

Legislative Assembly
of the Northern Territory

Draft Daily Hansard

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Madam Speaker Lambley took the Chair at 2.30 pm.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE
Member for Katherine

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Member for Katherine be granted leave of absence from the Chamber today due to ministerial business.

Leave granted.

MESSAGE FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR
Message No 16

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have received Message Number 16 from His Honour the Administrator notifying assent to the Bills passed in the May meetings of the Assembly. The message is dated 5 June 2026.

APPROPRIATION 2026–2027 BILL
Serial 63
TREASURY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 64

Continued from 5 May 2026.

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, pursuant to the resolution of the Assembly on 6 May 220 following the tabling of the Estimates Committee report, the Assembly will have before it the question that the expenditure proposed in the Appropriation 2026–20127 Bill 2026, Serial 63 stand as printed and that the report the Estimate Committee be noted.

The following time limits apply to the debate on the committee's report: ministers, Leader of the Opposition and shadow minister, 20 minutes; any other member 10 minutes; and the maximum period for consideration shall be five hours. There are no extensions of time. If the debate is not concluded after five hours the question will be put without further debate. I call the Chairman of the committee, the Member for Drysdale.

Ms Uibo: Hear, hear, a great Chair.

Mr Kerle: Agreed.

Mr HOWE (Chair of Estimates Committee): Thank you, Opposition Leader and Member for Blain.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table the report of the Estimates Committee and the associated minutes of proceedings on its consideration of estimates for proposed expenditure contained in the schedule to the Appropriation Bill 2026–27, the Treasury Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 and the activities, performance, practices and financial management of the Power and Water Corporation, Jacana Energy and Territory Generation.

This is the Legislative Assembly's 25th year of Estimates hearings. The Estimates process provides a valuable opportunity for members to ask ministers questions relating to agencies and programs being funded under the budget.'

The hearings worked effectively and provided members an opportunity to ask questions about any area of government. I thank members for the way they conducted themselves during the hearings and for allowing each other time to ask their questions of most interest.

The committee's report outlines the key lines of questioning that arose throughout the course of the hearings. During the hearings there were 136 questions that were taken on notice by ministers. Of these, 38 were answered during the course of the hearings. :These question answers have been uploaded to the committee's webpage. I note that outstanding answers to the questions taken on notice must be received by the committee secretariat by 13 July 2026. Answers will be uploaded to the committee's webpage as they are received. Answers that are not received by the due date cannot be accepted or published by the committee.

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Madam Speaker, I thank all ministers, the board chairs, Auditor-General and you for assisting the committee with their answers. I also thank the many agency staff who spent much time preparing information for the hearings, including those agencies the committee did not get to within the allotted time. There are many long days and night spent preparing, and this comes at the expense of one's personal time and time with family. This time sacrifice is noted and appreciated.

I also thank the many staff who supported the committee's hearings in various ways. I thank sincerely the secretariat staff for the huge body of work they did. Of note is the other committees currently doing work that they have to serve as well. There is the Legislative Scrutiny Committee, the Public Accounts Committee—these committees are ongoing with their work—and Estimates, so it is a huge body of work. I give a massive thank you to the secretariat staff. I thank my peers, my fellow MLAs for the opportunity to chair. I genuinely believe in the importance of the Estimates process. It is crucial to our democracy and the trust in this House.

I take the role of Chair very seriously. I try my best to ensure that it is nonpartisan, because I believe that the public's trust in this Chamber is paramount. My job is to facilitate that and ensure that all members, non-government members, crossbench, opposition all get their chance to put the questions that people want answered to the ministers.

Thank you, everybody. There were tie competitions between the Member for Gwoja, the Treasurer and the Health minister. They all put on some good displays of ties. I will not call the winner. I will leave that to the good people to decide.

Mr EDGINGTON: Surely I won.

Mr HOWE: We made a few changes this year that were important. For the first time, we brought in time limits on the opening statements. The committee resolved that we would have a 20-minute time limit. It was to try to strike a balance between a minister's opportunity to tell of the good work that their department has done whilst ensuring that we maximise the time for scrutiny. I am proud we introduced that measure. I hope that it stays as a precedent for this House for future Estimates.

The conduct of all members was excellent this year. It was a very good Estimates. That is important too. How we conduct ourselves in those hearings is very important for the people want to see that we are taking this role as professionals. I thank my fellow MLAs for the week.

I commend the Estimates Committee report to the Assembly.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: As the independent deciding who wins the tie competition, I give it to the Member for Karama.

Consideration in detail

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Estimates Committee for its work over the past two weeks and all the parliament staff for their work in running Estimates. I also thank the ministers and public servants who appeared before the Estimates Committee to answer questions.

I would especially like to thank the Member for Johnston, who asked many of my questions during the Estimates hearings. I have greatly appreciated her support, which has allowed me to attend many important events in my electorate, including the inaugural Dhadalal Homeland Festival at Gan Gan that ran last week, showcasing the strength of Yolngu people and culture, using our way and our law to bring people together for important discussions, ceremony and *bunggul*, working to guide the young people to become future leaders.

I also attended the funeral of a strong Yolngu leader in Galiwinku, my Aunty Rose Gondarra, who was a leader for her people, a schoolteacher and a principal of Shepherdson College. We celebrated her life and thanked her for the care she had provided to so many people. She also provided care for me when I lived on Elcho Island as a teenager and when my family moved away, she became my second mum.

Yesterday I was honoured to attend the PhD conferral ceremony for my *wawa,* Gawuara Wanambi, who is also the Chairperson for ARDS. He is a strong leader for his clan and all Yolngu people, and he has been a strong leader within the development of the direction of ARDS. He has finished producing his PhD at CDU and is now also recognised in the balanda system for his deep knowledge and expertise that he is already recognised for within the Yolngu system.

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These were uplifting events for many people in the Yolngu region that celebrated our culture, leadership and our people.

These uplifting and joyful events seem in strong contrast to the disappointing responses and government direction that come through the Estimates hearings. I have listened to the hearings and looked at the transcripts, and the message that comes from the government through Estimates is a continued lack of partnership with Aboriginal people.

A majority of spending for our people is based on jails, police and prisons. There is very little funding or support, just chicken feed for community-led programs to try to make our communities safer. The Treasurer outlined that there was no way to know how the GST funding for Aboriginal disadvantage is accounted for. How do we know that the Commonwealth funding is being invested in remote, disadvantaged communities and improving outcomes for people?

I am disappointed with the lack of spending and support for law and justice groups across the NT. We have one law and justice group in the Mulka electorate in Ramingining, but the elders across our communities need significant support to address the problems that exist in hub towns and urban towns. We are deeply saddened by the deaths that occurred in Galiwinku and Milingimbi earlier this year. The lack of government funding for community-led programs and empowering our leaders shows that this government does not care about the people in the bush.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Mr Deputy Speaker, I do not need commentary from the Member for Goyder telling me how to do my job. You pointed out, Member for Goyder, that it would be one for one, so I was waiting for the government to stand, but they were a bit distracted in their own process.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: A point of order! I call people as they stand, and had not stood when I called, but I am letting you go, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms UIBO: At a time when many Territorians are doing it tough the Estimates process had confirmed what many Territorians have already suspected, which is that the CLP government has delivered a budget with no plan, vision or aspiration for a better Territory.

When this budget was handed down last month our Labor opposition said that it was a maintenance budget. After two weeks of estimates it is clear that that description was far too generous. It is a budget that drifts rather than drives the Territory forward. It is a budget that keeps the lights on in government offices but does not light a pathway forward for Territorians.

This budget fails to deliver meaningful cost-of-living relief to Territory households struggling to pay their bills. It fails to address the housing crises facing our renters, first home buyers, central workers and remote communities. It cuts and delays infrastructure with no clear pipeline of works to keep Territory businesses, contractors, tradies, apprentices and suppliers in important work. It offers no long-term plan for maternity services or critical hospital infrastructure. It offers no plan to address the long-term causes of crime. It offers no plan to build the roads, housing amenities and services that Territorians need and deserve. It offers no plan to make Territorians, Territory businesses or Territory workers, the people who must benefit from any Territory budget provided with economic opportunities ahead of them.t

Over the past two weeks we have asked the CLP government basic questions about its budget, along the lines of: what is the plan, the targets, the funding, the timeline, who is responsible, who and how will Territorians know if this is working for them? Again and again, ministers of the CLP government could not answer some of those basic questions. Territorians are now left with no answers after two weeks of questioning on certain priorities of the CLP government, the lack of planning and the lack of responsibility taken by CLP ministers.

