrace.

There is nothing in this Bill that safeguards the ongoing employment of our public service Corrections officers and stops the commissioner from replacing the entire Corrections workforce with contractors. The union knows this, and its members are rightly furious.

I remind you that this whole problem is manufactured by the CLP. Its tough-on-crime approach does nothing to prevent crime or recidivism and is costing taxpayers and is now risking the lives of Corrections staff and inmates.

This Bill is poorly designed with far too much uncertainty. This is a deliberate move to undercut our current unionised Corrections workers. If the CLP had listened to Corrections staff to address the problems that they face and worked with them on a solution, I could have been open to supporting this, but in this format I will not be supporting this Bill.

Mr YAN (Treasurer): Madam Speaker, I support the Bill brought to this Chamber by the Corrections minister. I have heard some interesting things in debate today. I do not support most of them.

I am probably the only person in here who can speak with any authority on this subject. People who think they know about correctional services, Corrections officers and what takes place behind the wire, need to have a good, hard, long look at themselves.

When officers on the front line are short-staffed, two of them are running a yard with 250 prisoners, and they have no backup because the government has been unable to recruit, they do back-to-back shifts for 10, 12 or 14 days—I know officers who have worked 30 days straight—to back their mates in the Corrections area so that there are at least people on the ground to get those prisoners out of the cells. That is what they do; correctional staff and officers work extremely hard to ensure that the people they are responsible for are kept safe. They do their best so that prisoners can have their maximum out-of-cell time so that they are not put in situations that are not that great.

I have been on the front line and worked those days with my mates. I always had the backup of those mates. However, I can tell you that if there was the opportunity to get in some relief to help so that I could have a day off to spend with my family, I would have taken it.

When I was the general manager for the prison in Alice Springs I would have considered this option had it been open to me, because I had staff who were working their guts out day after day to look after and protect the people in their care so that they could get time out of their cells. These people were forgoing time with their families, working up to 18 hours a day and doing back-to-back shifts. If I had the opportunity back then to bring in staff from outside NT Correctional Services to provide that relief so that my staff had their days off and time at home with their families, so they were not worked into the ground, I would have taken it.

It is farcical to say that the people we may get from interstate to come and help are not qualified. The people who say that have no idea what they are talking about. There is a national Certificate III in Correctional Practice that is recognised across this country. To work in a correctional service, you generally must have at a minimum a Certificate III or IV. To say that these people are not qualified is a disgrace and a joke; you do not know what you are talking about.

This issue has been a long time coming. Even when I was still in Corrections in 2018 we were pressuring the government, saying that we did not have enough staff and needed more people, facilities and beds. Sadly, one thing was certain—prisoner numbers were escalating. What did the Labor government do? It is simple; it did very little.

I listened to the Member for Gwoja's input. He is probably the only other person in this Chamber who can speak with a little authority about Corrections, as he worked there for a while and worked with me.

He claims that the former government did all this work and expanded prison industries. I do not think he is quite correct in saying that—although he may have been the Attorney-General at the time and had responsibility for Corrections—because I was in the facility when Labor took government in 2016, and the first thing that happened was industries went backwards. They were defunded and the ability to do stuff in the community ceased.

The expansion of industries was done under the former CLP government. I was there in the middle of it, doing that work to expand prison industries to give people opportunities because it is not just about education and programs; it is also about vocational education, work readiness and self-esteem.

From those programs we implemented between 2012 and 2016 we started to see a huge drop in recidivism in those offenders who were engaged within prison industries. If my memory serves me correctly, in that cohort the drop was nearly 22% from the average, which back in those days was about 48%.

Therefore, it is a joke for the Member for Gwoja to say that the former Labor government did all this work to expand prison industries because Labor shut it down.

By not investing in Corrections, we see the issues the Corrections system faces now. I feel for my colleagues within Corrections because they are working hard, doing all those hours to support their mates.

There is a bit of fallacy and a misleading of this parliament taking place because a few people have said that 100% of the workforce is in the union. That is not true because, trust me, I know plenty of Corrections officers and, although some of them are in the union, quite a number choose not to be in the union. It is not that they do not support their colleagues; Corrections is a family and everybody supports everybody.

Going back to the core issue, the Member for Gwoja said that Corrections officers are doing tens of thousands of hours of overtime, and that is true. It is probably more than that; the cost is high. Some of the overtime is for escorts, but a lot of it is because of short staffing. The Alice Springs Correctional Centre alone is 50 to 60 staff members short to run its roster. To be able to run that place safely we need more staff.

There are a couple of ways to get more staff. We can recruit, but there is a three-month recruitment course, and we cannot recruit that many people that quickly to fill the gap.

We could get qualified and suitably trained officers from interstate to come and give that all important assistance to officers in Alice Springs and Darwin. That would give them relief and the safety within those correctional centres by providing the actual numbers needed in the prisons. Allowing qualified staff to conduct escorts, manage courts and work alongside police to manage prisoner movements will allow our highly trained Corrections officers who are already in the job to be at the coalface working with prisoners and providing that safe environment for themselves and the people they are responsible for caring for.

To deny them that opportunity is placing those officers and others at risk. The union cannot have its cake and eat it too. The union cries out that it needs help in the form of more staff and officers. Unfortunately, Labor dropped the ball on recruitment over the last four years and we have seen a drop in the number of prison officers.

This is an opportunity to get qualified staff from interstate to provide important relief for frontline staff in correctional centres so that they can not only spend time at home with their families with a few days off and recharge but also staff our correctional centres properly. Police from South Australia assisted the police in Alice Springs in recent months, which is great. We bring in agency nurses who are qualified and assessed as able to work in our health sector.

We must think outside the box. We cannot keep doing the same things and expecting a different result, which seems to be Labor's way. That is all it can come up with. These are tangible opportunities for Corrections to bring in qualified staff from elsewhere to provide important services to prisoners, manage our courts, provide escorts and provide backup for our existing experienced officers, putting them on the ground in our correctional centres where they are needed to provide the important service of protecting and managing offenders in our facilities.

The government is not about introducing private security guards. I could not stand here and support that. I have been through a number of private prisons across Australia and around the world. It is an insult to say that the correctional services staff and officers working in them are not suitably qualified and do not have the skills to manage prisons. Just because they work in a private prison or work for a private company does not mean that they do not have integrity or the skills, capacity, capability and the care to work with prisoners. That is insulting, and it is what the Labor opposition and the union is saying. I will not abide that because I know plenty of people in the private sector in correctional services across the country who are dedicated skilled people, and we could learn a lesson from the private sector in some respects.

I could talk on this subject for hours as it is close to my heart. As the manager for the correctional centre in Alice Springs many years ago, if I had the opportunity to get that all-important relief so that my staff could have a rest and a bit of a break, be safer and spend some time with their families, I would have done so.

I support this Bill and the Corrections Commissioner. I support the Minister for Corrections in bringing it to the Assembly.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, as the Member for Gwoja stated, the Labor opposition will not support this Bill.

Earlier this week 40-plus Corrections officers came to parliament of their own accord to voice their concerns about this legislation and the CLP government making decisions for their profession without their involvement as the experts in the field of Corrections. The Corrections officers of the Northern Territory walked into the parliament building feeling unheard by the CLP government. They had legitimate concerns that the government would make decisions about the future of their profession without talking to them or even looking them in the eye.

The Corrections officers were not initially granted access. Madam Speaker, I do not reflect on you in the Chair in this sense, but it is ironic that Corrections officers entering parliament were treated as a security risk. Our Corrections officers serve in one of the most high-risk environments in the Northern Territory, and they do so with the utmost professional standards.

Some of the Corrections officers were wearing United Workers Union shirts. They were asked to turn them inside out, as the union logo was considered to be distracting and disruptive to the House. They did what they had to do to enter the people's House.

The Corrections staff were here for a short time to hear our deliberations. They sat in silence and then left the Chamber. I thought that action in itself spoke volumes.

None of the CLP members, including the Minister for Corrections, had the decency to meet with any of the 40 Corrections officers who came in their own time to Parliament House to be heard. Anyone on the CLP team could have met with the Corrections officers, the United Workers Union members, who were at parliament to have that direct contact with the decision-makers, the government members. The Minister for Corrections owes Corrections workers the respect to meet with them face to face before passing this Bill.

I will point out some truths. The CLP government rubbished the United Workers Union and asked why it did not have protected action in the time that Labor was in government. To correct the record, it did. The union took protected action in 2021 and 2022, but obviously the opposition members at that time did not care because they were not in government, so they did not take their heads out of their own business to see what was happening around the Territory and listen to what the Corrections union members had to say.

Mr Maley: No. How hypocritical.

Ms UIBO: Deputy Chief Minister, I know that because I was the Attorney-General at the time. Clear decisions were made to understand what the Corrections officers wanted. I met the Corrections officers face to face; I did not hide away, cower in the corner or ignore the people I was responsible for as a minister.

Mr Maley: Did you go out there? No, you did not. Do not mislead parliament.

Madam SPEAKER: Enough!

Ms UIBO: That hits a strong chord with the Corrections minister because he has been too scared to meet with his own workers, the very public servants whom he is responsible to advocate for as a Northern Territory Minister of the Crown.

The clear difference is that the former Labor government members would eyeball, meet and talk face to face—not through another public servant or closed doors—with Corrections staff as leaders and government decision-makers. That is the stark distinction between the CLP government in its first six months and us.

Our Corrections officers serve day-in and day-out in our justice system, which indeed needs to continue to be reformed and improved across the Northern Territory.

Our former Labor government embarked on a journey with the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. This was signed with bipartisan support by the then Opposition Leader, now Chief Minister, Lia Finocchiaro and the Member for Barkly, the former shadow Attorney-General, who is now a minister. Unfortunately, he is not the Attorney-General or the Minister for Corrections because I know that he would not be scared to meet with union officials and Corrections officers directly, unlike his colleague the Member for Nelson. We probably would have seen a different outcome with this Bill had there been a better choice for the minister responsible for that key portfolio.

I will correct some information regarding the justice space. The Groote Archipelago Local Decision Making Agreement in my electorate of Arnhem had five key priorities from the Anindilyakwa people represented through the Anindilyakwa Land Council. One of the key pillars was justice. From the work done with local

decision-making agreements since 2018, on 19 June 2019 the justice implementation plan was signed for the Groote Archipelago Local Decision Making Agreement.

This key priority of justice for the Anindilyakwa people included the cultural rehabilitation centre, which the Attorney-General talked about during Question Time. The record I will correct is the sheer audacity of the Attorney-General to take credit in six months for the years and years of work by the Anindilyakwa people on cultural rehabilitation and service provision. That work was done before her time. It is astounding that somebody six months into being a decision-maker could waltz in to take credit for something they have not had a single piece of involvement in. She said, 'I have done this for the mainland of Groote Eylandt'. Groote is on the mainland, according to the Attorney-General. Maybe she should look at the map of Groote and realise that it is two islands in the archipelago, but let us not get technical for the Attorney-General.

This was a clear mistruth of the government. It was supposed to be for the people. The government is supposed to show that it is listening to, working for and will be there for the people. The sheer mistruths, misrepresentations and the comfortability to do that by people in key positions like the Attorney-General is astounding. I am not even angry; I am astounded that somebody thinks because they are a minister they can say things that are not true and then they will be true.

In my role I will endeavour to educate—because I am a former teacher—and make sure that the lessons are learnt by the new CLP government. Whether it takes those lessons or not, I will endeavour because, ultimately, we are here for the people we represent, not for ourselves. Unfortunately, we hear that more and more of the CLP ministers are here for themselves and not the people who elected them, and the people they are entrusted to take responsibility for, as ministers of the Northern Territory Government.

Perhaps it was a bit before the Attorney-General's time, but on 2 February 2024 the Groote Eylandt rehabilitation centre was opened, not by the Attorney-General of the CLP government but the former Labor government. We were proud to see the journey of the Anindilyakwa people in the justice space.

That work is important because a huge number of young Anindilyakwa men between the ages of 17 and 25 years were being incarcerated—a very high rate. The Anindilyakwa people got together and did not want to focus on what government could do for them. The Anindilyakwa people, my ancestors, asked, 'What can we do for our people—our young men in particular?' That model was developed, then put through the Western system of government, being supported by government policy. That is how the rehabilitation centre was born, grew and was established to be what it is today. It had nothing to do with the CLP Attorney-General. Shame on her.

Why would the Labor opposition give support to and ram through dodgy and ill-thought-out legislation that affects Territorians, was provided on urgency and for which we were given less than two hours' notice for a briefing offered yesterday? We would not be doing our job if we blindly said yes, which the CLP wishes we would all do.

We listened to and spoke directly with the Corrections officers. As the legislation has been brought on urgency it cuts out the process of the scrutiny committee in this parliament that the CLP government has been celebrating and creating a big song and dance about for the last couple of months. It is a bipartisan committee, but obviously with more government members so that the government can push through what it wants.

There was the big milestone of creating and reshaping the scrutiny committee, bringing it back to the Legislative Assembly, yet repeatedly that process has been cut by the CLP government. Anyone listening at home might say, 'Yes, the scrutiny committee is a great thing', and it is—but only if it can do its job with legislation being referred to the committee, which is the only way that legislation can be scrutinised by the scrutiny committee, as we in this place know.

Community members may not see that the CLP is putting things on urgency because it is too scared of scrutiny. The CLP does not want its legislation to be scrutinised. The government wants to say that it is transparent and accountable, yet it fails to send legislation to the scrutiny committee. What is it afraid of?

We will continue to see that, as we have seen it already in the last six months. I wish I had a fortune teller's crystal ball, but I do not. I can feel it in my bones that we will see this bad habit and horrible governing practice of the CLP for the next three-and-a-half long years of its term of government. We will see it cut out scrutiny and not listen to members and public servants whom they are supposed to represent in government. We will see a whole lot of the 'just because I was elected I do not need to listen to you now' attitude. That will be the real shame for all of us in the Territory. We know that our decision-making here affects other people's

livelihoods in the Territory; it has a rippling effect and impact. We would like to say that the CLP government is doing its best, but its track record so far shows otherwise.

This legislation means that Corrections workers will have to share their duties with unqualified officers. We do not see the level of training that is expected for such a high-risk environment. This is why Corrections officers are worried that their own safety, and that of the people they are responsible for keeping safe in our Corrections system, will be jeopardised.

I am genuinely concerned with the behaviour and bad habits of the CLP that governing is simply about smoke and mirrors and the glossy releases that we have seen made to the media—not to the people but the media.

It is the job of every one of us who represent the 25 electorates in the Northern Territory to ensure that legislation affecting fellow Territorians is the best possible and has the best policies and regulations to inform the programs of government in the best interests of Territorians.

The CLP government has definitely talked big guns about being open, transparent and more accountable to Territorians. However, it is failing miserably in practice; it is all talk and no action when it comes to accountability. The CLP government has abandoned those principles and is hell-bent on ramming legislation through parliament, with little thought to the medium or long-term consequences of its actions.

Our parliamentary processes exist so that not only opposition and crossbench members can scrutinise legislation but also the backbenchers in government—who in the CLP probably did not get much say on the legislation other than hearing, 'Hey, by the way, we will probably introduce this and pass it by the end of the week'—can look at legislation in detail and represent their constituents in this place.

I am sure many CLP members have Corrections officers living in their electorate, so I look forward to hearing their stories of doorknocking Corrections officers and talking to them face to face and listening to how the CLP has ignored their concerns.

We all need to be given the opportunity to properly scrutinise legislation in the parliament, to make informed decisions and to represent each of our electorates to the best of our ability, knowing that what happens in this place affects all Territorians. We will not get that outcome because of the CLP's predisposed premeditated decision to avoid scrutiny. We have already seen that in the last few months.

If the CLP government had the time to organise a photo opportunity in Alice Springs the day it announced this new policy, surely it should have had the time to properly consult on this Bill rather than forcing it through the parliament on urgency as it is doing this week.

To the credit of the Corrections minister's office, we received an offer to get a briefing. It was less than two hours' notice. We could create a time that was suitable for our team to get a briefing, when we were available. I thank the department for doing that through the minister's office.

However, the Bill—from everything that we have been told by Corrections officers—is not a minor thing. This Bill goes further than the Corrections Commissioner and the CLP government trying to twist the Labor opposition's words; it is not about that. It is about the power to replace guards in any way that is wanted through discretionary criteria.

We have confidence in the Corrections Commissioner, but we are not confident that he will get to keep his job. The CLP looks for scapegoats when things do not go well. In the first two months it sacked the Education CEO, the deputy Education CEO, the Health CEO and a couple of other CEOs. The CLP moved people around and created new CEO positions for the new departments it created.

We have heard the CLP defend the Corrections Commissioner strongly. We hope that he is not in the firing line and becomes a scapegoat for the minister for all things regarding Corrections. We will watch this space closely because the CLP DNA is to get rid of people who do not suit its purpose regardless of their expertise.

In this Bill we see that there is nothing more than clear work by the CLP towards privatisation of the Northern Territory Corrections system. The experience of other jurisdictions across Australia has not been perfect. Recently the New South Wales government announced that it is considering the return of some of its correctional facilities to the public sector. We want to learn the lessons of what not to do from around the country, so I sincerely hope that the CLP continues to do its homework in this space.

The previous CLP government considered privatising our Corrections system. I do not believe that is a secret; many members would know that. It is troubling that the CLP's failed ideas of the past are making a strong comeback. As the Member for Gwoja mentioned, some of the older thoughts, decision-making and feelings about the Corrections system have been brought back from the past because of the people who are now advising the minister.

We are deeply concerned that the CLP is looking at reducing recruitment and using contractors as the reason to make sub-par wage offers during the next rounds of enterprise bargaining. We will keep a close eye on that.

We are also concerned that the CLP is sending the wrong message to our community about the work our Corrections officers do. With this legislation the CLP suggests that the job is easy and anyone can be pulled off the street and made into a Corrections officer. The Labor opposition knows that nothing can be further from the truth.

Corrections officers work under stressful conditions in a high-risk environment and experience high rates of potential psychologically traumatic critical incidents. That is why the Member for Gwoja spoke about the work our former Labor government did to recognise post-traumatic stress disorder as one area of work health and safety. We hope that does not change.

Anyone who has spoken at length to a prison officer or youth justice officer will know that their jobs are stressful and forever changes who these people are. They need great support around them, not just in the work environment but also with their friends and family.

This is why we find it concerning and strange that the Minister for Corrections did not meet or consult directly with his public servants in Corrections. The Member for Namatjira spoke about his previous profession in Corrections, and I am sure he could have facilitated a direct face-to-face meeting for his colleague, but maybe they do not talk. Who knows?

The fact is that the CLP government's actions have made Corrections officers' jobs more difficult; that is the reason they are struggling to recruit staff to deal with the overcrowding being experienced in the Northern Territory.

Need I remind anybody about the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory? That $50m royal commission recommended separating adult and youth justice. This was wiped away in the 2024 election when the CLP put adult and youth justice together in one big department. We do not learn from the mistakes of the past if we do not implement those lessons in our future. That is a concern for us.

A word of advice to the Minister for Corrections is that he should face the staffing issues and listen to his staff about what they want to see in the justice system. It is unwise of him to turn his back on his staff and not have those hard conversations as a minister, leader and decision-maker. These officers are the ones putting in the extra hours and spending time away from their family and friends.

The CLP devalues the hard work that the Corrections teams do when their own minister ignores them. It would be great to see the minister grow a spine, stop being gutless and meet Corrections officers in person—as former Attorneys-General, the Member for Gwoja and I did—or is he keen to outsource his job and responsibility as a minister too? We are yet to see; it sounds like he is doing that with his meetings.

We asked questions about workers with minimal training being expected to do the work of fully trained Corrections officers. The Member for Namatjira gave some information about that, but when we first heard of this legislation—through the media—it was said that Corrections officers from other jurisdictions would be used in the Northern Territory. In our briefing yesterday we asked whether the secondment of Corrections officers from other jurisdictions would be possible. The answer was no. If someone is a Corrections officer in another jurisdiction they would have to quit their job in that jurisdiction, losing all their entitlements and benefits from that public service, to then enter the public service workforce in the Northern Territory.

If the minister could please explain that with clearly articulated words, not the waffle and ramble we usually get from him, we would appreciate it. That concern is a key sticking point for Corrections officers, because when we asked about the alternative of people coming from other jurisdictions to serve in those roles, the answer was about the private officers and the level of training they would receive. To provide comfort to people on the level of training—I know a Cert III is required—it would be most appreciated if the minister can address that in his reply. It would be helpful because, as we understand from the experts at yesterday's

briefing, a secondment from another jurisdiction is not possible unless that person is to resign from their public service job.

This legislation is a clear example of the CLP government not having a proper plan and pushing ahead despite the disapproval, concerns, warnings and expertise of the professionals who work in the field every day. We do not believe that this Bill will do anything to make the Territory safer. We believe that is wrong because Territorians deserve better.

We will not support the Bill.

Mr MALEY (Corrections)(in reply): Madam Speaker, I thank my fellow ministers and members of parliament for their contributions to this Bill that we introduced on urgency.

The intention of the Bill is to fulfil one of our many commitments and make sure the Territory is a safer place. We have introduced these amendments to the *Correctional Services Act* to reduce staffing pressures and create a more flexible workforce, which is important. This is not about replacing anyone; no-one will lose their job. We will fill the gap.

I will respond to some of the comments the Leader of the Opposition made about meeting with the union. I have met with the union.

I met with Erina Early, the representative; Officer Axel and Officer Cotton; and Officer Allen, who appeared via video link from Alice Springs. All three of them, I understand, were union delegates. I met them in my office. Guess what the first thing they raised with me was? I said, 'I am the new minister. Please explain to me what your concerns are.' They talked about communication and staffing. I am reading off my notes now. The meeting was in November, before we had an additional 500 prisoners because of Labor's failed policies on crime. They said that they were 20 to 30 people short. The notes refer to staffing and creating positions.

I wonder whether the union representative told the rest of the union that the bouncing ball started with her. This is what started the journey to make sure we resource the Corrections officers properly.

Prior to that Erina Early was talking to the media about staff shortages. The Member for Barkly spoke about it. In May 2022 Erina Early spoke about the crisis level of staff shortages. On 15 October 2024 Ms Early told Katie Woolf that members are fearing for their lives, concerned about work health and safety due to overcrowding and staffing shortages which are going unaddressed. NT prison officers threatened to walk off the job for fears of rioting amidst the Corrections crisis on 27 October.

We heard what the union told us on 11 November—the 11th of the 11th is a special day—that Corrections was 20 to 30 staff short. I can only assume that the other three officers were union delegates, so they know that they started the bouncing ball because we listened to them.

On top of that I have been to every correctional facility in the Northern Territory on multiple occasions. In fact, I went through the Alice Springs facility late last week and spoke with Corrections officers. I looked around to see what was going on, to see the staffing shortage and how many people were there. I heard the story about not having enough people and that prisoners were in lockdown because they do not have the staff to let them out.

I heard a story that there were a number of people in the Katherine hospital, which left a shortage of staff in the prison. The story I heard was that there were more officers at the hospital than there were in the prison at certain times last year.

From the stories I have heard and speaking to Corrections officers on the ground, staffing is an issue. It has been an ongoing issue for many years, and the former Labor government failed to address it. To say that I have not been talking to the union or visited the facilities is a misrepresentation; I have been to all the facilities. When I go to the facilities I speak to as many staff as I can and thank them for doing their job. The Corrections officers do a good job in demanding situations.

The infrastructure has been underfunded for many years. Madam Speaker, to refresh your memory, Labor has been in government in the Northern Territory for 19 of the last 23 years; there were four years when the CLP was in power. I note that the crime figures went down in that period. It is misleading when Labor members say that this is not their fault. They have been in power; they were the decision-makers who underfunded the resources.

The Member for Namatjira spoke about his experiences when there were 250 prisoners, and they were short-staffed. He said, 'I needed someone to back me up'. Corrections staff are a team; they are a family who look after their mates.

We want to help Corrections staff and give the commissioner the opportunity to have a more flexible workforce so that those highly trained and skilled officers are working in the prisons and the escorts taking prisoners to various events such as court can be done by qualified officers appointed under this legislation.

The Leader of the Opposition referred to the prison officers as 'guards'. They are not guards; they are highly trained Corrections officers who do a great job and work in difficult situations. As I said, I have been to look at all these prisons.

The Opposition Leader asked whether we would reduce recruitment. There are more than 30 new recruits in training. I have been to two of the three recruit squads since we have been in power in five months. Recruiting will continue, but it is hard to get prison officers because the Labor government failed them so badly. Their infrastructure is so poor that they do not want to work there. We are trying to make it safe, increase the infrastructure and spend some money to support these prison officers.

The Member for Namatjira spoke about how members have worked 30 days straight and that they should have an opportunity to go back to their family. I agree and fully support that, and I know the commissioner fully supports it. I have spoken about how he has genuine concern for his staff because he knows they are working overtime.

I remember Ms Early told the media that members are working 16 to 18-hour shifts; that is not acceptable. There is $22m in overtime because of the staff shortage caused by the previous government. We have been in office for five months, and we have a plan. We are working on that plan in relation to infrastructure and to help resource these prison officers, based on the information I have seen with my own eyes and, more importantly, when the union officials told me about their staffing issues.

The Opposition Leader spoke about training. I have spoken with the Member for Namatjira, who worked in the prison system for over 18 years, the commissioner and Corrections officers. The industry standard is a Certificate III or IV. To enlighten my friends on the other side, the Corrections Act says that to be a Corrections officer you need only to be a government employee; that is it. The commissioner relies upon the industry standard to work out what level of qualification the prison officers currently have.

This job is made more difficult due to the lack of infrastructure and overcrowding caused under Labor's watch which, as I said, was 18 to 19 of the last 23 years. There is a recruitment problem; no-one wants to do the job because of the resourcing issues caused by the previous government.

You cannot just pop up a prison overnight and make beds; you need proper planning. When I came into office the first thing I asked the commissioner for was a master plan, and we have one. I knew that we had overcrowding; I could see that prisons were bursting at the seams. I asked the commissioner to come back to us with options for the master plan. I am glad to say that we are punching above our weight in relation to the master plan and we are working successfully.

There has been a lot of misinformation. The Member for Gwoja spoke about it. The Member for Nightcliff talked about unqualified staff. That is simply not the case. One of the problems is that those on the other side are purposefully misleading people by saying that the officers will be unqualified. Members opposite have all been to a briefing, so they all know.

The legislation is only a couple pages long. The Member for Barkly read out that the commissioner must be:

> *… satisfied the person has the qualifications, skills or experience to properly perform the functions of a special correctional officer.*

The Bill says the same for a special probation and parole officer.

The people we will bring in will not be unqualified, unskilled or inexperienced. All their qualifications must be to the satisfaction of the commissioner, which is the rule currently. To become a correctional officer, you must be trained and have a qualification to the satisfaction of the commissioner, which is the industry standard of a Certificate III or IV.

The misinformation spread by the opposition, Independents and The Greens member goes to show how they are politicising this. They are making a game of these Corrections officers' lives. It is not a game; they deserve to be able to do their job safely and go home.

The Opposition Leader complained, 'I had only two hours for the briefing'. She had to walk out the door and down the hall—less than a two-minute walk—for the briefing. It was in parliament—everyone was here—yet those opposite complain that they did not get enough time. This is such an important issue that we brought in this legislation on urgency, yet those on the other side complain about having to walk out the door and take two minutes to get down the hallway to get a briefing. It is amazing they whinge about that.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 46; I want to ensure it is on *Hansard* that there were committee meetings during that time too, so two hours was insufficient. There were members who needed to attend those committee meetings.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Daly, you do not use a point of order to provide information or debate what the minister is saying.

Mr MALEY: There was also talk about how these officers will be held to account. There will be a contract which says that if you do the wrong thing you lose your job. New section 25D, Termination of appointment of special correctional services officer, will be inserted. Both special correctional officers and special probation and parole officers are special correctional services officers. New section 25D says:

The Commissioner may, at any time, terminate the appointment of a special correctional services officer.

It is clear that if a special correctional services officer does the wrong thing their job can be terminated.

I will again refer to the Member for Namatjira, who I think is an expert in this field. He spoke about private contractors. He has met them and been there, unlike me and many people in this Chamber. He said that they are professionals who put their lives on the line when doing their jobs across Australia, and I think he said the world. It is an insult to say that these people will come here and do a bad job. They are professionals in the industry, who are at industry standard, and they want to uphold themselves.

I have spoken to people in the industry who believe that some people from interstate are better trained, as they have been doing the job longer and are up to date with how things change in this world. I think the contractors who come in will build a flexible workforce to help facilitate making Corrections officers' jobs safer. It will also make it safer for prisoners. Locking up someone without providing rehabilitation and training is not good for anyone or for the community as a whole.

In his contribution, read out by someone else, the Member for Mulka said that many people could be diverted, and we could just let them out. Which ones? Who do you pick? Do you let out a murderer, a domestic violence offender or another violent person? What happens if you let them out and they reoffend? Who would be held to account for that?

That is simply not in the DNA of the Country Liberal Party. We are here to keep the community safe. If you throw the dice and let out some people because you think they can be diverted, which ones will it be? I am happy to provide a list, and the member can pick them. That is unrealistic.

It is easy to say some words in this place, but these people we are speaking about are in prison because they have been to court and had the opportunity to put their case. They are either granted bail or not, or they are convicted and in prison to serve their sentence.

I have been in court for many years. I have argued bail applications, run hearings and conducted pleas of guilty. The courts do a good job. People are given an opportunity to have their say and then the judge or jury decides, depending on which court it is. We have to rely upon our justice system. In my experience it generally does a good job. People have their say; the prosecution has its say; and the judge decides. That is how the court system works.

The Member for Mulka said that the law is for Aboriginal people only. One of the first things that I learnt at law school is that no-one is above the law; the rule of law applies to everyone the same.

As I have said many times, do not commit the crime. The Member for Barkly spoke about that. If people do not want to go into our prison system, they should not assault someone like their partner, murder someone, steal a car and burn it or break into someone's business, trash it and cause thousands of dollars of damage.

Do not do those things. It is about personal responsibility, which seems to be lacking in our community. Everyone seems to blame someone else, 'It is not my fault that I did this and that'. It is about time that members of our community grow up and take personal responsibility.

When people commit a crime, go through the court system and are sentenced to prison or are not granted bail and are held on remand it is because someone made a decision based on the evidence. I hold the court system in high esteem. I have been in the court system for many hours; I could almost say that I have done it all. I have seen a lot and know that everyone gets their opportunity.

I go back to the misinformation about unqualified staff. The Commissioner for Corrections will have the power to appoint these special officers, including qualified correctional service officers with experience interstate, because they will have the skills, qualifications and experience to do the job. If they do not, the legislation is clear that their appointment will be terminated.

This is about helping prison officers and giving the Corrections Commissioner more resources and a more flexible workforce. His hands were tied behind his back and his feet bound for the last eight years under the former Labor government. It is ironic that members opposite say, 'Why leave it up to him? How could you trust him?', because he was appointed by them; he is their pick. I fully support Commissioner Varley.

The commissioner, his executive and the workforce have done an outstanding job over the last five months. They have gone over and above. I take my hat off and say thank you; I hope they are listening. To the commissioner, the executive and the workforce, without people like you protecting the community I do not know where we would be. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. You have done a great job and you have my support 100%.

What we are introducing is not new; this happens across Australia. In fact, this is what the police do. Officers from South Australia Police make a difference when they come to help the NT Police in Alice Springs. It is that surge when there is a problem. This is like the legislation the Police Commissioner uses to appoint special constables.

We are allowing the Corrections Commissioner to do the same thing, appointing people to fill the gaps and ensure that prison officers can go home and are not overworked by working 30 days straight and 16-hour days. Not only is it hard on them, but what about their workmates? When someone has worked 18 hours two days in a row they must be tired. They must be drowsy, which creates a work health and safety issue for other officers. This will complement the workforce so that we can help Corrections officers to protect the Northern Territory community.

Police have the power to appoint special constables; this simply does the same. The use of experienced interstate Corrections officers will allow the current Corrections officers to go back to their core duties. This will take the immense pressure off staff that has been on them for too long.

Prison industries had to be put on hold; the workforce is not in the community mowing and cleaning up because of the staff shortage. Erina Early said that we do not have a staff shortage problem; it is an infrastructure problem Why are those services being cut? This morning I heard that a 99-year-old pensioner cannot get her lawn mowed, so it is clear that there is a staff shortage. I heard it from Erina Early, who last year told me personally that Corrections is 20 to 30 staff short.

It is about more than helping people with their lawns; it is also about the rehabilitation programs. What about the work done to rehabilitate people with the education and training programs which normally run inside the prison system and which cannot because of the staff shortage?

We want to put Corrections officers back in the prisons to operate them with staff and look after their buddies. The Member for Namatjira said that Corrections is a family; everyone is there to support each other. I have been into the maximum-security sections of the prisons, and it is a tough place. I would hate to be there alone. The Member for Namatjira spoke about there being 250 prisoners and two or three officers. It would be terrifying.

This is about giving the commissioner an opportunity to supplement his workforce and be more flexible. We have spoken a lot about the Corrections officers, but what about the probation and parole officers? When someone is released on parole, granted a suspended sentence or has electronic monitoring and is under supervision, it is the probation and parole officers who offer their support and wraparound services to try to keep them out of the prison system.

Those on the other side failed because there was a humungously high rate of people reoffending. The CLP wants to break this cycle because that is the way to keep the community safe. It can give people who may have made a wrong decision an opportunity to correct themselves and become better people and go back into the community, maybe get a job or have a family, and spend time with their family instead of being locked in a prison cell. We need to keep everyone safe and ensure that we do the right thing because it is about safety for prison officers, prisoners and the community, which is our number one priority.

There was talk about what control we will have and how the commissioner will control the special correctional services officers. There will be strict contractual arrangements between the provider and Corrections, which will require them to maintain a strict code of conduct. The legislation clearly says that the commissioner may terminate their appointment at any time.

We want to ensure that these people are qualified, have the skills and are well trained because it is about complementing the workforce and keeping the community safe. There is an overtime bill of 168,000 hours and $22m. An awful lot of money goes into the Corrections system.

Hopefully that clarifies that the commissioner—whom the Labor government appointed and whom I and the CLP team fully support—will make that decision. He has done a great job. He is a man with integrity. He is proud of his officers and the prison system he runs. I genuinely believe that the commissioner will do the right thing. He is a smart man who has been involved in policing and Corrections for a long time. The commissioner and his executive have my support. They are doing a good job in a tough time.

The Member for Gwoja said that the Bill does not guarantee the qualifications people will have, but the legislation does not do that now. As things evolve, the training gets better and more modules are added. We are trying to ensure that the same rules apply for everybody. If you are a prison officer, at the moment the standard is Certificate III or IV. If that goes to a Certificate V or new technology comes in and changes that, we want the commissioner to have the structure to ensure that everyone has the same qualifications.

No matter what people do in Corrections, it is a dangerous job. Sometimes they deal with murderers. They also deal with people who are open rated, who can go out in the workforce and come back. It is a different field.

We need to get it right so that we have value for money. The previous Labor government did not care about spending taxpayers' money, but we do. We need to get the best bang for our buck because the Treasurer told us that the economy has been blown out of this world.

However, this is about safety; it is not about saving money or taking shortcuts. This is about ensuring that prison officers, prisoners and members of the community are kept safe.

There has been an increase of 500 prisoners. That will probably continue to rise because the failed policies of the former Labor government sent the message that crime does not matter; people will get a slap on the wrist and be told to go home. We are changing that and making sure the community is safe.

These staffing changes are operational, so it is important the commissioner has the flexibility to make decisions to manage his staff and the Corrections system appropriately. This legislation will give him that. It will level the playing field with Corrections and police and enable the commissioner to have surge numbers if he needs them to run different parts, like providing hospital escorts, and allow Corrections officers to do their job of dealing with prisoners.

I thank the Department of Corrections and the Attorney-General's Department. I thank the Parliamentary Counsel for their work developing this Bill. A lot of work has been done in a short period. We know the importance of community safety and the safety of prison officers and prisoners. We need to get that balance right, and a lot of people have done a lot of work on it.

I thank the Corrections officers and the youth justice, probation and parole and admin staff. It is a massive task, and everyone must do their job. If they do not do their job, that cog breaks and the wheels stop turning. I am pleased to say that everyone I have met is dedicated and does a good job. They know that they are contributing to keeping the community safe and helping these prisoners have a better choice for later. The psychologists and educators do a good job because they are committed people. It has been a pile of work for departmental staff to make sure we get this right.

I thank all the MLAs for their contributions. Those opposite spread some misinformation about the qualifications and experience needed, so I hope that my wrap-up answered some of those questions. I look forward to going into consideration in detail if you think that is necessary.

I thank the commissioner and executive team for doing a great job. There have been difficult decisions made, but like the Chief Minister said, 2025 is the year of action and certainty. I want to ensure that the Corrections officers know we are here to give them certainty. We will give the community certainty of safety as we move forward and do that.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a second time.

Consideration in Detail

Clause 1, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 2:

Mr YOUNG: When will the legislation commence?

Mr MALEY: As soon as possible.

Mr YOUNG: Do you have a date for that?

Mr MALEY: No, I do not.

Mr YOUNG: Do you know when the legislation will go to the Administrator to be signed off?

Mr MALEY: When he is available.

Mr YOUNG: Have you spoken to the Administrator's office for an indication of when that legislation will go across to the Administrator?

Mr MALEY: Yes, I have.

Mr YOUNG: You have spoken to the Administrator, so I assume that you will have a date for the legislation to go across. What date would that be?

Mr MALEY: No, I have not spoken to the Administrator.

Mr YOUNG: You previously said you did speak with the Administrator.

Mr MALEY: I said we sent correspondence to the Administrator.

Mr YOUNG: The question was: have you spoken to the office? He said yes. Anyway, I will move on.

Do you have a scheduled meeting with the Administrator?

Mr MALEY: He said when he is available.

Ms UIBO: Because the commencement is a date that you cannot tell us—we understand the procurement process for the extra special purpose officers will be about an eight-week period—we want to make sure that the officers this legislation affects understand and know the timeframe of what you will be planning as the Corrections minister.

Mr MALEY: Yes, they do.

Ms UIBO: There is no date, so I want to check the date.

Mr MALEY: When the Administrator is available.

Mr PAECH: As is standard practice, is there is an intention to review the legislation with a review period built in?

Mr MALEY: It is not relevant to the clause. We are talking about the commencement; it is not anything to do with a review.

Mr PAECH: Usually the position is two years, and after that there is a review. Is that the intention?

Mr MALEY: No, it is not.

Clause 2 agreed to.

Clauses 3 to 5, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 6:

Mr YOUNG: Clause 6 inserts Division 4 in Part 2.2. In regard to new section 25B, will any medical training be provided to special correctional officers and special probation and parole officers?

Mr MALEY: I understand that is part of the Certificate III.

J DAVIS: We heard you say that special correctional officers will be qualified. Will they be required to be qualified to the same industry standards as current Corrections officers as a bare minimum?

Mr MALEY: They will be required to be qualified as to satisfy whatever the commissioner sees fit.

Mr PAECH: As we understand from the briefing, at the time the private officers can be brought on they will then have a 12-month window to complete the training. Is that the security training and the medical training to do with first aid? What mechanism is in place for Northern Territory Corrections Commissioner or the agency to be advised of the completion of that training? Will the company regularly provide that to Corrections or will it be a requirement of the commissioner to constantly check that those qualifications have been met?

Mr MALEY: Are you talking about new people who will go through the recruitment process that people already go through, or officers who are already trained coming in as contractors?

Mr PAECH: I am talking about the private officers who will be brought in. These are not Northern Territory Corrections employees; they are the contracted officers who are brought in and have up to 12 months to complete their certificates in security and first aid. What is the mechanism for Corrections to be assured—the checks and balances—that those certificates are finished? Is the liability on the company to report that to the commissioner, or is the commissioner required to check every three, six or 12 months that they have been completed?

Mr MALEY: That will be done through the contractual arrangements.

Mr PAECH: The contractor will be required under this legislation to report once someone has completed their qualifications, to make sure that those performance indicators have been completed. Is that correct?

Mr MALEY: It is not correct. I said that it will be done through the contractual arrangements, which have not been drawn up yet because this has not come into force. Once the legislation passes and the commissioner decides what to do, he will enter into contracts with providers about how this will work. That contract will work out what will happen if disciplinary action is required, what training needs to be done and all those details you spoke about. I cannot talk about hypotheticals because we do not know; these contracts do not exist yet.

Mr PAECH: I understand that this is a hypothetical matter, but will it be up to the company to report back to the commissioner at the time people have completed their training and are qualified?

Mr MALEY: The legislation is clear that the commissioner needs to be satisfied that the person has the qualifications, skills or experience to properly perform the functions of a special correctional officer. That will be drafted into the contract, which has not been drawn up yet, so we are talking about a hypothetical and I cannot answer hypothetical questions.

Mr PAECH: People can commence work as a Corrections officer, and they have a 12-month window to complete their certificate training. That process through Northern Territory Corrections is rigorous, and it can monitor and evaluate where people are at with their study. Will the company monitor and evaluate that and notify Corrections when the people have completed it?

Mr MALEY: That is a hypothetical question. I cannot say what a contract that does not exist will look like. That will need to be a discussion between the commissioner and the third party, whoever that is. I will not put on the record what might be in that contract. It is to be negotiated. There is nothing more I can say in relation to this. I will not speculate what might be in the contract. The legislation is clear that the commissioner

must be satisfied that the person has the qualifications, skills or experience. That will happen through a contract which will be done at the commissioner's discretion.

Mr PAECH: At the moment, no KPIs have been developed in regard to the reporting of people's qualifications. I get that is part of a contractual arrangement. I am clear in the understanding that there is no definition of what it means for the commissioner to be satisfied; that is up to him and his discretion.

J DAVIS: If the commissioner is satisfied that a taxidriver has the skills that are needed because the commissioner wants drivers who can ferry prisoners to hospital, can they be appointed?

Mr MALEY: The legislation is clear that the commissioner must be satisfied that the person has the qualifications, skills or experience. The commissioner is a professional person. It is up to him to do what he sees fit to be satisfied in relation to a person's qualifications and skills, just as he does with a Corrections officer who has been through the system and trained up here. The commissioner decides what training must be done.

The only qualification in the current legislation is that you must be a Northern Territory public servant. The commissioner then decides that training must be to the professional standard of a Certificate III or IV in Corrections. That may change as technology changes, and it might become a Certificate V or VI. It is up to the commissioner to set the qualifications across the board for people to perform the duty that they will do.

J DAVIS: Is the answer yes, this Bill provides a scenario in which a taxidriver could be appointed under the Act?

Mr MALEY: They are your words, not mine. I have answered the question.

Mr PAECH: Can you outline the criteria that the commissioner will need to follow to consider whether a person is appropriate to be appointed as one of these private officers, whether it is a special correctional worker or a special probation and parole officer? What are the minimum criteria for that role?

Mr MALEY: That is a matter for the commissioner. He is an experienced person. As I said, I back him 100%. Obviously, your team does too because you appointed him. It will be up to the commissioner to be satisfied. Provided he is satisfied a person has the qualifications, skills or experience, it is a matter for him.

J DAVIS: Will there be no minimum standards under the Act?

Mr MALEY: The Bill is clear. It states:

… the Commissioner is satisfied the person has the qualifications, skills or experience to properly …

I emphasise the word 'properly':

… perform the functions of a special correctional officer.

That also applies to the special probation and parole officer.

It is up to the commissioner to decide, as they do with Corrections officers now. It is the industry standard, and I expect that the commissioner will apply that standard.

Mr PAECH: You mentioned that the special correctional officers and special probation and parole officers are not public servants. Which industrial instrument would cover their wages and entitlements?

Mr MALEY: The contract that is negotiated between the commissioner and the provider.

Mr PAECH: It is important to have clarification about the industrial instrument that will be used. It could be anticipated that the wages and entitlements through that private contract may be more attractive than the public service, and we could lose employees. However, you are saying that those terms and conditions will be set out by the Northern Territory Corrections Commissioner through those private contracted negotiations.

Mr MALEY: There will be a contract that will set out the terms of how that contract operates, just like any other contract.

Mr PAECH: The Northern Territory Corrections Commissioner will be involved in those contract negotiations. Can you confirm that a probity group will be made up to work through that?

Mr MALEY: The commissioner will have to comply with all the regulations in relation to contracts and procurement as per the rules of the public service.

J DAVIS: Noting that these special correctional officers will not be public sector employees, there is a current process for complaints against Corrections officers. How will complaints be raised against these new employees?

Mr MALEY: They will be raised by someone making a complaint.

J DAVIS: To whom?

Mr MALEY: In the first instance it would be to the commissioner and he would take action in relation to the contract that is negotiated between the commissioner and the third-party provider.

Mr YOUNG: Will any training be provided to special correctional officers and special probation and parole officers on dealing with or identifying mental health risks?

Mr MALEY: Ultimately, that will be a matter for the commissioner. It will be part of the contract, whatever that is, between the commissioner and the third-party provider. That contract has not been drafted yet, so this is a hypothetical question. However, you would have to assume yes, because we are talking about the industry standard. Although we do not know the terms of the contract—it has not been drafted yet—we know that it will comply with all the rules of the public service. It will ensure that the commissioner is properly satisfied that these people have the qualifications.

Mr PAECH: Private providers are not subject to the same transparency and accountability mechanisms as government agencies, such as FOI obligations, and parliamentary scrutiny mechanisms such as budget Estimates questions from MLAs. What governance arrangements are in place to scrutinise special correctional officers and special probation and parole officers apart from a one-off negotiated agreement? Have the KPIs been developed?

Mr MALEY: Ultimately, they will be subject to the Ombudsman because it will be a contract. This is all to do with a contract that has not been negotiated yet, but I envisage that there will be the Ombudsman and the ICAC—just the normal processes—if you want to complain about how a public servant, a contract or a tender, whatever you want to call it, operates across the board.

J DAVIS: As per section 20 of the *Correctional Services Act* the commissioner can delegate any of their powers and functions under this Act. Does that mean that once section 25B is inserted into the Act, any person delegated by the commissioner could appoint special correctional officers using their own discretion as to the appropriateness of their skill?

Mr MALEY: Yes, you are right; the commissioner can delegate his powers. It is a matter for the commissioner what powers he delegates. Ultimately, the commissioner is responsible for the operations of the correctional facility and will be the one answering if there are any issues.

Mr PAECH: You were talking about the commissioner being ultimately responsible for this mechanism. What power does the commissioner have to discipline special correctional officers and special probation and parole officers within the environment if there is misconduct?

Mr MALEY: That would be included in the negotiations for the contract.

Mr PAECH: It has not yet been decided, but it will be a feature of any future conversation.

Mr MALEY: Yes.

J DAVIS: What is the projected cost of this policy change?

Mr MALEY: We have not put a cost on it because it will be a commercial venture and if we say what we think it will cost, that will be the cost. Unlike the previous government, we are cautious about costs. We want to make sure this is a commercial arrangement. We will do a contract and scope, and it will be tendered just like any other procurement. This is about getting the best bang for buck, with the safety of prison officers, prisoners and the community in mind.

Mr PAECH: There has been no decision on the expenditure ceiling on this issue, so there is no cap if more special correctional services officers are required because of Corrections growth. Could that expenditure continue in line with the growth the commissioner may see projected?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

J DAVIS: Can the commissioner qualify the application of the *Correctional Services Act* to these special correctional officers so that they can exempt special correctional officers from parts of the Corrections Act, such as limitations on use of force?

Mr MALEY: I do not understand your question.

Mr YOUNG: He has advisers he could ask.

J DAVIS: Yes; you could ask your advisers.

Mr MALEY: I do not know what question to ask them because I did not understand what you asked me.

J DAVIS: Can you qualify the way this Act will be applied? Does it mean that the commissioner can exempt special correctional officers from parts of the Corrections Act, such as limitations to the use of force?