How will Territory health services improve? How will school attendance be lifted and how will we engage with students who need to be re-engaged? How will we see the reduction of reoffending supported by the government? What are the key support sectors like Tourism to get major projects moving forward for the Territory? There were no answers to these important questions for Territorians.

CLP members could not explain its plan to make sure that the Beetaloo Sub-basin will create lasting jobs and business opportunities for Territorians. That project was gifted from the former Labor government to the CLP government. They cannot even answer some of the critical planning questions.

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Territorians have endured one of the most testing Wet Seasons in our history. Communities have been inundated, roads have been damaged, businesses have been disrupted and families have been forced from their homes. Some Territorians are only just getting back into their homes; others will be out of their homes and communities for much longer.

Businesses are recovering. Our road network has taken a massive hit, and we are still only coming to terms with the scale of recovery. This glorious Dry Season can mask what has really happened across the Territory, but for only so long. Equipment yards are full of heavy machinery because the work has not been brought to market.

Tourism operators are not seeing the visitor numbers that they were counting on. Our small businesses are struggling with cash flow, workforce shortages, insurance costs, freight costs and uncertainty about where their next job is coming from.

Families are paying more for water, power, rent, groceries and fuel across the Northern Territory.

Remote communities are still waiting for basic infrastructure that should never be treated as optional.

My team and I have been up and down the track speaking with Territorians and businesses from all walks of life and all industries, community organisations and remote communities and including health, education and frontline workers. We can hear the uncertainty in people's voices. Businesses do not know whether they can keep staff on. Contractors do not know whether the promised work will happen. Territorians do not know whether the CLP government has a real plan or projects will simply be pushed from one construction snapshot to the next. That uncertainty is the direct result of a CLP government without a clear plan, just press releases and gloss.

The CLP government loves to talk about growth. The hollow CLP promisers loves to talk about investment, but Estimates exposed the gap between the slogans and the substance.

The Territory economy is losing momentum across the too many key indicators. State final demand is going backwards; private investment has weakened; building approvals are down; job vacancies have declined; and wages and population growth are stalling. The Treasurer's predicted gross state product surge of 7.8% in 2025–26 came in at 2.7%.

At the very moment when Territorians need a government with energy, discipline and focus, the CLP has gone missing—thankfully, not this time gone fishing. Nowhere is it clearer than in the Beetaloo Sub-basin. With onshore gas reserves larger than the opportunity represented by INPEX, the Territory has been handed a chance to build lasting local jobs, local capacity, local procurement and local wealth, but no opportunity to deliver it. It requires planning, workforce pathways, training and procurement strategies, as well as opportunities for Aboriginal businesses and Aboriginal communities. It requires a government that is willing to sit down with industry, unions, training providers, land councils, regional businesses and communities alike to make sure Territorians are not just spectators in their own economy. Instead, the CLP members are more interested in patting themselves on the back than doing the hard work that is required to make sure our Territory businesses and workers see the benefits.

Territorians do not want to watch the wealth leave the Territory on the back of interstate contractors, workers or supply chains. Territorians want to know that their government has a plan to capture the benefit for Territorians. Estimates showed us that it does not.

The CLP has a serious issue with its economic plan. We would expect the Territory Coordinator to have a clear economic KPI for investment, job creation, business opportunities and projects being fast-tracked. Instead, after spending tens of millions of dollars for the Territory Coordinator office, Estimates revealed that the KPIs are not real economic outcomes; they are just a count of the number of meetings that the Territory Coordinator has held. That tells Territorians everything they need to know. The Territory will suffer under the CLP government with the budget like the one before us. The CLP government is not measuring whether the Territory is better off because of all the money it is spending on one office; it is measuring whether it is seen to be busy. That does not help Territorians in the long run nor our Territory businesses.

The CLP called this a budget for everyday Territorians, but at Estimates the Treasurer could not identify which everyday Territorians this budget is helping. We asked about key new measures regarding the cost of living and support for Territory households. All he could rattle off were existing programs that had already been installed over the last couple of years and, dare I say, under the former Labor government too.

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The Treasurer could not provide the expected rent increase for the year or what that means for the close to half of Territorians who rent. The Treasurer could not explain how families are meant to absorb rising housing, insurance, grocery and fuel costs and utility bills.

What does the Treasurer's budget do? It hits Territorians with a 5.3% increase in power, water and sewerage bills, starting from 1 July this year, while wage growth sits at 2.3%. Is this what Territorians need when we talk about reducing the cost of living? This is even more concerning when, alongside the CLP wages policy, we are seeing real wages go backwards for our frontline workers. For the nurses, teachers, police, Corrections officers, child protection workers, health workers and public servants already carrying enormous pressure, this CLP government's message is clear: work harder, deliver more, absorb more pressure and go backwards in real terms. It is a recipe for more vacancies, burnout, resignations and pressure on our essential services.

Budgets for the government of the day are about choice. The CLP government has chosen to deliver no meaningful cost-of-living relief. The government has chosen to underspend. It has chosen uncertainty.

At the start of the peak construction season all of us should see a clear pipeline of roadworks, housing, schools, clinics, community amenities and regional infrastructure moving to market. The budget papers show a $341m infrastructure underspend. That represents roads that are not sealed, schools that are not upgraded, community facilities not delivered, local jobs not supported and businesses left wavering.

At Estimates Treasurer Bill Yan walked away from his own test. In his first budget speech, just last year, he promised that under the CLP, projects would be delivered on time, on budget and with integrity. A year later, the Treasurer who is also the Infrastructure minister, would not give that same guarantee in Estimates.

The Northern Territory relies on its road network to connect communities, keep shelves stocked, support tourism and enable industry to operate across vast distances. At Estimates we learned that $200m of federal government investment to duplicate priority sections of the Stuart Highway between Darwin and Katherine have no timeframe for delivery under the CLP government. The $30m of flood resilience upgrades is still waiting for the outcome of a study that is not due for completion until the middle of 2027, next year, while communities continue to be affected by regular closures. This is one of the Territory's most important transport corridors. It is critical for road safety, freight, Defence, tourism, agriculture, mining and regional development.

The CLP government members have been asleep at the wheel and they are not driving the roads that everyone else is driving. Instead of fast-tracking planning, procurement and early works, as we would expect them to, the CLP has spent two years making excuses for its lack of productivity and decision-making. The CLP said that it would deliver projects on time, on budget and with integrity, but when handed millions of dollars in federal investment for one of the Territory's most important highways, the Stuart Highway, the CLP members have sat on their hands.

Everyone should have the chance to live in a safe, secure and affordable home, but under the CLP government, housing construction has stalled, affordability has collapsed and social housing stock has gone backwards. At Estimates, the Minister for Housing Construction, who is also the Treasurer, could not answer basic questions about how the government will build the homes that are needed in the Territory.

He admitted that the government's new home grants are failing in the regions, with just four having been taken up across Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine. The minister had no solution for getting housing construction moving in each of these critical regions, one of which he lives in—Central Australia.

He also admitted that only 52 houses for seniors and people with disabilities will be built under the Social Housing Accelerator Program. Federal money is provided through this program.

Despite the federal government providing $50m for 100 new homes in the Territory, the CLP is failing in this space. Under the federally funded housing accord, the CLP government has only managed to build 21 houses across the Territory, with no plan to meet the NT's target with another 96 homes.

Under the $4bn remote housing agreement, the CLP government will only build 455 homes across 2025-26 and the 2026–27 financial years against the target of 540 homes. With almost 5,500 Territorians waiting for social housing only around 150 additional social homes will be delivered within the next year. Total social housing stock has gone backwards under the CLP government.

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Most alarming of all, multiple ministers could not say how new houses will be built in town camps. When asked about the lack of uptake in places of the regions like Kilgariff and the lots that are in Alice Springs, the Minister of Lands, Planning and Environment—also home town for him—blamed 'picky builders'. Meanwhile, there is only $2m of the budget for future industrial and residential land releases in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek—nowhere else.

This is not what a plan looks like. A housing construction minister has no plans for housing construction, a lands minister has no plan for future land release, a housing minister cannot explain how demand for affordable and social housing will be met for Territorians—three CLP ministers, one housing crisis, zero plan.

Quality and accessible health services are a priority for all Territorians; unfortunately, not for this CLP government. The Health minister ruled out a new hospital for Darwin because 'there are only two-and-a-half years until he next election and it could not be built before then'. Think about what this means. Under the Finocchiaro CLP government they are making decisions about critical health infrastructure needed for Territorians based on the election cycle, not the needs of Territorians who we all represent in this place. A hospital is not built just for one election, a hospital is built for generations.