Mr MALEY: The commissioner can put limitations on the qualifications—I will read it out:

> *… subject to any conditions, limitations or qualifications decided by the Commissioner.*

That is section 25B(2).

J DAVIS: Does this allow for special correctional officers to be exempted from regulation of strip searches and use of force under the Act?

Mr MALEY: The commissioner has the decision of how to operate his services. That applies to any of these officers or the Corrections officers who are currently employed.

Mr PAECH: The powers that private officers may be delegated would involve the ability to use physical force and restraint and carry out searches, where appropriate; is that correct?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr PAECH: Could that be in the instance that one of these private officers could be putting a spit hood on somebody?

Mr MALEY: Can you repeat the question?

Mr PAECH: One of these special private officers, in terms of that, could use physical force and restraint such as a spit hood.

Mr MALEY: You cannot use a spit hood, but, yes, they have the powers of a Corrections officer.

Mr YOUNG: Will there be any cultural awareness training for these special officers?

Mr MALEY: That will be in the contract, but I assume yes.

Mr PAECH: Has there been any consideration of the Territory's vicarious liability for torts and acts of negligence committed by special correctional officers or special probation and parole officers?

Mr MALEY: That will be dealt with in the contract.

Clause 6 agreed to.

Clauses 7 to 11, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Remainder of the Bill, by leave, taken as a whole and agreed to.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is that the Bill be agreed to.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 17	Noes 6
Ms Boothby	Mr Brown
Mr Burgoyne	J Davis
Mrs Cahill	K McNamara
Mrs Carlson	Mr Paech
Mr Charls	Ms Uibo
Mr Edgington	Mr Young
Mrs Finocchiaro	
Mrs Hersey	
Mr Howe	
Mr Kerle	
Mr Mackay	
Mr Maley	
Mr O'Gallagher	
Mr Patel	
Dr Rahman	
Mr Yan	
Mrs Zio	

Bill agreed to.

Mr MALEY (Corrections): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 17	Noes 6
Ms Boothby	Mr Brown
Mr Burgoyne	J Davis
Mrs Cahill	K McNamara
Mrs Carlson	Mr Paech
Mr Charls	Ms Uibo
Mr Edgington	Mr Young
Mrs Finocchiaro	
Mrs Hersey	
Mr Howe	
Mr Kerle	
Mr Mackay	
Mr Maley	
Mr O'Gallagher	
Mr Patel	
Dr Rahman	
Mr Yan	
Mrs Zio	

Motion agreed to; Bill read a third time.

MOTION
Note Report – 2025 Year of Action

Continued from 12 February 2025.

Mr HOWE (Drysdale): Madam Speaker, security has been shattered throughout the Northern Territory. It has been shattered in our homes, businesses, workplaces and, as we have heard, by our own partners in our homes.

It is the first role of government to protect its citizens from threats foreign and within. That is our first responsibility and it is one that our government takes seriously.

Violence begets violence, and without interruption man falls prey to the savagery of nature with the most violent prevailing; therefore, it is the duty of the good to act and interrupt violence. There has been a sickness of thought that has overtaken the Territory in the past, that it is the rights of the violent and the offender that seem to supersede all others. I have no issue stating that I believe that the rights of the violent and the offender come last to those of the victim and the wider community.

We finally have a Chief Minister who will act and lead. We have a government that will act for the people. We will ensure we get the economic growth that we need to pursue the more noble pursuits of governing, including health, education and those other noble pursuits that we wish to get to, but first we must have security. We will give certainty to industry to ensure it can get on with improving economic growth and prosperity for all. This will allow us to proceed with the more noble humanitarian efforts of government. It is for these reasons that we take these measures. We will give certainty to families that they can own a home, their children can receive a good education, and they have a bright future in the Northern Territory.

Finally, to all the people in my electorate of Drysdale, we will act on security. No longer will there be silence from your elected representative on the crime that is happening day-in and day-out on your streets. You and I know it is happening. This government and the Chief Minister will act so that we have security once again.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, I am privileged to be part of our united 17-member government team that is committed to delivering on our election promises to reduce crime, rebuild our economy and restore our lifestyle. I am humbled by the fact that the overwhelming majority of Territorians, including those living in Karama, Malak and Knuckey Lagoon, gave us a clear mandate—there is that beautiful word 'mandate'—to implement our plan at the last election.

If you want to see what a mandate looks like, I urge all members to look at the government benches in the Chamber to see what that majority looks like. However, in the interests of workplace health and safety, I caution the opposition members to do this carefully so that they do not suffer neck strain. They have a lot of looking around to do, so turn that neck.

As I have said many times, we need a credible opposition to hold us to account to ensure we deliver on that plan. It can do that simply by getting a copy of our plan and ticking off what we said we would do and what we have already done or have underway.

Let me give you some examples from this lovely plan I am holding. Here is a beautiful one:

> *Raising School Attendance*
>
> *… The CLP will get kids to school and will not be afraid to hold parents accountable for depriving their child of access to education. We will create Truancy Officers with the power to get kids to school.*

Done; and I congratulate the Minister for Education and Training for doing so. That is just one example. Another example is:

> *Week 1 of Parliament we will:*
>
> *Stop the revolving door of bail by making all serious violent offenders, with or without a weapon, start with a position of no bail*
>
> *Make breach of bail an offence*

Done.

> *New minimum mandatory sentencing for assaulting for a frontline worker*

Done.

> *Introduce 'Ram Raids' legislation, using a vehicle as a weapon and 'posting and boasting' on social media will be an aggravated offence*

Done.

> *Give police powers to fine, charge and arrest for public drinking in non-exempt areas*

Done.

Lower the age of criminal responsibility so offenders don't fall through the cracks and can be sent to meaningful intervention programs to turn their life around.

Done.

As you can see, we made and will continue to make immediate changes to tackle crime. Another one is:

The CLP will remove payroll tax for small businesses so they can create jobs …

We did that this sittings. Congratulations to Minister Yan.

We have to reduce the cost-of-living costs for our community. The plan says:

The CLP will double the solar feed in tariff …

Done.

Making it easier for car and trailer owners. Saving you time and money.

Free Licence

Freezing Rego

3 year Trailer Renewal

Done.

God, this is beautiful reading:

Boosting construction and home ownership.

The CLP will deliver the most generous Home Builder Program in the country with a number of incentives. Importantly all with no cap on build or purchase price.

Done. That includes the HomeGrown Territory Grant and the FreshStart New Home Grant, which are wonderful initiatives.

We are all about developing our industries and playing to our strengths in those key five critical industry sectors—tourism, Defence, agriculture, gas and mining. The other day I spoke about how we are doing extraordinarily well in the onshore gas industry, creating a future for our economy.

The plan mentions improving trade with Asia to boost the economy, including improved aviation links. Congratulations to the Minister for Trade, Business and Asian Relations. How many wonderful announcements have we now heard, particularly about aviation recently? Our connectivity with the region is improving and there is more to come.

This is a good one. We promised:

Under the CLP projects won't just get announced they will be built.

We will:

Speed up approvals …

We have set up the Approvals Fast Track Taskforce:

Cut Red Tape …

We will get it away.

As we said at the last election:

Install the Territory Co-ordinator …

It is not a surprise to anyone. We have been promising this for a long time. Guess what? We are doing it and the legislation is before the scrutiny committee.

Of course, we are empowering bush communities. The minister for Local Government has already spoken about how we will do that. The plan says:

The CLP is committed to restoring control of communities to Aboriginal people and strengthening service delivery. Control that Labor took away.

That is plenty from the plan, but it shows what I am trying to say. This is not a glossy brochure; it is a blueprint for action, certainty and security that our united team is proud to own. We embrace it. It is a privilege to be a part of this team.

This is only the start. We still have lots of work to do to get the Territory back on track following its derailment over the last eight years by a disastrous Labor government.

On behalf of the residents of Karama, Malak and Knuckey Lagoon, we particularly need to fix the inherited public housing crisis that is currently destroying our suburbs, which I will address in more detail in my adjournment speech.

I and my colleagues, the Members for Blain and Drysdale, have vigorously and collectively been advocating on behalf of our constituents for reform, including legislative reform, of our failed public housing system. We are pleased that the minister made it a priority to come with us to visit antisocial behaviour hotspots within our electorates recently and meet directly with affected residents.

The minister also came to a public forum I hosted in early November attended by 50-plus residents to hear their serious concerns as to how escalating antisocial behaviour in some public housing tenancies has destroyed their lifestyle and impacted severely on their physical and emotional wellbeing.

I am heartened by the minister for Housing's announcement yesterday that we are looking to make substantial legislative reforms and other measures to make tenants responsible and accountable for their behaviour in housing. The minister said:

The pendulum has swung too far in defending the rights of individuals, and we will take action. In 2025 we will act on public housing reform. We will look at the Residential Tenancies Act *and how to align it with community expectations.*

The visitor management, tenancy management and Red Card policy all need to be reviewed.

You may recall the minister also cited a specific example brought to his attention:

… a tenant had 62 Red Card demerit points under Labor and was allowed to continue living in that house. This has all been allowed to happen while there is an eight to 10-year waitlist.

There are many good people on that waitlist looking to get into housing and willing to do the right thing, but they are being neglected because we keep people in there who are vandalising houses and destroying our neighbourhoods.

This year we will act. To the residents of Karama, Malak and Knuckey Lagoon, as I said in my maiden speech, I am here for you. This government—including the minister, me and my MLA colleagues—is working to support our Territory community by strengthening our housing policy so that we can evict people when need to. We do not want to evict people, but if we have to we will. We recognise that these are neighbourhoods and communities, and we cannot have people in there destroying them. I will give members plenty of examples in my adjournment speech to highlight how people have been suffering.

I thank the minister and my colleagues. We are on the right track. Let us keep going. We have only just started and have achieved a lot, but there is a lot more to go. I am interested in housing reform.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the speech delivered by the Chief Minister about her and her government's plans for the year ahead. Although I do not agree with a lot of the plan's positions and pathways, I acknowledge that the government has a mandate, and it will do what it does.

I will touch on what having a mandate means. I do not appreciate the constant demonisation of my electorate because it did not have the same mandate as other constituencies had. My constituents had a mandate and that was electing me to represent them and their interests because of the views, aspirations and goals we took to the election. I want that noted. Let us be mindful when we talk about that because we are here because people voted for us. There should be a diversity of views, opinions and aspirations.

The year ahead looks different depending on where you are, who you are, where you come from and what you want to see. For the good people of Gwoja from the bush, whom I represent, the year ahead looks different from what it might look like for other members and their constituents.

I approach this year ahead with optimism but also caution for the people of the bush. I say optimism because there are several plans in place that are national bipartisan agreements such as the remote housing plan, so we can continue to see that good work. I approach it with caution because as supportive as I have been, I am disappointed in the response from the minister for Housing's office.

I wrote to him in November with concerns about repairs and maintenance that constituents had reported, and we have not had a response from that office. It is nearly three months people have been waiting. Minister, I would greatly appreciate a response from your office to the letters I wrote to you in November. Just because the constituents of Gwoja are not represented in government does not mean that they should receive any less respect or service, and those issues raised through me are equally as important. I would appreciate correspondence back relating to the housing issues and concerns that were sent to the minister's office.

Country for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory is important. It is a foundation to our being and culture. This year we will work to understand changes that the government is putting up regarding anything that impacts our natural environment because it is important to talk about.

This year our focus is on housing and making sure the delivery is being done; it is on the environment, standing up strong and talking for country. Representing the views and aspirations of the people of Gwoja is important.

I shout out to all the amazing ranger groups throughout the electorate of Gwoja to celebrate them. We will be working this year to understand the issues, challenges and ideas they have to make the Territory's environment even safer, more protected and beautiful.

One issue that continues in Gwoja is how we can work as a community to respond to domestic, family and sexual violence. We will continue to ask questions of the minister about the continuation and rollout of funding, making sure that programs are evaluated. We have heard from the minister on the importance of programs needing to be evaluated, and we look forward to the government evaluating its own Circuit Breaker Program. We will be following that process and journey.

Across the Northern Territory there will be a range of events. First and foremost, this year we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the handing over—the pouring of the sand—in Gurindji country. The Wave Hill Walk-off this year is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the handback, an incredible history-making event. We will come together to celebrate the process of and journey to land rights in the Northern Territory. Land rights are our right.

Outside this Chamber we have an important date coming up—the federal election. It will be a time for people in the Territory to make a decision. We have a choice to continue down the avenue of seeing record investment in the Northern Territory by the federal government or to go for a Coalition government that said it plans to put countrymen on the cashless debit card and change income management. It talks about the erosion of land rights in the Northern Territory and conducting audits into Aboriginal organisations and only Aboriginal organisations. That is the kind of language we are hearing, which is causing concern for people across the Northern Territory. It will be important for people to hear from all sides at that time because whatever the outcome is will greatly change the work we do in here.

As an opposition member I will continue to travel across the Northern Territory, talking and listening to people, hearing their ideas and the things that people want us to talk about in here. Part of our role in opposition is to ask the questions and hear from people about their lived experience to understand what we can do to help shape debates in this place and to put forward positive ideas to help keep the Territory going.
We will see projects roll out. I was heartened to see continuation of the investment in sealing the bitumen across the Tanami Highway. It is an important project that continues to roll out, and I am thankful for the contributions coming from the Commonwealth. There are roadworks on the Buntine, Buchanan and Docker River roads, which are important roads.

The housing investment continues to roll out. Amazing works are happening in our communities, art centres and schools. I look forward to getting to all the schools across the great electorate of Gwoja, hearing from the teachers and meeting all those wonderful students. I will be meeting health professionals in communities and our local government workers. It is a great thing this year to get out and talk to people and understand how they are feeling and what they are experiencing.

This year for me the priorities are making sure the Housing minister and his office respond to the request from constituents to have their homes—their places of deep love and care—looked after, with repairs and maintenance carried out in a timely manner. They should not be left to wait, as some of my constituents have been under this current government. I have not had a response to a letter about repairs and maintenance in nearly three months. I will ensure that our mob out bush know the good story about housing.

I will be supporting our environmental organisations which have been defunded by the CLP; looking after our rangers; and making sure the government stays true to its word in honouring its commitment to support the domestic, family and sexual violence sector. I will look out for the good people of Gwoja. I look forward to seeing ministers travelling around and hearing from the people of Gwoja their experiences and some of their ideas.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Gwoja for his contribution. I too would like to lift up the people of Gwoja.

I pick up on comments he made earlier that there was criticism of the people of Gwoja. I have not heard it in this Chamber, and if anyone would criticise the good people of Gwoja I would have words with them.

Palmerston, particularly my electorate of Blain, is a meeting place for people from around the Northern Territory. I have people from Maningrida, Wadeye, Emu Point, Peppimenarti, Papunya and Lajamanu come to my electorate. The people from Lajamanu are big, strong men. They are strong people, worthy of respect.

I will comment on some of the luminaries who have come out of Gwoja—from Yuendumu, Bess Price, who was a member in this Chamber and a minister in a previous government.

Jacinta Price, her daughter, is on the national stage fighting for Indigenous people every day, not for the Indigenous industrial complex which benefits from keeping Indigenous people in poverty. In fact, the worse things are in remote communities, the worse that Indigenous people do in all kinds of outcomes; the further the gap gets, the better the professional Indigenous complex does. Jacinta Price is out there fighting for audits, for the real people on the ground in the communities, to make sure that the billions of dollars of federal tax money goes to the people who most need it.

Another point is that the Member for Gwoja commented on the mandate of Gwoja. I note for the record that from an enrolment of 6,132, the Member for Gwoja received only 1,654 votes. My maths is not too good; what percentage is that? It is 26%.

The majority of people in Gwoja chose not to vote for the current member. In fact, the majority chose to stay home or go out on country and not vote rather than vote for the current member. If that is a mandate it is no wonder that he thought he was doing a great job as Attorney-General when the current Corrections crisis was brewing for the last two years. I will leave that there.

On a different note, the Member for Johnston yesterday gave a wonderful speech on economy and society. I will make my contribution. You said, ‘The economy is a measure of the health of our society’. I agree with the sentiment, but my perspective is that society is a measure of the health of the economy. When there is an economy where people have jobs and are gainfully employed, small, medium and large businesses are flourishing and there is opportunity, there you will see a vibrant society with an outpouring of all the things that we appreciate.

When there is no economy or a fake economy we see a failure of society. I see that in some parts of Palmerston. The Member for Drysdale might see this in one part of Gray where there is not a real economy and people subsist on Centrelink, do not seek or engage in gainful employment, and end up in all kinds of antisocial behaviour that does not benefit anyone. That is my perspective.

I will talk about something positive, which is our plan. The Member for Karama set the bar high for promoting our plan. I am inspired to talk about this year of action, certainty and security.

Action: as a citizen in the Northern Territory for the last eight years I pounded my hands on my desk in disbelief at the lack of action by the previous Labor government—the Gunner/Fyles/Lawler Labor government. It failed to act on bail reform, youth justice reform and delivering the boot camps that it promised in 2020.

While doorknocking in Bellamack at the last election people told me that the Labor candidate in 2020 promised all these boot camps. When he was unceremoniously turfed out of the Labor Party he would talk about them and bring up the collateral that he was given to promote. Whatever happened to that? Was anything brought to this House? Was any program commissioned? Was one dollar put towards it? Nothing! There is nothing to show. I am proud to be part of a government that will be delivering boot camps.

Certainty: I love to talk about the economy. In any business people need certainty, even in the NGO space. If people do not have certainty in their funding they cannot commit to larger programs. A lot of NGOs, particularly in the DV space, seek five-year funding commitments because that gives them certainty across terms of government.

Unfortunately the private sector had no certainty over the last eight years. The only certainty was that if someone was a friend of certain high-placed people in the Labor government their project could get through. They might even be showered with torrents of taxpayer dollars, like certain projects that are turning the Treasurer's hair grey because those projects are causing him sleepless nights, unfortunately.

With the Finocchiaro CLP government industry and small businesses will have certainty. They will know that when they seek approval to invest that a yes means yes. The Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment earlier this week talked about a yes meaning yes. If people get an approval they can proceed. That approval is as sound as a dollar or pound. You can take that to the bank, whereas under the previous government an approval was simply a stay of execution until some green lawfare NGO came along and lobbed a merit review at you and potentially stalled your project for six to 12 months until you could get it out of NTCAT.

Security: the people of Blain already appreciate the security that is coming. It is not perfect yet; we still have a long way to go. As the Corrections legislation that we passed today eases the pressure on our Corrections system and allows the justice continuum to function more effectively security will move more in line with our desires. Things are already moving where they need to go.

This CLP government has a plan to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore our lifestyle. It is a commonsense approach. We were in the mall today reaching out to the normal people, the public servants of this great Territory. I cannot remember in the last eight years when Labor government members set up a tent in the mall and made themselves available to the normal citizens of the Territory. The Member for Spillett and her team have done that for quite a while. Not everyone stops, but when I talk to people they say that they appreciate us being available.

I turn to our natural strengths. I am running out of time, so I will be quick. I grew up in a Territory that was proud of itself; we were not embarrassed to promote ourselves because we did not see crime being splashed across the national broadsheets. I will not go further into that. I look forward to bringing tourism back onto the national stage. If it was not for Defence spending our economy would have been even worse over the last few years. In agriculture, the federal Labor government has declared war on our cattle industry. Gas—let us get the Beetaloo going. Mining is own-source revenue.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Madam Speaker, we are talking about the year of action, not the year of inaction, the year of not doing anything or the year of wasting our time. I am proud to be part of a government that is keen to get on with the job and turn around the mess that we have inherited.

The three words we are focusing on this year are action, certainty and security. It is important that people focus not just on the action, because that is coming, but also the certainty and security we are trying to provide through our action.

We are trying to give business and investors the power to know that their money will be safe in the Territory. If they invest in a major project and the approvals have been granted, the approvals will stay. We are getting rid of the third-party merit reviews whereby naysayers can throw bombs from the other side of the room and destroy and damage a project's viability by delaying it for months at a time. We are giving businesses the security to know that when a decision is made the decision will stay. I am proud to be part of a government that welcomes investors to the Territory instead of trying to scare them away.

Madam Speaker, you have no doubt witnessed in your few years in this Chamber—I will not say how long, but you are more than welcome to still be here; we love you—project after project come to the Territory and be hit by roadblock after roadblock for the last eight years. That time is over.

Mr Paech: Do you love me?

Mr MACKAY: I pick up on the Member for Gwoja's interjection. I acknowledge that he was recently married, and I would not like to get involved!

This year of action is something we should all be proud of. Already we have seen a swathe of new legislation in this Chamber. We passed three Bills this sittings—three Bills in three days is not a bad run in my book—and we are getting on with the job of turning things around.

We abolished the minimum unit price, which was an election commitment that the Members for Karama and Blain have already detailed was in our plan.

We have already raised the payroll tax threshold for the first time in 13 years—it might have been 15, but I am hoping it is 13 for the sake of being right. Thirteen years ago, I was a young pup and I did not know what payroll tax was, but we do now. I am proud to be part of the government that has raised the threshold for the first time. When payroll tax was first introduced it was equivalent to about 66,000 minimum wage hours. We have raised it to be about 100,000 minimum wage hours. In those 13 years the minimum wage rose significantly, and the amount of work versus the size of businesses that should be paying payroll tax has changed. I am proud that this government has taken this action. From 1 July that exemption will stay in place.

Today we got on with the job of trying to find a solution for our Corrections crisis we inherited. Five hundred more people are incarcerated than under Labor; that is 500 more Territorians who are no longer on the streets and posing a threat to the rest of us. However, our Corrections workers are overworked and tired. They are getting on with the job. I commend their spirit and their courage to go to work each day, but we are trying to provide some relief.

In the Bills we have introduced—I would hate to pre-empt future debate, so I will save my fine comments for later—we are getting across the spectrum, focusing on reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring our Territory lifestyle.

By the end of the year I hope to present them with a pet crocodile to take home. I look forward to every Territorian embracing our iconic animal. If the Leader of the Opposition would like a pet crocodile I will see what I can do. They are a great Territory icon and very low risk compared with other animals. I can safely say that with all the pet crocodiles I have seen in my life I have never been bitten. However, only yesterday my pet horse bit me, thinking I was hiding a carrot in my pocket. I was not hiding a carrot in my pocket. Crocodiles are a part of the Territory's iconic lifestyle, and there are many residents in my part of the world who love this change.

I normally write long speeches and have my notes in front of me, but today I only needed to know action, certainty and security. It is a simple motto to follow. I am proud to be part of the government that is getting on with the job.

We are seeing reform in education; we are getting kids back to school. I thank the Minister for Education and Training for making those changes. It is important to acknowledge that if we can get a kid to school we can get them on the right track.

The Member for Daly is passionate about getting kids to school in his electorate. A major benefit of the road that has been petitioned for this week is that it will allow kids in Wadeye to get to the state school in Palumpa. I support—100%—kids going to school and having access to both public and private schools.

I acknowledge the fantastic work that goes on in each department across the Territory. I thank the public service for getting on with the job, not hindering our progress and working with us to make sure that we can better the Territory as much as possible.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, I am glad that the Chief Minister brought on this year of action statement about action, certainty and security.

At the Darwin Convention Centre on Monday more than 500 businesses, leaders and peak bodies were represented. It was a fantastic event. I was proud to be there not only representing my electorate of Brennan

in Palmerston but also the whole Northern Territory in my roles as the Attorney-General and the Minister for Tourism and Hospitality, Parks and Wildlife, Major Events and Racing.

I have spoken in this House about the things that we have already done to reduce crime, which is one of our key election commitments. That includes having 500 extra prisoners instead of those people being out on the streets committing more crimes. We quickly expanded the legal services and gave Legal Aid much-needed money that it has begged for over a long time, because we wanted to ensure there was justice for victims.

I have spoken about increasing capacity in our courts by lifting the prisoner caps; making the courts work longer hours over Christmas and new year, which is a critical time; and appointing judges. That work is not set and forget; we will not stop working on this area. There is more legislation coming this year. An omnibus Bill—I will not pre-empt debate—will come forward soon. It will bring even more efficiency to our justice system because it is needed.

In the Tourism and Hospitality portfolio we immediately made it clear that rebuilding the economy would be a focus. Bringing departments together to work under the one ministry—being Tourism and Hospitality, Parks and Wildlife, Major Events and Racing—means that we can do things differently. We can work closely together instead of being in silos. As one minister with a great team behind me in the department we can get on with rebuilding our economy.

This includes the work we need to do in order to focus on the areas that shift the dial. We look at things that are not working now, what we have spent money on in tourism over many years that have not worked and how we can do it better so that we can ensure for every dollar we invest in tourism there is bang for our buck.

A lot of work has already happened in Tourism and Hospitality. This week we passed legislation to scrap the minimum floor price, which affected businesses because they had to do even more burdensome things and drove consumers to drink more hard spirits.

I look forward to this year of action and bringing on military tourism, which is our focus. Darwin is Australia's own battlefield, and we have so much deep history, military heritage and war history to share with the globe. I look forward to announcing what that will look like in the coming months.

The work that Minister Cahill is doing with me in the aviation sector already has great runs on the board in the last couple of weeks, with flights in and out of Darwin to and from the important destination of Denpasar, which is a major international airport. It helps not only our migrants but also inbound traffic into the Territory so that people can explore our beautiful destination.

As the Member for Goyder said, under our government Territorians can have a pet crocodile. We were quick to change that because it goes to the freedoms of being a Territorian. People come here for all sorts of reasons and if we can give them one more and they want a pet crocodile, then so be it. It is great to have that available for Territorians.

We need crocodile management. We do not want any more front-page news of crocodiles in our swimming holes like Litchfield because that sends a bad message to the rest of Australia that our waterways are not safe. We have a lot of crocodiles in the Territory. We need to manage them so that camping grounds and beautiful waterways can be open for tourists and Territorians. It is part of our lifestyle.

Regarding our lifestyle, it is important that under the Major Events portfolio we continue to deliver the things that are working. Today I announced the lineup for BASSINTHEGRASS, with one of the acts being the Hilltop Hoods, which is exciting. International and national people and locals are in the lineup, including Cyril, one of our Darwin locals. I was in the mall today with Hope D, one of the DJs, who is from Queensland. The Members for Fannie Bay and Drysdale joined me at that event.

We had a coordinated and strategic effort for the Alice Springs Masters Games which we delivered late last year when we first came to government. It will take a big effort to grow the games. It cannot just happen. It has to be a focus and a collaboration between all the departments and everyone involved to ensure that we make it bigger and better every time.

We will have fireworks at Mindil Beach this July. It is important. It was under threat last year, and Labor tried to hide that it would not have the fireworks. All of a sudden Labor said, 'It is okay; we will have it at the Waterfront.' There was lots of confusion; we did not know what was going on. I guarantee Territorians and anyone who comes up for the 1 July fireworks—which people love; it is one of our unique things that

Territorians can enjoy once a year—the fireworks at Mindil Beach, with a stage and a fantastic show. It will be amazing. I look forward to it.

I look forward to the year of action led by our Chief Minister who, by all accounts, has been the most courageous Chief Minister the Territory has seen in a long time. She has been getting a lot of attention around the globe for all the decisions being made.

Motion agreed to; report noted.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
17th Anniversary of the National Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples

Madam 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:

Recognising the 17th anniversary of the National Apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples and the ongoing impact caused by the past mistreatment of members of the Stolen Generation in the Northern Territory.

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

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I thank my parliamentary colleagues for supporting this matter of public importance discussion.

On this day 17 years ago the then Labor Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, stood in Australia's Parliament House in Canberra and issued an apology to members of the Stolen Generation for the pain and suffering they had endured as a result of longstanding government assimilation policies.

This is some of what Prime Minister Rudd said that day:

> *For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.*
>
> *To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.*
>
> *And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.*

It is important on this historical day that the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly takes the time to remember and reflect on what the Apology continues to mean for fellow Aboriginal Territorians.

For some six decades, from 1910 into the 1970s, thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children across the country were forcibly removed from their families and their communities. These children of First Nations were removed by government officials, religious institutions and welfare bodies under the sanction of various government assimilation policies. Children were removed regardless of whether there was a valid welfare reason to do so. As many as one in three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were taken away from their families over these decades—thousands of children, some only babies at the time.

It is difficult to think about the terror these children must have felt, some literally ripped out of their mother's arms and taken away from their home. They spent their childhoods in compounds, on missions and in the homes of strangers. They were denied the opportunity to grow up with their loved ones and their families, to listen and to speak their language, to understand and perform their culture, to celebrate milestones together and to feel the strength of family bonds, their country, identity and strong culture.

For many these fundamental human rights of belonging, unfortunately, were replaced with horrific neglect and abuse. The waves of trauma, grief and suffering that those terrible policies caused Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to ripple out even today with the intergenerational trauma. It has become a tragic and long-lasting legacy for so many families across the Northern Territory who are still suffering from the trauma that has been passed down through generations. As a country we continue to pay for the legacy of the Stolen Generations. We pay through the impacts of ongoing trauma, disadvantage and poverty, and we pay in a way that diminishes us as a nation, of not being whole.

It also serves as a reminder to everyone in this Chamber of our responsibility to ensure that we do not enact laws or introduce policies that cause harm over good for fellow Territorians.

It is likely that every Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family across the country would have had direct or indirect connection to a member of the Stolen Generations, demonstrating how far reaching these policies were. They are still impacting us today.

In 2019 the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare published a report on the impact of children and young people living in a household with members of the Stolen Generations. The report outlined the reality of intergenerational trauma, finding that these children and young people were more likely to struggle with health issues, school attendance and adverse life outcomes compared with non-Indigenous Australians. This is why it is critical that we, as decision-makers and lawmakers, ensure that policy considers the entire circumstances facing a child or young person and their family. In this place we can lift them up and support them to thrive, not punish and judge.

The seminal Bringing Them Home report that was tabled in the federal parliament on 26 May 1997 was the catalyst for Prime Minister Rudd's Apology some 11 years later. The report was unequivocal:

> *For individuals, their removal as children and the abuse they experienced at the hands of authorities or their delegates have permanently scarred their lives. The harm continues in later generations, affecting their children and grandchildren.*

In confidential evidence, one member of the Stolen Generation taken at the age of 12 months in 1967 shared their story:

> *The Government has to explain why it happened. What was the intention? I have to know why I was taken. I have to know why I was given the life I was given and why I'm scarred today. Why was my Mum meant to suffer? Why was I made to suffer with no Aboriginality and no identity, no culture? Why did they think that the life they gave me was better than the one my Mum would give me?*
>
> *And an apology is important because I've never been apologised to. My mother's never been apologised to, not once, and I would like to be apologised to.*

On 24 October 2001, well before Kevin Rudd delivered the National Apology as the Prime Minister to the Stolen Generation, there was an apology delivered in this Chamber by the then Labor Chief Minister, Clare Martin. We were the last jurisdiction in Australia to offer this recognition. The gallery was full of members of the Stolen Generation, who came to bear witness to this important acknowledgement of what they experienced, to validate that we knew what happened to them as children at the hands of government authorities in the Northern Territory.

Chief Minister Martin spoke of the experiences of members of the Stolen Generation who were taken away from their families at alarming rates, with most placed in one of the seven missions established across the Territory.

Chief Minister Martin relayed the experience of one man who was originally removed from the Kahlin Compound in Darwin at just three years of age and then placed in the Bungalow in Alice Springs:

> *There's where food was scare again. Hardly anything … night time we used to cry with hunger, y'know, lice, no food. And we used to go out there to the town dump … we had to come and scrounge to the dump, y'know, eating old bread and smashing tomato sauce bottles and licking them. Half of the time our food we got from the rubbish dump. Always hungry there.*

It was a profoundly important moment in the history of this Chamber, but the then CLP Leader of the Opposition, Denis Burke, had only this to offer in reply:

> *I certainly do not believe it is my right, or the right of anybody, to apologise on behalf of the Territory government or the Territory parliament …*

I can only imagine how disappointing and hurtful this response must have been for the Stolen Generation members who attended that day.

Yesterday the Member for Gwoja and I attended the event in Darwin to mark the 17th anniversary of the National Apology. There were many high-profile Territorians and elders who have dedicated their lives to

telling their stories, their truths, about being part of the Stolen Generation. They have contributed greatly to their community, family, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren to continue the story, honour what happened and make sure it never happens again.

Today is a day that members of the Stolen Generation in the Territory continue to mark because it remains such an important day, a part of truth-telling and the history of this country. More importantly, it is a part of the healing process. It provided much-needed and long-hoped-for recognition of the pain that these children and their families endured over many decades. It was an honour to be at the event and support our own Stolen Generation community in remembering this all-too-recent part of our Australian and Territory history.

To have the time and space to acknowledge and reflect is often not available, and today is one of those days. We must focus on what this means for the past, the feelings of today and the healing of tomorrow.

Members of the Stolen Generation in Darwin are concerned that the $3m committed by the former Labor government for a dedicated commemorative space at the former Kahlin Compound will be scrapped by the CLP government. I wrote to the Chief Minister to outline these concerns of Stolen Generation members and the Friends of Kahlin group, but I am yet to receive an answer.

This memorial is profoundly important to the survivors, their families and the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the Territory. The Friends of Kahlin have been working on this commemorative space for many years. I sincerely hope that the Chief Minister understands how important this project is to many people across the Darwin and Palmerston regions and, indeed, the Northern Territory. The commemorative space has been driven by survivors and their families for the opportunity of healing and to ensure we never forget or repeat this chapter of our dark history.

Today is a reminder that we all have an important responsibility in this Chamber to act in the best interests of the people of the Northern Territory, to lift people up and support them to thrive so that they can live full and meaningful lives. It is a reminder that there are people in our community and their families, who face enormous challenges which are often not of their own making. As decision-makers we have a responsibility to support them, not further entrench them in a life of poverty and disadvantage.

The recommendations of the Bringing Them Home report remain as relevant today as they were when the report was first released. This report and its recommendations should act as guideposts in the work we do alongside, and in the name of supporting, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Territorians.

For example, the report includes clear recommendations about policies and practices that should be adopted to ensure that we do not see another Stolen Generation. That includes the application of the Aboriginal child placement principles, which are used to ensure children in our care system are raised in the best possible environment for them. In the first instance, that means placing them in a safe, caring environment with a member of their family or community, if that is possible. Every jurisdiction across the country applies these principles when it comes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in care.

These principles are explicit that the first consideration should always be what is in the best interests of the child. That is clear in the legislation as it stands. Any suggestion from the CLP government that it is deliberately meddling with this legislation, without being able to give a solid justification for doing so, has to be taken with caution. I believe it is disingenuous to Aboriginal Territorians.

I have spoken at length about the horrific impacts of child removal on our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, but the story of the Stolen Generations is also a story of strength and resilience. Aboriginal Territorians have seen countless government policies that made determinations over their lives. They have seen these come and go—some good, some well-intentioned but misplaced and some harmful.

Through it all, Aboriginal Territorians have continued to practise their culture, speak their language and raise their families to contribute to their communities; run businesses, organisations and corporations; and provide services to their fellow man and woman. They have done this despite the many challenges that have faced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the Territory.

There is one clear message that we should take away from the horrific experience of the Stolen Generations and all who have come after them: when Aboriginal Territorians can take control of their own lives to make their own decisions in the best interests of their own families and communities that is when they thrive.

Our role as members of parliament is to lift up and support fellow Territorians to ensure that the Territory and its people flourish and thrive.

Aboriginal Territorians were talking about self-determination before that word was given to it. It is a great disappointment that the CLP government chose to scrap the treaty process which offered a clear pathway to consider and explore what full self-determination could mean for Territorians.

The CLP government has also not committed to continuing anything about the local decision-making agreements once they expire in the Territory. This is another process that has been linked to self-determination, with a way of doing government business differently and providing the opportunity for Aboriginal Territorians, communities, organisations and regions to run service delivery for themselves, decide for themselves and be accountable to themselves.

All these areas, unfortunately, are starting to look darker. When it comes to government policy we would love to see what the vision is from the CLP government besides local government reform.

We all know that Aboriginal people are not homogenous. There are different areas of interest and different skills and talents, but one thing is for sure: everywhere I have been in the Northern Territory since growing up here there is understanding of the strength of Aboriginal Territorians and knowing that they continue to fight for self-determination even to this day.

I acknowledge all the Stolen Generations over the decades; those survivors who are still with us, the many who have passed since that horrible government policy commenced in 1910 and all the families who honour and respect the legacy that their families fought for. Some failed and some continue to fight today, but ultimately, everyone wants a brighter future for their families.

It gives me great honour to commend this matter of public importance before the Assembly.

Mr EDGINGTON (Aboriginal Affairs): Madam Speaker, today marks the 17th anniversary of the Apology to the survivors of the Stolen Generation.

Delivered in 1997 by the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Bringing Them Home—the report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families—is a tribute to the strength and struggles of many thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people affected by forcible removal from their families and their country.

I empathise with the parents who lost children and children who were forcibly taken away from their parents. I acknowledge the hardships endured and sacrifices made. I have no doubt that many people have experienced unimaginable lifelong grief and shame for not being able to protect and keep their children safe.

I acknowledge the Stolen Generations for their suffering, loss, resilience and, ultimately, for their dignity. I also acknowledge the incredible contribution our Northern Territory Stolen Generations survivors have made to this great Northern Territory.

The Northern Territory Stolen Generations Corporation service was incorporated in 1998, 10 years before the Apology. The Northern Territory Stolen Generations Corporation service provides ongoing support, intergenerational activities, social wellbeing, healing and identity-strengthening programs. This is important work led by some incredible Territorians.

The $378m Territories Stolen Generations Redress Scheme is managed by the Australian Government. It is open until 28 February 2026.

As the Northern Territory Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, along with many other portfolios, I am exceedingly proud of the direction our CLP government is heading in to ensure that voices of Aboriginal Territorians are heard.

With overwhelming support at the polls in August, Territorians indicated that they had enough of Labor's self-interest over selflessness and its arrogance over altruism. Quite frankly, I think the Labor government and the Labor Party more broadly should say sorry to all Territorians.

I was interested to read today's *NT News* article that quotes Mr William Tilmouth, an Arrernte elder and co-founder of Children's Ground. The article says:

> *Thursday, February 13, marked 17 years since former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered an apology to survivors of the stolen generation.*

> *But Children's Ground chair William Tilmouth—an Arrernte elder who was taken to Croker Island as a child—says 'the situation for First Nations children remains dire'.*

This is of great concern to me as the Aboriginal Affairs minister. The article goes on to say:

> *Mr Tilmouth's comments come after Prime Minister Anthony Albanese used his Closing the Gap speech in parliament to tell the country that only five of the 19 targets are on track to be met.*

Mr Tilmouth is quoted as saying:

> *The system is failing our children, our families and our communities. After 17 years of Government 'solutions', only five of 19 targets on track to be reached by 2031. Rates of out-of-home care, suicide and incarceration, among many others, are worsening …*

The article also says:

> *Data from the productivity commission shows five closing the gap targets are on track for completion by 2031: babies being born healthy; children enrolling in preschool; getting 25-64-year-olds employed; and land and water rights.*

Clearly, as stated in that article, the most concerning thing is that the situation for First Nations children remains dire. That is the key takeaway from Mr Tilmouth's comments.

Quite frankly, Labor has a lot to answer for, being in government for 19 of the last 23 years in the Northern Territory. There are a lot of things that Labor should be saying sorry for, given the dire situation that children face in the Northern Territory. Labor should be saying sorry for contributing to the erosion of our great Territory lifestyle.

I have spoken many times about the Northern Territory law and justice strategy that was scrapped in 2005 by the Labor government. Not only was it scrapped; it set us back 16 years. The new Aboriginal Justice Agreement was signed just a few years ago.

On 1 July 2008—a date fairly and squarely etched in people's minds—the Northern Territory Labor government disempowered Aboriginal people in remote communities when it took away local government councils and introduced super shires. Everywhere I travel, different stakeholders and Aboriginal people in the bush have been disempowered and have lost the ability to deliver their own services in their communities.

Our policy is all about empowering Aboriginal people in the bush. That is what we were elected to do. That is what we will do. This year as we move through the Territory consulting and engaging with Aboriginal people, our aim is to empower people in the bush.

We want to ensure that Aboriginal people living in the bush thrive and have local decision-making through local government to control the services and programs that are delivered in their community. We want to restore the power to Aboriginal people living in those places, which was taken away by the Labor Party on 1 July 2008.

There will be opportunities for social and economic development, planning for infrastructure, delivering programs—whether that is night patrol, safe houses, sports and recreation—doing the municipal work, looking after the roads, employing local people and all those services that were taken away by the Labor government on 1 July 2008.

That is the date the community control was taken away in the bush. Labor should be saying sorry for that. Will Labor apologise to Aboriginal people in the bush for disempowering them?

What about local decision-making? This was an exercise in spin. Local decision-making plans were a concept that Labor adopted over the last eight years. Many of those plans were never signed. There were statements of intent for all sorts of things. Essentially it was an exercise in smoke and mirrors, putting together a shiny and, as the Member for Gwoja often says, gammon plan. That is what some of those plans were; they were tokenistic, virtue-signalling plans. Clearly, Labor missed the memo about supporting Aboriginal people. Labor should say sorry to those Aboriginal people.

Will Labor say sorry for consistently failing Aboriginal people over the last eight years? In June 2020 members on the opposite side consisted of 18; they have now been reduced to four. Between travel rorts, cocaine–sex parties, abuse of taxpayer funds and fiscal mismanagement, it is not surprising.

Will Labor say sorry for failing to act and allowing the rivers of grog into our town camps and communities at the sunsetting of Stronger Futures? Will the Member for Gwoja say sorry for looking to profit from these rivers of grog? Will Labor say sorry for failing to build the Port Keats Road, despite having secured federal money to do so? Will the Member for Daly say sorry for bringing the elders and community members from West Daly into parliament to grandstand and ask questions that he already knew the answer to?

Will Labor say sorry for failing to keep its staffers in line, turning a blind eye to their poor behaviour? Will the Opposition Leader say sorry for the toilet creeper?

Will Labor say sorry for being asleep at the wheel with no plan and no idea, letting crime spiral out of control across the Territory, impacting on the children of the Northern Territory and school attendance?

Will Labor say sorry to my constituents in the Barkly for failing to invest in critical infrastructure to benefit families and children? Why did you not invest in BRADAAG, a rehabilitation facility after signing the Barkly Regional Deal? Why did you not deliver the crisis youth support and safe places accommodation for young people or trauma-informed care and services for all those issues that impact on Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory? You had 19 of the last 23 years to deliver programs and services to support children in the Northern Territory. Will you say sorry for failing to invest in Corrections and the justice system? You have let down many Territorians.

As Mr Tilmouth said, the situation for First Nations children remains dire. After governing for 19 of the last 23 years, Labor in the Northern Territory has some explaining to do. The system you created has failed our children, families and communities. If it had any integrity, Labor should apologise to Territorians for the way it treated children over the last 19 years.

In closing, I acknowledge every member of the Stolen Generation. Their lives have been turned around through that process of removing children, and I acknowledge that, but the situation today is as dire as it ever has been. I expect Labor to apologise for that.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am speechless. I am appalled that this MPI is being politicised by members in this Chamber, because my grandparents are Stolen Generation. I did not appreciate you, Member for Barkly, coming in here and politicising their removal for your own political gain.

My grandparents and great-grandparents are products of the Stolen Generation. This is not the time for any member of this Assembly to politicise it. To come in here and talk about Uncle William's story and make it fit your own political narrative to play politics with people's lives is not the right time.

This motion was not brought on because we wanted to get a point. It was brought on because yesterday I saw members of my family at the Stolen Generations lunch, and they asked what the Northern Territory parliament is doing about the anniversary of the Apology to us. I had to tell them that there was nothing planned. I came back and talked to the Opposition Leader. I said, 'Selena, I think we should do something to recognise the importance of this anniversary'. That is why we are here. Not for anything else but to acknowledge and honour the Stolen Generation survivors. Member for Barkly, you should be ashamed of yourself.

We gather here in the spirit of reflection, remembrance and hope. Today is a profound day of significance for all Australians, especially for Aboriginal people, the original inhabitants of this land. Today is a day to pause and acknowledge the grief, trauma and pain caused by governments to the Stolen Generation. Their lives were ripped apart by policies of forced removal, separation and assimilation. This is not just a day about sorrow; it is a day about truth and the courage to face our shared history.

No matter how uncomfortable it may be and no matter how hard it is, we have to walk together to the path of healing and justice. The Apology delivered in 2008 by then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was a monumental step forward, but it was only one step—a first step.

We cannot forget that words without actions are hollow. We must continue, as Aboriginal people and everyday Australians, to demand that the apologies, the promises and goodwill are translated into tangible change for our people and communities.

We do not need symbolic gestures; we need systemic reforms that change and address the legacy of colonisation and intergenerational trauma. I am thankful for the work that was done by members of the Commonwealth parliament as a whole and our own Senator for the Northern Territory Malarndirri McCarthy in this space, who have worked tirelessly supporting the redress scheme and other healing programs.

For too long the voices of Aboriginal people have been silenced, sidelined and often ignored. Too often our rights, culture and lives have been treated as secondary to the interests of others. However, the time has come for a new era—a time when the voices of Aboriginal people are not just heard but also involved in shaping the policies and decisions of the future that shape our lives.

As we remember the Stolen Generations today we also acknowledge the strength and resilience of those who have survived. Their fight for justice and recognition continues to inspire us all. Let us be clear: we are not just looking for recognition of the past wrongs; we are demanding a future built on respect, dignity and equality. Our children, elders and community deserve more than just the apologies. We deserve real commitments to closing the gap that are not just about improving statistics because we are those statistics and we are real people. What about uplifting people, preserving culture and securing our sovereignty? We deserve self-determination, not as a distant dream but as a reality that we begin to build today.

To those who may doubt our resolve I say that we will never stop fighting for justice or the importance of the land and our culture and rights. We are not a burden to be pitied; we are proud descendants of the oldest living culture on the planet. We are here to stay. We are powerful, resilient and unified people. We will not rest until our voices are heard, respected and acted upon, and until our children are with us.

Let us also be clear with ourselves: it is not the time for complacency. We cannot afford to rest on past victories or stand still in the face of ongoing injustice. Now, more than ever, it is time for Aboriginal people and our organisations to step forward with renewed strength, resolve and purpose. We must work harder and demand harder results.

Our fight for justice is far from over. We cannot be afraid to call out racism or injustice where it exists, whether it is in our communities, our halls of power or in the everyday lives of our people. Silence and complacency are no longer options; it is time to stand up and loudly and unapologetically call for the rights and dignity of our people. We must hold all governments, institutions and individuals accountable for their actions. We must ensure that the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are always at the forefront of this struggle.

On this day, the anniversary of the Apology to the Stolen Generations, let us commit to a future where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are truly seen, heard and respected. Let us work together to heal the wounds of the past and build a future where our children can grow up in a world that values their culture, language and dignity. We will not rest until we see justice, equality and respect in every aspect of our lives.

It is important to highlight that in the Northern Territory, of all the children in the out-of-home care system, 23% are with their kinship structures and 69% are in child protection experiences where they are not with their kin. I urge honourable members to read the Family Matters report that has been put together; it is incredibly important.

Today is a day to say that the Stolen Generations is a past policy, but it is a policy that was built on people seeing and feeling that they were a better group of Australians. My great-grandparents were in loving and caring families. They were supported, loved and cherished, and they were removed.

I have seen the devastation and trauma caused by the Stolen Generations people not knowing their country and who they belong to and not knowing their ceremony, their songs and their *Tjukurpa* (Dreaming). That erodes people; it eats away at you when you do not know who you are. Think about that for a second: everyone here knows where we come from. We know our families, our culture and belief systems, but imagine not knowing that.

Imagine taking your great-grandparents or grandparents back to country that they were removed from, that they have never been to since, and seeing their reaction to meeting family members whom they have never met before. That is not just their experience; that is your experience. It is your family story, and it is one that no-one in this place should be playing politics with. We all must do better. Today is about honouring those stories because they are stories woven into our nation's history. Those stories need to be respected and honoured; they are stories that each and every one of us needs to commit not to repeating.