A maternity system is not designed around the next political headline, it should be designed with the needs o f babies now and into the future and their families. It is designed around whether families can safely have children here, support children with high needs and high risk once they are born, whether our health workers can be supported to do their jobs and whether people choose to build their lives in the Northern Territory. We all know the story of someone who came for six months and stayed for 60 years. That only happens when people feel that they can build their lives in the Territory. The CLP government's failure to address the maternity crisis means we are now starting to lose essential workers. We are losing young families.

At Estimates the Health minister took question after question on notice. He did not know how many ambulance calls were abandoned, how often ambulances were unavailable for immediate responses in his home town of Tennant Creek, Katherine, Darwin, Palmerston or Alice Springs. He did not know how many elective surgeries have been delayed or postponed because of the code yellows. He did not know the cost of transferring patients interstate, despite confirming that 2,975 patients had been transferred in the reporting period. He did not know how many remote community clinics can provide X-rays. He did not provide any regional breakdowns of elective surgery waiting lists across the reporting period. He could not say if there was any money in the budget for master planning a new hospital in the Northern Territory, in particular in the capital city of Darwin.

If the Health minister cannot answer basic questions about the health system he is responsible and accountable for and cannot explain the plan of what comes next, Territorians should be asking if he is up to the job.

This CLP budget and these Estimates have also confirmed that the CLP has no serious plan for Gove or the entire East Arnhem region. Gove is an essential hub for East Arnhem. Rio Tinto's departure is imminent, and economic, social and community consequences are significant, yet there is still no dedicated funding for the Gove futures transition.

I asked the Chief Minister in the Estimates process could she please table a plan regarding the Gove transition. She could not. This should be a huge concern for Territorians, not just in the East Arnhem region but across the Territory. It is a critical region of the Territory, and the CLP still fails to have a plan.

This budget was also an opportunity for the CLP government to reset it relationship with Aboriginal Territorians. Instead, Estimates showed that remote communities are still being treated as an afterthought or perhaps something more sinister, deliberately ignored and dismissed. When we have seen the failings of the remote housing target under the CLP, one could wonder if it is incompetence or deliberate.

There were so many more undertakings, observations and reflections of the Estimates process. I will say it on the record that the CLP has no plan for its budget and no aspiration for Territorians. That is a shame for us all.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the public servants, the frontline workers, the department staff and parliamentary staff who helped support this Estimates process. I also acknowledge the ministers, the advisors and the opposition staff who have all put in the hours preparing for the process.

I say sorry to the departments and public servants that we did not get to hear from. Estimates is a long process. It can be difficult and tiring but it is one of the most important parts of our democracy when the right

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questions are asked. It is an opportunity for Territorians to see where their money is being spent, what the government is prioritising and whether ministers can answer basic questions regarding the services they are responsible for.

After this Estimates process, it is clear. The government is very good at slogans but it still has to show Territorians the detail, the delivery and the accountability they deserve. Across health, child protection, justice, domestic violence, housing and community safety, we heard the same pattern. There were big announcements, tough talk and lots of excuses. When asked for the detail, data, timelines, funding and outcomes, too often the answers were not there.

In Health, we heard about hospitals and health services under pressure. We heard about the need for better infrastructure, better workforce planning and better supports for nurses, doctors, Aboriginal health practitioners, allied health workers and frontline staff. Territorians do not just want a headline regarding health. They want to know that when they are sick or when their child is unwell or their family member needs urgent care, the system will be there for them.

In Child Protection, we heard again that the system operates under enormous pressure. Caseworkers are carrying near-impossible workloads and families are not always getting the support early enough. Children are often entering the care system when early intervention may have made a bigger difference. Changing laws alone will not fix child protection. If this government is serious about keeping kids safe, it must invest in frontline workers, early intervention, family supports, kinship carers, foster carers and Aboriginal community-controlled services.

In domestic, family and sexual violence, we heard that critical frontline services continue to face uncertainty. Women and children who are fleeing violence should not have to wonder whether the service they rely on will still be there tomorrow. The government cannot say it is serious about reducing violence while frontline services are left fighting for secure funding.

In justice, we heard about a system that is overloaded. Courts and legal services are under pressure and Corrections continues to be under pressure. Victims are waiting. People are on remand and communities are left waiting for action.

The CLP talks a lot about law and order but when law and order requires more than just laws, it is not there. It requires police, courts, legal services, victims supports, Corrections rehabilitation, housing, youth programs, community-led prevention all working together. You cannot legislate your way out of the problems or pass a law and pretend it creates a caseworker, nurse, youth worker, safe house, prison bed or a community program.

The government must do better and do the hard work of funding the services that make the system actually work.

For remote communities, the message from estimates was also clear, the bush is always often still left behind. Remote housing remains under pressure. We heard that the targets are behind and that they are not being met. Many remote communities are still waiting for answers about new houses, upgrades and repairs. We are left asking about the roads, clinics, police presence, youth services and community infrastructure, that all desperately need investment.

People in remote communities deserve the same level of transparency and accountability as everyone else in the Territory. They deserve to know what is being funded, when it will be delivered and whether this government is actually listening to them.

Frontline workers across the Northern Territory are doing an incredible job in incredibly difficult circumstances. Our nurse; doctors; teacher; child protection workers; youth workers; domestic violence workers; Aboriginal health practitioners; legal service staff; hardworking Correctional staff; public service; and community workers, are holding these systems together. They deserve more. They deserve proper resources, support and a government that listens to what they saying.

The estimates process has shown us that the government has some serious questions to answer. Territorians deserve transparency, honest answers and investment in services that keep people safe, healthy and supported. They deserve a government that is focused not just on big announcements but on outcomes. The opposition will continue to ask those questions each Estimates and continue to stand up for the bush. We will continue to hold the government to account and push for investment, reform and services that Territorians deserve.

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Estimates is an important process. I thank all the Northern Territory's public servants who prepared the work, showed up and supported their minister in answering questions. I acknowledge a number of questions were taken on notice and we await those responses. I want to acknowledge the Estimates Committee as I had the ability to jump in and out of portfolio areas, but some people did an incredible number of hours on that committee.

Regardless of what side of politics we are on, you all did a good job. It is hard work. Sometimes it is hard wrangling me, I acknowledge that, but sometimes we have to bring a bit of spice, and I acknowledge whilst it might have looked a bit spicy between me, the Member for Barkly and Minister Cahill—a different side of politics—but I respect the work the parliament does. Thank you for working through a number of questions I had on behalf of me, my local community and stakeholders. We got a bit out of it.

The only area concerning for me was that we did not see the freedom of independence for the Antidiscrimination Commissioner or the Children's Commissioner to respond to questions about their commission. That is one thing we can look at for the next estimates proceed, to give them the ability to clearly, as independent officers, respond to their commissions.

That is Estimates done for another year. I thank everyone who participated. I also extend that acknowledgement beyond the hardworking public service, ministers, advisers and opposition staff, to the Territorians who reached out to us with questions. You have remained alert to what has been happening in your local community, workplace or about what you are uncomfortable or comfortable with. I thank you for having the courage to reach out to provide questions or give us a steer in the right area to look at. The Estimates process is good for the Northern Territory's democratic process and enables us to ask those questions and move on.

It is an interesting journey. I have been in Estimates as a government backbencher, a minister and now in my second year as an opposition member. Regardless of where you are each Estimates, it is always a great opportunity to hear what is and is not happening.

I thank the Northern Territory public servants for showing up every day and doing the hard work. It is an important process. Thank you to everyone who appeared before the Estimates Committee.

I acknowledge the true heroes of this process, and that is the Legislative Assembly staff who have kept it moving. They have kept us in line—all of us, not just me. They provided the support for the committee and for the public service when people were appearing. They did an enormous amount of work in producing the report that we are talking about today. Thank you for the work that you do. You do an incredible job, whether it was this committee or every committee, it is important for us all to acknowledge that important role.

Thank you to the opposition members who participated. Thank you to the Member for Johnston who did more than 60 hours on the Estimates Committee. It is not often that I thank CLP members, but I thank the CLP members on the Estimates Committee; we got to a good spot. I acknowledge the Member for Drysdale, the Member for Fannie Bay and the Member for Karama who were all Chairs when I was in the sessions. You gave me some leniency, and I appreciate that. It is a good process for the Territory. Thank you to everyone.