I swear the ancestors were looking down on me the other night when I left here, went home and switched on the TV, and I saw a powerful documentary on NITV by Larissa Behrendt on the child placement principle and how important that was. I urge people to look at that and understand what that means.

I have two important things to say. One is a quote from one of my constituents who has passed on, but his family live strong and his legacy remains. That was Bobby Randall. Bobby Randall sang the song *Brown Skin Baby (They Take Him Away)*. It is powerful; people need to listen to that. You can feel the emotion in Bobby's words, the history of being removed and trying to reconnect later in life and the struggles he took. We only need to look at the late Archie Roach where he famously said in his songs:

This story's right, this story's true
I would not tell lies to you
Like the promises, they did not keep
And how they fenced us in like sheep

These stories are people's lived experiences. I thank all the amazing people who opened their arms with love yesterday at the Stolen Generations lunch at Silks Darwin. A big shout-out goes to the people in the Stolen Generations services across the Northern Territory and the Link Up services who do an amazing and incredible job linking families for the first time. I would be overwhelmed.

Thank you to all the Stolen Generations. I see you, I hear you, I feel you, and I thank you for your courage every day. To the families who are still on their journey to find their loved ones, I wish you the best. I send you strength, courage love and the hope that you may find your loved ones. If they are with their ancestors at least you will know where they are resting in peace, and you will know that story.

Let us take the moments to reflect on the significance of today. Let us be reminded that this is not about politics; this is about reflecting and remembering those who have gone before us.

Mrs HERSEY (Education and Training): Mr Deputy Speaker, I will speak from an Education perspective on this MPI recognising the 17th anniversary of the National Apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples and the ongoing impacts caused by the past mistreatment of members of the Stolen Generation in the NT.

Our government is committed to improving education outcomes for Indigenous children—in fact, all children. We were elected with a clear mandate to get kids back to school and set them on a better brighter path. Education is the key to a successful future. It opens doors to better employment opportunities and better health and overall wellbeing.

Let me be clear that under Labor the Northern Territory's education system was nothing short of a national embarrassment. The statistics speak for themselves. When it comes to school attendance, academic achievement and the safety of teachers and students, Labor over the last term deserved nothing less than an F.

The Member for Arafura asked about swimming in his electorate. We went to the election with a $3m commitment to teach all children how to swim. This is …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. I understand there is often latitude in debate, but this is a matter of public importance about the 17th anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generation.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I understand, but other members had latitude, and we are only early into the speech.

Mrs HERSEY: All children in Years 1 to 6 across the Territory will be learning to swim. As our national drowning rate is extremely low, it is important that all children learn to swim. Some of the inference from the other side in Question Time was questionable.

Under the previous government the Northern Territory had the worst educational outcomes in the nation. Territory kids, particularly Indigenous children, are falling behind the rest of the country in fundamental skills like reading and writing.

Ms Uibo: Do you understand what intergenerational trauma is, Member for Katherine?

Mrs HERSEY: As I pick up on the …

Members interjecting.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Honourable members, this is an important motion. Until now everyone has been civil. You may not agree with what people are saying, but we have all listened to them in silence. Can we continue that, please.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. This is an important issue, about the Stolen Generations …

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order. I have already ruled on that previously.

Mr Young: It has nothing to do with the Stolen Generations.

Mrs HERSEY: I pick up on the interjections from the Opposition Leader and the Member for Daly. This is all about intergenerational trauma. I will paint a picture to show exactly how we have come to be here.

Ms Uibo: Exactly—talk about it. It is not in the last eight years, Member for Katherine.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, please.

Mr Maley interjecting.

Mrs HERSEY: Mr Deputy Speaker, I sat and listened in silence, without interjecting …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Standing Order 1; I understand the Member for Nelson is interjecting. He is not doing so from his chair. He is out of his seat.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Can we all just calm down a bit. Please let people speak in silence.

Ms Uibo: The Deputy Chief Minister of the Northern Territory acts like a little sulky schoolboy—pathetic.

Mr Maley: Shut up. Go outside and cry.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, stop interjecting, please. This is an important motion. Please let people speak in silence.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Standing Order 31; offensive and disorderly words by the Member for Nelson telling me to shut up.

Mr Young: He needs to withdraw.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I cannot say I heard it.

Ms Uibo: Lucky, he did it twice; I only reported him once.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Can we please let the Member for Katherine speak.

Mrs HERSEY: There are constant interjections, when I sat here and listened to the Opposition Leader …

Ms Uibo: Because you are not talking about the subject. You are a disgrace; that is why.

Mrs HERSEY: … who is now calling me a disgrace. I ask you to make a ruling on the constant interjections, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr HOWE: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Standing Order 20; this has been an incredibly respectful debate on an important issue for a lot of people in the Northern Territory. Could we please go back to the order we had and listen to the Member for Katherine in silence?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Drysdale. That is why I emphasise we have been conducting this debate in a civil tone. Whether you agree with people or not, we cannot continue with interjections. I will not put up with it.

Mrs HERSEY: I would like to ask, if I may, that the clock go back a couple of minutes because I have an important addition, and the Opposition Leader has just wasted a couple of minutes of my time that I do not have to give my contribution.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I do not know whether the clock was stopped during that time.

Mrs HERSEY: It did not stop. Anyway, I will press on.

Under the previous government—those opposite may not like the recollection or the reminding—the Northern Territory had the worst educational outcomes in the nation. Territory kids, particularly Indigenous students, are falling behind the rest of the country in fundamental skills like reading and writing. One-third of all NT students are categorised as needing additional support in literacy and numeracy compared with just one in 10 students nationally. NAPLAN results show 58% of NT students, including 85% of whom are Aboriginal, failed to meet basic literacy and numeracy standards. A staggering 35% of these students are performing at the lowest level.

We talk about Closing the Gap targets, but those targets paint an equally damning picture. Significant numbers of children in the Northern Territory remain developmentally vulnerable. Only 16.4% of Indigenous children in the NT are on track in all five key developmental domains by school age, which is nearly half the national average. The education gap is painfully wide. Only 40.2% of Indigenous students in the NT complete Year 12 or its equivalent compared with 68.1% nationally. Even more alarmingly, only 19.5% of Indigenous people aged 25 to 34 have completed a Cert III or higher—again, this is less than the national rate.

I want to comment on that because this is why it is so important to get children to school and why it is about early intervention and prevention. Minister Cahill is working hard with the Circuit Breaker Program and we are working hard in Education with school attendance officers, as well as boosting literacy and numeracy.

The most appalling failure is in the school attendance area where Labor utterly neglected its responsibility to enforce the law which mandates that all children over the age of six years must attend school. Over the past eight years attendance has steadily declined across the Territory, leaving us with the lowest school attendance rates in Australia, well below the national average. Since 2016 school attendance across the Territory has dropped from 80.8% to a shocking 74%. In some regions the decline is even worse.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. This is an MPI on the 17th anniversary of the National Apology. The member has not made any reference to it at all; she has come in and politicised the issue.

Madam SPEAKER: I will give some latitude. This is a sensitive issue, and broad in the fact that it is talking about Aboriginal disadvantage and issues. The Leader of the Opposition spoke about the difficulty that the Stolen Generation has experienced. The opposition has brought on this matter of public importance. That does not mean you get to dictate what other people say, even if it is not to your liking or how you hoped this would go. In the context of this general topic, I will allow the Member for Katherine to continue to talk about Aboriginal disadvantage in terms of education because I think it is relevant.

Mrs HERSEY: It is all about Aboriginal disadvantage in education, and I understand that the Stolen Generation is a sensitive topic.

Ms Uibo: Not for the last eight years. Why don't you talk about the Stolen Gen?

Mrs HERSEY: It is terrible when the Opposition Leader does not want to hear, as a previous Education minister, the failings of her government.

Ms Uibo: You don't talk about the Stolen Generation.

Madam SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, remain silent.

Mrs HERSEY: Since 2016 school attendance across the Territory has dropped. What has not been shown, which is even more alarming, is the state of Indigenous student attendance. Only 51.9% of enrolled Indigenous students attend school. That is just over half compared with 84.3% of non-Indigenous students.

Even this figure does not tell the whole story. There is an unofficial list, the intensive support roll, on which students who have been absent for 20 days or more are placed. This list holds 1,710 children, of whom

1,616 children are Indigenous children. These are kids who have not attended school for one month, and in many cases for much longer. They have been on the list for one, two or even more years.

This is a Labor legacy, which had three Education ministers who clearly did not value children's education and hid these figures from Territorians to make school attendance rates look better.

Ms Uibo: Do not talk rubbish, you are a minister.

Mrs HERSEY: Let me be clear: 1,616 Indigenous children are being deprived of their lawful right to an education and a better future. This is why I wanted to shed a light on education and Aboriginal children who are not attending school. If we want their lives to be better and we want them to grow up with better literacy and numeracy, they need to attend school. They need to be educated to get a job in the end.

Does the Opposition Leader not want these children to be educated? I just find it remarkable.

Madam SPEAKER: Direct your comments through the Chair, please, minister.

Mrs HERSEY: Sorry, Madam Speaker.

If we include these children the true attendance rate for Indigenous students in the Territory is only 49.5%, not 55.2% as the official figure claims. Less than half of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory are attending school. This is unacceptable.

As the Education minister I will not stand by while these kids are left behind. I have asked the Department of Education and Training for a full briefing to get to the bottom of this, including options to improve transparency and accountability. The CLP government …

K McNAMARA: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; there are only two minutes left, and I am yet to hear anything about the Stolen Generations. I feel that this is off topic. It is not about political pointscoring; I want to hear about the MPI.

Madam SPEAKER: Part of the MPI says, 'and the ongoing impact caused by the past mistreatment of members of the Stolen Generation in the Northern Territory'. Giving all members some latitude, talking about education is relevant. However, Member for Katherine, maybe it is time to tie it in to the specific topic we are talking about.

Mrs HERSEY: It all ties in to the specific topic—the opposition and members on the other side have wasted at least five minutes of my speaking time—because this is an MPI on the Stolen Generation. We are talking about the importance of Indigenous children. Whether they were from Stolen Generation families or not, it is about getting children to school.

We inherited a failing education system when we came to government, but we have made our priorities clear. We are increasing school attendance, boosting literacy and numeracy by getting back to basics and attracting and retaining exceptional teachers who can make a difference.

Education is fundamental to building a strong and safe Territory, and we are not afraid to do the hard work to turn things around. We introduced 13 school attendance officers this year, with 11 positions still to be recruited. These school attendance officers form part of the 47 Northern Territory authorised officers currently employed.

We are giving teachers financial certainty by moving them from short-term contracts into permanent positions so that they can put down roots in the Territory and teach these children in remote and very remote schools, working side by side with Aboriginal teachers in the schools that are doing bilingual education.

I have been to Galiwinku which has had 50 years of bilingual education, but even with that 50 years of bilingual education it has a terrible school attendance rate.

We are doing everything we can to make the education setting good for these children. We have amazing teachers, great schools, learning on country and bilingual education, yet we cannot seem to get children to school. That is why as an election commitment we have brought back school attendance officers to make sure we do this.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, on the anniversary of the Prime Minister's 2008 Apology to the Stolen Generation I begin by acknowledging—as we do every morning in this Chamber—that we are gathering on Larrakia country, which has never been ceded and in which I am deeply grateful to live and work.

I also acknowledge our Aboriginal colleagues in this Chamber and thank them for sharing their country and their work inside and outside this Chamber.

I know from many people how significant the Apology was and how much hope it brought them—hope which has not been realised.

As a non-Aboriginal person I am mortified that people in this Chamber are using this MPI—which is about acknowledging the harm caused and the Apology given to Stolen Generation people—to attack Aboriginal members in this Chamber.

I received messages from people in my community who were happy to hear that this MPI was on today. People have been texting me asking, 'What is going on in the Chamber?' I am sorry to the people who are watching this. I am sorry, Noel, Grace and Emily, for you and your families who are sitting here watching this with hope and instead are hearing political pointscoring. This is not the parliament that I want to be part of; I do not think it is a parliament that we should have here …

Mr Maley: Will you resign?

Madam SPEAKER: Silence, please. Come on; no interjections.

J DAVIS: I beg your pardon, minister?

Mr Young: Show some respect.

Madam SPEAKER: This is a sensitive topic, issue and MPI. Let us be respectful. Different people will have different perspectives and ways to respond to this, and we have to be respectful.

J DAVIS: I am sorry to my colleagues in the Chamber who brought this MPI as an opportunity for respect and healing and instead have been attacked. I acknowledge that this is your story and you are the people who have been harmed by this. I am sorry for all the harm caused and that we continue to cause in this Chamber.

I have been privileged to facilitate meetings for some of the survivors of the Stolen Generation under the redress scheme—which we heard referred to before—where representatives of the institutions which stole children sat with those who were stolen. The courage and grace with which these now old people shared their stories was one of the most humbling experiences that I have ever been part of.

It is not my place to tell those stories, but if you have not heard them I encourage everyone in this Chamber to find a way to hear them. These stories are a part of the fabric of the Northern Territory. I also acknowledge the courage of the religious leaders and senior government leaders in hearing their stories and acknowledging the harm that was caused.

Once again I say sorry—a word that some people find difficult and many misunderstand—for the great harm we have done and continue to do because we do not have to look far to see that these injustices are not over, as we have seen today in this Chamber.

Last night the Member for Gwoja talked about hate speech on the internet. I join with him in saying that we all have a role in stopping this. I am sure every person in this Chamber would join with me in being horrified by some of the commentary on social media. I have seen people feeling emboldened to freely make public comments like, 'It is scientifically proven that Aboriginal people have a lower IQ', calling Aboriginal people monkeys and openly calling for a return to the Stolen Generation. I know that no-one in this Chamber would want that.

I also note that this commentary was in response to some of the Bills that have been proposed, debated and passed in this Chamber. What we discuss and do in this Chamber, the highest place of power in the Northern Territory, affects what happens everywhere in our community. When we pass laws which we know will impact disproportionately on Aboriginal people or use harmful language in our debates, these decisions matter; they cause real harm. These choices matter and they have lasting consequences for the people we are meant to represent.

When we hear that our colleague the Member for Mulka—now in his third term in this parliament, and a man of incredible dedication, wisdom and integrity—on his way home from a long day working with all of us in the Chamber is denied service at a petrol station because he is Aboriginal, we must ask ourselves what we are doing to challenge and change that.

As well as acknowledgement and saying sorry, I reiterate my commitment to justice in this Chamber and in this country—to truth, justice and treaty.

In the last week I was saddened to see the CLP's decision to abandon the huge body of work that people across the Northern Territory did towards a treaty. I stand with all those who believe in the power of reconciliation and justice.

My work until I came into this Chamber was about bringing people together, often those who had harmed each other deeply. I worked with individuals and communities who often had been in conflict over many generations. Time and again I saw that bringing people together worked because it created spaces for people to listen to each other beyond fear and assumptions, acknowledge past harms and find a way forward. It worked for people to move forward and build stronger, better communities.

In the field that I work in a real apology involves listening to the harm, acknowledging it and then committing to doing things differently. In this country, we are deeply divided. The media and vested interests feed into our polarisation, making it harder for us to see the humanity in one another.

In the Northern Territory where we pride ourselves on our cultural wealth, our diversity and living side-by-side, it is tragic that some cannot see that addressing our history and creating a future together is in everyone's best interests.

A treaty is not something that anyone is forced into; it is the result of people working together. It is the result of collaboration not coercion. It brings clarity, fairness and peace. It is an opportunity, not a threat.

In the words of the Member for Mulka, which I was privileged to read to this Chamber earlier: will we see a legacy of partnership and respect for self-determination, a pathway that brings hope for our future? That is what treaty is about. It is a diplomatic space where we can plan for the future together.

I am proud to wear this shirt tonight designed by Rev Dr Gondarra who left us last year and was honoured in this Chamber and also with a state funeral. This is a hand-drawn design by the reverend of the *dhulmu-mulka* (sacred dillybag), the keeper of Yolngu law. The reverend was a champion of bridge building, *makarrata* and treaty making throughout his great life, and he is greatly missed.

I want to say that I think we can do things differently; we can model a way of listening and working together, a way that we want for all Territorians. I have said before that I want to be part of a parliament that I can be proud of and one where we work together for what is best for every person in our community, where we model ways of respect and collaboration, are brave enough to acknowledge when we have caused harm and have courage to do what we need to do to address that harm.

On today, National Sorry Day, I commit to continuing to work for justice in our country. I commit to truth and treaty, and I urge my fellow members to show leadership and join with me.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, I start by paying my respects to the traditional owners of the land on which we gather, the Larrakia people, to their elders, past, present and emerging. I also pay my respects to those Larrakia people who were affected by the Stolen Generations, who were taken away from their families, mothers and dads.

I also acknowledge my own heritage as a Yaegl man from New South Wales, and my family, my grandparents who were taken away due to this policy.

Seventeen years ago on this day, in 2008, Australia took a major step on its path for reconciliation. The then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd stood in the Australian Parliament and made a formal apology to Australia's First Nations people. On behalf of the nation he said sorry to the Stolen Generations and to our families, acknowledging a painful chapter in our nation's history.

For decades Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were taken from their families across Australia under the form of protection and assimilation by churches, welfare organisations and governments. Our

families were torn apart, our culture was denied and our identities were stolen, leading to profound grief, suffering and loss.

The exact number is unknown; however, it is estimated that one in three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were forcibly removed from their families and fostered or adopted by non-Indigenous families or raised in institutions. Children grew up in these institutions or foster homes where they faced neglect, abuse and a lifetime of disconnection from their heritage. Some found their way home; many did not.

In 1997 the Bringing Them Home report was released, shedding light on those horrendous policies and their lasting impact on the Stolen Generations. The report makes it clear this is not just history, but a shameful legacy that still affects communities in the Northern Territory and those across Australia. This trauma did not end with the members of the Stolen Generation. Its impact continues today in our children and grandchildren. The report called for truth-telling, justice and healing. It emphasised culturally appropriate services and self-determination, recognising that Aboriginal people must have a say over their own future.

Reconciliation is not just a word; it is action. It means listening to the voices of those who suffered, ensuring their stories are never forgotten, and committing to policies that strengthen, not separate, Aboriginal families and to heal this country from the devastation of one of its darkest chapters.

The Apology was an important moment. It admitted that past government policies had caused immense pain and grief. Children lost their culture, language and identity. It was a line in the sand, saying that these mistakes should not and would not ever happen again.

Today as we remember that Apology we also celebrate the incredible resilience and strength of the members of the Stolen Generations. Even though they went through so much hardship, they continue to stand up for justice and healing. They shared their stories so that younger generations understood what happened and never have to go through the same thing. They fight to protect and keep their cultures alive. Their resilience is inspiring. Their courage reminds us how strong our Aboriginal communities are even in the face of huge challenges.

The Stolen Generations endured loss, pain and enforced separation, yet they have built lives, raised families and worked tirelessly to reconnect with our culture and country. Their perseverance shows us the power of the human spirit. The trauma of being taken away from their families has left lasting scars, but their strength has helped lead the fight for justice, recognition and cultural survival. By acknowledging their endurance, we honour their ability to reclaim what was lost and stand proud in their identity.

While we recognise the Apology, we must also admit that there is still a long way to go. We should all continue to support and advocate for self-determination for Aboriginal Territorians.

If we are to close the gap in life expectancy, health, education and employment outcomes, Aboriginal Territorians need a seat at the table in all areas of government policy and decision-making. Aboriginal communities have worked hard to achieve justice and fairness, but these decisions make things even harder for them. They take away control from Aboriginal people and make it more difficult for communities to stand strong.

It is essential that Aboriginal Territorians are engaged on their terms on their own country. True progress will be made only when Indigenous communities are given the power to decide their own future. Too often governments of all persuasions impose policies without properly consulting Aboriginal people. Programs that are not led by Indigenous voices often fail because they do not reflect the real needs and values of the communities they are meant to serve.

Instead, decision-making must be grounded in deep respect, consultation and partnership with Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal leaders, elders and traditional owners must be at the centre of discussions that impact their lands, cultures and people. We need to listen to Aboriginal voices and make sure they are included in important decisions. We must make sure apologies are not just words but real action because only by facing the truth can we move forward united as a nation that respects, values and uplifts its First Nations people.

I was going to share a story tonight of my grandfather who was taken away, but I have decided that I will not share that story here. Unfortunately, we have seen the politicisation of the Stolen Generations tonight. I came in thinking that the goodwill of the Chamber would be here and we would genuinely speak about the Stolen Generations. It saddens me, as I talked to my family about speaking on this tonight. In my heart I know it is

not the right place because I thought people here would genuinely with goodwill be speaking on behalf of the Stolen Generations, so I will not be sharing that.

It is a shame that there have been members in this Chamber, including the Aboriginal Affairs minister, and I am shocked by his behaviour in this Chamber—the disrespect that has been given to survivors of the Stolen Generations, the disrespect to their families, and the disrespect to the Aboriginal members here tonight. Each and every one of us has been impacted by this.

I think it is a time to reflect and look at what has been put up tonight—an MPI to discuss the 17th anniversary of the Apology to the Stolen Generation. Throughout certain people's contribution to the debate I saw the Deputy Chief Minister laughing, thinking it is a joke. This is not a joke. This has caused serious harm, and I would hope tonight that every one of us who witnessed it will reflect on that behaviour. We are supposed to be leaders in the Northern Territory, and we copped that disgusting behaviour. We get that there is a time for politics, but read the room.

To the Stolen Generations families watching tonight, I am sorry for the behaviour of some members in this Assembly. There are no words for it.

To the Stolen Generations families, your strength and courage will always be remembered. Your fight for justice will always be supported. Thank you for your voices that continue to lead the way as we work for a future where these mistakes are never made again, and where true fairness and respect are achieved.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I recognise my Aboriginal colleagues in this Chamber, their resilience, their families' resilience and the importance of their stories.

Thank you to the Member for Arnhem for bringing this matter of public importance before the House.

I recognise the Member for Daly's speech. I am feeling quite heightened and emotional after that, because I have also been sitting here during this debate.

We saw a similar motion to mark the anniversary of Cyclone Tracy recently, and I note that the behaviour, mood and contributions of that were different from what we saw today. Many members were vulnerable and everyone in this Chamber showed respect to that. I cannot believe that we have not seen that here tonight.

The contributions from the Members for Barkly and Katherine were shameful. It is shameful to politicise this and not take it seriously. The interjections, laughter and heckling of the Member for Johnston by the Member for Nelson continue to demonstrate his inability to have any skerrick of humility, decency or respect in this Chamber. It is disgusting.

Today marks 17 years since Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made the first national public apology to the Stolen Generations. As I stand here on stolen Larrakia lands, I reflect on our shared and shameful history, and I recognise this legacy and that the trauma of the Stolen Generations is still ongoing. I say to all the descendants of the Stolen Generations—many of whom live in my electorate, and whom I speak to regularly—I see you, I recognise your pain on this significant day, and I recognise that we still have much further to go in addressing the ongoing implications of this intergenerational crime.

We see the impacts of the Stolen Generations in the Closing the Gap targets or more specifically in the failing to meet those targets year after year. Today 90% of children in our foster care system are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, despite making up only 26% of the population—that figure is wrong, sorry. What is this except the continuation of Stolen Generations? Children need to be in safe homes, but what are the factors that lead to those homes becoming unsafe? It is the impacts of intergenerational trauma, dispossession and genocide that have been enacted against First Nations people for over 200 years.

The Closing the Gap figures show that what we are doing is not working, and by 'we' I mean white institutions. It is not working. Let us commit to continuing to implement the recommendations of the Bringing Them Home report, investing in closing the gaps and seeking genuine and structural justice throughout the Northern Territory.

One way to do this is through treaty. As I said in my inaugural speech, I support our colleague the Member for Mulka's call for treaty. Aboriginal Territorians deserve self-determination. They need to have control over matters impacting their lives. This week it was devastating for survivors and families of the Stolen Generations to see the government throw out years of work that had been done on the NT Treaty Commission report. The NT Greens and I unequivocally support truth-telling and self-determination through treaty.

As part of truth-telling for Stolen Generations, there is a tangible and entirely feasible action that we can take. I spoke about this in an adjournment speech last year, but it is pertinent to mention it again.

Members of the group called Friends of Kahlin—some of whom live in my electorate—have been working tirelessly and asking the government for years to build a commemoration space on the site of the former compound. It is important to recognise and commemorate this site, acknowledge the terrible failings of the past and build a monument to truth-telling. Only when telling the good and the bad stories, with owning our past mistakes and recognising the strength needed by First Nations people to survive them, can we build a shared future founded on mutual respect and trust. I am waiting eagerly to hear whether the government will respect the wishes of the survivors and families of the Kahlin Compound and honour the plan for recognition of this important bit of our history.

Today I recognise the importance of the Apology to survivors of the Stolen Generations, and I honour the continued survival and resilience of First Nations people all over this country.

I thank the Member for Daly for what he said, and I implore the other members who may be speaking on this to do what they can to try to show a tiny bit of humility, decency and respect.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Madam Speaker, 17 years ago today then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd stood in federal parliament and delivered a National Apology to the Australian Indigenous peoples. It was a defining moment of truth-telling and recognition. It acknowledged the immense harm inflicted on the Stolen Generation and the ongoing trauma caused by decades of discriminatory government policies. Colleagues, today we look back on the moment with mixed emotions, pride and sorrow. There is pride in the incredible resilience of the Stolen Generation survivors who, despite everything, have held onto their culture—not all but most—language and identity.

Before I go on, we need to understand what that policy was trying to do: remove kids who had a bit of colour in them from wherever and take them to another spot in the country where there were dorms. In my electorate of Arafura there are two main spots, Minjilang on Croker Island and Garden Point on Melville Island; there is a plaque in Minjilang acknowledging that.

Even though I am not a Stolen Generations person I have relatives because of intermarriage that occurred. The Aboriginal people took them in and showed them that culture, and now they have culture.

Sorrow—because while an apology matters, words alone cannot erase the pain of the past and the lasting disadvantage that shapes the lives of Indigenous Australians. The forced removal of children was not just personal trauma; it was a government-led effort to erase Aboriginal identity. That legacy is still with us, reflected and faced by Indigenous communities with poorer health and life expectancy, over-representation in child protection and the justice system and barriers to education and employment.

Identity—imagine being removed from your people and put in the place of other Indigenous groups and trying fit in. It is horrific. They could not understand the language. That is why I was extremely disappointed with the Aboriginal Affairs minister. He could have these types of people in his departments listening to him. He is also the Mental Health minister.

Aussie governments at every level have a responsibility to address these injustices, not just with words but with real action, yet here in the Territory we see local decision-making taking a backward step. Instead of building on commitments made in the Apology we are undoing hard-fought-for progress by Aboriginal people.

Most devastatingly, this government plans to dismantle the Aboriginal child protection placement principle. I am a kinship carer, and we have had this girl since she was five; she is related to my partner. In the first month she struggled. She did not have language, did not know who her family was and did not know where her country was. She is now in high school thriving. The proposed amendments to the *Care and Protection of Children Act* would allow the government to override the principle under so-called special and exceptional circumstances. I am concerned about that.

The Apology was not the end of our responsibility to the Stolen Generations; it was the beginning. Reconciliation is not about words; it is about action. It is about justice, self-determination and policies that actually make life better for Aboriginal people. Seventeen years on, we all know the strength of those who survived the past injustices, but we have to acknowledge that our work is not done.

The NT has a big cohort. It is one of the main places. As I said before, we have people amongst your departments who have come from the Stolen Generations. They are thriving in our communities—most made

AFL from Tiwi—and they are leaders, despite all of that. We have to ask ourselves whether we are moving forward or leaning towards our past; are we repeating the same mistakes all over again?

I thank everyone who contributed.

Mrs ZIO (Fannie Bay): Madam Speaker, today marks the 17th anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations, a pivotal moment in Australia's history.

On 13 February 2008 the then Prime Minister stood before parliament and delivered an apology to Indigenous Australians, acknowledging the profound grief, suffering and loss inflicted by past government policies. This Apology was not merely a symbolic gesture, but a recognition of the cold, confronting, uncomfortable truth of our nation's past.

The Apology addressed the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, communities and country. It was a formal acknowledgement of the pain endured by the Stolen Generations, their descendants and the families left behind. As the mother of three children I cannot imagine the pain that those people went through.

Although the Apology was a significant step forward towards reconciliation, as the Member for Arafura said, it was never intended to be the end of the journey. This new chapter was meant to focus on closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity. Seventeen years on we must acknowledge that progress has been slow. The latest Closing the Gap annual report shows that only five of the 19 socioeconomic targets are on track. It is a sobering reality that reminds us all that the work is far from complete.

We must strive for practical solutions that make a tangible difference in the lives of our First Nations people, particularly in the areas of safety, housing, health, education and employment.

I hope that we can use this anniversary as a catalyst for change. Let us work together—Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians alike—to write a new chapter for our nation's history, a chapter based on mutual respect, resolve and responsibility. As we reflect on the past, please let us also look to the future with determination and hope, for it is through our actions, not just our words, that we will create a more just and equitable Australia for us all.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Fannie Bay from whom I always get a lesson about listening more and speaking less. It has been humbling today to listen to everything everyone had to say. I had not planned on saying anything in particular; I have no prepared notes, so we will see how this goes.

I have no specific nexus to this issue or to the Stolen Generations, and I do not want to speak for anyone else. I had the privilege, though, of being in Canberra on the day when the Apology was given. I remember it being an emotionally charged time and issue. I remember people having a range of opinions about whether an apology should be issued, what it meant, what it did not mean and who had the authority to speak on any of the issues.

We all have a right to speak in this place on all these issues. I am grateful for the diversity of voices I have heard tonight. I do not wish to speak for anyone else. I recall clearly that Hon Dr Brendan Nelson was under extraordinary pressure not to support the Apology. It was one of the more stellar moments of his leadership that he could bring together a coalition of the willing to join forces and provide a unified, dignified and respectful position and try to move things forward.

I can honestly say, hand on heart, for what it is worth that I am proud to be part of the government. I believe in the sincerity of all my colleagues on this side of the Chamber. I believe in their commitment to want to make things better for all Territorians and Indigenous Territorians.

Indigenous disadvantage begins with education. People who have represented electorates out in the bush and have a deep and abiding connection to Indigenous communities are entitled to vent frustration at the fact that in the last 17 years we have not managed to progress a range of things we aspired to in that National Apology.

I do not have any answers. I am grateful we had the opportunity to hear from everyone today on these issues. It is only by having open and respectful discussions that we can move the agenda forward.

I did not know the Member for Daly until last December when we were both forced to be at the Scrutiny of Legislation Conference in Victoria, briefly. I got to know him a little as a human being, and he is not a bad bloke. I would like to hear his grandad's story at some point.

I think it is great that everybody could make a contribution today and recognise the anniversary of the Apology.

Madam SPEAKER: I pay my respects to the Stolen Generation of the Northern Territory on this 17th anniversary of the National Apology. I acknowledge the pain and suffering they have experienced, and I wish them peace, love and kindness going forward.

I, too, would love to have heard the story of your grandparents, Member for Daly, because they come from a part of the world that I know well, at the top of the Clarence River. Maybe we can have a cup of tea one day, and you can tell me the story.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Madam Speaker, I raise a deeply concerning incident that occurred within the parliamentary precinct yesterday. On Wednesday 12 February, on a sitting day of the NT parliament, a federal staff member of Senator Malarndirri McCarthy attempted to physically intimidate a Member of the NT Legislative Assembly.

The independence and liberty of all MLAs in this Chamber is of the utmost importance and is essential to the Westminster system. It should be of great concern to all in this Chamber and in the Northern Territory that a staff member for a Cabinet minister in the federal Albanese government attempted to intimidate and harass a member of this Assembly.

All representatives of the people, at all levels of government in Australia, must ensure we uphold a free and democratic society. Why Senator McCarthy's staffer set out to intimidate a Territory MLA is unknown. However, he followed up his physical intimidation with harassment and unfounded accusations.

To the members of the NT Labor Party, I hope you share similar concerns that our NT parliament should be free of intimidation and harassment, especially from federal taxpayer-funded staff.

I hope the Prime Minister takes swift action on the senator's office and the staff member who actively attempted to intimidate a Member of the NT Legislative Assembly and did so on Parliament House grounds on a sitting day of parliament.

Given what has already been widely reported in terms of the behaviour of staff from the Leader of the Opposition in this place, I call on the Leader of the Opposition to speak with her federal ALP colleagues, as a leader of her organisation in the NT, to make clear to her members and supporters that this behaviour is unacceptable and to prevent this sort of action from taking place again.

I make it clear that behaviour of this type is unacceptable, and I will not hesitate to call it out when it takes place. Although I refrain from naming the individual involved at this time or mentioning his personal connections to this place, I have no qualms naming this community member if these actions and behaviour continue in any way.

Mr PATEL (Casuarina): Madam Speaker, I celebrate remarkable individuals and cultural milestones within our Casuarina community—moments that reflect the spirit of service, dedication and multiculturalism that define the Northern Territory.

It is my privilege to recognise Mr Michael Foley OAM, who has been named the 2025 NT Senior Australian of the Year. In many cultures, especially in my culture, elders are revered as pillars of wisdom, strength and compassion. For more than 40 years Michael has embodied these values, ensuring that senior citizens are not only recognised but also celebrated.

In 2014 he founded Seniors of Excellence NT, a platform dedicated to honouring the contributions of elders. Since its inception 183 seniors have received the Seniors of Excellence NT Award highlighting their lifetime of achievements. Michael's dedication extends beyond this initiative. He has given his time and resources to

organisations such as Cancer Care NT, Variety, the Royal Darwin Hospital palliative care hospice and the National Heart Foundation Australia.

At 84 years old Michael remains steadfast in his mission to uplift and honour our elders, reflecting the wisdom of the *Bhagavad Gita*: always act for the welfare of the world. On behalf of Casuarina and the Northern Territory, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Michael Foley OAM on his well-deserved recognition. His work is a shining example for all generations.

On Saturday 1 February I had the honour of attending and speaking on behalf of the Northern Territory Government at Thaanama 2025: Rhythms of Sri Lanka, a spectacular cultural event celebrating Sri Lankan traditions and diversity within our community.

I attended this event alongside Minister Marie-Clare Boothby; Member for Wanguri, Oly Carlson; and Member for Karama, Brian O'Gallagher, all of whom share a strong commitment to supporting and celebrating the diverse cultures that make up our Territory.

This event was more than just a festival of dance; it was a powerful expression of history, storytelling and unity. Through the NT Government's Community Benefit Fund we are proud to support cultural initiatives that strengthen community ties and enrich our social fabric.

This year's event also marked the fifth anniversary of the Lankan Dance Academy, the largest Sri Lankan dance academy in Darwin. Under the leadership of Mr Sadeepa Sandaruwan the academy has grown from just four students to more than 50 dancers, with 36 dancers residing in the Casuarina electorate. These young performers, aged two to 27 years old, are keeping the traditions alive while building bridges between cultures. Congratulations, Sadeepa, for your hard work; it has paid off.

Thaanama 2025 featured traditional and contemporary dance forms, including Kandyan dance, mask dances and cross-cultural collaborations with the Vietnamese, Colombian and Philippine dance communities. The festival also highlighted the grace and depth of Divine Steps Bharatanatyam, reinforcing the deep cultural ties between Sri Lanka and the broader South Asian region.

To all the performers, teachers and cultural leaders, your dedication ensures that these traditions are preserved, celebrated and shared with new generations.

Events like Thaanama demonstrate the importance of multiculturalism in the Northern Territory and how cultural expression strengthens our community. As Territorians we must continue to support and celebrate diverse cultural events like Thaanama, ensuring these traditions continue to thrive and gain national recognition. I look forward to seeing this academy and its talented dancers represent the Northern Territory on a national level in the future.

I recognise an outstanding young athlete from the Northern Territory. Congratulations to Arabella-Vada Sinclair for being selected as one of only 11 finalists in the Woolworths Cricket Blast 1st XI program. This is an incredible achievement, and she is the sole representative from the Northern Territory. As a proud Indigenous girl from Larrakia land, Arabella-Vada has demonstrated commitment and perseverance through Tracy Village Cricket Club, the Cricket Blast program and the All Girls Pop-Up Colour Blast program. Her dedication and love for the game have brought her to this incredible moment, and I could not be prouder of her.

Arabella-Vada, you are an inspiration. Keep playing, keep pushing and keep proving that NT cricket has some serious talent. The future is bright, and I cannot wait to see what is next for you.

I warmly welcome our newest Australian citizens in the Casuarina electorate. Among those who have made this proud commitment are Dimuthu Darshana Jayasekara and his son, Thenuka Jayasekara, residents of Muirhead. Becoming an Australian citizen is a significant milestone, symbolising a commitment to our shared values of democracy, freedom and respect. Their journey to citizenship is not just about gaining a nationality; it is about embracing new opportunities, responsibilities and a future filled with promise.

To Dimuthu, Thenuka and all new citizens, I extend my heartfelt congratulations. Australia is enriched by your presence, and I have no doubt that you will contribute great energy, talent and dedication to the Northern Territory and the Casuarina electorate.

This adjournment speech reflects the best of our community—cultural pride, service, inclusivity and new beginnings. From Michael Foley OAM's lifelong dedication to seniors to Thaanama 2025's cultural showcase,

Arabella-Vada Sinclair's sporting excellence and our newest Australian citizens, we see the richness and strength of the Casuarina community and the Northern Territory. Let us continue to support and celebrate the diversity, dedication and achievements that make our Territory a great place to call home.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, in my capacity as shadow minister for Fire and Emergency Services I place on the public record my congratulations for 50 years of the Northern Territory Emergency Services.

In January this year we marked 50 years since the establishment of emergency services. Northern Territory Emergency Services was formally created in response to the devastation caused by Cyclone Tracy in 1974. Since 1975 Northern Territory Emergency Services has grown to include 18 volunteer units across the Territory, with volunteers playing a crucial role in responding to a range of emergency situations, including tropical cyclones such as the recent Cyclone Marcus in 2018 and Cyclone Trevor in 2019.

Other significant events include the Central Australia and Barkly fires in 2023; Central Australia floods and storm events in 1988, 2016 and 2023; and the Big Rivers region floods in 2006, 2022, 2023 and 2024, which all impacted parts of my electorate of the Daly. Northern Territory Emergency Services also played a significant role during the Katherine floods in 1998 and 2006; supported the MH370 air observers' search in 2014; assisted overseas in the Christchurch earthquake response in 2012; and had deployments closer to home during the New South Wales flood support in 2022. The service has also responded to train, plane and motor vehicle accidents, as well as performing vertical rescues and missing person searches and providing support to other agencies.

It is the dedicated volunteers who ensure that the Northern Territory Emergency Services is available 24/7, 365 days a year, ready to respond to any emergency. We can all agree that the sight of these amazing volunteers arriving in their distinct orange uniforms is reassuring to know help is at hand. There are many Northern Territory Emergency Services volunteers from my electorate of Daly. I thank them for all the hard work that they commit to.

I ran out of time on Tuesday evening as I acknowledged some of the citizenship awards that were recently handed out throughout communities across the Northern Territory. I will pick up from where I left off.

I acknowledge all our Territory award winners who represented us in Canberra. I give a special congratulations to Daly electorate local and 2025 NT Local Hero, Mignon McHendrie, the wildlife carer and advocate from Darwin River. I am sure many people in here know of her work, especially those members who represent the rural area.

For over 30 years Mignon's work has brought compassion and education to her community, rescuing and caring for the Northern Territory's unique wildlife. As head of the community organisation Wildcare Inc NT, she is at the helm of a team of volunteers who rescue wildlife. She also donates her time to work with remote communities, including organising for animals to be flown to Darwin for specialised care.

As a volunteer the wildlife warrior shoulders a large responsibility, applying for government grants, managing finances, recruiting and coordinating volunteers for rescues and facilitating board meetings. Organising fundraising events and managing public relations is also part of her considerable remit. She is expanding the work of Wildcare Inc by training the community on how to care for orphaned baby animals and licenses the taking of animals with carers into local schools.

Mignon is a true advocate for Australia's treasured wildlife. Her kindness and compassion are contagious.

I acknowledge West Daly's amazing achievement late last year at the Keep Australia Beautiful Council NT Tidy Towns 2024 Awards. I give a special shout-out to the Palumpa community for winning the Community Participation Award. Your dedication and hard work are truly inspiring. I take my hat off to everyone involved, including the Thamarrurr Development Corporation, the Palumpa school, ALPA and the West Daly Regional Council, for your efforts to make the community a clean and beautiful place.

The community members take great pride in their community. Two or three years ago they put in the bottle cages where people can place all their recycled bottles. They are trucked off to be recycled. It is a way members can keep the community clean and make a bit of money along the way. It has made a huge difference in the community for Palumpa.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, crime and antisocial behaviour associated with some public housing tenancies continue to be the major issue raised with me by residents in my Karama electorate. I continue to vigorously advocate on their behalf, raising their concerns with our government, including

relevant ministers and agencies such as our Chief Minister and Police minister, Hon Lia Finocchiaro MLA; the minister for Housing, Hon Steve Edgington MLA; senior police; and department of Housing staff.

For example, earlier this month I took the minister for Housing to meet with a number of Karama residents to discuss their longstanding concerns about some neighbouring public housing tenancies which continue to destroy their lifestyle. The residents included one young family in Copra Crescent, Karama.

This young wonderful couple, who had their first child seven weeks ago, bought their house two-and-a-half years ago and invested significant money in it to create a fantastic home and garden. This couple both have jobs and dearly wish to stay and raise their family in Karama. However, this dream has been ruined by ongoing antisocial behaviour, including continual loud music until 5 am, screaming, fighting and drunken behaviour from often up to 20 people staying at an overgrown and rubbish-laden neighbouring public housing tenancy in Manunda Terrace.

That house in Manunda Terrace has been the subject of multiple police and housing complaints over a number of years from many neighbouring residents, including accusations of drug dealing. Last weekend one of the fugitives from the recent shocking shooting at Nightcliff was arrested hiding in this house.

The sad consequence of all this trauma, including severe sleep deprivation for the young mother during her pregnancy from all the ongoing noise and violence, is that this couple are looking to sell their house at a financial loss and move interstate to try to restore their lifestyle. What a shame, as these are the type of people we need to desperately keep in the Territory to help build our economy and population.

The minister and I also met a middle-aged couple who own their home and have had similar concerns over the last three years with some public housing tenancies in Fig Court, Karama. They have already invested almost $60,000 in strengthening the security of their house, but still have longstanding issues with antisocial behaviour. After many years of ruining the lives of neighbours one of these public houses has recently been vacated, but the minister and I saw three trades vans at the property with tradies doing major repairs to the vacated house at great public expense.

The couple's greatest fear is that once fixed, the department of Housing will put in another batch of tenants who will be no better and may be worse than the previous tenants. They are pleading with the department of Housing to truly vet the next tenants to ensure that they will respect the neighbourhood.

The minister and I also visited an abandoned house in Wylie Court that was left in a state of disrepair several months ago.

These are just three of multiple examples that I could give of how our neighbourhoods have been destroyed in Karama and Malak by a failed public housing policy inherited by this government from the disastrous Labor government.

I thank the minister for Housing and the minister for Territory Families for coming to a public forum in Malak that I hosted in early November to hear the serious concerns of 50-plus residents about how the escalating antisocial behaviour in some public housing tenancies has destroyed their lifestyle and impacted severely on their physical and emotional wellbeing.

As I mentioned in my maiden speech, to those residents living in Karama, Malak and Knuckey Lagoon severely affected by antisocial behaviour in public housing tenancies, including those who live in Mistletoe Circuit, Dorrigo Crescent, Dalwood Crescent, Tabletop Place, Fawcett Court, Koojarra Court, Koolama Court and Applegum Drive—to name a few—I am here for you.

Along with the Members for Blain and Drysdale, I have been advocating for legislative reform, including amendments to the *Residential Tenancies Act*, to emphasise that public housing is a privilege. We want real and strong consequences, including much speedier eviction when irresponsible tenants use their house for criminal activities, including drug dealing; cause significant damage to their public house; or continually breach orders regarding antisocial behaviour that destroys our neighbourhoods.

We also have issues regarding the overly high density of public housing in Karama, Malak and suburbs in Palmerston. We urgently need to sell stock, including abandoned houses, to reduce this density to more community-acceptable levels. We are fed up with parts of our suburbs becoming the ghettos of Darwin and Palmerston. Enough is enough.

I am heartened by the minister for Housing's announcement yesterday that we are looking to make substantial legislative reforms and other measures to make tenants responsible and accountable for their behaviour. The minister said:

> *The pendulum has swung too far in defending the rights of individuals, and we will take action. In 2025 we will act on public housing reform. We will look at the* Residential Tenancies Act *and how to align it with community expectations.*
>
> *The visitor management, tenancy management and Red Card policy all need to be reviewed.*

The minister cited a specific example brought to his attention:

> *… a tenant had 62 Red Card demerit points under Labor and was allowed to continue living in that house. This has all been allowed to happen while there is an eight to 10-year waitlist.*

Note that there are many good people on that waitlist who are looking for housing and willing to do the right thing.

This year we will act. To the residents of Karama, Malak and Knuckey Lagoon, I am here for you. This government, including the minister, my MLA colleagues and I, are working to support our Territory community by strengthening our housing policy so that we can evict people when we need to.

I am a strong supporter of the need for public housing. I have many deserving residents who respect the privilege of being allocated public housing and many others on the eight to 10-year waitlist who would do the same. Here is a message for those tenants who blatantly disrespect this privilege and assume they are free to destroy our neighbourhoods: your time is up.

To the responsible residents of Karama, Malak and Knuckey Lagoon, I am here for you.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I will again talk about my expansive Fong Lim electorate, which has residential areas like Stuart Park, Bayview, Woolner and The Narrows; industrial areas like Berrimah, Wishart and Winnellie; and special purpose areas, like Charles Darwin National Park and Hidden Valley. However, tonight I will focus on Coonawarra, Eaton, East Arm and Defence service-adjunct precincts, which we do not talk about enough in this House, as far as I am concerned …

Mr Howe: Great topic.

Dr RAHMAN: Thank you, Member for Drysdale.

I do so to underscore the significance of Defence investment for our economic future. It will be critical to us realising a prosperous economic future.

I had the privilege on 24 January to join the Chief Minister in her capacity as Minister for Defence NT for her launch of NT Defence Week, which also included Defence industry and Defence veterans' awards launches. We gathered at Shorebarge, which is a business at East Arm. It is a marine logistics firm with experienced vessel masters who operate landing barges and execute safe beach landings and wharf moorings.

The stakeholders at that session were the kind of people who already know in many ways how important Defence is to our future. They included people from the Army's 1st Brigade, Master Builders, ICN NT, the Chamber of Commerce, the Australian Industry and Defence Network, Charles Darwin University and the NT Indigenous Business Network, as well as hardworking public servants in DefenceNT. That is preaching to the choir, to some extent; that is a group of people who understand how important Defence industries are to us.

I will speak about the economic multiplier effect of Defence industries and Defence investment. Our government is focused on trying to stimulate economic growth, and that is the right strategy. One of the five areas on which we are concentrating to try to stimulate that growth in is Defence. It is important to understand what a potent economic multiplier effect Defence spend has in the Northern Territory. In fact, it is disproportionately large relative to any other industry.

ICN NT—which all of us in the Chamber would agree provides good data for us to work with comparatively in understanding supply chains, logistics and business in the Northern Territory—estimates that almost 70% of reported contracts in Defence over the past seven years went to local companies, not FIFO or fly-by-night

companies. If you translate that, it is something like $800m of the total $1.15bn spend that has been circulating through the NT economy.

Defence does not just spend in little pockets by themselves; it ends up chipping into our businesses, shops, contractors and supply chains. It is critically important that we do everything that is required to make sure we secure our Defence future. Why do I say that? Because it is not a sure thing. I will drop back a step.