The budget will pass, and we will have the job for the next 12 months of looking at the commitments that were made and what was said and to hold the government to account, as you do in any democratic system.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Gwoja; we will cancel any warnings against you.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Mr Deputy Speaker, I too thank all the staff for putting in the long hours and the government officials and committee members who sat through the days and nights of long hours. To Justine who sat through all last week's and this week's Estimates, congratulations for winning that award.

I asked the Minister for People, Sport and Culture questions about the cost-of-living issues for elders and seniors. The NT Seniors Recognition Scheme has not been increased for the last three years, which is concerning, especially given the cost of living for our elderly folks. Please look into that.

I asked a lot of questions of the minister for Education about the truancy program that was rolled out, which is $33m over two years. The numbers are going down in some areas, so I asked the minister to revisit that and look at other ways of getting kids into school. I asked what the truancy program is based on and whether there is any evidence. Obviously with this evidence, the numbers are going backwards; the writing is on the wall that it is not working. I asked whether the minister should invest in other ways to get kids to school,

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especially the social aspects for the people living in remote communities and regional centres. Look at their living standards, the overcrowding and the family situations with regard to work and participating in everyday community life. School attendance is down in Big Rivers, Barkly, Central Australia, Darwin and the Top End.

In terms of the Better and Fairer Schools funding, there was a number of conditions, and that is increasing the attendance to 79.9%; it is currently at 73%, so we got the minister to take that on notice and asked whether there are consequences of taxpayers' money on that program that is not working.

Students with additional needs—if you do not live in Ali Curung or Palmerston, you miss out. Especially in regional centres, in Gove there is a high number of kids who need additional needs in the classroom. I have asked a few questions about increasing funding for infrastructure for resources, including social workers and the people who are in that field to help those kids.

Across the Territory there are eight psychologists, 20 social workers, eight behaviour coaches, five occupational therapists and three speech therapists. My take on that was they get flown out to the places that they are needed; they are not full-time in certain areas.

We talk a lot about the justice groups. We want communities to make decisions on their own youths, their own people. There is no better way than to give these communities incentive. We need to fund justice groups so that the leaders on these boards can—they know what is best for the kids, and they can get up there. When the courts come through—it happens in Maningrida and Ramingining. That is the difference. When it happens in front of their people, and they are tried, it is holistic community approach. Everyone knows this kid who is going through this phase and everyone can participate, acknowledging and can actually get in and help him or her out. When a kid is thrown into the mainstream system—it happens in Darwin it is out of sight and out of mind basically and the support from the community is not there.

The Attorney-General visited only six Territory remote Aboriginal communities. We want ministers to do more in getting out to our regions and our remote areas.

Going back to the schools, one of the biggest obstacles—in Milikapiti 11 principals went through the school in the past two years.

We did not have time to get to this point, but infrastructure in housing for teachers is a must for people to be comfortable in remote areas. I think that is something that we have missed hitting the mark on. Remember, these people are going out to the communities on their own. They need to be comfortable in their own setting. They will be in the community for longer and build a rapport with the community if they are comfortable in their own houses. It is not just the school and the resourcing; it is also the infrastructure. I am not sure where that falls under. My biggest confusion in Estimates was asking about something that fell under a different minister.

I have a few recommendations for the Chair for next year about whether we ask which portfolios they cover before we start asking questions. The other thing I have a suggestion about is the timer for the government questions. That way at the end of the day we can add it all up—you did that well last year. I remember you saying that you only had 10% or something altogether.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Mr Deputy Speaker, today I thank everyone involved in the Estimates process over the last two weeks. First, I thank the amazing Legislative Assembly staff for all their hard work and the hours they put in to establish the Estimates Committee. We know they are under a lot of pressure because there are many other committees running either side of the Estimates period. It is a huge amount of work for the number of staff they have, which is quite a small but effective team in getting this up and running. A huge thank you to all the DLA staff upstairs for all their work.

Second, I thank all the public servants for their hard work getting all the information together for their ministers to ensure that the ministers were prepared for us—opposition, the crossbench and some of the government members—to ask those important questions on behalf of Territorians and understand where Territorians' money is being spent, deep dive into that and hold the government and ministers accountable. I am a strong believer in that process. I thank all those public servants, staff and ministerial staff who get their ministers ready to answer the important questions on behalf of Territorians. Thank you to everyone who was involved.

Budgets are hard to put together. It is hard for any government to prioritise funding to ensure it has the right impact on Territorians. There are some budget announcements for me in the Daly electorate. I am happy on behalf of all constituents. I welcome the funding for the Port Keats Road that will be sealed and, hopefully, started next year. I noted that the Treasurer and the Infrastructure minister could or would not give me

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a guarantee that it would start in the first quarter of 2027. However, I welcome that it is in the budget. It has been missing over the last couple of budgets and been delayed for a few years.

As the Treasurer acknowledged, big projects like this can be delayed. It happens across all infrastructure projects across the Northern Territory. This project is important for the residents of the Thamarrurr region, particularly those between Wadeye and Palumpa. It will open up new opportunities for people in those two communities. Students who live in Wadeye will have the choice to attend the public school. It will make the journey from Wadeye to Palumpa a 25-minute drive rather than a 45-minute drive on a dirt road with a lot of corrugation that can be quite rough. I look forward to it and hope that project will start in April next year.

We have seen huge flooding events across the Northern Territory and northern Australia. A lot of damage was done across the regions. It was important to ask important questions such as that about the $20m was announced by Director General Ken Davies in April. It was to come out of the $100m flood recovery fund. I was disappointed that the Chief Minister could not answer a question about that money and stated that the $20m had not come out of the $100m. We were unable to get into the detail of why that announcement was made in April. The *NT News* reported on it in April. It is a huge amount of money, but there was no breakdown of the costings and where that $20m had been allocated within the budget. That was disappointing.

There were other allocations of money for Daly River outside of that $20m, like the $8m for roads as part of the $30m road package. That $8m is spread over four key networks in the Daly electorate—Cox Peninsula Road, Daly River Road, Port Keats Road and Wooliana Road. There was a huge amount of damage along Wooliana Road where the road had been washed into the river. Residents at the time were stuck, especially if they lived down the end of Wooliana Road. Part of that funding meant that the road could be filled in. It is now accessible for business owners, the tourism operators, in the Daly electorate. They are slowly starting to get back on their feet.

There are some business owners I spoke to during the week who still have not had any government official visit their business. They are still where they were a few months ago because they cannot get machinery into their tourism businesses to clean up.

It was also disappointing when the Chief Minister was asked about the threshold to call in the ADF. We wanted to get an understanding of what that threshold is. It was important for the government to relay that. Instead, I got the response, 'You can just go check that on the website'. That is not a good enough response from the Chief Minister. You should be held accountable and understand whether you put that request through to the federal government to bring in the ADF, just like what happened in Katherine.

The ADF came to Katherine to help residents and businesses get back on their feet. That was needed. I do not understand why the Daly did not meet that threshold because I am sure that anyone who has been there and seen the widespread damage would know that there was a huge amount of sand, silt and damage done to a lot of business and residential homes.

It was also disappointing when the Corrections minister claimed, 'We are not just doing more rehabilitation; we are doing it better.' When I dug a bit deeper and asked how many youth diversion programs are running in Wadeye, I was told that there is a Sentenced to a Skill program for young people. When I asked how many people were in the Sentenced to a Skill program, all the minister could say was none. Not one person from the community of Wadeye had been put in the Sentenced to a Skill program.

I am still a bit flustered as to why the minister is claiming that the government is not just doing more rehabilitation; it is doing it better. You need people in those programs to do the rehabilitation. I hope that the government will look into that and get more people into those rehabilitation programs because it is needed.

The Leader of the Opposition put to the government that there should be an independent public inquiry into the floods. This would give people who were affected by the floods the opportunity to have their say; to better improve the systems we have in place, especially preparedness and planning for when floods occur; and to look at warning signs for flooding and cyclones and emergency response times.

The emergency teams across the Northern Territory were run off their feet because of how widespread it was. They did an amazing job, but the constant message I get from many people who were on the ground is that because it was so widespread, it was difficult to keep up with demand and the response needed. That really showed in Darwin River when people called 000 but were not responded to. Some people had to sit on their roofs for four to five hours. We had one pregnant lady sitting on her roof then had to wade through water. These are the reasons it is so important to have inquiries to ensure we have better systems in place moving forward to ensure the safety of Territorians when we have these emergencies in our communities.

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I thank everyone involved from the DLA staff, the public servants and to the Estimates Committee for all your hard work, thank you.

Mr SMELT (Nightcliff): Mr Deputy Speaker, the CLP's second budget was one of missed opportunities, and Estimates did nothing but reinforce that view. It is a budget of misguided priorities that plunges public funding into prisons and punitive measures, rather than genuine community safety approaches or infrastructure that ultimately lifts us all up. Rather than setting the direction towards a stronger better future for all Territorians this budget seeks to narrow the future and worsen outcomes for too many Territorians.

I would like to start with my shadow portfolio of housing. Throughout Estimates we saw answers from the Minister for Housing Construction and the Minister for Lands, Planning and the Environment about what their plan was to address the critical and growing housing crisis across the Territory. They either passed the buck or could not articulate a plan. There was no sense that they ever got around to discuss how they might harness their collective departmental resources and come up with a cohesive plan to ensure a strong steady pipeline for affordable housing for all Territorians.

In the midst of a housing crisis it is clear that addressing housing shortages is not a priority for this CLP government. During Estimates we also heard almost 5,500 Territorians are waiting for social housing while housing stock has gone backwards in the past year, with only around 150 additional social homes planned to be delivered over the next year. We also learned under the $4bn remote housing agreement, the CLP government will only build 450 homes over 2025–26 and 2026–27 against the target of 540 homes. There are no answers on new and much-needed houses, especially when it comes to town camps.

The Minister for Housing Construction, Bill Yan, admitted that his new home grants are failing in the regions with just four grants taken up across Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine. When asked why housing construction had stalled in the regions, he did not have an answer. He admitted that only 52 houses for seniors and people with disabilities will be built by his government under the social housing accelerated program despite the federal government providing $50m for 100 new homes.

Under the federally funded housing accord aimed at delivering more social and affordable housing, Bill Yan was forced to admit the government had only managed to build 21 houses across the Territory.

Madam SPEAKER: Could you just pause, Member for Nightcliff. You do not refer to members by their names, it has to be their titles. Please continue.

Mr SMELT: My apologies, Madam Speaker. Minister Yan was forced to admit the government had only managed to build 21 houses across the Territory with no plan to meet the NT target of 96 homes. At a time when people are struggling to find a decent place to live, the CLP government cannot explain where the homes will come from, when they will be built or who is responsible for delivering them.

The latest NT cost-of-living report confirms what too many people already know. If you are on a low income finding affordable rental in the private market is almost impossible. We are talking about Territorians who are working in our cafes, shops, childcare centres and aged-care homes—Territorians doing the jobs our communities rely on who are being pushed out of places that they help keep running.

The Finocchiaro CLP government talks about rebuilding the economy and growing the Territory lifestyle, but that falls apart if workers cannot find a home. From social housing to remote housing and town camps, the pattern is the same: delivery is going backwards and the funding is not there.

When it comes to infrastructure Estimates further exposed the CLP government's lack of action or urgency on behalf of Territorians. The Infrastructure minister admitted that the $200m federal government investment to duplicate priority sections of the Stuart Highway between Darwin and Katherine has no timeframe for delivery. In addition, the $30m for flood resilience upgrades is awaiting the outcome of a study that will not be completed until mid-2027. These are critical road safety, freight and economic projects for the Northern Territory that will make travel safer, improve freight movement and strengthen one of the most important transport corridors in the country. Instead of fast-tracking these critical projects, the CLP government has spent the past two years making excuses and it still does not have a plan.

In his first budget speech, the Treasurer set his own test for the CLP government. He promised Territorians that under the CLP, projects will be delivered on time, on budget and with integrity. Less than a year later, he has walked away from his own words. There were no guarantees to be seen or heard during the Estimates

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process. Projects are slipping, communities are waiting longer and the Treasurer will not even stand by the standard that he set for his own government.

Time and again we heard about how Territorians simply are not getting what they were promised. Alice Springs' new library has been delayed by 12 months. The Peter McAulay Centre for the Joint Emergency Services Communication Centre upgrade has been delayed by 15 months. The Centralian Senior College air-conditioning upgrade has been delayed by 12 months. The new multicultural centre for Alice Springs has been delayed by nine months. The upgrade and sealing of the Sandover Highway has been delayed by nine months. These are projects communities were told would be delivered, but now they are being pushed back by a government that is unable to keep its promises and be up-front with the community about it.

Estimates revealed that the Tourism NT–NT Major Events merger is not complete, despite the minister promising that it would be a single entity by 1 January 2026. It also became apparent that the overall funding to the Territory screen sector and support for tourism operators has gone backwards while events funding has increased. We also learned that there is no specific funding attached to the minister's tourism action plans. There are no public targets to measure whether the strategy is working. We also heard that there is no guarantee for AFL to be played in Darwin and Alice Springs in 2027.

During the Nightcliff by-election campaign I talked a lot about being a strong voice for our community. I spoke about a number of local issues and projects during Estimates and question the government about them.

First, we discussed community batteries in depth and detail today. It was disappointing to hear that the 16 community batteries that were allocated under an ARENA grant to Power and Water Corporation have been put on hold. However, it was good to hear that a pilot program is kicking off with three community batteries to be installed across the Darwin and Katherine regions. On behalf of the Nightcliff electorate I will write to the CEO of Power and Water Corporation and suggest that Nightcliff would be an ideal spot for one of those three pilot community batteries.

The second item I talked about a lot during the by-election was joint patrols to help improve community safety in places like my electorate of Nightcliff. We have the resources in the Territory and can get better use out of them by having them work together more closely. It is about having the hardworking NT police, City of Darwin rangers, Larrakia patrols and others all working together on the ground in the community. Operation Ventura has been operating in Palmerston. We need more coordination and more of those joint activities across our suburbs that can deal with issues before they escalate. I will continue to champion that for the Nightcliff electorate.

Thirdly, I asked about the Nightcliff Jetty and we did hear about that from the minister. The upgrades going on at the moment are a fantastic initiative, and I applaud that. We also heard that the current upgrades should survive 15 years to increase the life of that iconic and much-loved piece of infrastructure. However, there is still no long-term plan for the Nightcliff Jetty; that is something I will continue to champion.

Estimates has laid bare that this is a budget of missed opportunities and misguided priorities, delivered by government without a clear plan, vision and ambition. Three things that continually to come to mind to me, when I hear feedback from our community, and what I hear from on the ground.

Firstly, I hear that the wheels are falling off because they are focusing on one or two issues, everything else has been put to the side. Core services on education and health are being overlooked. Having a focus on housing is completely out of the picture, and people in the community are seeing it, talking about it and coming to us.

Secondly, we are constantly hearing from industry about the lack of a pipeline of works. There are a couple of projects, but if they do not have a project now they are struggling. Industry, companies and contractors cannot see where the next projects are coming from.

Thirdly, it is cost-of-living we hear every day in our communities. It was very disappointing that this budget did not speak to that, it only recycled the same programs that had been in place for years. There is not real cost-of-living relief coming forward under this budget and government. We on the Labor opposition side will be continuing to talk about and advocate that. Many people are struggling in our communities.

Territorians deserve much better than this, and we will be taking that up over the next year. I thoroughly enjoyed my first Estimates process. There are always many more questions to answer and many that ended up on the cutting-room floor but we will continue asking those questions of the government.

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I would like to share in the sentiments expressed previously about thanking the Department of the Legislative Assembly staff, who supported us through that process. Sixty hours is a lot of work to support, with Hansard's reports and summaries. I thank them for supporting us through that process, from the committee and myself personally. I thank my fellow committee members and the Chair, Member for Drysdale, and the other Chairs who filled in. It was a good process, and it was pleasing to hear some of the new initiatives that the Chair has brought in from the last sittings. There are other things we can do to continually improve it. I thank all the members for their support.

I thank the many public servants who appeared at Estimates and those who did not get the chance to speak. Our Labor opposition team recognises the work that goes into that. I have been involved in preparing many reports and updates for the Estimates process. It is thorough and exacting at times on the public servants, and I appreciate their work.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, firstly I extend my heartfelt thanks to every public servant who prepared and appeared before Budget Estimates as well as all those who did not get the opportunity to appear.

I am truly grateful for the hours I know that you put into this essential transparency process and into the work that you do to support Territorians every day, in all facets of their life. I only wish we could table all your big binders that you brought in, so that a much greater level of transparency could be achieved. I am sorry that so many of you did not get to share your work with Territorians.