In August 2023 ACIL Allen produced the Economic Impacts of Defence Infrastructure in the Northern Territory report. This is great for those of you who are looking for a bit of light reading to understand how to improve our economic prospects. It is an excellent overview of the economic, Defence industry and construction industry landscapes and how they intermingle.

This report, if it is to be believed—I admit it may be a little on the optimistic side in some regards—paints a rosy picture of how important Defence industries are here. According to this report, the Defence sector is expected to invest up to $6.2bn in the Northern Territory by 2027, potentially contributing $800m per annum to the current levels of construction activity to the Top End as well. The Defence sector could create upwards of 7,000 jobs in the Northern Territory—4,000-plus directly in construction and 3,000-plus across the economy—and add almost 5% to gross state product. However, that is if the NT can sustain high levels of local investment. That is key.

What we want is a Defence future where Defence has a footprint in the Northern Territory; what we want to move against is the prospect of a FIFO Defence future, which is a real risk unless we lobby the federal government to ensure our Defence security going forward.

There are two overall findings in this report that are worth noting. First, the NT construction industry has a track record of delivering on industry needs. Even though we have workforce limitations, when we need our workforce to kick in it does kick in. The NT's civil works capacity is underutilised and ready to deliver projects. If you look at CDU Danala and across the harbour, you see that we can deliver. The industry locally, including businesses in East Arm and in my electorate across Fong Lim, has the capacity to scale up when we need it to scale up. More alarming is the second overall finding that policy action is required to address the constraints on industry.

Four of the findings that came out of this, findings 15 to 18, are worth reflecting upon. We need: a workforce strategy for the construction industry; to address barriers to temporary and permanent migration; a Northern Territory population strategy; and to address accommodation shortages in order to build a local workforce.

These are issues I have consistently brought up, and they impact our Defence future. Staff retention issues have been used as a justification for scaling down troop numbers in the north. This government is committed to improving liveability in the Northern Territory, which is a critical part of making sure that Defence wants to be here as well.

I am not the only person saying these things. People who are passionate about advocating in this area, like Dr John Coyne at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and Dave Malone, former CEO of Master Builders, have been writing about it for a long time in things like The Strategist and ASPI. I encourage members to read some of the things that they have written.

In 'To build its future, northern Australia needs clarity from Defence' we can reflect on, for example, Bandiana being a long way from the Northern Territory and that decision conveying a lack of commitment to northern Australia.

'Taking Defence beyond the barbed wire in northern Australia' points out that a fly-in fly-out model for Defence operations is something that is being bandied about if we do not push harder to fight our corner. Likewise, the real challenge is ensuring continued work for those who need to stay in the north, when it comes to Defence being an employer of choice in the construction workforce space.

The most important thing I want to reflect on is from 'Australia must think more about Defence's position in the nation's north':

Somehow and quickly, given the urgency articulated in the DSR, …

That is the Defence Strategic Review:

… we need to get better at linking everyone to be more organised and to avoid simply using a model that assumes activities will self-organise.

It will not happen by accident. It would be a mistake to think that Defence will just land here even if we do not try for it. Do not assume Defence investment will come automatically due to existing bases or what was written in the Defence Strategic Review; it is wishful thinking. Delays and reprioritisation of Defence works are evidence of that. A good recent example is the shifting of helicopter assets and support workforce to Townsville. We need to lobby to make sure that those kinds of things do not happen.

The Defence Strategic Review is a wonderful document, but the gap between the rhetoric of it and the reality of its implementation in the north is wide. It should matter to everybody in this House. We will have to work with the federal government to make sure that we fight our corner when it comes to Defence. Defence spending is highly political, and funds are being redirected to southern states for economic and political reasons. We need to actively lobby Defence and the federal government to secure Defence investment and see actual follow-through on the Defence Strategic Review.

I am pleased to say that our government is committed to realising the potential of the strategic review, in conjunction with the federal government. You could tell the shift in optimism from the range of stakeholders at Shorebarge in East Arm the other day knowing that they have a government committed to fighting our corner on Defence and a Chief Minister who also represents Defence industries.

The next sensible opportunity for all of us to do something positive in this space will be NT Defence Week, which is coming up at the end of April. I encourage you all to add it to your calendars, because it is important that we put on a united show to say that Defence matters to the Northern Territory in terms of not just personnel but also businesses, supply contracts and the entire Defence ecosystem. It is an opportunity to engage with the sector, families and suppliers. For me personally it is an opportunity to generate greater engagement and exposure of local Defence businesses, particularly those based in the Fong Lim electorate, for which I will be advocating.

Ms CAHILL (Port Darwin): Madam Speaker, one of the truly great things about being the Member for Port Darwin in this Legislative Assembly is that I get to meet amazing people. One of those people is Hriday Nayyar.

I was privileged to join Hriday, along with my colleagues the Members for Fannie Bay, Casuarina and Brennan, at the launch of his first book, *Life Chronicles: Experiences and Challenges*. This wonderful book reflects on Hriday's journey since coming to Australia and ultimately calling Darwin his home, along with his parents and siblings. It is a wonderful story of personal growth, the journey of overcoming challenges in education and career and the importance of building strong community connections. Hriday wrote his book with the intention of inspiring young individuals, particularly those in the Northern Territory, to pursue their dreams while contributing to the advancement of society.

Hriday is a wonderful example of the amazing contributions our international students make to the Territory. He is about to complete his studies to become a secondary school teacher in the NT education system, which is evidence that as we attract our international students to live and work in this wonderful place we call the Territory, we are building a future for the Territory at the same time.

I congratulate the recipient of my December Larrakeyah Primary School citizenship award, Shusank Ghimire, a middle/upper primary school student who received the award for representing the school values and looking after the school environment.

Congratulations to the recipients of my annual overall citizenship awards.

Alexis Zemaitis received the early childhood award for displaying the school values at all times throughout the year and supporting classmates and peers when in times of need.

Sampurna Sapkota got the middle/upper primary school award for displaying the school values at all times throughout the year and being an outstanding role model across the school. I think the future of our Territory is in good hands when we see these young students coming through, leading by example for their classmates.

I also congratulate Milly Ravlich, who has been selected to participate in the Northern Territory junior representative calisthenics team. Milly will travel with the team to Adelaide in July, where they will compete in the Australian Calisthenic Federation's AusCaliCarnivale national competition. The event hosts teams of

all abilities and ages from across Australia and provides development workshops for participants. This is a fabulous opportunity and achievement. Well done, young Milly.

Finally, congratulations to my two Port Darwin electorate 2025 NT Sports Awards finalists, who were both nominated in the Official of the Year category: Greg Dickson for tennis and Katherine Reynolds for swimming. I wish them all the best when the awards are announced later this year.

Mrs HERSEY (Katherine): Madam Speaker, I put on the record that at the recent citizenship ceremony held in Katherine we had 14 conferees. I congratulate all of them and welcome them to our community. I look forward to seeing them out and about. They are Mahmmoud Abdel Rahim Al Haw; Aloalii Leuelu; Daniele Piga; Tejaswini Sunnapu; Varuna Sumanasena; Ubaid ur Rahman; Karunasri Vennamaneni; Laasya Rao Vennamaneni—there were two families, and it was great to welcome them into the community—Venu and Laasya Rao Vennamaneni; Mary Joy Braganza; Alexis Phoebe Braganza; Edward Romano Braganza; and Achilles Axle Braganza. It was a lovely citizenship ceremony.

It is great for our community in Katherine to finally get the attention that we deserve with a CLP government.

I have spoken many times in the Chamber about the school attendance officers. I was recently out with Jodianne and Taylah in Katherine, walking around and engaging with families, which was fantastic. I have been in Alice Springs where we kicked off the media campaign with Cory, Jono and Chloe. I have also been on patrols in Palmerston. I have been on a number of compliance patrols across the Territory; it is great to see these school attendance officers talking to parents and reminding them of their legal responsibility to ensure their children are attending school.

Across the Territory there are 153 schools, including bilingual schools and on-country learning. Teachers and principals strive to provide education in the most culturally sensitive and appropriate ways possible. It is great that we have schools with the right environments to get kids there. I am proud that we have school attendance officers who are doing a great job in getting children back into the school environment.

Operation Oxley is in force in Katherine. That will continue until 15 March. So far Operation Oxley has resulted in 324 arrests; 1,333 patrols, resulting in 1,025 litres of alcohol being tipped out and 1,280 people moved on; 93 licensed premises patrols; 302 traffic apprehensions; 87 infringement notices; and 33 random breath testing stations with 3,188 drivers being breath tested. Those results have been in a short time. Police have been doing a fantastic job, as they do every day, to keep our community safe.

It has been great to have seen many ministers come through town. The Chief Minister has been in town a couple of times. I have been out on patrols with her and the police in the evening. Deputy Chief Minister Gerard Maley, Minister Cahill and Minister Boothby have been in town. Minister Edgington met with our local council, and just before Christmas we met with Danielle Valler. The minister and I acknowledged her 30 years of service in the public sector. Congratulations to Danielle. She is one of many dedicated public servants in the Territory. Recently, Treasurer Bill Yan came to town with the roadshow telling Territorians about the state of our books.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Madam Speaker, Durack School is an incredible primary school in my electorate. In fact, it has been in my electorate the entire time I have been a member of parliament, so I have a deep and strong relationship with that school. Cindy McLaren is the principal and she does an amazing job.

I congratulate the following students who received the Chief Minister's Literacy Award at the end of last year: Lane Middleton; Emily Gerlach; Levi Taylor; Ariana Colon; Chloe Carter; Luna-Mae Stinton; Rachel McDonald; Alice Waldron; Levon Aroyan; Jesse Tauasa; Mayari Hutchinson; Lila-Rose Quattromani Santana; Sophie Henderson; Joni Clark; Lucas Parker; Max Ryan; Darwin Quinio; and Makayla Lakruyana.

Academic Achievement Awards went to Gianna Cheriyan; Lewis Buckwell; Evren Wilson; Hailey Kirby; Mason Joyner; Bastian Worden; Jayce Mayers; Harper Epiha; Jayden Cheriyan; Ethan Sanchez; Ava Carberry; Jose Branco-Seran; Scarlett Butcher; Ruby Clark; Aaima Qasim; Vennie Choudhary; Elii Bell; and Annabelle Mammino.

Student Citizenship Awards went to Blake Hari; Porsha Rowsell; Hailey Lloyd; Harrison Petty; Daley Finn; Eliza Butcher; Lillee Hayes; Audri Johnson; Edmund Calverley; Moise Kabangu Bafwe; Willow King; Willow Clark; Yaana Patel; Lily Mickan; Savannah O'Brien-Xavier; Zoe McMahon; Daniel Ridolfi; and Michael Rutherford.

The students who won the Dance Award were Joshua Ogbu; Milani Atiola; Willow Bell; Indiana Butt; Alana Pell; Laila Ross; and Daniel Ridolfi.

Art and Design Awards went to Lewis Buckwell; Kyla Farris; Ian Hong; Zara Petty; Kai Dysart; Aaima Qasim; and Keith McClelland.

Japanese is the language that students learn at Durack School and they have a strong relationship with a sister school in Japan. The winners of the Japanese Award were Evren Wilson; Chloe Carter; Pechdara Mau; Liam Gonzaga; Willow Clark; Aaima Qasim; and Joshitha Kamar.

Environmental Science Awards went to Lylah Stone; Asfia Zaman; Jayce Mayers; Lincoln Ryan; Sophie Shellback; Isabella Rossiter; and Stacie Lewis.

Our sporting champs at Durack last year were Avalee Pearce; Jacob Eruera; Riley Chappell; Brodie Cameron; Cooper Atkins; Cruz Butt; and Vennie Choudhary.

I congratulate the students who received top accolades overall at Durack: Eva Howieson, who won the Australia Day Citizen Award; Sophie Cameron, who won the Sportsperson Award; Ethan Fisher, who won the Principal's Award; and Vennie Choudhary, who won the Academic Excellence Award.

These are incredible achievements by a wonderful group of students who are kicking goals and taking a keen interest in their learning. I want all of them to continue to strive for excellence as 2025 brings a new opportunity for them to learn and grow.

I acknowledge the student leadership at Durack School for this year. School captains Eva Howieson and Cruz Butt will be ably supported by school vice captains Ruby Clark and Daniel Chatindivara. The house captains for Durack this year will be Savahna Pearce; Jayde Harris; and Ariana Godwin. The house vice captains are Archie Corey; Jaxon Lade; and Reuben Hayes. Congratulations on your student leadership journey. I know you will make the most of this amazing opportunity to represent your peers at the highest levels of the school.

MacKillop Catholic College is a fantastic senior school in my electorate. It has outstanding students doing amazing things. I acknowledge the student leaders for 2025 and wish them all the best on their student leadership journey. Making the most of opportunities like being a student leader provides incredible personal and professional development that will put them in good stead for the future. I know these students will get stuck into how they can leave a legacy and support a better school environment as a result of their hard work and commitment to their new roles.

My congratulations go to school captains Louis Shepherd and Amber Netherwood; vice school captains Vanessa Owina and Khachonyot Permsati; middle school captains Abigail Munnich and David Prakash Mathew; vice middle school captains Evelyn Small and Ashton Ling; prefect for Catholic identity Ashley Samarita; prefect for sport Joshua Gorddard; prefect for fundraising and hospitality Vonn Samson; prefect for inclusiveness Emma Turton; prefect for performing arts Timica Miller; prefect for art Tahlia Te Maro; prefect for academia Ayla Dore; prefect for careers and VET Ellie Wilson; prefect for culture and languages Ewen Isiakpere; prefect for Defence Jordan McGregor; and prefect for environment James Toll.

Congratulations to all of you. Best of luck for 2025. What you put in is what you get out of it, and I know you will make the most of this wonderful year ahead.

On Australia Day we welcomed new Australian citizens at the City of Palmerston Australia Day Citizenship Ceremony. There were 30 new citizens from 12 different countries who took the pledge and the oath, officially becoming Australian citizens.

I acknowledge all the 2025 Australia Day Award winners for Palmerston. A big congratulations goes to Rodney Greenwood who was awarded Citizen of the Year for his exceptional leadership, community spirit and unwavering dedication as President of the Palmerston Raiders Rugby League Football Club for five years.

Since 2019 Rodney has transformed the Palmerston Raiders Club, increasing its membership by 56% and establishing a successful women's team. Rodney was recently awarded the Palmerston Raiders Rugby League Football Club 2024 Volunteer of the Year for his tireless work in looking after the club and providing support to its members. Well done on this amazing recognition of your hard work. It is much appreciated.

Congratulations also goes to Yolanda Kanyai who was awarded Young Citizen of the Year for her work with community organisations, including Vibrant Diverse Cultures, Football without Borders and Young Professionals Rotaract NT, leading to the creation of innovative and impactful community initiatives.

Congratulations to the Community Event of the Year, which was awarded to the Palmerston NAIDOC Committee Elders Lunch. This event was held on 10 July and arranged by the NAIDOC Organising Committee and funded by Grassroots Action Palmerston. The event brought together 100 First Nations elders from across the community, fostering a sense of connection and belonging through shared stories and knowledge, strengthening social bonds within the community.

I congratulate all the Australia Day Award nominees and winners. I note that this year Palmerston had a record number of nominations and the nominees should also be recognised.

The nominees for Citizen of the Year were Balachander Mohanraj; Emma Cawood; Dian Dunn; Hannah Finbow; Katie Grimshaw; Luke Seib; Natalie La Pira; Paeatia Reea; and Sanjeev Patel.

The nominees for Young Citizen of the Year were Elorah Ryan; Niesha Korman; and Penny Ralph.

The nominees for Community Group or Event of the Year were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day; Arafura Music Collective; Aunties Place; Auntys Free Feeds; NT Breatheasy S.T.A.A.R.S; Good Shepherd Lutheran College Palmerston Campus Community Fun Day; the Heart Foundation walking program; Magnify HER Women in Business; Musical Night by the Tamil Society; Orange Sky Palmerston Team; Palmerston Rugby Union Junior 7s Tournament; Palmerston parkrun; Riding for the Disabled in the Top End Community Open Day; STEPS Group Palmerston; STRIVE; Taiwanese Community of the Northern Territory Dragon Boat Festival; Walk to Remember by Amber NT; and Woodroffe Care Community.

Congratulations to all the nominees. It is a wonderful recognition of the hard work you do in volunteering and supporting a vibrant Palmerston. To everyone who is involved in preparing the nominations and making sure that people are recognised for their hard work, we say thank you.

It is important that people who are leading our community in these many and varied ways—the people who underpin the fabric, the social connections and the community activities, events and support for people to engage in wellbeing activities—are recognised. Engagement is important.

Congratulations to everyone involved. We are proud of all the nominees and winners. We look forward to seeing your continued contribution to making Palmerston a place for people.

Mrs CARLSON (Wanguri): Madam Speaker, I place on the record an amazing person in the Territory community, Donna Rousham OAM. Donna received her OAM recognition in the King's Birthday 2024 Honours List for services to people with a disability.

Donna was also recognised as Citizen of the Year in the City of Darwin Australia Day Awards this year, which I attended with the Chief Minister and many other Members of the Legislative Assembly. Donna is a worthy winner of that award.

Donna has been recognised for the work she has been doing for decades to have inclusive swimming for all children and for forming the NT Starfish Swim Group in 2005. The NT Starfish Swim Group was created to offer families with children who have disabilities access to free, comprehensive water skills programs whilst helping them learn to swim and stay safe in the water at the Mimik-Ga Centre in my electorate of Wanguri.

As the local member I was privileged to tour the Mimik-Ga Centre, which used to be the Henbury School. It has a swimming pool onsite, and this is how I came to find out about the swim school. Donna fought hard with the government to keep the swimming pool, as it was to be demolished.

She has been a fantastic advocate for parents of children with disabilities and the children themselves. A lot of this is through her volunteer work. Donna has been a volunteer for Variety the Children's Charity for more than 30 years and was a committee member and volunteer for the Down Syndrome Association of the Northern Territory Inc.

I dropped in at the swim school last Saturday and could clearly see the wonderful work the instructors are doing with the children. I heard that each child looks forward to their weekly lessons and with early intervention many of the children thrive from these wonderful lessons.

Throughout the year Donna also fundraises for the swim school for equipment. For that and keeping the lessons going for the last two decades she deserves all the accolades she has received for her tireless work. We should be inspired by community advocates like Donna for the work they do. Thank you, Donna.

I wish to recognise the wonderful community I work and live in, with constituents like Fran and Greg Hansen who went out of their way to assist a senior member of our community, Edward Martin, also known as Jim.

Unfortunately, Jim's car was stolen before Christmas. Fran and Greg rallied friends in recovering the car and getting it fixed so that he would have transport. They paid for the parts to fix the car and got it back on the road for Jim. Whilst Jim was without a car he would walk from his home in Lyons with his dog to the Hibiscus shops to get his groceries. To put this into context Jim is 84 years of age. His car is his independence. However, this wonderful community gesture was short lived, as days after the car was returned to Jim it was stolen again. Fran Hansen brought it to my attention.

The Member for Casuarina and I visited Jim the next day at his home, as he was without transport. He lives in the electorate of Casuarina. We spent a couple of hours working with Jim, looking at the services he needed to keep his independence. Jim is a proud man, and asking for help would be hard. It is great to know that there are still good people in our community. Fran and Greg rallied again to get Jim's car fixed and have since got his car back. He now knows he has people in the community he can call on. Fran and Greg, along with their mates, used personal funds to fix the car on both occasions when the car was stolen and damaged. They also volunteered their own time to help fix it to keep the costs low. Thank you, Fran and Greg.

I acknowledge a group of mates who have been long-term Territorians and meet weekly in front of my electorate office at Hibiscus. They have been mates for more than five decades and many played football together in the Territory, which is the heart of their mateship.

This small group of mates managed to pull off an event to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Cyclone Tracy at the Tracy Village sports club on 21 December 2024. What started as an idea over their weekly meet-ups to commemorate the anniversary with mates 12 months before turned into organising an event for more than 200 locals who survived the cyclone. They had to cap the event as the room could not hold any more people. I was curious about what these men were doing. As they explained they were organising this significant event, I offered four door prizes which they received with appreciation.

The original organising committee consisted of Denis Lewfatt; Costa Karaolias; Basil Damaso; Harry Appo; Brian Keleher; Barney Quall; John Greenoff; Chris Karaolias; Grant Rowe; Joe Daby; Eddie Motlop; Chooky McDowell; and Herbie Sinclair. Sometime during the planning process the mates realised they needed further help as the event got bigger than *Ben Hur*, so Lorraine Adams; Liz Tak; Annie Sinclair; Isabel Appo; and Muki Muir also volunteered their time.

The committee asked me to drop in and see the event. It was wonderful that upon entry the guests got a ticket for the door prizes I had donated and received a bag of salty plums. It was wonderful to see the community enjoy the night. This was a testament to the committee's hard work over the year.

I recognise the wonderful work that the Nepalese Association of Northern Territory led by President Prativa Devkota and the Non-Resident Nepali Association of Northern Territory led by Sanzeev Dhakal Gorkhali—who is also the Vice President of the Non-Resident Nepali Association Australia and state coordinator—and their respective committees are doing in the Territory with events and initiatives.

These two organisations worked collaboratively from 5 to 9 December last year with the Multicultural Council of the NT and Skillaroo Your Career Partner team to deliver the passport renewal program, by bringing staff from the Embassy of Nepal in Canberra to Darwin to assist community members in renewing their passports. This initiative benefited 333 individuals, saving them the cost and inconvenience of travelling to Canberra for their passport renewals. With flight tickets being expensive, this program provided significant financial relief to members of the Nepalese community and meant that they did not need to seek leave from work. Over those five days my colleagues the Members for Sanderson and Casuarina and I attended to see the initiative working to save time and money. We congratulate the Nepalese community on a successful program.

On New Year's Day I attended the Topi Diwas celebration of the Nepalese community. This is an annual event celebrated on 1 January to honour and promote the cultural heritage of Nepal. It raises awareness and encourages Nepalese youth to embrace their traditional attire. You may be familiar with the traditional hat the Nepalese wear.

On 18 and 19 January the Nepalese Association of Northern Territory with the support of the NT Government successfully hosted the 3rd Multicultural Volleyball Tournament, bringing together diverse communities in a celebration of sportsmanship and unity in the lead-up to Australia Day celebrations. There were 12 participating teams, and the finals on Sunday were a great close contest. The Members for Brennan,

Fannie Bay and Casuarina and I sat on the edge of our seats cheering on the teams from the Australian Defence Force, the Philippine community, the Indian community, the Vietnamese community and other Territorians.

Nepalese community members are proud of their heritage and are a great contributor to our community. I thank the Nepalese community.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, I will share some positive stories, and I shout out to all my *yapa* family who are tuned in. These truly special stories are worth celebrating, and every person in this parliament should hear them.

The community of Yuendumu is a remarkable place full of strength, resilience and incredible individuals doing extraordinary things. I take a moment to acknowledge one such person, an outstanding Warlpiri woman who has made a profound impact. We are deeply grateful for my nanna Ormay Nangala Gallagher, whose tireless dedication to our Yuendumu School has been recognised after 10 years of outstanding service. For a decade Nangala has been there through the highs and the lows, supporting, nurturing and educating many of our *yapa* children. We are beyond thankful for her exceptional work and unwavering commitment.

Nangala is a passionate Warlpiri educator and an incredible author who has devoted much of her life to the advancement of Warlpiri education. With years of experience teaching Warlpiri language and culture at Nyirripi and Yuendumu Schools, she continues to inspire and shape the future every day. Her incredible work in bilingual education at Yuendumu School speaks volumes. She has created invaluable Warlpiri books and language resources that help preserve, importantly, our Warlpiri culture. Her dedication continues to empower not only Warlpiri educators but also non-Warlpiri educators (*kardiya*), ensuring they can effectively engage with the community and teach in ways that are culturally respectful and enriching. Nangala, your work is a gift to us all and we thank you.

I am thrilled to share some wonderful stories that have made their way across the desert. Tonight I celebrate a champion of the bush, Maryanne Malbunka. Maryanne recently joined the MacDonnell Regional Council, representing the areas of Hermannsburg and Wallace Rockhole. She is an outstanding role model for her community. She has always been a strong and passionate advocate, standing up for her community and making sure everyone in the community has the opportunity to build a bright, bold and beautiful future. She is making sure that the communities of Wallace Rockhole and Ntaria (Hermannsburg) have a strong future and strong leadership.