Thanks to my fellow committee members; our Chair; and the other people who came into the role of Chair who did a sterling job. I thank the DLA and Committees Secretariat staff. Your work is astounding. The amount you do across all of the committees and across this two weeks is excellent, reliable, appreciated—you are amazing.

I thank my staff and the incredible volunteers who work for me. As the Independent shadow minister for everything, it is a huge job to be across every portfolio, so the people who support me in getting across that, the amount of work and effort that they have put into this, on behalf of our constituents and the Territory is appreciated.

Thank you to all the people outside this Chamber who I followed along with Estimates, sent in questions and engaged deeply with this process because they care deeply about the Northern Territory. This is the people's House, and I feel inspired and hopeful by the number of people who contacted me because they care so much about what we are doing. Every question that I did not get time to ask, I will put in as a written question, so, public servants, all your work, preparation and thick binders will not be wasted.

Budget Estimates is one of the most important accountability processes we have in this parliament. We have 60 hours to ask questions and it is one of the few opportunities for elected representatives to sit down with ministers and senior public servants and ask the simple question, 'What are you doing with Territorians' money and is it improving Territorians' lives?'

It is not a partisan question; it is not a political question; it is the most basic responsibility of any parliament. As my fellow committee members have said, after being present for every minute of two weeks of Estimates, I have come away with deep concerns not because I heard things that I disagreed with, not because I think government should never make difficult decisions, but because time and again we were told that there were critical areas of government where there is no clear plan, no meaningful evaluation, no way of measuring success and, in some cases, no way for Territorians to know whether the money that is being spent in their name is achieving what it is supposed to.

Our constituents deserve better than that. If the government is spending public money—our money—we should know what outcomes we are trying to achieve. If the government is making major policy decisions, we should know what evidence supports them. If we are investing hundreds of millions or billions of dollars, we should know whether those investments are working. This is a minimum standard of transparency and accountability that Territorians should expect from any government.

Throughout Estimates a consistent pattern emerged. When asked about evidence, the tone was set on day one when I asked the Chief Minister whether any specific evidence was relied on in developing these Bills and she replied, 'This is so old news, Member for Johnston. Your style is incredibly predictable.' Yes, you have got me, Chief Minister. I will keep asking about evidence, evaluation and how the government is making decisions and spending all of our money.

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We were told over and again that evidence is about election commitments and that the data for measuring whether things are working either does not exist or we could not see it. When we asked about plans, we were told they did not exist or we could not see them or they were being developed. When we asked about how decisions were made too often the answer was simply, 'Trust us'. Territorians deserve more than trust. They deserve evidence, transparency and accountability.

Let me start with justice. For two years Territorians have been told that tougher laws would make communities safer, yet when I asked what evidence underpinned major changes to bail laws, youth justice laws and the Criminal Code, the answer was not research, evidence or evaluation, but that Territorians voted for them. That is not evidence. It is entirely possible for a policy to be popular and ineffective at the same time.

If the CLP genuinely cares about reducing crime, it should measure whether these policies are working, yet Treasury has undertaken no long-term modelling of what investing in prevention could mean compared with investing in prisons. There has been no modelling of whether earlier intervention would reduce offending or of the long-term costs borne by future generations.

The same pattern emerged across every portfolio. In Housing we heard that there is little evidence of a comprehensive plan to address the huge scale of need in housing which affects every aspect of Territorians' lives.

In Children and Families we heard that the intensive therapeutic out-of-home care costs around $750,000 per child per year, the median cost for a house, but the minister could not tell us how many women and children are turned away from domestic, family and sexual violence crisis accommodation. The funding increases promised to frontline domestic violence services have still not reached providers, with only weeks remaining in the financial year. How can we know whether the services are meeting demand if we do not measure unmet demand? How can we know if investments are working if promised funding is not reaching the front line?

We heard, incredibly and concerningly, that the Attorney-General could not say whether she had met with, received advise or acted on recommendations from the Children's Commissioner. The Children's Commission exists to advocate for vulnerable children. Part of her statutory role is to advise the minister. If the CLP truly cares about protection children, listening to the independent office established to protect children's interest would be a good place to start. When I asked to speak directly to the commissioner who was sitting at the table, the Attorney-General said, 'I am the minister and I decide who speaks'. This is a deeply concerning attitude towards independent statutory officers.

In Health the same question arose. We could not hear what proportion of the Health budget is spent on prevention. The only figure provided was 'around 1%'. If the CLP genuinely cares about improving health outcomes, it should know how much is being spent on preventing illness before it occurs because every preventable illness means healthier Territorians and a more sustainable health system.

We saw the same disconnect between spending policy and evidence in schools. When asked what evidence supported finding parents and children to increase school attendance, the minister said, 'Whether evidence exists or not it was an election commitment'. Millions of dollars are being spent on a program with no evidence, no program evaluation and where attendance rates are dropping. What is the plan?

When asked about support for Kriol-speaking students the minister could not identify any and described Kriol as 'broken English'. Kriol is a recognised language and the second-most language spoken in the Northern Territory, with at least 11 schools having all students speaking Kriol as their first language.

We learned that 65% of Territory Generation's investments are currently in gas, but when asked to provide modelling showing how investment decisions are made, including decisions about renewables, we were told that it could not be provided. We heard that the Department of Mining and Energy could not say whether fossil fuels represent the cheapest energy option because the modelling has not been done. If the CLP genuinely cares about keeping power affordable it should be undertaking that work urgently to work out what is the cheapest, most effective, most sustainable way for Territorians to have a power source.

The same lack of planning is evident in environmental policy. With no strategic plan for the Beetaloo Basin, cumulative effects will be measured at the end after they have all happened when it is too late to fix any harm that might have been done.

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One of the most disturbing themes is what we learned about accountability. The Territory cannot track our GST funding spent—nearly half of our revenue. The Territory Coordinator cannot provide a list of who the office has met with. Key conflict of interest information relating to the EPA is not available. The NT ranked last out of 12 jurisdictions in the 2025 audited independence report. The Auditor-General, the independent officer who is responsible for auditing government spending, cannot fully examine whether public money is achieving what it is supposed to.

I was not expecting perfection in Estimates, but I was expecting to get answers. When we have a minister who answers questions about what framework they use to develop laws with said, 'The formal framework I adhere is the one that Territorians elected us to do, which is to restore the Territory lifestyle', we should all be worried.

Governments might plan for the four-year electoral cycle, but the rest of us are here for the long term. That is what we want planning for, not for the next election but for all of our children and grandchildren.

Mr BURGOYNE (Lands, Planning and Environment): Madam Speaker, I have been watching just about every minute of the two weeks of Estimates. I thank the DLA staff and the committee for their work across those two weeks and 60 hours to ensure that questions were asked and answered.

One thing we heard a lot about over the last two weeks is growth certainty and security. For many people these might be buzzwords, but for our government they are not. They are key items which we have to deliver to ensure that the Territory continues to grow into the future.

Nowhere is that more evident than in my hometown of Alice Springs. In the last four years of the Labor government, what we saw delivered in Alice Springs was car park—that you fought for valiantly for many years, Madam Speaker, but a car park nonetheless.

Since coming into government—these are things that our government is extremely proud of having not only announced but start delivering in our hometown—there is $9.8m for the first-ever multicultural centre for Alice Springs. Many times I have enjoyed travelling to the multicultural centres around Darwin, seeing how multiculturalism is celebrated in the Top End. In Alice Springs we have many different multicultural communities that also want to celebrate their culture. Through that investment in Alice Springs they will be able to do that at far less cost than currently when they have to rent out large spaces.

There is $14.96m for a new public library in Alice Springs. The public library is often utilised by many in our community. When I had my first-born daughter I would often go there and enjoy the story times and see community members seeking shelter out of the hot summer sun, enjoying and utilising the services as well as the holiday programs that are often provided. It is about working hand in hand with local community organisations and the town council to deliver this.

The $14.5m towards the first stage of works for the Gillen Oval multisport precinct is huge for our town. When I drive around the Top End I see so many amazing sporting ovals and fields that are filled with young people over the weekends. I quite often go past Gardens Oval and Marrara; there is oval after oval. In Alice Springs there are some young ladies who are unable to take part in soccer because they cannot fit enough teams in the number of ovals we have. Football in Central Australia (FICA) has raised this with me for many years. Seeing $14.5m put towards the first stage of the Gillen Oval multisport precinct brings a lot of joy to me, as someone who has played a lot of soccer over the years and remembers when we used to quite literally play soccer at Blatherskite Park. Unfortunately, the oval now probably has so many rabbit holes in it you would do your ankle if you ran around on it.

These are investments that our government is making into communities across the Territory, especially in Alice Springs, for growth and the improved lifestyle that we speak about so much and to give certainty and security to the people who live in these areas.

On the weekend I was at a recently completed project that this government helped to fund, the Newland Street Skate Park. Many people will never understand what happened to ensure that project got off the ground and was completed. Former Mayor Matt Paterson came to me and the Treasurer and said there is a fantastic idea for a new play precinct in our town, but we are $1.8m short and not sure whether this will be delivered without the support of the Northern Territory Government. We worked together to make it as part of a commitment. We got into government and delivered that money and that play precinct.

On the weekend, for the first time, I went there with my family and saw many young families enjoying that facility. It was wonderful to see the absolute courage my two young girls were exhibiting, riding around the

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pump track and getting up on the newly erected flying fox. It was a space bringing together Alice Springs people from various backgrounds. It is hard to imagine if you live in Darwin with your amazing playgrounds, but in Alice Springs this is a playground unlike any I have ever seen in our town. Many young people can get out there to avail themselves of the new precinct, and it has been fantastic to see.

Community safety has been spoken about a lot over the two weeks of Estimates. It is our government's top priority. The crime statistics in Alice Springs show that we are starting to make real inroads. For years I have spoken in this Chamber about the increase in crime statistics, month after month, year after year. They were heading in the wrong direction under the former Labor government. Whilst there is still plenty of work to do, I can look at the 49% decrease in motor vehicle theft, the 40% drop in commercial break-ins and the 31% decrease in house break-ins. My own home was one of those houses that made up a stat during on year. We all knew someone in our town who had been impacted negatively. There are less of those stories and community members coming to my office, but there are still too many. I do not want to sound like a broken record, but there is continued work to do in this space. I am filled with so much hope, like many who live in Alice Springs, that we are starting to make inroads in decreasing crime, not just in Alice Springs but across the Territory.

I note the work of the police and the operations they have been doing in Palmerston, Katherine and the Top End northern suburbs to ensure that we continue to put downward pressure on crime.

This budget contains a record investment in law and order to ensure those hardworking police, courts and Corrections staff—we heard the Treasurer speak about this when he was asked about Corrections, because he knows better than most in this Chamber; he spent years working at the top at a Northern Territory Corrections centre and saw what happens through under-investment. I used to work at the prison as an electrician and would see what would happen without that investment. There are so many opportunities for our offenders when they are in a Corrections facility to learn skills and all these things they can utilise when they come out. Unfortunately, without the investment in Corrections, people come out without the necessary skills to integrate back into the community. It is good to see investment of that much-needed money in Corrections to deliver real outcomes for law and order.

Regarding my portfolio responsibility of DCDD, it is fantastic to see we are investing in myRoster and these important programs that will mean improved efficiency—that is a big buzzword at the moment. There is a range of programs they have been working on, including $5m ongoing to automate and enhance the central payroll system, which will mean that all public servants who work so hard throughout the Northern Territory continue to get paid on time. When they do not, we hear about it, so we are investing to ensure that continues to happen.

I want to touch on e-conveyancing. For so long, many people in that sector spoke to us about the need to automate and digitise that. Our government is getting on with delivering that.

Regarding Lands and Planning, there is $2m over the next two years to undertake land investigations in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. It is important that these regional areas that have not been given a lot of money over the previous years are. With Arafura Rare Earths finally reaching final investment decision, we know the growth and need to continue investing in these regional areas; it is so important. Our government is doing that.

In greater Darwin the Crown land developments at Northcrest, Zuccoli, Asche, Marrara Gardens, Durack Height and Humpty Doo are all happening. We heard a lot about the need to increase housing supply so that we can put downward pressure on housing prices and make sure there is availability of homes for so many people in our community.

Our government is building the residential aged-care facility at Holtze, which the Member for Barkly and Minister for Health so often speaks about as so critical. We have the land; we need the federal government to put that money in, and we will all work together to deliver that. I am already getting briefs regarding how we will deliver on that, and it is fantastic to see.

The Member for Johnston spoke about the Environment department. There is $2m ongoing for regional biospheric monitoring. It continues in this budget to track any cumulative impacts from the development of an onshore gas industry in the Beetaloo region. These are things we are doing. So much work has been done regarding the SREBA so that we can track those effects now and into the future.

I spoke about flood mitigation, which has been spoken about for a decade in Alice Springs. We are getting on and delivering that as a government. It is important to see.

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Regarding Water Resources, we want to see the expansion of the Ord. A lot of people do not know that the Ord in Western Australia could one day come to the Territory and offer real potential for agriculture. As the Minister for Water Resources it has been wonderful to work with the WA Government about an inter-governmental agreement to facilitate that. It is important work that will deliver real outcomes in the Northern Territory.

This week there was an important announcement regarding air quality monitoring. Our government has been unashamedly talking up the benefits that the Beetaloo Sub-basin can bring to the Northern Territory. It will mean increased industrialisation in certain areas around Darwin, Palmerston and the rural area. We would like to provide certainty to Territorians that the air they are breathing now, and into the future, is safe. The bill for the millions of dollars that will be invested into new technology to measure the air quality for volatile organic compounds will not be placed upon Territory taxpayers, it will be sent to those that produced the hydrocarbons, and that make lot of money from exporting and overseas. They will be paying for that air quality monitoring.

I am proud to be a part of a government delivering that. It is the first time in the Northern Territory's history that the air quality monitoring will be able to account for volatile organic compounds and deliver. It is one of the many things we are doing in this space to ensure that Territorian's get a better deal across a wide range of areas.

To conclude, we are supporting industry, investment and jobs, and we are growing our economy. We are doing this whilst ensuring strong transparency and accountability measures that are in place for community regarding their health and wellbeing. I look forward to hearing the Treasurer wrap up. Thank you to everyone for the last two-weeks in the Estimates process.

Mr YAN (Treasurer)(in reply): Madam Speaker, I rise in reply of the Treasury Legislation Appropriation Bill 2026 and the Treasury Legislation Amendment Bill 2026. This is the second budget delivered by the Finocchiaro CLP government. Before I speak to the significance of these Bills and the work that they enable, I place on the record my appreciation for the hard work and dedication shown throughout the Estimates process. To the Chair, Deputy Chair and members of the Estimates Committee, I sincerely thank you.

Scrutiny is an essential part of any parliament. It is how Territorian's see where their money is going, how decisions are made and whether government is focused on the issues that matter to them. I thank the staff of the Legislative Assembly, the Under Treasurer, the Chief Executive of the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure and all departmental officers who prepared and participated in Estimates. I know from bitter experience that this work is detailed, demanding and, at times, thankless, but it is work that matters. I also like the opposition and the Independents who sit on the Estimates Committees. I know that work is hard; I have been there and done it myself along with you, Madam Speaker.

This Appropriation Bill authorises $9.818bn from the Central Holding Authority for the 2026-27 financial year. This money funds our police; nurses; teachers; correctional officers; roads; hospitals; schools; remote housing; flood recovery and the practical services that Territorian's rely on every day. This budget is responsible, disciplined and focused. It delivers the second phase of our plan to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore the Territory lifestyle.

When we came into government the Territory was carrying the consequences of eight years of Labor's mismanagement, which was rising debt, unfunded programs, infrastructure promises without credible delivery plans and front-line services under pressure. Labor left Territorians with a budget structure that borrowed too much, delivered too little, and too often confused an announcement with an achievement; never mind about the delivery.

This government has taken a very different path, and we have returned the general government sector to a net operating surplus of $95m in 2025–26. That matters because it means that we are no longer borrowing to pay for the ordinary day-to-day operations of government or to pay wages, and we are not using the credit card just to keep the lights on. As a basic test of fiscal responsibility Labor failed, but we are restoring it. Debt is still too high, and I do not have to pretend otherwise. The Territory's debt challenge is real, but the direction has changed.

Under Labor debt was growing at about 22% per year. In this budget, debt growth has been brought down to about 4%. In the 12 months since our last budget, peak debt has been reduced by $757m. That matters when we compare ourselves with other jurisdictions.

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In Estimates I outlined that the Territory's debt-to-revenue ratio is stabilising at about 120%; Queensland is about 124%; South Australia is 132%; Tasmania is about 124%; and Victoria is above 180%. These are the figures we measure ourselves on because they are real figures that matter.