For many years, Maryanne Malbunka has worked in various roles within her local community, showing her unwavering commitment and dedication to making a positive difference in Ntaria and the surrounding regions. She is deeply committed to being a powerful advocate for health, housing, community safety, homelands and the wellbeing of our children. Maryanne Malbunka has been a kinship carer, and for that we are incredibly thankful.

Congratulations, Maryanne, on this well-deserved achievement. We are excited to work alongside you and look forward to seeing the incredible things you will be able to do for the Hermannsburg (Ntaria) community and Wallace Rockhole.

School is back. The first term of school has commenced, and it has been exciting for many families across the bush as children return to school and, for some, attend for their first time. A huge shout-out goes to all the amazing teachers, educators, support staff and families who will be doing incredible work across schools this year to support Territory kids.

To all our kids, be cool and stay in school. I look forward to getting to Amanbidji; Areyonga; Bulla Camp; Haasts Bluff; Imanpa; Kalkarindji; Lajamanu; Laramba; Mbunghara; Yuendumu; Yuelamu; Mutitjulu; Ntaria; Nyirripi; Papunya; Nitjpurru; Wallace Rockhole; Watarrka; Willowra; Yulara; and Nyangatjatjara College, as well as working with the amazing families at the ICPA. I cannot wait to hear all the amazing things our Territory schools have planned this year.

Let us talk about Gwoja pride. Late last year Territory Tidy Towns held its annual awards night. I must say that I was thrilled to see incredible work being recognised. Across the Northern Territory outstanding efforts were celebrated.

I extend my heartfelt thanks and pride to all the communities that participated in the Territory Tidy Towns. You are all winners in my eyes who are committed to your communities. Your dedication and hard work are truly inspiring, and I urge you all to keep it up. Across the Northern Territory our communities need your vital contributions to keep our communities looking beautiful.

It is not just about celebrating the winners and nominees; it is also a powerful reminder for all of us to take a moment and express thanks to those who work hard behind the scenes to make our communities stronger, more beautiful and safer every day.

The highlights from Gwoja on that night were:

- Waste Management Award—MacDonnell Regional Council
- Water Conservation Award—Ikuntji (Haasts Bluff)
- Energy Conservation Award—Warumpi (Papunya)
- Environment Action Award—MacDonnell Regional Council
- Culture and Heritage Award—Ikuntji Arts, and the Member for Johnston is wearing some of that amazing art
- Territory School Award—Laramba School
- Best Regional Council Award—MacDonnell Regional Council
- Citizen Award—Kathleen Abbott and Alison Anderson
- Best Small Community Award—Ikuntji (Haasts Bluff).

That is Gwoja pride, celebrating the amazing achievements of our communities doing great things. It is a wonderful moment for us to come together and recognise it.

This cannot happen without the amazing work of all our community members, so I thank all our countrymen who get up every day, go to the council, do their work, keep making our communities look beautiful and keep talking about how beautiful our communities are. Across the Northern Territory remote communities are beautiful; they are full of strong people, beautiful country and incredible projects.

Members of this parliament who are not bush members, if you ever get the chance reach out to your bush members and come on a trip to the bush. You will see amazing art centres, Territory schools, health centres and the country.

I congratulate all the winners of the Territory Tidy Towns awards and all the nominees. Keep up the great work; you are doing a deadly job and we are proud of all the work you do.

I acknowledge the communities that put together events and festivals. A lot of sports weekends are coming up this year. I look forward to getting out, kicking a footy, seeing all the great work and supporting communities to achieve great things.

To all the bush mob, keep strong, keep deadly and keep up the good work. I am proud of you.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, I honour and recognise some of the nominees and winners of the Palmerston Australia Day Awards.

Dian Dunn was nominated for Citizen of the Year in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the NT Breatheasy S.T.A.A.R.S group and the Palmerston community. Dian has been president of the NT Breatheasy S.T.A.A.R.S group for the last seven years and dedicated her time to helping connect people who have chronic pulmonary conditions to ongoing support. Di organises weekly meetings that feature guest speakers, exercises, member updates and opportunities for social connection during annual events and excursions.

Di's caring and selfless attitude towards the community is demonstrated through providing transport to those who need support with daily living tasks and activities. Through both her formal and informal volunteer contributions, Di embodies the spirit of community service and generosity. Well done, Di, and hopefully you win next year.

Hannah Finbow, whom I know as Hannah Quilford, was nominated for Citizen of the Year in the Australia Day Awards for her dedication to empowering women and supporting her community in Palmerston. Hannah volunteers her time with various not-for-profit organisations and has made a significant impact in the world

of powerlifting—strong women. As a passionate advocate for women's strength and empowerment, Hannah organised the first-ever Katherine powerlifting competition and come-and-try powerlifting day. She supports the fitness community by offering free mentoring, building people's confidence in competing.

Being a small business owner, mother and a semi-pro athlete has not stopped Hannah from consistently giving back to others. Hannah shares personal experiences that inspire others, especially women, to find their strength. Her positive influence extends beyond Palmerston, embodying community spirit by connecting and uplifting those around her. Well done, Hannah; good work.

I honour the Palmerston Young Citizen of the Year, Yolanda Kanyai, who won the award for her work with multiple community organisations, including Vibrant Diverse Cultures, Football Without Borders, the Congolese Sports and Culture Association NT and Young Professionals Rotaract NT. Yolanda's work with these organisations has demonstrated exceptional leadership and dedication to community advocacy and empowerment. Her program development has led to the creation of innovative and impactful initiatives that have built capacity for individuals and communities. Well done, Yolanda, for your hard work and congratulations on your recognition.

The Palmerston NAIDOC Committee Elders Lunch won the award for Community Event of the Year. It was held on 10 July, arranged by the NAIDOC organising committee and funded by Grassroots Action Palmerston. The event brought together 100 First Nations elders from across the community, fostering a sense of connection and belonging through shared stories and knowledge, strengthening social bonds within the community. Congratulations to Palmerston NAIDOC Committee Elders Lunch and Grassroots Action Palmerston for their recognition.

I will talk about some of the nominees for Community Event or Group of the Year.

Auntys Free Feeds is a community collaboration delivering weekly food and groceries to individuals experiencing housing and food insecurity in the Palmerston area. Since 2019 Auntys Free Feeds has been providing food and groceries to those in need from the SWELL car park in Moulden every Sunday afternoon.

The impact of Auntys Free Feeds goes far beyond just providing a meal; it is seen as the first port of call for those experiencing sudden and unexpected food insecurity, offering temporary support and guidance to navigate the complex web of support services. This initiative, run entirely by volunteers through generous donations from businesses and individuals, has delivered more than 312 weekly dinners and fed diverse numbers, showcasing the power of community coming together to make a difference. Auntys Free Feeds has helped to build resilience in the Palmerston community by sharing resources and addressing fundamental human needs for people experiencing disadvantage, helping to improve liveability and social connection.

I enjoy volunteering at Auntys Free Feeds, as does the Member for Drysdale. Congratulations to Auntys Free Feeds on its nomination.

NT Breatheasy S.T.A.A.R.S is a special-interest group which provides information and support to those suffering from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). The group has approximately 30 members who meet weekly for a social morning tea, as well as three grant-subsidised physical therapy sessions.

NT Breatheasy S.T.A.A.R.S has a significant impact on the Palmerston community, providing essential support and resources for those suffering with COPD. Its dedication to providing health and wellbeing through its weekly meetings, specialised exercise programs and guest speaker presentations greatly benefits its members, helping them to maintain their independence and improve their quality of life. Congratulations to NT Breatheasy S.T.A.A.R.S on its nomination.

Palmerston Rugby Union Club, also known as the Crocs, was one of the founding clubs of Northern Territory rugby union in 1976–77 and has been playing out of Palmerston since 1984. The club works tirelessly every year to deliver a unique event, the Palmerston Junior 7s Tournament. This tournament provides families an affordable sporting option for young people aged four to 16 years old. In 2024 the competition included a girls division for the first time since the 2020 COVID pandemic. The Palmerston Junior 7s competition provides a valuable opportunity for referee development, giving up-and-coming referees the chance to hone their skills before the official rugby union season commences. Congratulations to Crocs Junior 7s on its nomination.

Palmerston parkrun is a free, fun and friendly weekly five-kilometre run. This community event is held at the Palmerston Water Park every Saturday. Participants of all ages, fitness levels and abilities can walk, jog, run or volunteer. Each week up to 100 community members participate, supported by eight volunteers. Parkrun

provides a safe, enjoyable and welcoming place to exercise. In November Palmerston parkrun celebrated its 400th event. The organisation has facilitated a shared responsibility to volunteering, demonstrating leadership in the field and inspiring other organisations to instil a similar approach. Congratulations to Palmerston parkrun on its nomination.

Woodroffe Care Community, a group that is close to my heart, is a grassroots community organisation based in the Palmerston suburb of Woodroffe. It meets on the first Thursday of each month at Woodroffe Primary School. The group brings together residents of Woodroffe who want to make a difference in their community. The group's aim is to make Woodroffe a safe, friendly and inclusive neighbourhood with a strong community spirit. It focuses on friendship, community and shared responsibility for those living in Woodroffe. Activities delivered by the group include growing and sharing vegetables, games days, book clubs, cooking classes, gardening classes, bingo nights, music, quiz nights and much more. Congratulations to Woodroffe Care Community on its nomination.

Walk to Remember was initiated by 12-year-old Taylah Peters in memory of her brother. It has become an annual event in Palmerston, providing a safe and supportive space for families to honour and remember children who have passed away. In 2024 the event attracted more than 70 participants to Sanctuary Lakes, providing a communal space for reflection and remembrance. Proceeds of the event support Amber NT's free bereavement services, including one-on-one counselling, group support sessions and training for healthcare professionals. Congratulations to the Walk to Remember on its nomination.

The Tamil Society hosted the Musical Night. The Tamil Society has actively contributed to the cultural integration of Tamil-speaking residents in the NT over the past 40 years, with approximately 200 members. The last hour of the Musical Night featured audience participation with the opportunity for spectators to demonstrate their skills and talents. As a result of the hard work and effort invested by the Tamil Society volunteers, the Palmerston community benefits from a family-friendly and safe opportunity to build social connection and cohesion. Congratulations to the Tamil Society on its Musical Night nomination.

Mr CHARLS (Sanderson): Madam Speaker, as the Minister for People, Sport and Culture I am acutely aware of the impact that sport has on our community. I am pleased to report that more than 80 nominations were received for the 2025 Northern Territory Sports Awards, which represents the pinnacle of the Territory's significant sporting talent achievements.

Earlier this week I had the enormous pleasure of announcing our Sport Awards finalists. Let me tell you, Madam Speaker, we have some talent in the Territory. Finalists include sportspeople from regions across the Territory and a range of sports, including judo, BMX, sailing, Muay Thai, athletics, swimming and hockey.

The 2024 Sportsperson of the Year, Alannah Joyce, is a dominant force in Australian judo and, once again, is a finalist, along with 14-year-old swimmer Macey Sheridan and Alice Springs resident Marc Woods who, at over 50 years old, outperformed his younger counterpart to win the 231-kilometre West Macs Sonder Monster ultra. Past finalists included Nova Peris, Brooke Peris and Jeremy Hayward—Territorians who have represented the Territory at the highest level in hockey.

The NT Sports Awards night will be held on 29 March. I encourage all sporting organisations and the general public to come along to support our stars.

I farewelled the Territory Stingers at Darwin International Airport last week ahead of their departure to Malaysia to take part in the Malaysian Hockey League. You can watch the livestream via the Territory Stingers Facebook page if you want to tune into the action. The Member for Fannie Bay is actively following the team on their journey.

The government is proud to support this initiative which aligns with our commitment to developing and showcasing Territory talent. By investing in opportunities like this we are creating pathways for our young athletes to reach their full potential and represent the Northern Territory with pride.

The refurbishment of the second field at Marrara's MWT Hockey Centre, with works scheduled to commence in March or April, demonstrates our commitment to providing quality sporting facilities for our community. This upgrade will ensure that our athletes have the resources they need to train and compete at the highest level. By supporting our athletes and investing in our sporting infrastructure we can build a stronger, more vibrant lifestyle in the Northern Territory for all.

As the Minister for the Arts I met with the CEO of Darwin Entertainment Centre, Georgia Hendy, and took a tour of the centre. There is a great deal of wonderful shows planned for 2025.

On 16 December 2024 I had a behind-the-scenes tour at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, along with Laurie Zio MLA, assistant minister for People, Sport and Culture. Adam Worrall, Director of MAGNT, facilitated the tour and showed the rich cultural arts and paintings stored within the facility. I acknowledge that the art gallery needs attention, and I will work with MAGNT to have the best possible outcome within the economic constraints that the Territory faces.

I started my Alice Springs visit in December with a chat with Beechy from 8HA and Cherice from CAAMA Radio. I conducted a tour of the Strehlow Research Centre and dropped into the Alice Springs Public Library to check out the drone workshop as part of the school holiday programs.

I met with and listened to the multicultural community leaders in Alice Springs on 19 December at the Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia, along with the Members for Namatjira and Braitling. I thank Mona Sree, the President of Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia, and other committee members for facilitating this meeting.

I visited Hermannsburg in December and interacted with members of the community. I also visited the youth activity coordinated by MacDonnell Regional Council. It was great to see about 40 young individuals engaged in school holiday activity.

I watched the Redtails Pinktails Right Tracks Program training session whilst in Alice Springs, and I saw Traeger Park light up for the Alice Springs women's cricket T20 match. I also had the opportunity to meet with Ted Egan AO whilst I was in Alice Springs.

On 14 December 2024 I attended the special commemorative mass for the 50th anniversary of Cyclone Tracy at St Mary's Cathedral. On 22 December 2024 I attended the ecumenical service commemorating the 50th anniversary of the cyclone at St Mary's Cathedral in Darwin. Thanks to all who attended these important services.

On 31 December 2024 I attended the NT Timor Chinese Association Inc and Cyprus Community of the NT events to celebrate New Year's Eve. I thank Tim, Kivi and the committee of the NT Timor Chinese Association, and Helen Gordon and the committee from the Cyprus Community association for inviting me to be part of their New Year's Eve celebrations.

More recently the Defence Expo was held on Saturday at the Convention Centre. During the week, along with the Members for Blain and Drysdale, I attended a veterans' lunch in Palmerston. It is great to see our veterans coming together.

I also recently attended the 77th Sri Lankan Independence Day celebration outside Parliament House, alongside a number of my parliamentary colleagues. It was a good celebration.

Netball NT announced the 2025 under-17 and under-19 teams today. Congratulations to the athletes selected to represent the Territory at the National Netball Championships taking place from 10 to 16 April at Sydney's Netball Central.

Ms UIBO (Arnhem): Madam Speaker, I speak in adjournment about the disgusting arrogance, lack of honesty and poor behaviour displayed by members in this Chamber this week. I am at a loss as to how to describe this poor behaviour and the lack of leadership and respect shown by members opposite. The way fellow parliamentary members have been disrespectful toward each other and trying to spout mistruths in every other way would be commonly known as a lie.

There is an old saying that the standard you walk by is the standard you accept. I will no longer accept the poor behaviour being displayed towards me, my team and the crossbench. I call out the rude comments and blatant disrespect displayed by CLP members in the Chamber this week, particularly tonight, and demand that we, as elected members, hold ourselves to a higher standard.

The matter of public importance (MPI) this evening was an important topic to many people in the Northern Territory community, especially the victims and survivors of the Stolen Generation. The National Apology 17 years ago was indeed a matter of public importance for today.

There was rubbish and disrespect from the Member for Barkly, who I used to think conducted himself with integrity and honesty. I held him in high esteem, but he has sunk to an all-time low after his contribution tonight.

Seeing the Member for Katherine stand to contribute to the MPI made me think that now she is a minister she would show some genuine empathy about the Stolen Generation in the Territory. What came out of the Member for Katherine's mouth could not have been further from the truth, with a lack of empathy, respect and care for the MPI topic. I am disgusted by the Member for Katherine's contribution. If this is the way that CLP ministers think it is appropriate to contribute about such a traumatic part of history in Australia, what will they think about the rest of the Territory for the next four years?

To top it off, the Member for Nelson, who is the Deputy Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, was laughing when the Member for Johnston was making her carefully considered, genuine and heartfelt contribution to the matter of public importance. All week the Member for Nelson has been acting in an unprofessional manner, being rude and disrespectful in his behaviour and words. I hope that Territorians call him out on this. I am and will continue to do so.

Growing up in the Territory I was taught by my parents to be respectful to everyone. Now I have zero respect for the Member for Nelson. I used to think he was a decent person; now I am struggling to find a word to describe how pathetic his behaviour has been when he is in the second-highest decision-making job in the Northern Territory Government.

The outright arrogance and pure nastiness that has been on display all this week by many of the CLP members have been astonishing. Sometimes I have struggled to find words to describe it. One can only assume that this poor behaviour is sanctioned by the CLP leadership.

There was no leadership shown by our Chief Minister, Lia Finocchiaro, with unruly comments thrown around the Chamber and the bad behaviour that has been displayed by her CLP team—which was so disciplined in the lead-up to the election and now has been so unruly. This has caused me to feel harm and insecurity. I have a feeling of being unsafe in this special and privileged workplace that we are in every day.

The immature and disgusting poor behaviour of the Deputy Chief Minister, Gerard Maley, has been appalling. It makes me wonder why someone so immature …

Mr Maley: You are an embarrassment.

Ms UIBO: … could be entrusted with the honour of being second-in-charge of leadership in the Northern Territory Government.

If my mum was still alive, she would describe the Member for Nelson as a baby brain.

I remind the Member for Nelson that when he was reliving his trauma of the Cyclone Tracy experience in this Chamber last year, he had the support of every member in the Chamber, including me and my Labor opposition members …

Members interjecting.

Ms UIBO: Can you say that again? I am a loser—come on, say it again.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 46; the Deputy Chief Minister has said an offensive word, calling the Leader of the Opposition a loser. I ask him to withdraw.

Madam SPEAKER: Deputy Chief Minister, could you withdraw that? I did not hear it, but if you said it …

Mr Young: He said it. Withdraw.

Ms Uibo: He was whispering and mouthing it like a pathetic little thing.

Mr MALEY: I withdraw.

Mr HOWE: A point of order, Madam Speaker! The Opposition Leader just referred to the Deputy Chief Minister as a 'pathetic little' something. Could she withdraw that comment?

Madam SPEAKER: I heard her say that. It was not picked up at the time. For the sake of fairness, could you withdraw that, please, Leader of the Opposition?

Ms UIBO: I withdraw.

The Member for Nelson just called me a loser in the moment I was sharing that during the Cyclone Tracy contributions in December the Member for Nelson clearly had the support of every member in this Chamber, including me and the Labor opposition members.

Tonight the Member for Nelson continues with his bad behaviour and unruly words. During the MPI the Member for Nelson disrespected every Labor member who spoke on the topic. Many of our families, friends, colleagues and constituents have had experience of trauma from not just one weather event but many years of traumatic events in their lives, so the lack of understanding and empathy from the Member for Nelson is astonishing.

I am often asked by family, friends, constituents and, at times, even strangers how I put up with all that crap. My answer is usually pretty standard; I say automatically, 'I have good support around me, which helps me to do what I love'. I must admit that if someone asked me that same question tonight I would probably say, 'I honestly do not know'. I ask myself, 'How do you put your life's work away from your family and friends to always expect the best in everyone, only to find that in the sacred, hallowed halls of the Northern Territory's Parliament House, the lawmaking body of the NT, that a high standard is not expected of your government?'

I have enjoyed the banter and friendly theatre of parliament. That is something I learnt from the former CLP Member for Daly, Gary Higgins. A conversation I had with Gary Higgins many years ago shaped how I view this place; it was that the theatre, fun and jibes can happen, but the real work happens behind the scenes with the relationships you build with fellow members of parliament away from the spotlight and the 15 to 20-second grab on the news. Gary said to me that at any one time there are only ever 20 other people in the Northern Territory who know what you are going through as a member of parliament. I wish some of the CLP members could have a chat with Gary and learn from who I call a true Country Liberal.

I have been the Member for Arnhem for nearly nine years. It has always been an honour and a privilege to represent fellow Territorians. Many in my electorate are my family. It is not just a job; I feel an obligation to do my best, try my best and make things happen in the electorate and across the Territory for the better.

Now, six months in from the NT election, I still feel humbled to be the Member for Arnhem and am truly honoured to be the Northern Territory Labor Opposition Leader. However, I feel deflated this week with the dawn of reality that despite my high expectations of a new government—regardless of the different values we may sometimes have—the CLP government will not act in the best faith for Territorians.

Tonight has also ignited the fire in me, remembering that hundreds of Territorians who do not have their voices heard are counting on our Labor opposition—as my mum would have said if she was alive—to do our best and respect everyone. When we talk about the concerns that are raised and questions that we as the Labor opposition ask of the CLP government, we want to make sure that Territorians are not ignored or forgotten. I pledge that my Labor team and I will work hard every day to make sure they are not forgotten by the CLP government.

I will finish with this thought: it can take years to build up respect and trust, yet both can be lost in a matter of moments. I have lost respect for many members of parliament this week—many of whom for the past years whilst I did not agree with them, I respected them. I have lost respect for any claim of their integrity. I have lost respect for any of them as members and as people—as fellow humans. I will not accept their poor words or their behaviour, not now and not ever.

Mr HOWE (Drysdale): Madam Speaker, I will talk about the shocking Independent Commissioner Against Corruption report, Operation Jupiter part two, which was tabled in parliament this afternoon.

The ICAC report confirms what everyone knows: that there is a stench around the Labor Party in the Northern Territory. It is more than a stench; it is a disease. With the report and investigative journalism of the NT Independent we now clearly know that former Chief Minister Michael Gunner, using his taxpayer-funded brother-in-law Ryan Neve and his cronies—that was his assistant chief of staff—to run a protection racket for the party and used taxpayer funds in the 2020 election.

For my people in Drysdale, the Labor Party used money that you earned, which it took as taxes, for its party's gain in the 2020 election. That is one of the most shocking breaches of public trust that could possibly happen in the NT's history.

I will quote some of the lines from the report:

> *In the months leading up to the 2020 election, officers within the OCM, and in particular the digital unit, performed political campaign work within normal office hours and while being paid from the public purse.*

Apparently, the lines of reporting were not clear. However, Labor knew what it was doing and did it on the constituents of Drysdale's dollars and the dollars of every other Territorian.

The report went on to say that the digital unit director was requested to carry out political work by not just one person but several different people throughout that time.

These are damning findings. Labor members deliberately broke the rules to spend taxpayer-funded time to help their party win the 2020 election. In a democracy Territorians expect all political parties to be given a fair go leading to an election. Thankfully, our government will ensure that this will never happen again.

The people of the Northern Territory deserve confidence in their government and representatives. The ICAC report proves what the Labor Party did prior to the 2020 election is unforgivable. The Leader of the Opposition was part of that government, yet this week she has been lecturing our government about integrity. The team that spent the people's money so that it could be re-elected has the audacity to lecture any other party on integrity. This is a disgraceful moment in the history of the NT and, I dare say, one of if not the most disgraceful for the NT Labor Party.

It will be interesting to hear what the Leader of the Opposition says about this ICAC report, which is damning of the party she leads. Given her staffer who pinned up a poster in the men's fifth floor toilet a couple of weeks ago walked away with a slap on the wrist, will the Leader of the Opposition finally show some backbone and call out the disgusting behaviour of her own party?

The Labor Party is a disgrace. It knowingly and deliberately broke the rules prior to winning the 2020 election. What a disgrace for Territorians that they had to put up with Labor for four years, given this ICAC report has confirmed it rorted the 2020 election. Territorians cottoned on to the disease surrounding the Labor Party, and it was thrown out last August. That is why there are only four of its members left. Shame on Labor Party members for taking the money of my constituents and spending it on their own campaign so that they could continue feeding themselves from the public purse. Shame on them—shame, shame, shame!

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.