The point is simple: other jurisdictions are still on steepening debt paths, but the Territory is flattening its debt path. We are one of the few jurisdictions showing debt stabilisation over the forward estimates. In fact, we are the only jurisdiction showing improvement in debt per capita terms over the forward estimates. That does not mean that the job is finished; it just means that the direction is right.

The Labor Party took us from a debt-to-revenue ratio of 35% in 2016–17 to 116% in 2024–25—a catastrophic deterioration of the Territory's finances. We are reversing that direction. The rating agencies understand this, as well as commentators. This budget has been described externally as 'disciplined'. Some commentators want more ambition. I accept that challenge, but ambition without discipline is how Labor got the Territory into trouble in the first place. The CLP government will build ambition on a sustainable foundation, not another pile of unfunded promises.

This budget was delivered in extremely difficult circumstances. The Territory has faced natural disasters, flood recovery pressures, high fuel costs, national inflation and international instability. We had to respond to cyclones, flooding and road damage across the Territory, including Katherine, Nauiyu and the rest of the Daly region and other communities in the Barkly and Central Australia that were affected by severe weather. That is why this budget includes more than $130m for flood recovery and resilience, including a $100m flood recovery fund and a $30.5m roads repair package.

At the same time, Territorians are also dealing with cost-of-living pressures. The federal budget has made that harder, not easier. The Albanese government went to the election saying one thing and then delivered a budget that did another. Changes to negative gearing and capital gains tax are tax increases by any reasonable description. It broke promises and has created uncertainty.

The public reaction has been sharp because people understand what happens when governments make investment harder in the middle of a housing shortage. Territory Labor has been quiet about this because it knows the public reaction to Labor's federal budget has been disastrous. In a Territory where our housing market is smaller and more sensitive, Canberra's decisions can have outsized impacts. The federal budget's own modelling shows that 35,000 fewer homes will be built as a result of these policy changes.

If investors pull back, rental stock falls and new housing supply is discouraged, and Territory renters and first homebuyers pay that price. That is why this government has extended the HomeGrown Territory and Fresh Start Housing Grants. We want more homes built, more people putting down roots and more activity flowing through local builders, tradies and suppliers.

This afternoon I was at the opening of NT Fasteners' new building. That shows the confidence the sector has in the growth of our housing and construction market. It invested $8m in building a new showroom and shop for servicing our construction industry. It will not do that with its own money unless there is certainty into the future. That certainty is coming from the Finocchiaro CLP government.

During Estimates the opposition tried to argue both sides at once. They criticised housing pressure and then questioned the very grants designed to bring more supply to the market. They asked about regional uptake, and that is a fair issue. I acknowledged then, and I will acknowledge again, right now, that uptake in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine must improve. The constraint is not just demand; it is builders, land availability, cost of construction and the pipeline of serviced lots. We are actively working through those constraints. That is what a responsible government does. It identifies the problem then works through the delivery chain.

Law and order is a prime focus of this budget because community safety remains the number one priority for Territorians. This budget delivers $1.73bn in law and order spend. It funds our police, courts, Corrections and new public safety officers. It invests $250m in the Corrections Infrastructure Masterplan, including new prisoner work camps in Darwin and Katherine and upgrades to the Alice Springs Correctional Centre.

By 31 March 2026, 1,400 new and 274 repurposed Corrections beds have been delivered under the masterplan; that is a major delivery effort. It is also a necessary response to the capacity pressures that Labor left behind. Labor burred Corrections—forgot about them. Labor underinvested in the system behind the police response. They left watch houses carrying pressures they were never designed to carry. They talked about reform but did not fund the system required to make that reform work.

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This government is funding the frontline and the system behind it, including police, courts, Corrections and rehabilitation pathways through work camps. Would you like to guess whether Labor spent more time asking about criminals or victims during Estimates? Of course, they had more questions about the rights of criminals than about the victims of crime; that shows where their priorities lay.

This budget also funds record health and education investment for all Territorians. Health funding reaches $2.62bn this next financial year, and education funding is record $1.73bn. I made this point in Estimates, and I will make it again here: the education spend in this budget is equal to our law and order spend. Education is a top priority for this government. Education spend also includes $110m for a new secondary special education school here in Palmerston. We are investing in the services that families rely on while also restoring fiscal discipline.

We have grown frontline staffing by 884 full-time equivalents since the September quarter of 2024; that includes police, police auxiliaries, classroom teachers, assistant teachers, medical officers, nurses and Corrections officers. Executive staffing remains below the September 2024 levels. That distinction matters. Growth in the frontline is not the same as uncontrolled bureaucratic growth. We back the people Territorians see in our schools, hospitals, police stations and our Corrections facilities. We are expanding the frontline while also delivering an operating surplus.

This year's Estimates showed a clear contrast in priorities. The opposition spent much of its time relitigating projects it did not properly fund in the first instance trying to manufacture confusion between infrastructure program and infrastructure cash, complaining that we had cleaned up the mess that they had left behind.

They did not mention gas or the Beetaloo in their budget in reply speeches or during Estimates. What does that signal to industry and for our economic development? Let me be clear: a project on a list is not the same as a funded scope and deliverable project. Labor's infrastructure program was inflated by announcements that had not been properly costed and could not be credibly delivered. This government has put discipline back into the infrastructure program.

The 2026–27 budget secures a $4.25bn infrastructure program, including more than $2bn for roads and transport. Nearly 60% of the infrastructure program is directed to regional and remote communities, that includes major investments in Tanami Road, Central Arnhem Road, Outback Way and in remote housing, land serving and essential services.

The ship lift is another perfect example of the former Labor government's approach. It delivered large promises and escalating costs, but it did not deliver a ship lift, nor did it ever assemble an adequate business case for this project in over a decade. We inherited that reality from those opposite; we did not create it. I can tell you now that we will deliver the project properly, because walking away would expose Territorians to even greater cost for no benefit.

On roads, we were transparent. The Tanami, Carpentaria, Central Arnhem, Port Keats, Santa Teresa, and Tiwi Islands roads and Mereenie Loop all involve complex delivery issues, including traditional owner consultation, land tenure, access to extracting materials, weather windows and Commonwealth funding agreements. Anyone who pretends those projects should be delivered by slogans has not delivered anything harder than a media release. We are working with the land councils, traditional owners, contractors and the Commonwealth to get these projects moving. That is where the real work of infrastructure is delivered.

For barge landings the same principle applies. Labor left figures in the program without the necessary tenure, scope and delivery certainty. We are working through section 19 issues and on proper costings so that when the projects go back onto the program they are real and costed appropriately. This is the difference between this government and the former Labor government. We get on with the job, but Labor politicises the process.

Often in Estimates we saw the opposition drifting back to the same pattern. Over and again Labor members attacked the cleanup while ignoring the mess of their own creation. They want the benefit of every announcement they made in government, without responsibility for the debt, delays and cost blowouts that actually came with them. Territorians are entitled to better than that.

This budget delivers practical cost-of-living support. There is more than $290m in concessions, subsidies and targeted household support, including Power and Water subsidies, back-to-school vouchers, Sport Voucher, free training pathways and support for our seniors.

This budget supports business through competitive payroll tax settings. Our payroll tax-free threshold remains the highest in the nation at $2.5m. Apprentices and trainees remain exempt, and at the same times,

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very large national employers and payroll tax groups will contribute a fairer share through a higher tax rate when they pay above $100m in Australian wages. This is a balanced approach. It supports local growth, protects small and medium Territory businesses and funds essential services.

This budget is not flashy. It is not designed for headlines; it is designed for practicality. It is a budget for all Territorians. It is designed for the Territory we actually govern, which is vast and remote. We are exposed to weather and are dependent on roads and freight. We are reliant on frontline workers and ready for private investment. Government provides certainty. It is a budget for safer communities, stronger services and more disciplined infrastructure delivery. It stabilises debt growth while investing where Territorians need it the most.

The Finocchiaro CLP government knows the job is not done. Our debt is still too high, housing supply needs to lift and remote infrastructure needs sustained investment. Crime reduction requires a relentless focus, but this budget moves the Territory in the right direction.

Labor left behind a Territory budget built on drift, debt and delay. We are building one based on action, certainty and security.

I commend the Bills to the Assembly.

Madam SPEAKER: The question is that the expenditure proposed in the Appropriation (2026–27) Bill 2026, Serial 63, stand as printed and that the report of the Estimates Committee be noted.

Motion agreed to.

Remainder of the Bills, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Bills agreed to.

Mr YAN (Treasurer): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bills be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to; Bills read a third time.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.

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